

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 12, inclusive, answered orally.

Questions Nos. 13 to 46, inclusive, resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 47 to 55, inclusive, answered orally.

Anti-Social Behaviour

56. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her views regarding anti-social behaviour, such as drug taking and knife crime, in Dublin city centre; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42285/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I can assure the Deputy that I am in ongoing contact with the Garda Commissioner in relation to the measures which are being taken to combat crime and enhance public safety in the city centre area. An Garda Síochána make full use of the extensive range of legislation which is in place to address street crime and anti-social behaviour, including knife crime and drug related crime. In this regard there is a comprehensive and robust legal framework in place with respect to knife crime including strong Garda powers to search without a warrant and penalties of up to five years imprisonment.

Tackling this type of crime is central to the overall and ongoing implementation of the Dublin City Centre Policing Plan. This involves a high-visibility uniformed presence on key thoroughfares, as well as the use of undercover Gardaí as appropriate. As part of the Garda Plan a range of dedicated policing operations and measures are in place including Operation Spire and Operation Pier which target crime with concentrated high-visibility patrolling, as well as a special operation to enhance public order policing on the Liffey boardwalk. Drug crime is further targeted by covert operations such as Operation Viking and Operation Clean Streets.

The resumption of Garda recruitment and the deployment of newly attested Gardaí are of course key components in providing visible policing in the city centre and elsewhere.

In addition to the Garda responses, I am sure the Deputy would concur that the issues involved are not simply policing ones. He will also recall that I have previously met with the key state agencies and other stakeholders in relation to various actions which are aimed at improving the general environment in Dublin City Centre, and strongly support this ongoing work.

In relation to the concerns which have been expressed about drug misuse in the city centre, the Deputy will be aware that the Government's overall response to the problem of drug

misuse, is set out in the National Drugs Strategy for the period 2009-2016. The Strategy is being delivered under the stewardship of my colleague, Minister of State Ó Ríordáin, and it provides a coordinated and comprehensive response founded on a partnership approach and work is already underway in planning the development of the new Strategy post 2016.

I think it is generally accepted that the complex issues which contribute to drug addiction and related behaviours must be addressed in a coordinated and cross-cutting manner. In response to the particular issues arising in Dublin City Centre a multi-agency street outreach approach is being used to work with vulnerable and high-risk individuals and an offender management programme is being piloted to address repeat offending in the Dublin City area. These measures, combined with the Government's initiatives to tackle homelessness, are helping to address the broader aspects of the problems referred to by the Deputy.

In conclusion, the Deputy will also be aware that I strongly support the continued close engagement between An Garda Síochána, Dublin City Council and other agencies as well as ongoing consultation with key stakeholders, such as the Dublin City Business Forum. My Department is maintaining contact with these cooperative initiatives, and I understand that positive feedback is being received in relation to the policing measures being employed by the Garda authorities, and their level of engagement with business and community interests.

Garda Operations

57. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the additional resources that will be made available to An Garda Síochána in Gurrabraher and Mayfield in the Cork city Garda Síochána division under Operation Thor; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42407/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Operation Thor is a multi-stranded national operation which builds on previous and current Garda operations to tackle crime, particularly burglaries the number of which, as we know, increase with the advent of the long winter nights, in both urban and rural communities nationwide. In excess of €5 million is being committed to support Operation Thor. This allocation, which includes funding for Garda overtime will support a combination of additional patrols, checkpoints, rapid armed response and public awareness measures.

This special, targeted operation has to be seen in the context of the major investment that this Government is making in An Garda Síochána. The 2016 Budget allocation of €1.5 billion for An Garda Síochána includes over €67 million in additional funding which will allow the recruitment of 600 new Gardaí next year on top of the 550 Gardaí recruited since this Government reopened the Garda College in September 2014. It will also provide additional funding for Garda Surveillance, special operations and targeted, intelligence-led policing. This additional recruitment and budget allocation builds on the current high level of investment in Garda vehicles. We have invested over €34 million in new Garda vehicles since 2012 with over 640 new vehicles coming on stream in 2015, ranging from more Garda patrol cars to high-powered vehicles for armed units. The Government's Capital Plan 2016-2021 provides for a further €46 million of investment in vehicles as well as an additional €200 million for Information and Communications Technology which will allow An Garda Síochána to deploy the latest cutting edge technologies in the fight against crime. We are also investing in airborne surveillance. Taken together, this step-change in investment in policing will ensure that the Gardaí can be mobile, visible and responsive, on the roads and in the community.

So far this year the Cork City Division has been allocated 7 newly attested Gardaí and 24

new Garda cars as a result of this increased investment.

Operation Thor entails a broad range of activities to tackle burglars, organised crime gangs and prolific offenders as well as working with communities to prevent crime. These activities include: additional high-visibility patrols in identified burglary hot-spots; increased use of checkpoints to tackle the criminal gangs using the national road network; the use of new high powered vehicles by the armed Regional Response Units; efforts to disrupt the stolen goods market; programmes to help reduce re-offending by prolific offenders; a high-profile national crime prevention awareness campaign, and targeted crime prevention advice for local communities and enhanced supports for victims.

The Commissioner, in consultation with her senior management team, is responsible for the detailed allocation of resources, including the additional allocation of the €5 million to support Operation Thor. The Commissioner has assured me that she will aim to maximise the use of these additional resources. A large proportion of domestic burglaries are committed by serial offenders. Figures from the Garda Síochána Analysis Service indicate that 75% of burglaries are committed by 25% of burglars. Targeting these prolific offenders is a priority, consequently the allocation of resources under Operation Thor will be intelligence led and based on analysis of crime patterns by An Garda Síochána. The aim is to deploy resources in advance of where An Garda Síochána anticipate crime might take place in order to prevent the crime occurring.

In this context the Deputy will appreciate that it is not possible to detail the additional resources that will be made available to any one County under Operation Thor. However the Commissioner will continually review the allocation of resources under the Operation, taking into account crime trends and policing priorities across the Garda Regions so as to ensure that the best possible use is made of these resources. I am confident that this comprehensive operation by An Garda Síochána, supported by Government investment, will help disrupt the activities of burglars, organised crime gangs and prolific offenders and will improve the safety of all our communities across the country.

Garda Operations

58. **Deputy John Browne** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the additional resources that will be made available to An Garda Síochána in County Wexford under Operation Thor; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42413/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Operation Thor is a multi-stranded national operation which builds on previous and current Garda operations to tackle crime, particularly burglaries the number of which, as we know, increase with the advent of the long winter nights, in both urban and rural communities nationwide. In excess of €5 million is being committed to support Operation Thor. This allocation, which includes funding for Garda overtime will support a combination of additional patrols, checkpoints, rapid armed response and public awareness measures.

This special, targeted operation has to be seen in the context of the major investment that this Government is making in An Garda Síochána. The 2016 Budget allocation of €1.5 billion for An Garda Síochána includes over €67 million in additional funding which will allow the recruitment of 600 new Gardaí next year on top of the 550 Gardaí recruited since this Government reopened the Garda College in September 2014. It will also provide additional funding for Garda Surveillance, special operations and targeted, intelligence-led policing. This additional recruitment and budget allocation builds on the current high level of investment in Garda vehicles. We have invested over €34 million in new Garda vehicles since 2012 with

over 640 new vehicles coming on stream in 2015, ranging from more Garda patrol cars to high-powered vehicles for armed units. The Government's Capital Plan 2016-2021 provides for a further €46 million of investment in vehicles as well as an additional €200 million for Information and Communications Technology which will allow An Garda Síochána to deploy the latest cutting edge technologies in the fight against crime. We are also investing in airborne surveillance. Taken together, this step-change in investment in policing will ensure that the Gardaí can be mobile, visible and responsive, on the roads and in the community.

So far this year the Wexford Division has been allocated 15 newly attested Gardaí and 11 new Garda cars as a result of this increased investment.

Operation Thor entails a broad range of activities to tackle burglars, organised crime gangs and prolific offenders as well as working with communities to prevent crime. These activities include: additional high-visibility patrols in identified burglary hot-spots; increased use of checkpoints to tackle the criminal gangs using the national road network; the use of new high powered vehicles by the armed Regional Response Units; efforts to disrupt the stolen goods market; programmes to help reduce re-offending by prolific offenders; a high-profile national crime prevention awareness campaign, and targeted crime prevention advice for local communities and enhanced supports for victims.

The Commissioner, in consultation with her senior management team, is responsible for the detailed allocation of resources, including the additional allocation of the €5 million to support Operation Thor. The Commissioner has assured me that she will aim to maximise the use of these additional resources. A large proportion of domestic burglaries are committed by serial offenders. Figures from the Garda Síochána Analysis Service indicate that 75% of burglaries are committed by 25% of burglars. Targeting these prolific offenders is a priority, consequently the allocation of resources under Operation Thor will be intelligence led and based on analysis of crime patterns by An Garda Síochána. The aim is to deploy resources in advance of where An Garda Síochána anticipate crime might take place in order to prevent the crime occurring.

In this context the Deputy will appreciate that it is not possible to detail the additional resources that will be made available to any one County under Operation Thor. However the Commissioner will continually review the allocation of resources under the Operation, taking into account crime trends and policing priorities across the Garda Regions so as to ensure that the best possible use is made of these resources. I am confident that this comprehensive operation by An Garda Síochána, supported by Government investment, will help disrupt the activities of burglars, organised crime gangs and prolific offenders and will improve the safety of all our communities across the country.

Garda Operations

59. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the resources that will be made available to An Garda Síochána under Operation Thor; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42397/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Operation Thor is a multi-stranded national operation which builds on previous and current Garda operations to tackle crime, particularly burglaries the number of which, as we know, increase with the advent of the long winter nights, in both urban and rural communities nationwide. In excess of €5 million is being committed to support Operation Thor. This allocation, which includes funding for Garda overtime will support a combination of additional patrols, checkpoints, rapid armed response and public awareness measures.

This special, targeted operation has to be seen in the context of the major investment that this Government is making in An Garda Síochána. The 2016 Budget allocation of €1.5 billion for An Garda Síochána includes over €67 million in additional funding which will allow the recruitment of 600 new Gardaí next year on top of the 550 Gardaí recruited since this Government reopened the Garda College in September 2014. It will also provide additional funding for Garda Surveillance, special operations and targeted, intelligence-led policing. This additional recruitment and budget allocation builds on the current high level of investment in Garda vehicles. We have invested over €34 million in new Garda vehicles since 2012 with over 640 new vehicles coming on stream in 2015, ranging from more Garda patrol cars to high-powered vehicles for armed units. The Government's Capital Plan 2016-2021 provides for a further €46 million of investment in vehicles as well as an additional €200 million for Information and Communications Technology which will allow An Garda Síochána to deploy the latest cutting edge technologies in the fight against crime. We are also investing in airborne surveillance. Taken together, this step-change in investment in policing will ensure that the Gardaí can be mobile, visible and responsive, on the roads and in the community.

Operation Thor entails a broad range of activities to tackle burglars, organised crime gangs and prolific offenders as well as working with communities to prevent crime. These activities include: additional high-visibility patrols in identified burglary hot-spots; increased use of checkpoints to tackle the criminal gangs using the national road network; the use of new high powered vehicles by the armed Regional Response Units; efforts to disrupt the stolen goods market; programmes to help reduce re-offending by prolific offenders; a high-profile national crime prevention awareness campaign, and targeted crime prevention advice for local communities and enhanced supports for victims.

The Commissioner, in consultation with her senior management team, is responsible for the detailed allocation of resources, including the additional allocation of the €5 million to support Operation Thor. The Commissioner has assured me that she will aim to maximise the use of these additional resources. A large proportion of domestic burglaries are committed by serial offenders. Figures from the Garda Síochána Analysis Service indicate that 75% of burglaries are committed by 25% of burglars. Targeting these prolific offenders is a priority, consequently the allocation of resources under Operation Thor will be intelligence led and based on analysis of crime patterns by An Garda Síochána. The aim is to deploy resources in advance of where An Garda Síochána anticipate crime might take place in order to prevent the crime occurring.

In this context the Deputy will appreciate that it is not possible to detail the additional resources that will be made available to any one County under Operation Thor. However the Commissioner will continually review the allocation of resources under the Operation, taking into account crime trends and policing priorities across the Garda Regions so as to ensure that the best possible use is made of these resources. I am confident that this comprehensive operation by An Garda Síochána, supported by Government investment, will help disrupt the activities of burglars, organised crime gangs and prolific offenders and will improve the safety of all our communities across the country.

Garda Operations

60. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the additional resources that will be made available to An Garda Síochána in the Kilkenny Garda Síochána district under Operation Thor; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42427/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Operation Thor is a multi-stranded national operation which builds on previous and current Garda operations to

tackle crime, particularly burglaries the number of which, as we know, increase with the advent of the long winter nights, in both urban and rural communities nationwide. In excess of €5 million is being committed to support Operation Thor. This allocation, which includes funding for Garda overtime will support a combination of additional patrols, checkpoints, rapid armed response and public awareness measures.

This special, targeted operation has to be seen in the context of the major investment that this Government is making in An Garda Síochána. The 2016 Budget allocation of €1.5 billion for An Garda Síochána includes over €67 million in additional funding which will allow the recruitment of 600 new Gardaí next year on top of the 550 Gardaí recruited since this Government reopened the Garda College in September 2014. It will also provide additional funding for Garda Surveillance, special operations and targeted, intelligence-led policing. This additional recruitment and budget allocation builds on the current high level of investment in Garda vehicles. We have invested over €34 million in new Garda vehicles since 2012 with over 640 new vehicles coming on stream in 2015, ranging from more Garda patrol cars to high-powered vehicles for armed units. The Government's Capital Plan 2016-2021 provides for a further €46 million of investment in vehicles as well as an additional €200 million for Information and Communications Technology which will allow An Garda Síochána to deploy the latest cutting edge technologies in the fight against crime. We are also investing in airborne surveillance. Taken together, this step-change in investment in policing will ensure that the Gardaí can be mobile, visible and responsive, on the roads and in the community.

Operation Thor entails a broad range of activities to tackle burglars, organised crime gangs and prolific offenders as well as working with communities to prevent crime. These activities include: additional high-visibility patrols in identified burglary hot-spots; increased use of checkpoints to tackle the criminal gangs using the national road network; the use of new high powered vehicles by the armed Regional Response Units; efforts to disrupt the stolen goods market; programmes to help reduce re-offending by prolific offenders; a high-profile national crime prevention awareness campaign, and targeted crime prevention advice for local communities and enhanced supports for victims.

The Commissioner, in consultation with her senior management team, is responsible for the detailed allocation of resources, including the additional allocation of the €5 million to support Operation Thor. The Commissioner has assured me that she will aim to maximise the use of these additional resources. A large proportion of domestic burglaries are committed by serial offenders. Figures from the Garda Síochána Analysis Service indicate that 75% of burglaries are committed by 25% of burglars. Targeting these prolific offenders is a priority, consequently the allocation of resources under Operation Thor will be intelligence led and based on analysis of crime patterns by An Garda Síochána. The aim is to deploy resources in advance of where An Garda Síochána anticipate crime might take place in order to prevent the crime occurring.

In this context the Deputy will appreciate that it is not possible to detail the additional resources that will be made available to any one County under Operation Thor. However the Commissioner will continually review the allocation of resources under the Operation, taking into account crime trends and policing priorities across the Garda Regions so as to ensure that the best possible use is made of these resources. I am confident that this comprehensive operation by An Garda Síochána, supported by Government investment, will help disrupt the activities of burglars, organised crime gangs and prolific offenders and will improve the safety of all our communities across the country.

Garda Misconduct Allegations

61. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of reviews of cases which have been completed by the independent review mechanism; the likely time frame for completion of the reviews of all 319 cases she referred to the mechanism; her current estimate of the number of commissions of investigation which may result from these review studies; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42358/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Deputy is referring to the mechanism established for the independent review of certain allegations of Garda misconduct, or inadequacies in the investigation of certain allegations, which have been made to me as Minister for Justice and Equality, or the Taoiseach.

I have repeatedly emphasised that the Independent Review Mechanism was not established to act as a Commission of Inquiry or Investigation. Nor was it designed to make findings. Its purpose was to triage the allegations to see whether further action was needed and what that action would be. It is also important to emphasise that the range of matters covered by the cases referred to the Panel was very wide. They included property disputes, probate issues, disputes between neighbours, dissatisfaction with the outcome of civil and criminal court actions as well as decisions of the DPP and GSOC. These are all matters in which I, as Minister, have no role. Nevertheless, they were considered by the Panel despite the fact that, at face value, they were outside the remit of the IRM.

I am happy to say that the Panel has provided recommendations to me in all 320 cases submitted to them and has therefore largely concluded its work. The issuing of notification letters to complainants commenced on 29 June. To date, 298 complainants have been notified of the outcome of the review of their cases. Letters will continue to issue to all complainants until the process is completed.

I am mindful that all complainants are anxious to know the outcome of the review of their case and every effort is being made to conclude the process. In each case a summary is prepared together with a draft letter to the complainant. Mr Justice Roderick Murphy is continuing to review the summaries and the draft letters of notification to ensure that they are a fair and accurate reflection of the recommendations made by counsel.

I have previously assured Deputies that where further investigation is recommended by the review then that will occur. Where cases have resulted in recommendations for further action, I have accepted those recommendations. These include referral to the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission (GSOC), requesting a report from the Garda Commissioner in accordance with section 41(2) of the Garda Síochána Act 2005, establishment of an inquiry under section 42(1) of the Garda Síochána Act 2005, establishment of a non-statutory inquiry, appointment of a Legal Advisor.

Garda Operations

62. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the additional resources that will be made available to An Garda Síochána in Limerick city under Operation Thor; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42423/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Operation Thor is a multi-stranded national operation which builds on previous and current Garda operations to tackle crime, particularly burglaries the number of which, as we know, increase with the advent of the long winter nights, in both urban and rural communities nationwide. In excess of €5 million is being committed to support Operation Thor. This allocation, which includes funding

for Garda overtime will support a combination of additional patrols, checkpoints, rapid armed response and public awareness measures.

This special, targeted operation has to be seen in the context of the major investment that this Government is making in An Garda Síochána. The 2016 Budget allocation of €1.5 billion for An Garda Síochána includes over €67 million in additional funding which will allow the recruitment of 600 new Gardaí next year on top of the 550 Gardaí recruited since this Government reopened the Garda College in September 2014. It will also provide additional funding for Garda Surveillance, special operations and targeted, intelligence-led policing. This additional recruitment and budget allocation builds on the current high level of investment in Garda vehicles. We have invested over €34 million in new Garda vehicles since 2012 with over 640 new vehicles coming on stream in 2015, ranging from more Garda patrol cars to high-powered vehicles for armed units. The Government's Capital Plan 2016-2021 provides for a further €46 million of investment in vehicles as well as an additional €200 million for Information and Communications Technology which will allow An Garda Síochána to deploy the latest cutting edge technologies in the fight against crime. We are also investing in airborne surveillance. Taken together, this step-change in investment in policing will ensure that the Gardaí can be mobile, visible and responsive, on the roads and in the community.

Operation Thor entails a broad range of activities to tackle burglars, organised crime gangs and prolific offenders as well as working with communities to prevent crime. These activities include: additional high-visibility patrols in identified burglary hot-spots; increased use of checkpoints to tackle the criminal gangs using the national road network; the use of new high powered vehicles by the armed Regional Response Units; efforts to disrupt the stolen goods market; programmes to help reduce re-offending by prolific offenders; a high-profile national crime prevention awareness campaign, and targeted crime prevention advice for local communities and enhanced supports for victims.

The Commissioner, in consultation with her senior management team, is responsible for the detailed allocation of resources, including the additional allocation of the €5 million to support Operation Thor. The Commissioner has assured me that she will aim to maximise the use of these additional resources. A large proportion of domestic burglaries are committed by serial offenders. Figures from the Garda Síochána Analysis Service indicate that 75% of burglaries are committed by 25% of burglars. Targeting these prolific offenders is a priority, consequently the allocation of resources under Operation Thor will be intelligence led and based on analysis of crime patterns by An Garda Síochána. The aim is to deploy resources in advance of where An Garda Síochána anticipate crime might take place in order to prevent the crime occurring.

In this context the Deputy will appreciate that it is not possible to detail the additional resources that will be made available to any one County under Operation Thor. However the Commissioner will continually review the allocation of resources under the Operation, taking into account crime trends and policing priorities across the Garda Regions so as to ensure that the best possible use is made of these resources. I am confident that this comprehensive operation by An Garda Síochána, supported by Government investment, will help disrupt the activities of burglars, organised crime gangs and prolific offenders and will improve the safety of all our communities across the country.

Proposed Legislation

63. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality why the Judicial Council Bill and the issue of the reform to judicial appointments have not been progressed through the Houses of the Oireachtas during this Government's term of office to

date. [42460/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Deputy will appreciate that this question concerns two separate matters.

The Government continues to be committed to bring forward a Judicial Council Bill but for reasons the Deputy will be familiar with, has had to give way to other pressing priorities in the legislative area. The Government Legislative Programme which was published on 22 September includes the Judicial Council Bill amongst those Bills which are expected to be published in the period from the commencement of the current Dáil session to the start of the next session. The Bill has been the subject of extensive consultation with the judiciary, and my Department is working closely with the Office of the Attorney General to bring it to an early conclusion. I remain committed to advancing this legislation within a speedy timeframe.

As regards judicial appointments, a consultation process relating to the system of such appointments was conducted in 2014 with the intention of instituting reforms to enhance the current system. The need to ensure and protect the principle of judicial independence was a significant factor in initiating the consultation process. Further, while the Judicial Appointments Advisory Board process was a model of best practice in its day, almost 20 years from its establishment it was considered worthwhile to review the operation of the entire judicial appointments system to ensure it reflects current best practice, that it is open, transparent and accountable and that it promotes diversity.

There was a significant response to the call for submissions and, arising from the consultation process, draft legislative provisions to reform and update judicial appointment procedures are being prepared by my Department. The review, and reform of this area which is of critical importance to the functioning of our system of justice, provides an opportunity to determine how to best respond to the expectations and needs of a modern State. I anticipate that legislation in the matter will be published in 2016.

Garda Operations

64. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the additional resources that will be made available to An Garda Síochána in County Galway under Operation Thor; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42419/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Operation Thor is a multi-stranded national operation which builds on previous and current Garda operations to tackle crime, particularly burglaries the number of which, as we know, increase with the advent of the long winter nights, in both urban and rural communities nationwide. In excess of €5 million is being committed to support Operation Thor. This allocation, which includes funding for Garda overtime will support a combination of additional patrols, checkpoints, rapid armed response and public awareness measures.

This special, targeted operation has to be seen in the context of the major investment that this Government is making in An Garda Síochána. The 2016 Budget allocation of €1.5 billion for An Garda Síochána includes over €67 million in additional funding which will allow the recruitment of 600 new Gardaí next year on top of the 550 Gardaí recruited since this Government reopened the Garda College in September 2014. It will also provide additional funding for Garda Surveillance, special operations and targeted, intelligence-led policing. This additional recruitment and budget allocation builds on the current high level of investment in Garda vehicles. We have invested over €34 million in new Garda vehicles since 2012 with

over 640 new vehicles coming on stream in 2015, ranging from more Garda patrol cars to high-powered vehicles for armed units. The Government's Capital Plan 2016-2021 provides for a further €46 million of investment in vehicles as well as an additional €200 million for Information and Communications Technology which will allow An Garda Síochána to deploy the latest cutting edge technologies in the fight against crime. We are also investing in airborne surveillance. Taken together, this step-change in investment in policing will ensure that the Gardaí can be mobile, visible and responsive, on the roads and in the community.

Operation Thor entails a broad range of activities to tackle burglars, organised crime gangs and prolific offenders as well as working with communities to prevent crime. These activities include: additional high-visibility patrols in identified burglary hot-spots; increased use of checkpoints to tackle the criminal gangs using the national road network; the use of new high powered vehicles by the armed Regional Response Units; efforts to disrupt the stolen goods market; programmes to help reduce re-offending by prolific offenders; a high-profile national crime prevention awareness campaign, and targeted crime prevention advice for local communities and enhanced supports for victims.

The Commissioner, in consultation with her senior management team, is responsible for the detailed allocation of resources, including the additional allocation of the €5 million to support Operation Thor. The Commissioner has assured me that she will aim to maximise the use of these additional resources. A large proportion of domestic burglaries are committed by serial offenders. Figures from the Garda Síochána Analysis Service indicate that 75% of burglaries are committed by 25% of burglars. Targeting these prolific offenders is a priority, consequently the allocation of resources under Operation Thor will be intelligence led and based on analysis of crime patterns by An Garda Síochána. The aim is to deploy resources in advance of where An Garda Síochána anticipate crime might take place in order to prevent the crime occurring.

In this context the Deputy will appreciate that it is not possible to detail the additional resources that will be made available to any one County under Operation Thor. However the Commissioner will continually review the allocation of resources under the Operation, taking into account crime trends and policing priorities across the Garda Regions so as to ensure that the best possible use is made of these resources. I am confident that this comprehensive operation by An Garda Síochána, supported by Government investment, will help disrupt the activities of burglars, organised crime gangs and prolific offenders and will improve the safety of all our communities across the country.

Legislative Programme

65. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality given the controversy surrounding advice given to the Minister for Finance relating to the Commission of Investigation into Certain Irish Bank Resolution Corporation transactions, and the timing and content of this advice, if she will review the Official Secrets Act; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40608/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): There is a commitment in the Programme for Government to amend the Official Secrets Act 1963.

An analysis of the impact of the Freedom of Information and Protected Disclosures Acts on the Official Secrets Act is required in order to assess the extent of any necessary change.

Any issues arising in relation to the Commission of Investigation into Certain Irish Bank Resolution Corporation Transactions concerning the Official Secrets Act will be considered in

that context.

Garda Deployment

66. **Deputy John Browne** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda Síochána stations and the number of gardaí in each station in County Wexford on 1 November 2010 and on 1 November 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42414/15]

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

I have been informed by the Garda Commissioner that list of stations and the number of Gardaí assigned to those stations in the Wexford Division on the 31 October 2010 and on the 31 October 2015, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was as set out in the tables.

This Government is committed to ensuring that An Garda Síochána has the capacity to provide effective, visible policing throughout the country. A crucial element of the Government's strategy is ongoing seamless recruitment to renew An Garda Síochána. With this in mind Budget 2016 made provision for the recruitment of 600 new Gardaí next year bringing to 1,150 the number of new Gardaí that will be recruited since the reopening of the Garda College in Templemore in September 2014. So far 295 of those new recruits are fully attested and are on the ground in communities nationwide.

I was very pleased to announce the commencement of the recruitment campaign for 2016 last Friday, 27 November. It is being organised by the Public Appointments Service on behalf of the Garda Commissioner. Applications must be made through www.publicjobs.ie. The closing date for applications is Tuesday 5 January 2016. Successful candidates can expect to enter the Garda College from June 2016 onwards.

Wexford Garda Division 2010

| Division | District | Station | Total | |
|----------|----------|--------------|------------------|----|
| WEXFORD | | BLACKWATER | 3 | |
| | | CLONROCHE | 2 | |
| | | ENNISCORTHY | 42 | |
| | | FERNS | 3 | |
| | | KILTEALY | 1 | |
| | | OULART | 1 | |
| | | OYLEGATE | 2 | |
| | | ENNISCORTHY | Total | 54 |
| | | | BUNCLODY | 8 |
| | | | COURTOWN HARBOUR | 2 |
| | | GOREY | 55 | |
| | GOREY | Total | 65 | |
| | | BALLYCULLANE | 2 | |
| | | BALLYWILLIAM | 0 | |
| | | CAMPILE | 2 | |

Questions - Written Answers

| Division | District | Station | Total |
|----------|----------|-------------------|-------|
| | | CARRICK-ON-BANNOW | 1 |
| | | CARRICKBYRNE | 2 |
| | | DUNCANNON | 4 |
| | | NEW ROSS | 43 |
| | NEW ROSS | Total | 54 |
| | | BALDWINSTOWN | 1 |
| | | CASTLEBRIDGE | 3 |
| | | GLYNN | 1 |
| | | KILMORE QUAY | 2 |
| | | ROSSLARE HARBOUR | 7 |
| | | ROSSLARE STRAND | 2 |
| | | TAGHMON | 3 |
| | | WEXFORD | 93 |
| | WEXFORD | Total | 112 |
| | Total | 25 Stations | 285 |

Wexford Garda Division 31 October 2015

| Division | District | Station | Total |
|----------|-------------|-------------------|-------|
| WEXFORD | | BLACKWATER | 2 |
| | | BUNCLODY | 7 |
| | | CLONROCHE | 2 |
| | | COURTOWN HARBOUR | 4 |
| | | ENNISCORTHY | 40 |
| | | FERNS | 2 |
| | | GOREY | 43 |
| | | OULART | 2 |
| | ENNISCORTHY | OYLEGATE | 1 |
| | | Total | 103 |
| | | BALLYCULLANE | 1 |
| | | CARRICKBYRNE | 1 |
| | | CARRICK-ON-BANNOW | 1 |
| | | DUNCANNON | 3 |
| | NEW ROSS | NEW ROSS | 42 |
| | | Total | 48 |
| | | CASTLEBRIDGE | 2 |
| | | KILMORE QUAY | 2 |
| | | ROSSLARE HARBOUR | 7 |
| | | ROSSLARE STRAND | 1 |
| | | TAGHMON | 3 |
| | WEXFORD | WEXFORD | 89 |
| | | Total | 104 |
| WEXFORD | | 20 Stations | 255 |

Garda Deployment

67. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí and Garda Síochána stations in the Togher district in the Cork city Garda division on 1 November 2010 and on 1 November 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42412/15]

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

I have been informed by the Garda Commissioner that list of stations and the number of Gardaí assigned to those stations in the Togher District on the 31 October 2010 and on the 31 October 2015, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was as set out in the tables.

This Government is committed to ensuring that An Garda Síochána has the capacity to provide effective, visible policing throughout the country. A crucial element of the Government's strategy is ongoing seamless recruitment to renew An Garda Síochána. With this in mind Budget 2016 made provision for the recruitment of 600 new Gardaí next year bringing to 1,150 the number of new Gardaí that will be recruited since the reopening of the Garda College in Templemore in September 2014. So far 295 of those new recruits are fully attested and are on the ground in communities nationwide.

I was very pleased to announce the commencement of the recruitment campaign for 2016 last Friday, 27 November. It is being organised by the Public Appointments Service on behalf of the Garda Commissioner. Applications must be made through www.publicjobs.ie. The closing date for applications is Tuesday 5 January 2016. Successful candidates can expect to enter the Garda College from June 2016 onwards.

Togher Garda District 31 October 2010

| Division | District | Station | Total |
|-----------|----------|------------------|-------|
| | | BISHOPSTOWN | 23 |
| | | CARRIGALINE | 21 |
| | | CROSSHAVEN | 3 |
| | | DOUGLAS | 28 |
| | | PASSAGE WEST | 4 |
| | | TOGHER | 59 |
| CORK CITY | TOGHER | 6 Stations Total | 138 |

Togher Garda District 31 October 2015

| Division | District | Station | Total |
|-----------|----------|------------------|-------|
| | | BISHOPSTOWN | 21 |
| | | CARRIGALINE | 19 |
| | | CROSSHAVEN | 2 |
| | | DOUGLAS | 23 |
| | | PASSAGE WEST | 2 |
| | | TOGHER | 49 |
| CORK CITY | TOGHER | 6 Stations Total | 116 |

Garda Deployment

68. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda Síochána stations and the number of gardaí in each station in County Laois and in County Offaly on 1 November 2010 and on 1 November 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42416/15]

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

I have been informed by the Garda Commissioner that list of stations and the number of Gardaí assigned to those stations in the Laois/Offaly Division on the 31 October 2010 and on the 31 October 2015, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was as set out in the tables.

This Government is committed to ensuring that An Garda Síochána has the capacity to provide effective, visible policing throughout the country. A crucial element of the Government's strategy is ongoing seamless recruitment to renew An Garda Síochána. With this in mind Budget 2016 made provision for the recruitment of 600 new Gardaí next year bringing to 1,150 the number of new Gardaí that will be recruited since the reopening of the Garda College in Templemore in September 2014. So far 295 of those new recruits are fully attested and are on the ground in communities nationwide.

I was very pleased to announce the commencement of the recruitment campaign for 2016 last Friday, 27 November. It is being organised by the Public Appointments Service on behalf of the Garda Commissioner. Applications must be made through www.publicjobs.ie. The closing date for applications is Tuesday 5 January 2016. Successful candidates can expect to enter the Garda College from June 2016 onwards.

Laois/Offaly Division 31 October 2010

| Division | District | Station | Total |
|----------|-----------|------------------|-------|
| | | ABBEYLEIX | 28 |
| | | ARLES | 2 |
| | | BALLACOLLA | 1 |
| | | BALLINAKILL | 1 |
| | | BALLYLINAN | 4 |
| | | BORRIS-IN-OSSORY | 1 |
| | | DURROW | 2 |
| | | RATHDOWNEY | 4 |
| | ABBEYLEIX | Total | 43 |
| | | BANAGHER | 5 |
| | | BIRR | 29 |
| | | CLOGHAN | 1 |
| | | FERBANE | 5 |
| | | KILCORMAC | 2 |
| | | KINNITTY | 1 |
| | | SHANNONBRIDGE | 1 |
| | | SHINRONE | 2 |

| Division | District | Station | Total |
|---------------|------------|---------------|-------|
| | BIRR | Total | 46 |
| | | CLONASLEE | 2 |
| | | MOUNTMELICK | 7 |
| | | MOUNTRATH | 4 |
| | | PORTARLINGTON | 14 |
| | | PORTLAOISE | 114 |
| | | STRADBALLY | 2 |
| | PORTLAOISE | Total | 143 |
| | | CLARA | 5 |
| | | CLONBOLOGUE | 0 |
| | | DAINGEAN | 2 |
| | | EDENDERRY | 13 |
| | | GEASHILL | 0 |
| | | RHODE | 2 |
| | | TULLAMORE | 80 |
| | TULLAMORE | Total | 102 |
| LEIX / OFFALY | Total | 29 Stations | 334 |

Garda Division of Laois/Offaly on 31 October 2015

| Division | District | Station | Total |
|----------|------------|------------------|-------|
| | | BANAGHER | 5 |
| | | BIRR | 25 |
| | | CLOGHAN | 1 |
| | | FERBANE | 5 |
| | | KILCORMAC | 2 |
| | BIRR | KINNITTY | 1 |
| | | Total | 39 |
| | | ABBEYLEIX | 19 |
| | | ARLES | 2 |
| | | BALLYLINAN | 2 |
| | | BORRIS-IN-OSSORY | 1 |
| | | CLONASLEE | 1 |
| | | DURROW | 1 |
| | | MOUNTMELICK | 6 |
| | | MOUNTRATH | 3 |
| | | PORTARLINGTON | 12 |
| | | PORTLAOISE | 99 |
| | | RATHDOWNEY | 3 |
| | PORTLAOISE | STRADBALLY | 2 |
| | | Total | 151 |
| | | CLARA | 3 |
| | | DAINGEAN | 2 |
| | | EDENDERRY | 14 |

| Division | District | Station | Total |
|--------------|-----------------------|-------------|-------|
| | | RHODE | 1 |
| | TULLAMORE | TULLAMORE | 70 |
| LAOIS/OFFALY | | Total | 90 |
| | LAOIS/OFFALY Total | 23 Stations | 280 |

Traveller Community

69. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the measures she will take to tackle the discrimination faced by members of the Traveller community; if she will support the establishment of a Traveller agency; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42395/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy Aodhán Ó Ríordáin): The Deputy will be aware that there is a consultation process underway led by my Department to develop a new National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy. Phase 1 (identification of key themes for the new Strategy) has been completed, and Phase 2 (identification and agreement of high-level objectives under each agreed theme) will commence shortly. The final Phase, Phase 3 (identification of detailed actions to achieve each agreed objective, with associated timescales, Key Performance Indicators, institutional responsibilities and monitoring arrangements), will commence in early 2016 and conclude also in early 2016 with the presentation of a new Strategy for Government approval.

This process will give us a new Traveller Inclusion Strategy and a set of very real actions that need to be taken to bring about a real improvement in quality of life for Travellers. The question of whether revised institutional arrangements for delivery of services to Travellers are necessary to bring about greater coherence in and improve the effectiveness of statutory services for the Traveller community has been raised during the ongoing consultation process and, as indicated on behalf of the Government during the recent debate in the House on the question of recognition of Travellers as an ethnic group, will be considered in the drafting of the new Inclusion Strategy.

Garda Deployment

70. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí in the Henry Street and Roxboro districts on 1 November 2010 and on 1 November 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42424/15]

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

I have been informed by the Garda Commissioner that list of stations and the number of Gardaí assigned to those stations in the Henry Street and Roxboro Districts on the 31 October 2010 and on the 31 October 2015, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was as set out in the tables.

This Government is committed to ensuring that An Garda Síochána has the capacity to

provide effective, visible policing throughout the country. A crucial element of the Government's strategy is ongoing seamless recruitment to renew An Garda Síochána. With this in mind Budget 2016 made provision for the recruitment of 600 new Gardaí next year bringing to 1,150 the number of new Gardaí that will be recruited since the reopening of the Garda College in Templemore in September 2014. So far 295 of those new recruits are fully attested and are on the ground in communities nationwide.

I was very pleased to announce the commencement of the recruitment campaign for 2016 last Friday, 27 November. It is being organised by the Public Appointments Service on behalf of the Garda Commissioner. Applications must be made through www.publicjobs.ie. The closing date for applications is Tuesday 5 January 2016. Successful candidates can expect to enter the Garda College from June 2016 onwards.

Henry Street and Roxboro Road Districts 31 Oct 2010

| Division | District | Station | Total |
|----------|--------------|------------------|-------|
| | | ARDNACRUSHA | 3 |
| | | CASTLECONNELL | 4 |
| | | HENRY STREET | 268 |
| | | MARY STREET | 18 |
| | | MAYORSTONE PARK | 84 |
| | HENRY STREET | Total | 377 |
| | | BALLYNEETY | 0 |
| | | CAHERCONLISH | 1 |
| | | PATRICKSWELL | 0 |
| | | ROXBORO ROAD | 140 |
| LIMERICK | ROXBORO ROAD | 9 Stations Total | 141 |

Henry Street and Roxboro Road Districts 31 Oct 2015

| Division | District | Station | Total |
|----------|--------------|------------------|-------|
| | | ARDNACRUSHA | 3 |
| | | CASTLECONNELL | 4 |
| | | HENRY STREET | 233 |
| | | MAYORSTONE PARK | 71 |
| | HENRY STREET | Total | 311 |
| | | BALLYNEETY | 2 |
| | | CAHERCONLISH | 1 |
| | | PATRICKSWELL | 2 |
| | | ROXBORO ROAD | 121 |
| LIMERICK | ROXBORO ROAD | 8 Stations Total | 126 |

Garda Recruitment

71. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the numbers of new gardaí since the resumption of recruitment, by county; and her views on the current status of the

community Garda role, which has been a successful element of An Garda Síochána. [42386/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will appreciate the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of personnel, including new probationer 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.

This Government is committed to the ongoing recruitment of trainee Gardaí, and to this end the first intake since 2009 of new recruits commenced training at the Garda College, Templemore, in September of last year. To date there have been six intakes of Garda Trainees to the Garda College, giving a total intake of 550. So far 295 of the new Garda Trainees have attested as members of An Garda Síochána. On attestation, new probationer Gardaí are assigned to stations throughout the country by the Garda Commissioner, where they are assigned to mainstream uniform policing duties. I am assured by Garda management that the needs of all Garda Divisions are fully considered when determining the allocation of new probationer Gardaí. The table sets out the Division breakdown of the distribution of the 295 probationer Gardaí.

The Deputy will be aware that I announced the opening of a recruitment campaign for new members of An Garda Síochána last Friday 27 November. This new campaign is necessary to fulfil the Government's commitment to recruit 600 Gardaí in 2016. The 600 new Gardaí to be recruited next year will bring to 1,150 the total number of new recruits since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014. This ramped-up recruitment underscores the determination of this Government to deliver an effective, responsive police service to protect our communities and respond to emerging crime trends.

The Public Appointments Service (PAS) is organising the recruitment competition on behalf of the Garda Commissioner and applications may be made through the PAS website at www.publicjobs.ie. The closing date for applications is Tuesday 5 January 2016.

A key part of An Garda Síochána strategy in the fight against crime is to work in partnership with the community. As of 31 October the latest date for which figures are available there were 813 dedicated Community Gardaí working and engaging with communities both urban and rural.

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 An 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 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.

Distribution of Probationer Gardaí 2015 by Division

| | | | |
|-------------------|----|------------------------|----|
| DMR East | 10 | DMR North | 19 |
| DMR North Central | 23 | DMR South | 19 |
| DMR South Central | 20 | DMR West | 30 |
| Kildare | 15 | Laois/Offaly | 9 |
| Meath | 5 | Westmeath | 5 |
| Wicklow | 10 | Cavan/Monaghan | 10 |
| Donegal | 10 | Louth | 10 |
| Sligo/Leitrim | 5 | Kilkenny/Carlow | 10 |
| Tipperary | 5 | Waterford | 14 |
| Wexford | 15 | Cork City | 7 |
| Cork North | 0 | Cork West | 5 |
| Kerry | 10 | Limerick | 9 |
| Clare | 10 | Galway | 5 |
| Mayo | 5 | Roscommon/ Longford | 0 |

Garda Deployment

72. **Deputy Helen McEntee** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the need for additional Garda Síochána resources in communities (details supplied) in County Meath; if she will request a report from the Garda Commissioner on plans to improve policing in the relevant communities; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42287/15]

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

I have been informed by the Garda Commissioner that Kilcock is in the Kildare Garda Division and forms part of Leixlip Garda District and as of 31 October 2015, the latest dates for which figures are readily available there are 9 gardaí assigned to Kilcock Garda station. This station is open 3p.m. to 6p.m. Friday to Saturday and from 3p.m. to 5p.m. on Sundays subject to manpower availability with a Public Access Call Box (P.A.C.B.) to Leixlip, which is approximately 19Km away.

The number of Gardaí assigned to Ashbourne and Duleek on the 31 October 2015, was at 43 and 4 respectively. Duleek Garda station is opened subject to manpower availability with a Public Access Call Box (P.A.C.B.) to Ashbourne which is opened 24 hours a day. I have also been informed by the Garda Commissioner that Dunore is patrolled by members attached to the neighbouring Drogheda District, which is approximately 6Km away.

I can assure the Deputy that this Government is committed to delivering an effective, responsive police service to protect our communities and respond to emerging crime trends. An essential component of our strategy to achieve this is on-going, seamless recruitment of trainee Gardaí. To this end the first intake since 2009 of new recruits commenced training at the Garda College, Templemore, in September of last year. To date there have been six intakes of Garda Trainees to the Garda College, giving a total intake of 550. So far 295 of the new Garda Trainees have attested as members of An Garda Síochána. On attestation, new probationer

Gardaí are assigned to stations throughout the country by the Garda Commissioner, where they are assigned to mainstream uniform policing duties. I am assured by Garda management that the needs of all Garda Divisions are fully considered when determining the allocation of newly attested Gardaí and that 15 and 5 of these newly attested Gardaí have been assigned to the Kildare and Meath Garda Divisions respectively.

The Deputy will be aware that I announced the opening of a recruitment campaign for new members of An Garda Síochána last Friday 27 November. This new campaign is necessary to fulfil the Government's commitment to recruit 600 Gardaí in 2016. The 600 new Gardaí to be recruited next year will bring to 1,150 the total number of new recruits since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014. The Public Appointments Service (PAS) is organising the recruitment competition on behalf of the Garda Commissioner and applications may be made through the PAS website at www.publicjobs.ie. The closing date for applications is Tuesday 5 January 2016.

In relation to emerging crime trends, Operation Thor, which was launched by the Garda Commissioner recently is a multi-stranded national operation which builds on previous and current Garda operations to tackle crime, particularly burglaries the number of which, as we know, increase with the advent of the long winter nights, in both urban and rural communities nationwide. Operation Thor is made possible by the increased investment in policing by this Government, including an allocation of €5 million to specifically support this new Operation.

It entails a broad range of activities to tackle burglars, organised crime gangs and prolific offenders as well as working with communities to prevent crime. These activities include: additional high-visibility patrols in identified burglary hot-spots; increased use of checkpoints to tackle the criminal gangs using the national road network; the use of new high powered vehicles by the armed Regional Response Units; efforts to disrupt the stolen goods market; programmes to help reduce re-offending by prolific offenders; a high-profile national crime prevention awareness campaign, and targeted crime prevention advice for local communities and enhanced supports for victims.

I am confident that this comprehensive operation by An Garda Síochána, supported by Government investment in Garda resources and personnel, will disrupt the activities of burglars, organised crime gangs and prolific offenders and will improve the safety of all our communities across the country.

Crime Prevention

73. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the measures she will take to prevent assaults on vulnerable older persons; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42398/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The general law relating to non-fatal offences, which includes assaults, is contained in the Non-Fatal Offences Against the Person Act 1997. There are a number of different offences related to assault, the more serious of which carry heavy penalties. The legislation provides maximum penalties, and in considering sentencing in a given case a judge may consider any relevant aggravating factors, including the age and vulnerability of the victim, which might warrant the imposition of a relatively higher sentence to a similar case where such factors did not arise. There is also statutory provision to allow the DPP to appeal a sentence on grounds of undue leniency.

While specific crime prevention measures are a matter for the Garda authorities, I am of

course concerned that we do all that we can to support and protect elderly and other vulnerable people in our communities.

The Deputy will be aware that the Government is making very significant investments in policing. The resumption of Garda recruitment has provided for the training of 1,150 new Gardaí by the end of 2016, increasing the number of Gardaí available for frontline duties. In addition, the expansion and upgrading of the Garda fleet and modernising Garda technology and systems will support more flexible and responsive patrolling, increasing the visible police presence and providing reassurance for our communities, including elderly and more vulnerable persons.

Unfortunately we have seen several incidents where elderly people were assaulted in the course of burglaries and the Deputy will be aware that we now have a strategy in place under Operation Thor to significantly step-up our response to this form of criminality. Operation Thor is a multi-strand national anti-crime and anti-burglary operation which has been in the planning for several months. It was launched both as a follow-on to recent announcements regarding investment in policing and to coincide with the advent of longer winter nights.

The strategy being pursued under Operation Thor will entail a broad range of activities to tackle burglars, including additional high-visibility patrols and increased use of checkpoints to tackle the criminal gangs using the national road network, as well as a high-profile national crime prevention awareness campaign, and targeted crime prevention advice for local communities as well as enhanced supports for victims.

Insofar as the particular needs and concerns of the elderly are concerned, An Garda Síochána's Older People Strategy promotes actions to support and respond to the needs and expectations of older people on an ongoing basis. This strategy is pursued through various community policing initiatives and crime prevention programmes carried out in partnership with local communities such as Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert.

The Garda authorities strongly support the ongoing development of these partnership initiatives, and I as Minister greatly value this work. In fact, I have secured a doubling of the funding for these types of initiatives to be funded by my Department in 2016. My Department is currently considering how this funding might be best allocated, in consultation with the Garda authorities.

Garda Deployment

74. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda Síochána stations and the number of gardaí in each station in County Westmeath, County Longford, County Roscommon and County Monaghan on 1 November 2010 and on 1 November 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42422/15]

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

I have been informed by the Garda Commissioner that list of stations and the number of Gardaí assigned to those stations in the Westmeath, Longford/Roscommon and the Cavan/Monaghan Divisions on the 31 October 2010 and on the 31 October 2015, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was as set out in the tables.

Questions - Written Answers

This Government is committed to ensuring that An Garda Síochána has the capacity to provide effective, visible policing throughout the country. A crucial element of the Government's strategy is ongoing seamless recruitment to renew An Garda Síochána. With this in mind Budget 2016 made provision for the recruitment of 600 new Gardaí next year bringing to 1,150 the number of new Gardaí that will be recruited since the reopening of the Garda College in Templemore in September 2014. So far 295 of those new recruits are fully attested and are on the ground in communities nationwide.

I was very pleased to announce the commencement of the recruitment campaign for 2016 last Friday, 27 November. It is being organised by the Public Appointments Service on behalf of the Garda Commissioner. Applications must be made through www.publicjobs.ie. The closing date for applications is Tuesday 5 January 2016. Successful candidates can expect to enter the Garda College from June 2016 onwards.

Westmeath, Roscommon/Longford and Cavan/Monaghan Divisions 31 October 2010

| Division | District | Station | Total |
|-----------|-----------|-------------------------|-------|
| | | ATHLONE | 66 |
| | | BALLINAHOWN | 1 |
| | | BALLYMORE | 2 |
| | | GLASSON | 2 |
| | | KILBEGGAN | 4 |
| | | MOATE | 17 |
| | ATHLONE | Total | 92 |
| | | BALLYNACARGY | 2 |
| | | CASTLEPOLLARD | 3 |
| | | CASTLETOWN GEOGHEGAN | 1 |
| | | DELVIN | 14 |
| | | FINEA | 1 |
| | | KILLUCAN | 5 |
| | | KINNEGAD | 6 |
| | | MULLINGAR | 132 |
| | | MULTYFARNHAM | 1 |
| | | RATHOWEN | 0 |
| | | ROCHFORTBRIDGE | 5 |
| | MULLINGAR | Total | 170 |
| WESTMEATH | Total | 17 Stations | 262 |

| Division | District | Station | Total |
|----------|----------|-----------------|-------|
| | | BOYLE | 30 |
| | | COOTEHALL | 1 |
| | | ELPHIN | 2 |
| | | KEADUE | 1 |
| | | ROOSKY | 3 |
| | | STROKESTOWN | 4 |
| | | TARMONBARRY | 2 |
| | BOYLE | Total | 43 |
| | | BALLAGHADERREEN | 7 |
| | | BALLINLOUGH | 2 |
| | | BALLINTUBBER | 1 |
| | | CASTLEREA | 35 |

| Division | District | Station | Total |
|-------------------------|-----------|----------------|-------|
| | | FRENCHPARK | 3 |
| | | LOUGHGLYNN | 1 |
| | | TULSK | 2 |
| | CASTLEREA | Total | 51 |
| | | ARDAGH | 1 |
| | | BALLINALEE | 2 |
| | | DRUMLISH | 2 |
| | | EDGEWORTHSTOWN | 7 |
| | | GRANARD | 30 |
| | | SMEAR | 1 |
| | GRANARD | Total | 43 |
| | | BALLYMAHON | 6 |
| | | KENAGH | 1 |
| | | LANESBORO | 6 |
| | | LONGFORD | 63 |
| | | NEWTOWNCASHEL | 1 |
| | LONGFORD | Total | 77 |
| | | ATHLEAGUE | 2 |
| | | BALLYFORAN | 1 |
| | | CLONARK | 1 |
| | | KNOCKCROGHERY | 9 |
| | | ROSCOMMON | 75 |
| | | TAUGHMACONNELL | 1 |
| | ROSCOMMON | Total | 89 |
| ROSCOMMON / LONGFORD | Total | 31 Stations | 303 |

| Division | District | Station | Total |
|----------|--------------|----------------|-------|
| | | BAILIEBORO | 40 |
| | | BALLYJAMESDUFF | 4 |
| | | COOTEHILL | 9 |
| | | KINGSCOURT | 6 |
| | | MULLAGH | 1 |
| | | SHERCOCK | 2 |
| | | TULLYVIN | 0 |
| | | VIRGINIA | 5 |
| | BAILIEBORO | Total | 67 |
| | | BALLYCONNELL | 29 |
| | | BAWNBOY | 1 |
| | | BELTURBET | 4 |
| | | BLACKLION | 4 |
| | | DOWRA | 2 |
| | | KILLESHANDRA | 2 |
| | | SWANLINBAR | 2 |
| | BALLYCONNELL | Total | 44 |
| | | BALLYBAY | 5 |
| | | CARRICKMACROSS | 51 |
| | | CASTLEBLANEY | 24 |
| | | CORRINSHIGAGH | 2 |

Questions - Written Answers

| Division | District | Station | Total |
|---------------------|----------------|-------------|-------|
| | | ROCKCORY | 1 |
| | | SHANTONAGH | 2 |
| | CARRICKMACROSS | Total | 85 |
| | | ARVA | 3 |
| | | BALLINAGH | 3 |
| | | CAVAN | 69 |
| | | KILNALECK | 4 |
| | | REDHILLS | 1 |
| | | STRADONE | 1 |
| | CAVAN | Total | 81 |
| | | CLONES | 9 |
| | | CLONTIBRET | 1 |
| | | EMYVALE | 4 |
| | | MONAGHAN | 101 |
| | | NEWBLISS | 1 |
| | | SCOTSTOWN | 4 |
| | | SMITHBORO | 0 |
| | MONAGHAN | Total | 120 |
| CAVAN / MONAGHAN | Total | 34 Stations | 397 |

Garda Divisions of **Cavan/Monaghan**, **Roscommon/Longford** and **Westmeath** on 31 October 2015

| Division | District | Station | Total |
|----------|----------------|-------------------------|-------|
| | | BAILIEBORO | 39 |
| | | BALLYJAMESDUFF | 3 |
| | | COOTEHILL | 6 |
| | | KINGSCOURT | 3 |
| | | MULLAGH | 1 |
| | | SHERCOCK | 1 |
| | BAILIEBORO | VIRGINIA | 11 |
| | | BAILIEBORO Total | 64 |
| | | BALLYBAY | 3 |
| | | CARRICKMACROSS | 42 |
| | | CASTLEBLANEY | 27 |
| | CARRICKMACROSS | ROCKCORY | 2 |
| | | CARRICKMACROSS Total | 74 |
| | | ARVA | 3 |
| | | BALLINAGH | 1 |
| | | BALLYCONNELL | 17 |
| | | BELTURBET | 6 |
| | | BLACKLION | 3 |
| | | CAVAN | 60 |
| | | DOWRA | 1 |
| | | KILLESHANDRA | 1 |
| | | KILNALECK | 3 |
| | CAVAN | SWANLINBAR | 1 |

| Division | District | Station | Total |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------|-------|
| | | CAVAN | 96 |
| | | CLONES | 5 |
| | | EMYVALE | 3 |
| | | MONAGHAN | 78 |
| | MONAGHAN | SCOTSTOWN | 2 |
| CAVAN / MONAGHAN | | MONAGHAN | 88 |
| | CAVAN / MONAGHAN Total | 25 Stations | 322 |
| | | BALLAGHADERREEN | 8 |
| | | BALLINLOUGH | 2 |
| | | BOYLE | 26 |
| | | CASTLEREA | 35 |
| | | ELPHIN | 1 |
| | | FRENCHPARK | 3 |
| | | KEADUE | 1 |
| | | ROOSKY | 4 |
| | | STROKESTOWN | 6 |
| | CASTLEREA | TULSK | 1 |
| | | CASTLEREA | 87 |
| | | DRUMLISH | 2 |
| | | EDGEWORTHSTOWN | 10 |
| | | GRANARD | 27 |
| | GRANARD | SMEAR | 1 |
| | | GRANARD | 40 |
| | | BALLYMAHON | 8 |
| | | KENAGH | 1 |
| | | LANESBORO | 8 |
| | LONGFORD | LONGFORD | 65 |
| | | LONGFORD | 82 |
| | | ATHLEAGUE | 1 |
| | | CLONARK | 5 |
| | | ROSCOMMON | 75 |
| | ROSCOMMON | TAUGHMACONNELL | 1 |
| ROSCOMMON / LONGFORD | | ROSCOMMON | 82 |
| | ROSCOMMON / LONGFORD | 22 Stations | 291 |
| | | ATHLONE | 60 |
| | | BALLYMORE | 1 |
| | | GLASSON | 2 |
| | | KILBEGGAN | 4 |
| | ATHLONE | MOATE | 15 |
| | | ATHLONE | 82 |
| | | BALLYNACARGY | 2 |
| | | CASTLEPOLLARD | 4 |
| | | DELVIN | 10 |
| | | KILLUCAN | 4 |
| | | KINNEGAD | 5 |

| Division | District | Station | Total |
|-----------|-----------|----------------|-----------|
| | | MULLINGAR | 133 |
| | | MULTYFARNHAM | 1 |
| | MULLINGAR | ROCHFORTBRIDGE | 4 |
| WESTMEATH | | MULLINGAR | Total 163 |
| | Total | 13 Stations | 245 |

Garda Misconduct Allegations

75. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when a person (details supplied) will receive communication from the review panel of barristers regarding a case; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42437/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The particular case to which the Deputy refers is amongst those considered under the mechanism established for the independent review of certain allegations of Garda misconduct, or inadequacies in the investigation of certain allegations, which have been made to me as Minister for Justice and Equality, or the Taoiseach, or other public representatives with a view to determining to what extent and in what manner further action may be required in each case. A panel consisting of two senior and five junior counsel was established for that purpose.

The Panel has provided recommendations to me in all 320 cases submitted to them and has therefore largely concluded its work. I am mindful that all complainants are anxious to know the outcome of the review of their case and every effort is being made to conclude the process. In each case a submission will be prepared. Mr Justice Roderick Murphy will review the summary of the conclusion and the letter of notification drafted to ensure that they are a fair and accurate reflection of the recommendation.

The issuing of notification letters to complainants commenced on 29 June. To date, 298 complainants have been notified of the outcome of the review of their cases. Letters will continue to issue to all complainants, including the case referred to by the Deputy, until the process is completed. I have previously assured Deputies that where further investigation is recommended by the review then that will occur.

Garda Inspectorate Reports

76. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she is satisfied that the issues highlighted in the Garda Síochána Inspectorate report, particularly relating to the misrepresentation of crime figures, have been addressed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42366/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will be aware, the Garda Inspectorate Report on Crime Investigation forms an important component in the overall justice reform programme which is currently underway and in respect of which significant progress has already been made. Implementation of this programme, including the reforms recommended by the Inspectorate, is being overseen by the Cabinet Committee on Justice Reform, chaired by An Taoiseach.

Following the publication of the Report, An Garda Síochána established an Implementation Steering Group to focus on the implementation of the short, medium and long-term recommendations in the Report. To assist in the overall reform process a Strategic Transformation

Office has been established at Garda Headquarters to coordinate the implementation of the reforms arising from the Inspectorate's report.

An Garda Síochána has taken a number of important steps to address the issues identified including the establishment of a new Data Quality Team within the Garda Information Services Centre (GISC), and the piloting of a new incident recording process to test data review processes. Arising from and building on this work, the Commissioner indicated that further measures will be rolled out to enhance accountability, governance and oversight of investigations.

In light of the concerns raised by the Inspectorate about the recording of crime data, and the implications for the Official CSO Recorded Crime Statistics, the CSO conducted an in depth review of the crime figures and published its analysis of these matters on 30 June this year. The work of both the CSO and the Garda Inspectorate identified common issues of concern in relation to Garda crime recording processes and systems. Many of these issues have no doubt built up over time and it is true to say that similar issues have also been found with police data in other jurisdictions. CSO's analysis clarified and quantified the issues which were identified by the Inspectorate in relation to crime recording. Notwithstanding these issues, the CSO concluded that the data are of sufficient quality to allow publication of crime statistics, on the basis that care should be taken in their interpretation in light of the report's analysis. The CSO is working with An Garda Síochána to address these issues and will repeat their analysis at regular intervals to monitor data quality.

I might also draw the Deputy's attention to other work being led by the CSO which is chairing an Expert Panel to examine the Garda Inspectorate's recommendations on crime statistics, including with a view to the development of new crime counting rules.

I am pleased that there is a programme of work in place to address the issues identified by the Inspectorate so that we can be satisfied that we have accurate, reliable data on crime. This work will be well supported by the very substantial additional provision of €205 million for new technology and information systems for An Garda Síochána which is provided in the Government Capital Plan 2016 - 21. This level of investment underlines my commitment to progress the important reforms of An Garda Síochána identified by the Garda Inspectorate.

Garda Operations

77. Deputy Seamus Kirk asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the additional resources that will be made available to An Garda Síochána in County Louth under Operation Thor; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42425/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Operation Thor is a multi-stranded national operation which builds on previous and current Garda operations to tackle crime, particularly burglaries the number of which, as we know, increase with the advent of the long winter nights, in both urban and rural communities nationwide. In excess of €5 million is being committed to support Operation Thor. This allocation, which includes funding for Garda overtime will support a combination of additional patrols, checkpoints, rapid armed response and public awareness measures.

This special, targeted operation has to be seen in the context of the major investment that this Government is making in An Garda Síochána. The 2016 Budget allocation of €1.5 billion for An Garda Síochána includes over €67 million in additional funding which will allow the recruitment of 600 new Gardaí next year on top of the 550 Gardaí recruited since this Government reopened the Garda College in September 2014. It will also provide additional

funding for Garda Surveillance, special operations and targeted, intelligence-led policing. This additional recruitment and budget allocation builds on the current high level of investment in Garda vehicles. We have invested over €34 million in new Garda vehicles since 2012 with over 640 new vehicles coming on stream in 2015, ranging from more Garda patrol cars to high-powered vehicles for armed units. The Government's Capital Plan 2016-2021 provides for a further €46 million of investment in vehicles as well as an additional €200 million for Information and Communications Technology which will allow An Garda Síochána to deploy the latest cutting edge technologies in the fight against crime. We are also investing in airborne surveillance. Taken together, this step-change in investment in policing will ensure that the Gardaí can be mobile, visible and responsive, on the roads and in the community.

Operation Thor entails a broad range of activities to tackle burglars, organised crime gangs and prolific offenders as well as working with communities to prevent crime. These activities include: additional high-visibility patrols in identified burglary hot-spots; increased use of checkpoints to tackle the criminal gangs using the national road network; the use of new high powered vehicles by the armed Regional Response Units; efforts to disrupt the stolen goods market; programmes to help reduce re-offending by prolific offenders; a high-profile national crime prevention awareness campaign, and targeted crime prevention advice for local communities and enhanced supports for victims.

The Commissioner, in consultation with her senior management team, is responsible for the detailed allocation of resources, including the additional allocation of the €5 million to support Operation Thor. The Commissioner has assured me that she will aim to maximise the use of these additional resources. A large proportion of domestic burglaries are committed by serial offenders. Figures from the Garda Síochána Analysis Service indicate that 75% of burglaries are committed by 25% of burglars. Targeting these prolific offenders is a priority, consequently the allocation of resources under Operation Thor will be intelligence led and based on analysis of crime patterns by An Garda Síochána. The aim is to deploy resources in advance of where An Garda Síochána anticipate crime might take place in order to prevent the crime occurring.

In this context the Deputy will appreciate that it is not possible to detail the additional resources that will be made available to any one County under Operation Thor. However the Commissioner will continually review the allocation of resources under the Operation, taking into account crime trends and policing priorities across the Garda Regions so as to ensure that the best possible use is made of these resources. I am confident that this comprehensive operation by An Garda Síochána, supported by Government investment, will help disrupt the activities of burglars, organised crime gangs and prolific offenders and will improve the safety of all our communities across the country.

Garda Confidential Recipient

78. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she believes that the present arrangements for investigations into Garda Síochána whistleblowing allegations are sufficiently robust, given the current ongoing cases; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42388/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): It is assumed that the cases referred to are the same cases that were raised in Parliamentary Questions on 20 October and 26 May, 2015. I would again make the point that all of us in this House must be very careful in discussing individual cases of whistleblowing. Protection for whistleblowers rightly prioritises the confidentiality of the process, which is central to the efficacy of the process.

Prior to the Protected Disclosures Act 2014 coming into operation, whistleblowing by members of the Garda Síochána was provided for under the Garda Síochána (Confidential Reporting of Corruption or Malpractice) Regulations 2007, which provided for the appointment of an independent Confidential Recipient to whom Garda members, and civilian support staff, could report, in full confidence, instances where they believed there may have been corruption or malpractice within the Garda Síochána.

This system was replaced by the Protected Disclosures Act 2014, which came into operation on 15 July 2014 as part of this Government's comprehensive approach to enhance the protection available to whistle blowers, including Garda whistleblowers. GSOC was prescribed under the Act as a body to receive protected disclosures on Garda matters. Under the Act, members of the Garda Síochána may now communicate their concerns to the Garda Commissioner, as their employer, or to GSOC as a prescribed body, and are entitled to the protections provided by the Act.

I am satisfied that the legislative provisions now in place under the 2014 Act, including the protections afforded for whistleblowers, will prove to be an effective remedy for Garda members who wish to report their concerns regarding potential wrongdoing.

As I have previously advised House in relation to these particular cases, I have no function in relation to criminal investigations and the submission of files to the DPP, or in relation to the investigation of complaints by GSOC.

Garda Deployment

79. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda Síochána stations and the number of gardaí in each station in County Clare on 1 November 2010 and on 1 November 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42404/15]

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

I have been informed by the Garda Commissioner that list of stations and the number of Gardaí assigned to those stations in the Clare Division on the 31 October 2010 and on the 31 October 2015, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was as set out in the tables overleaf.

This Government is committed to ensuring that An Garda Síochána has the capacity to provide effective, visible policing throughout the country. A crucial element of the Government's strategy is ongoing seamless recruitment to renew An Garda Síochána. With this in mind Budget 2016 made provision for the recruitment of 600 new Gardaí next year bringing to 1,150 the number of new Gardaí that will be recruited since the reopening of the Garda College in Templemore in September 2014. So far 295 of those new recruits are fully attested and are on the ground in communities nationwide.

I was very pleased to announce the commencement of the recruitment campaign for 2016 last Friday, 27 November. It is being organised by the Public Appointments Service on behalf of the Garda Commissioner. Applications must be made through www.publicjobs.ie. The closing date for applications is Tuesday 5 January 2016. Successful candidates can expect to enter the Garda College from June 2016 onwards.

Clare Garda Division October 2010

| Division | District | Station | Total |
|----------|------------|---------------------|-------|
| | | CRUSHEEN | 2 |
| | | ENNIS | 129 |
| | | IMMIGRATION OFFICE | 6 |
| | | LISSYCASEY | 1 |
| | | NEWMARKET ON FERGUS | 4 |
| | | QUIN | 2 |
| | | SHANNON | 62 |
| | | SIXMILEBRIDGE | 4 |
| | ENNIS | Total | 210 |
| | | BALLYVAUGHAN | 1 |
| | | COROFIN | 2 |
| | | ENNISTYMON | 24 |
| | | INAGH | 1 |
| | | LAHINCH | 3 |
| | | LISDOONVARNA | 2 |
| | | MILTOWN MALBAY | 3 |
| | ENNISTYMON | Total | 36 |
| | | BROADFORD | 1 |
| | | KILLALOE | 35 |
| | | MOUNTSHANNON | 1 |
| | | SCARIFF | 5 |
| | | TULLA | 2 |
| | KILLALOE | Total | 44 |
| | | CARRIGAHOLT | 1 |
| | | DOONBEG | 1 |
| | | KILDYSART | 3 |
| | | KILKEE | 3 |
| | | KILMIHIL | 1 |
| | | KILRUSH | 31 |
| | | LABASHEEDA | 1 |
| | KILRUSH | Total | 41 |
| CLARE | Total | 27 Stations | 331 |

Clare Garda Divison 31 October 2015

| Division | District | Station | Total |
|----------|----------|---------------------|-------|
| | | CRUSHEEN | 1 |
| | | ENNIS | 118 |
| | | IMMIGRATION OFFICE | 6 |
| | | KILLALOE | 31 |
| | | LISSYCASEY | 1 |
| | | NEWMARKET ON FERGUS | 3 |
| | | SCARIFF | 4 |
| | | SHANNON | 52 |
| | | SIXMILEBRIDGE | 4 |

| Division | District | Station | Total |
|----------|----------|----------------------|-------|
| | ENNIS | TULLA | 2 |
| | | Total | 222 |
| | | BALLYVAUGHAN | 1 |
| | | COROFIN | 2 |
| | | ENNISTYMON | 25 |
| | | KILDYSART | 2 |
| | | KILKEE | 2 |
| | | KILRUSH | 37 |
| | KILRUSH | LISDOONVARNA | 1 |
| CLARE | | Total | 70 |
| | | Total 17 Stations | 292 |

Traveller Community

80. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her views on the establishment of a Traveller agency to address issues of equality; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42431/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy Aodhán Ó Ríordáin): The Deputy will be aware that there is a consultation process underway led by my Department to develop a new National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy. Phase 1 (identification of key themes for the new Strategy) has been completed, and Phase 2 (identification and agreement of high-level objectives under each agreed theme) will commence shortly. The final Phase, Phase 3 (identification of detailed actions to achieve each agreed objective, with associated timescales, Key Performance Indicators, institutional responsibilities and monitoring arrangements), will commence in early 2016 and conclude also in early 2016 with the presentation of a new Strategy for Government approval.

This process will give us a new Traveller Inclusion Strategy and a set of very real actions that need to be taken to bring about a real improvement in quality of life for Travellers. The question of whether revised institutional arrangements for delivery of services to Travellers are necessary to bring about greater coherence in and improve the effectiveness of statutory services for the Traveller community has been raised during the ongoing consultation process and, as indicated on behalf of the Government during the recent debate in the House on the question of recognition of Travellers as an ethnic group, will be considered in the drafting of the new Inclusion Strategy.

Garda Reserve

81. **Deputy Anthony Lawlor** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda Síochána reserves; the number in County Kildare; their role in the community; if they should be more proactive in community policing; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42295/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of personnel, including, reserve members 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 as of 31 October 2015, the latest date for which figures are readily available, there are 988 reserve members in total, of which 32 are assigned to the Kildare Garda Division.

The Garda Reserve was established in accordance with the Garda Síochána Act 2005 to enhance the links between An Garda Síochána and local communities and consists of voluntary unpaid members, drawn from the community, to support the work of An Garda Síochána. Reserve members make a real and tangible contribution to the policing of communities right across the country and I am fully supportive of the continued development of the Reserve. In particular, I welcome the recent conferring by the Commissioner of additional powers on reserve members under the Criminal Justice (Public Order) Act 1994 and also her decision that reserve members should carry out additional duties including the serving of summonses, and the issuing of Fixed Charged Penalty Notices where offences are detected.

I am pleased that the recruitment campaign for 2016 for full-time members of An Garda Síochána, which I announced last Friday, 27 November includes a special stream for eligible members of the Garda Reserve. Reserve members have undergone training in many of the skills required to be an effective full-time member of An Garda Síochána and have gained experience in operational policing and it is right that satisfactory service by a reserve member be given due recognition.

The Public Appointments Service (PAS) is organising the recruitment competition on behalf of the Garda Commissions and applications may be made through the PAS website at www.publicjobs.ie. The closing date for applications is Tuesday 5 January 2016. I would encourage all reserves who satisfy the eligibility criteria to apply.

Anti-Social Behaviour

82. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her plans for the Garda Síochána to introduce a public order unit for Dublin; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42400/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the deployment of Garda personnel and for the management and organisation of Garda operational units. I am assured that Garda management in the Dublin Metropolitan Region keep this deployment under continuing review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities, including with respect to concerns about public order and anti-social behaviour, so as to ensure that the best possible use is made of policing resources. The very significant additional Garda resources which the Government is now making available will undoubtedly support enhanced policing and public safety in all areas, including Dublin City.

I am advised by the Garda authorities that a Public Order Unit is in place in the Dublin Metropolitan Region since 2004, and is deployed as required. The Unit is highly skilled and trained to deal with public order incidents of all gravity up to and including riot. In addition, the Deputy will be aware that An Garda Síochána have developed a clear strategy to address public order concerns within the framework of the Dublin City Centre Policing Plan which has been operational since June 2013. Garda actions under the Plan include dedicated high visibility patrols in key commercial and public thoroughfares. These patrols are informed by crime trends, demand studies and footfall in the areas in question, and include dedicated patrols on weekend nights to deal with public order issues in the city centre.

The Garda approach includes focusing resources on specific areas of the city according to need. As part of this, a number of targeted city centre policing operations are in place. These operations include Operation Spire, which provides for a high visibility policing presence specifically on O'Connell Street at critical times to address anti-social behaviour, drug dealing and related crime. The operation is designed as a preventative measure and the area is patrolled by uniform patrols supplemented as required by Crime Prevention Unit and Divisional Crime Task Force personnel. The City Centre policing plan is also supported by other operations including Operation Pier which focuses on the Pearse Street District, as well as Operation Viking and Operation Clean Streets which further target the sale and supply of illicit drugs in the city centre.

Addressing the factors which contribute to public order issues also requires communication and cooperation with a range of relevant stakeholders and An Garda Síochána engages extensively with business and community interests with respect to crime prevention, enforcement and policing concerns.

Garda Deployment

83. **Deputy Anthony Lawlor** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the measures in place to relieve gardaí of administrative duties and to allow them to concentrate their efforts on crime prevention; her plans to focus on this; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42294/15]

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

There are currently over 2,000 full-time-equivalent civilian support staff in the Garda Síochána making up 14% of the overall Garda workforce. Civilian personnel wholly or largely staff several vital operational support areas such as the Garda Central Vetting Unit, the Garda Information Services Centre, and the Fixed Charge Processing Office. They also provide vital support services in a wide range of areas, such as human resources, training & development, IT and telecommunications, finance and procurement, internal audit, research and analysis, accommodation and fleet management, scene-of-crime support and medical services. In doing so, they release highly trained Gardaí from administrative tasks to operational policing.

I am committed to ensuring that the overall composition of the Garda workforce achieves the right balance between highly trained Gardaí and professional, skilled civilian staff. Having regard to international experience, there is undoubtedly value in exploring further opportunities for increasing the ratio of civilians to Gardaí, and for releasing Gardaí from administrative and other positions to front-line duties.

The process which is currently ongoing to civilianise border control functions at Dublin airport and the transfer of these responsibilities from An Garda Síochána to the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department is an excellent example of this. The first phase of that project is now completed with civilian staff of INIS operating all passport controls in Terminal 1 on a 24/7 basis from 22 June, 2015. The civilianisation of front-line immigration checks in Terminal 2 is under way with civilian staff operating checks at the transit desk in that Terminal since October, 2015. The move to a 24/7 civilian operation in Terminal 2 will be completed over the coming months. I am also looking at deploying civilian officers to other

major ports of entry to the State where this makes sense from a cost and efficiency perspective.

Further work in this area will be progressed in conjunction with the Garda Commissioner in the context of the report of the Garda Inspectorate of its review under the Haddington Road Agreement. The terms of reference of that review include all aspects of the operation and administration of An Garda Síochána including the structure, organisation and staffing of An Garda Síochána and the deployment of members and civilian staff to relevant and appropriate roles.

Cabinet Committee Meetings

84. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the implementation of the working group's recommendation to prioritise applicants for asylum who are waiting for a decision for five years or more; if she is aware that information on implementation has not been communicated to a number of persons in this circumstance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42376/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): In my response to Parliamentary Question No. 340 on 10 November last, I informed the Deputy that an analysis of the recommendations contained in the Report of the Working Group on the Protection Process had been prepared for the Cabinet Committee on Social Policy and Public Sector Reform.

The Deputy will be aware that the Report of the Working Group identifies the excessive length of time in the protection process as the most significant issue facing applicants, in particular those in the Direct Provision system. Notwithstanding the deliberations of the Cabinet Sub-Committee on this matter, I am committed to tackling the lengthy delays in the protection system. A number of initiatives have already been taken to deal with the number of cases on hand, including the scheduling of interviews on Saturdays, the transfer of subsidiary protection application processing to the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner, the establishment and subsequent enhancement of a legal panel to assist the Commissioner with this work, and the appointment of additional members to the Refugee Appeals Tribunal.

As I also mentioned in my response to the Deputy on 10 November last, one of the key recommendations in the Working Group Report is the early enactment of the International Protection Bill which will provide for the introduction of a single application procedure for international protection, which is specifically aimed at addressing the length of time persons spend in the protection process. The Bill provides for the transfer of responsibility for the processing of protection applications from the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner to the Department of Justice and Equality. It is intended to establish a Protection Office within the Department for this purpose. The Bill also provides for the establishment of an independent International Protection Appeals Tribunal. The new procedure will significantly streamline and speed up the processing of protection applications and will reduce the length of time that persons spend in the Direct Provision system. Existing best practice will be protected and embedded within the new regime. The Deputy will be aware that I published the Bill last week with a view to have it enacted by year end.

Garda Deployment

85. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda Síochána stations and the number of gardaí in each station in County Cavan and in County Monaghan on 1 November 2010 and on 1 November 2015; and if she will make a

statement on the matter. [42418/15]

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

I have been informed by the Garda Commissioner that list of stations and the number of Gardaí assigned to those stations in the Cavan/Monaghan Division on the 31 October 2010 and on the 31 October 2015, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was as set out in the tables.

This Government is committed to ensuring that An Garda Síochána has the capacity to provide effective, visible policing throughout the country. A crucial element of the Government's strategy is ongoing seamless recruitment to renew An Garda Síochána. With this in mind Budget 2016 made provision for the recruitment of 600 new Gardaí next year bringing to 1,150 the number of new Gardaí that will be recruited since the reopening of the Garda College in Templemore in September 2014. So far 295 of those new recruits are fully attested and are on the ground in communities nationwide.

I was very pleased to announce the commencement of the recruitment campaign for 2016 last Friday, 27 November. It is being organised by the Public Appointments Service on behalf of the Garda Commissioner. Applications must be made through www.publicjobs.ie. The closing date for applications is Tuesday 5 January 2016. Successful candidates can expect to enter the Garda College from June 2016 onwards.

Cavan/Monaghan Division 2010

| Division | District | Station | Total |
|----------|--------------|----------------|-------|
| | | BAILIEBORO | 40 |
| | | BALLYJAMESDUFF | 4 |
| | | COOTEHILL | 9 |
| | | KINGSCOURT | 6 |
| | | MULLAGH | 1 |
| | | SHERCOCK | 2 |
| | | TULLYVIN | 0 |
| | | VIRGINIA | 5 |
| | BAILIEBORO | Total | 67 |
| | | BALLYCONNELL | 29 |
| | | BAWNBOY | 1 |
| | | BELTURBET | 4 |
| | | BLACKLION | 4 |
| | | DOWRA | 2 |
| | | KILLESHANDRA | 2 |
| | | SWANLINBAR | 2 |
| | BALLYCONNELL | Total | 44 |
| | | BALLYBAY | 5 |
| | | CARRICKMACROSS | 51 |
| | | CASTLEBLANEY | 24 |
| | | CORRINSHIGAGH | 2 |
| | | ROCKCORRY | 1 |

Questions - Written Answers

| Division | District | Station | Total |
|------------------|----------------|-------------|-------|
| | | SHANTONAGH | 2 |
| | CARRICKMACROSS | Total | 85 |
| | | ARVA | 3 |
| | | BALLINAGH | 3 |
| | | CAVAN | 69 |
| | | KILNALECK | 4 |
| | | REDHILLS | 1 |
| | | STRADONE | 1 |
| | CAVAN | Total | 81 |
| | | CLONES | 9 |
| | | CLONTIBRET | 1 |
| | | EMYVALE | 4 |
| | | MONAGHAN | 101 |
| | | NEWBLISS | 1 |
| | | SCOTSTOWN | 4 |
| | | SMITHBORO | 0 |
| | MONAGHAN | Total | 120 |
| CAVAN / MONAGHAN | Total | 34 Stations | 397 |

Garda Division of Cavan / Monaghan 31 October 2015

| Division | District | Station | Total |
|------------------|----------------|-------------------------|-------|
| CAVAN / MONAGHAN | BAILIEBORO | BAILIEBORO | 39 |
| | | BALLYJAMESDUFF | 3 |
| | | COOTEHILL | 6 |
| | | KINGSCOURT | 3 |
| | | MULLAGH | 1 |
| | | SHERCOCK | 1 |
| | | VIRGINIA | 11 |
| | | BAILIEBORO Total | 64 |
| | CARRICKMACROSS | BALLYBAY | 3 |
| | | CARRICKMACROSS | 42 |
| | | CASTLEBLANEY | 27 |
| | | ROCKCORRY | 2 |
| | | CARRICKMACROSS Total | 74 |
| | CAVAN | ARVA | 3 |
| | | BALLINAGH | 1 |
| | | BALLYCONNELL | 17 |
| | | BELTURBET | 6 |
| | | BLACKLION | 3 |
| | | CAVAN | 60 |
| | | DOWRA | 1 |
| | | KILLESHANDRA | 1 |
| | | KILNALECK | 3 |
| | | SWANLINBAR | 1 |
| | | CAVAN Total | 96 |
| | MONAGHAN | CLONES | 5 |
| | | EMYVALE | 3 |

| Division | District | Station | Total |
|----------|---------------------------|-------------------|-------|
| | | MONAGHAN | 78 |
| | | SCOTSTOWN | 2 |
| | | MONAGHAN Total | 88 |
| | CAVAN / MONAGHAN Total | 25 Stations | 322 |

Garda Deployment

86. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda Síochána stations and the number of gardaí in each station in County Mayo on 1 November 2010 and on 1 November 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42402/15]

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

I have been informed by the Garda Commissioner that list of stations and the number of Gardaí assigned to those stations in the Mayo Division on the 31 October 2010 and 31 October 2015, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was as set out in the tables.

This Government is committed to ensuring that An Garda Síochána has the capacity to provide effective, visible policing throughout the country. A crucial element of the Government's strategy is ongoing seamless recruitment to renew An Garda Síochána. With this in mind Budget 2016 made provision for the recruitment of 600 new Gardaí next year bringing to 1,150 the number of new Gardaí that will be recruited since the reopening of the Garda College in Templemore in September 2014. So far 295 of those new recruits are fully attested and are on the ground in communities nationwide.

I was very pleased to announce the commencement of the recruitment campaign for 2016 last Friday, 27 November. It is being organised by the Public Appointments Service on behalf of the Garda Commissioner. Applications must be made through www.publicjobs.ie. The closing date for applications is Tuesday 5 January 2016. Successful candidates can expect to enter the Garda College from June 2016 onwards.

Mayo Garda Division October 2010

| Division | District | Station | Total |
|----------|----------|--------------|-------|
| | | BALLINA | 50 |
| | | BALLYCASTLE | 1 |
| | | BONNICONLON | 1 |
| | | CROSSMOLINA | 4 |
| | | KILLALA | 1 |
| | | LAHARDANE | 1 |
| | BALLINA | Total | 58 |
| | | BALLYCROY | 1 |
| | | BANGOR ERRIS | 3 |
| | | BELLACORICK | 1 |
| | | BELMULLET | 19 |

Questions - Written Answers

| Division | District | Station | Total |
|----------|-------------|---------------------|-------|
| | | BLACKSOD | 1 |
| | | GLENAMOY | 1 |
| | BELMULLET | Total | 26 |
| | | BALLA | 2 |
| | | BALLYGLASS | 1 |
| | | BALLYVARY | 1 |
| | | CASTLEBAR | 76 |
| | | GARDA INFO SERVICES | 3 |
| | | GLENISLAND | 0 |
| | | PARTRY | 2 |
| | | TOURMAKEADY | 1 |
| | CASTLEBAR | Total | 86 |
| | | BALLINDINE | 1 |
| | | BALLINROBE | 9 |
| | | CLAREMORRIS | 37 |
| | | CONG | 1 |
| | | HOLLYMOUNT | 1 |
| | | KILMAINE | 0 |
| | | KNOCK | 2 |
| | | SHRULE | 1 |
| | CLAREMORRIS | Total | 52 |
| | | BALLYHAUNIS | 10 |
| | | CHARLESTOWN | 7 |
| | | FOXFORD | 3 |
| | | KILKELLY | 9 |
| | | KILTIMAGH | 3 |
| | | SWINFORD | 28 |
| | SWINFORD | Total | 60 |
| | | ACHILL SOUND | 3 |
| | | KEEL | 0 |
| | | LOUISBURGH | 2 |
| | | MULRANNY | 1 |
| | | NEWPORT | 3 |
| | | WESTPORT | 30 |
| | WESTPORT | Total | 39 |
| MAYO | Total | 39 Stations | 321 |

Mayo Garda Division 31 October 2015

| Division | District | Station | Total |
|----------|----------|--------------|-------|
| | | BALLINA | 45 |
| | | BONNICONLON | 1 |
| | | CROSSMOLINA | 5 |
| | | FOXFORD | 3 |
| | BALLINA | KILLALA | 2 |
| | | Total | 56 |
| | | BALLYCROY | 1 |
| | | BANGOR ERRIS | 3 |

| Division | District | Station | Total |
|----------|-------------|-----------------------|-------|
| | | BÉAL AN MHUIRTHEAD | 25 |
| | BELMULLET | GLEANN NA MUAIDHE | 1 |
| | | Total | 30 |
| | | BALLA | 2 |
| | | CASTLEBAR | 80 |
| | CASTLEBAR | PARTRY | 1 |
| | | Total | 83 |
| | | BALLINDINE | 1 |
| | | BALLINROBE | 7 |
| | | BALLYHAUNIS | 10 |
| | | CHARLESTOWN | 5 |
| | | CLAREMORRIS | 37 |
| | | CONG | 1 |
| | | KILKELLY | 5 |
| | | KILMAINE | 1 |
| | | KILTIMAGH | 1 |
| | | KNOCK | 1 |
| | | SHRULE | 1 |
| | CLAREMORRIS | SWINFORD | 23 |
| | | Total | 93 |
| | | ACHILL SOUND | 5 |
| | | KEEL | 1 |
| | | LOUISBURGH | 2 |
| | | NEWPORT | 2 |
| | WESTPORT | WESTPORT | 30 |
| MAYO | | Total | 40 |
| | | Total | 302 |
| | 29 Stations | | |

Garda Deployment

87. **Deputy Seamus Kirk** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí in each Garda Síochána station in County Louth on 1 November 2010 and on 1 November 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42426/15]

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

I have been informed by the Garda Commissioner that list of stations and the number of Gardaí assigned to those stations in the Louth Division on the 31 October 2010 and on the 31 October 2015, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was as set out in the tables.

This Government is committed to ensuring that An Garda Síochána has the capacity to provide effective, visible policing throughout the country. A crucial element of the Government's strategy is ongoing seamless recruitment to renew An Garda Síochána. With this in mind

Questions - Written Answers

Budget 2016 made provision for the recruitment of 600 new Gardaí next year bringing to 1,150 the number of new Gardaí that will be recruited since the reopening of the Garda College in Templemore in September 2014. So far 295 of those new recruits are fully attested and are on the ground in communities nationwide.

I was very pleased to announce the commencement of the recruitment campaign for 2016 last Friday, 27 November. It is being organised by the Public Appointments Service on behalf of the Garda Commissioner. Applications must be made through www.publicjobs.ie. The closing date for applications is Tuesday 5 January 2016. Successful candidates can expect to enter the Garda College from June 2016 onwards.

Louth Garda Division 31 Oct 2010

| Division | District | Station | Total |
|----------|----------|------------------|-------|
| | | ARDEE | 31 |
| | | CASTLEBELLINGHAM | 3 |
| | | COLLON | 6 |
| | | LOUTH | 1 |
| | ARDEE | Total | 41 |
| | | CLOUGHERHEAD | 4 |
| | | DROGHEDA | 102 |
| | | DUNLEER | 5 |
| | DROGHEDA | Total | 111 |
| | | BLACKROCK | 5 |
| | | CARLINGFORD | 6 |
| | | DROMAD | 7 |
| | | DUNDALK | 133 |
| | | HACKBALLSCROSS | 8 |
| | | OMEATH | 5 |
| | DUNDALK | Total | 164 |
| LOUTH | Total | 13 Stations | 316 |

Louth Garda Division 31 October 2015

| Division | District | Station | Total |
|----------|----------|------------------|-------|
| | | ARDEE | 25 |
| | | CASTLEBELLINGHAM | 2 |
| | | COLLON | 5 |
| | ARDEE | LOUTH | 1 |
| | | Total | 33 |
| | | CLOUGHERHEAD | 3 |
| | | DROGHEDA | 95 |
| | DROGHEDA | DUNLEER | 6 |
| | | Total | 104 |
| | | BLACKROCK | 3 |
| | | CARLINGFORD | 5 |
| | | DRUMAD | 7 |
| | | DUNDALK | 122 |
| | | HACKBALLSCROSS | 4 |
| | DUNDALK | OMEATH | 3 |

| Division | District | Station | Total |
|----------|----------|-------------|-------|
| LOUTH | | Total | 144 |
| | Total | 13 Stations | 281 |

International Terrorism

88. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the analysis she has carried out regarding potential security threats posed by Ireland's facilitation of the US military at Shannon in County Clare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42387/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As I have stated to the House previously, Ireland, in common with other democratic states, faces a threat from international terrorism. The current assessment is that while an attack here is possible, it is unlikely and there is no specific information that an attack here is planned. The level of threat from this source is kept under constant review by An Garda Síochána and the Garda Authorities have reference to all relevant information in carrying out their assessments, including international events.

I am aware of comments made previously to the effect that Ireland is a target because we permit US planes to refuel at Shannon Airport. However, permission to land in the State is subject to clear policy stipulations – that aircraft are unarmed, carry no arms, ammunition or explosives, do not engage in intelligence gathering and that the flights do not form part of military exercises or operations. These arrangements apply to all foreign military aircraft landing in Shannon. These arrangements are fully consistent with our policy of military neutrality.

I can assure the House that An Garda Síochána, supported where necessary by the Defence Forces, is taking all possible steps to deal with any threat to this country. The Deputy will understand that, of their nature, security measures should not be disclosed publicly.

Garda Operations

89. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the additional resources that will be made available to An Garda Síochána in north and west Cork under Operation Thor; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42405/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Operation Thor is a multi-stranded national operation which builds on previous and current Garda operations to tackle crime, particularly burglaries the number of which, as we know, increase with the advent of the long winter nights, in both urban and rural communities nationwide. In excess of €5 million is being committed to support Operation Thor. This allocation, which includes funding for Garda overtime will support a combination of additional patrols, checkpoints, rapid armed response and public awareness measures.

This special, targeted operation has to be seen in the context of the major investment that this Government is making in An Garda Síochána. The 2016 Budget allocation of €1.5 billion for An Garda Síochána includes over €67 million in additional funding which will allow the recruitment of 600 new Gardaí next year on top of the 550 Gardaí recruited since this Government reopened the Garda College in September 2014. It will also provide additional funding for Garda Surveillance, special operations and targeted, intelligence-led policing. This additional recruitment and budget allocation builds on the current high level of investment in Garda vehicles. We have invested over €34 million in new Garda vehicles since 2012 with

over 640 new vehicles coming on stream in 2015, ranging from more Garda patrol cars to high-powered vehicles for armed units. The Government's Capital Plan 2016-2021 provides for a further €46 million of investment in vehicles as well as an additional €200 million for Information and Communications Technology which will allow An Garda Síochána to deploy the latest cutting edge technologies in the fight against crime. We are also investing in airborne surveillance. Taken together, this step-change in investment in policing will ensure that the Gardaí can be mobile, visible and responsive, on the roads and in the community.

Operation Thor entails a broad range of activities to tackle burglars, organised crime gangs and prolific offenders as well as working with communities to prevent crime. These activities include: additional high-visibility patrols in identified burglary hot-spots; increased use of checkpoints to tackle the criminal gangs using the national road network; the use of new high powered vehicles by the armed Regional Response Units; efforts to disrupt the stolen goods market; programmes to help reduce re-offending by prolific offenders; a high-profile national crime prevention awareness campaign, and targeted crime prevention advice for local communities and enhanced supports for victims.

The Commissioner, in consultation with her senior management team, is responsible for the detailed allocation of resources, including the additional allocation of the €5 million to support Operation Thor. The Commissioner has assured me that she will aim to maximise the use of these additional resources. A large proportion of domestic burglaries are committed by serial offenders. Figures from the Garda Síochána Analysis Service indicate that 75% of burglaries are committed by 25% of burglars. Targeting these prolific offenders is a priority, consequently the allocation of resources under Operation Thor will be intelligence led and based on analysis of crime patterns by An Garda Síochána. The aim is to deploy resources in advance of where An Garda Síochána anticipate crime might take place in order to prevent the crime occurring.

In this context the Deputy will appreciate that it is not possible to detail the additional resources that will be made available to any one County under Operation Thor. However the Commissioner will continually review the allocation of resources under the Operation, taking into account crime trends and policing priorities across the Garda Regions so as to ensure that the best possible use is made of these resources. I am confident that this comprehensive operation by An Garda Síochána, supported by Government investment, will help disrupt the activities of burglars, organised crime gangs and prolific offenders and will improve the safety of all our communities across the country.

International Terrorism

90. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will report on the emergency meeting of EU Justice and Interior Ministers in Brussels in Belgium on 20 November 2015 which discussed the European Union's response to the terrorist attacks in Paris in France; the proposals the Irish Government made as being the most appropriate response to the tragic events there; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42436/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): On 20 November 2015, I met with EU Justice and Interior Ministers in emergency session in Brussels to discuss the European Union's response to the terrorist attacks, which took place in Paris on 13 November 2015. As well as making clear Member States' solidarity with France, the focus of Ministers' was ensuring an appropriate and unified response to the attacks, including all reasonable measures to counteract the terrorism threat. In this regard, the Council Conclusions of 20 November 2015 underline the importance of accelerating the implementation of all areas covered by the statement on counter-terrorism issued by the Members of the European Council on 12 February

2015 and in particular of the following measures: the EU Passenger Name Record (PNR) directive, firearms, controls of external borders, information sharing, terrorist financing, and the criminal justice response to terrorism and violent extremism.

At the meeting on 20 November, I expressed on behalf of Ireland my deepest sympathy to the French Government and to the people of France. I offered Ireland's support for the Council Conclusions, and in particular the proposals put forward by France.

In referring to the critical importance of cooperation between the police and intelligence services in combatting terrorism, I expressed my view that enhanced access for EU police and security services to data and intelligence sharing has a critical role in the fight against terrorism. An Garda Síochána already makes full use of the range of information sharing means available to them, including Interpol, Europol and especially bi-lateral information exchange. I added that we must always be careful to ensure that any additional measures we consider enhance rather than complicate that existing co-operation.

In relation to the European Passenger Name Record Directive, the Council emphasised that the Directive should include internal EU flights in its scope, provide for a sufficiently long period during which the PNR data can be retained in non-masked-out form and that the Directive should not be limited only to crimes of a transnational nature. I confirmed that Ireland fully supports the compromise proposals put forward by the Presidency in relation to the Directive in the interests of securing early agreement with the European Parliament before the end of 2015. I am satisfied that the Council's general approach on the PNR proposal, which was established in April 2012 and supported by Ireland, contains a robust set of bespoke safeguards for privacy and data protection in the context of a proportionate framework for providing law enforcement access to PNR data to support the fight against terrorism and serious crime.

In relation to other issues discussed, I indicated Ireland's support for the proposals relating to terrorist financing, given the fact that disrupting the flow of funds to terrorists is a vital aspect of combatting their activities. I also confirmed that Ireland supports EU common standards for the deactivation of firearms and welcomed the Commission's proposal to develop an Action Plan against illegal trafficking of weapons. I acknowledged that the establishment in Europol of the Counter Terrorism Centre is an important development and that its role in removing illegal internet content will be particularly important in helping to stem the spread of material that contributes to radicalising people and feeding extremism.

Prison Accommodation Standards

91. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the practice of doubling and trebling the number of prisoners in prison cells is draconian; if there should be one prison bed per prison cell, given that many prisoners in custody have mental health issues and problems with anger management and given that cell sharing is proving very problematic for prison staff and prisoners. [42289/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Prison Service that figures in relation to the prisoner population and capacity levels are published on their website www.irishprisons.ie on a daily basis. The Deputy should be aware that the overall bed capacity of the Irish Prison System is 4,116. On 26th November, 2015 there were 3,777 prisoners in custody. This represents a capacity rate of 92 per cent.

On 14 October 2015, there were 3,685 prisoners in custody. Of that total, 2,040 (55 per cent) prisoners were accommodated in single cells. There were 660 cells accommodating 2 prisoners

(1,320 or 36% of prisoners), 85 cells accommodating 3 prisoners (255 prisoners) and 16 cells accommodating 4 or more prisoners (70 prisoners) of which 12 were dormitory room style accommodation in Shelton Abbey Open Centre.

I can inform the Deputy that all committals are assessed upon arrival to prison and matters requiring interventions, such as mental health issues and anger management are identified and assessed. Further, throughout the period of their incarceration, prisoners will be reviewed in order to establish the most practical and suitable programmes available to them to address factors impacting on their likelihood to re-offend upon release. This assessment process also seeks to ensure that wherever possible, prisoners are accommodated in cells appropriate to their needs. Some prisoners are more suited to multi-occupancy cells, while others are more suited to single-cell occupancy.

I wish to add that the Director General of the Irish Prison Service accepted the recommendations contained in the Report of the Commission of Investigation into the Death of Gary Douche (commonly referred to as the McMorrough Report). A “Cell Sharing Risk Assessment Policy” has been drafted and is currently being piloted in Midlands Prison. It is intended to roll-out the Assessment tool throughout the Estate in order to improve the safety of prisoners and staff alike.

Garda Deployment

92. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda Síochána stations and the number of gardaí in each station in the Limerick Garda Síochána division on 1 November 2010 and on 1 November 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42399/15]

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

I have been informed by the Garda Commissioner that the number of stations and the number of Gardaí assigned to those stations in the Limerick Division on the 31 October 2010 and on the 31 October 2015, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was as set out in the tables.

This Government is committed to ensuring that An Garda Síochána has the capacity to provide effective, visible policing throughout the country. A crucial element of the Government’s strategy is ongoing seamless recruitment to renew An Garda Síochána. With this in mind Budget 2016 made provision for the recruitment of 600 new Gardaí next year bringing to 1,150 the number of new Gardaí that will be recruited since the reopening of the Garda College in Templemore in September 2014. So far 295 of those new recruits are fully attested and are on the ground in communities nationwide.

I was very pleased to announce the commencement of the recruitment campaign for 2016 last Friday, 27 November. It is being organised by the Public Appointments Service on behalf of the Garda Commissioner. Applications must be made through www.publicjobs.ie. The closing date for applications is Tuesday 5 January 2016. Successful candidates can expect to enter the Garda College from June 2016 onwards.

Limerick Garda Division October 2010

1 December 2015

| Division | District | Station | Total |
|----------|----------------|-----------------------|-------|
| | | ADARE | 3 |
| | | ASKEATON | 23 |
| | | CROOM | 4 |
| | | FOYNES | 1 |
| | | GLIN | 1 |
| | | PALLASKENRY | 1 |
| | | RATHKEALE | 7 |
| | | SHANAGOLDEN | 1 |
| | ASKEATON | Total | 41 |
| | | BALLYLANDERS | 1 |
| | | BRUFF | 24 |
| | | BRUREE | 1 |
| | | CAPPAMORE | 2 |
| | | DOON | 1 |
| | | GALBALLY | 1 |
| | | HOSPITAL | 1 |
| | | KILFINANE | 1 |
| | | KILMALLOCK | 6 |
| | | MURROE | 3 |
| | | OOLA | 1 |
| | | PALLAS | 2 |
| | BRUFF | Total | 44 |
| | | ARDNACRUSHA | 3 |
| | | CASTLECONNELL | 4 |
| | | HENRY STREET | 268 |
| | | MARY STREET | 18 |
| | | MAYORSTONE PARK | 84 |
| | HENRY STREET | Total | 377 |
| | | ABBEYFEALE | 9 |
| | | ATHEA | 1 |
| | | BALLINGARRY | 1 |
| | | CASTLETOWN CONYERS | 1 |
| | | DRUMCOLLOGHER | 2 |
| | | KILMEEDY | 1 |
| | | NEWCASTLE WEST | 29 |
| | | TOURNAFULLA | 1 |
| | NEWCASTLE WEST | Total | 45 |
| | | BALLYNEETY | 0 |
| | | CAHERCONLISH | 1 |
| | | PATRICKSWELL | 0 |
| | | ROXBORO ROAD | 140 |
| | ROXBORO ROAD | Total | 141 |
| LIMERICK | Total | 37 Stations | 648 |

Limerick Garda Division 31 October 2015

Questions - Written Answers

| Division | District | Station | Total |
|----------|----------------|-------------------|-------|
| | | BALLYLANDERS | 1 |
| | | BRUFF | 27 |
| | | BRUREE | 1 |
| | | CAPPAMORE | 3 |
| | | HOSPITAL | 2 |
| | | KILMALLOCK | 6 |
| | | MURROE | 2 |
| | BRUFF | PALLAS | 1 |
| | | Total | 43 |
| | | ARDNACRUSHA | 3 |
| | | CASTLECONNELL | 4 |
| | | HENRY STREET | 233 |
| | HENRY STREET | MAYORSTONE PARK | 71 |
| | | Total | 311 |
| | | ABBEYFEALE | 8 |
| | | ADARE | 2 |
| | | ASKEATON | 10 |
| | | ATHEA | 1 |
| | | CROOM | 3 |
| | | DRUMCOLLOGHER | 2 |
| | | FOYNES | 2 |
| | | NEWCASTLE WEST | 36 |
| | | PALLASKENRY | 1 |
| | NEWCASTLE WEST | RATHKEALE | 10 |
| | | Total | 75 |
| | | BALLYNEETY | 2 |
| | | CAHERCONLISH | 1 |
| | | PATRICKSWELL | 2 |
| | ROXBORO ROAD | ROXBORO ROAD | 121 |
| LIMERICK | | Total | 126 |
| | | Total 26 Stations | 555 |

Asylum Applications

93. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons from outside the European Economic Area who were refused asylum, work or study visa or residence applications by the United Kingdom authorities, and who subsequently entered Ireland from the United Kingdom and made similar applications to the Irish Government in each year from 2012 to 2015 to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42359/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The protection of the Common Travel Area is of utmost importance and the Irish Naturalisation and Citizenship Service (INIS) of my Department works closely with their UK counterparts across a number of areas to ensure that any abuses of the CTA are addressed.

Over the course of the past year or so, there has been a marked increase in the number of asylum applications from Southern Asian nationalities. Checks carried out show a previous UK immigration history in respect of a substantial number of these applicants. This year the number of applications for asylum is expected to reach over 3,300 compared to 1,448 last year.

A large portion of this increase can be attributed to persons with previous UK immigration histories.

This matter has been raised at the highest levels between officials of the Department and the UK Home Office, specifically at meetings of the Common Travel Area Forum jointly chaired by the Acting Director of the INIS and his UK counterpart. Arising from this meeting a joint operation to detect illegal immigrants has been undertaken by the Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB) and the UK Border Force to carry out checks at the ferry ports.

In addition, there is enhanced cooperation with the respective agencies and with the UK to fast track some applications under the Dublin Regulation to return the persons concerned to the UK as quickly as possible. A similar project is under way to fast track substantive asylum cases through to deportation stage and efforts are underway to enforce a number of Deportation Orders already processed where the applicants have been refused refugee status and leave to remain.

The immigration service works closely with the UK authorities to monitor and address any immigration abuses between the two countries and share relevant information on an ongoing basis in this regard.

It is not possible to compile the figures sought by the Deputy without expending a disproportionate amount of scarce resources. However, I can say that immigration controls at ports of entry to the State remains a crucial element of enforcement and the numbers of refusals of leave to land this year are expected to be significantly up on last years figure of 2,615. In that regard, it should be noted that in accordance with Section 4 of the Immigration Act, 2004, one of the grounds that a person can be refused leave to land is if the person concerned intends to travel (whether immediately or not) to the UK and would not qualify for admission had they come directly to the UK.

Garda Operations

94. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the additional resources that will be made available to An Garda Síochána in County Cavan and County Monaghan under Operation Thor; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42417/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Operation Thor is a multi-stranded national operation which builds on previous and current Garda operations to tackle crime, particularly burglaries the number of which, as we know, increase with the advent of the long winter nights, in both urban and rural communities nationwide. In excess of €5 million is being committed to support Operation Thor. This allocation, which includes funding for Garda overtime will support a combination of additional patrols, checkpoints, rapid armed response and public awareness measures.

This special, targeted operation has to be seen in the context of the major investment that this Government is making in An Garda Síochána. The 2016 Budget allocation of €1.5 billion for An Garda Síochána includes over €67 million in additional funding which will allow the recruitment of 600 new Gardaí next year on top of the 550 Gardaí recruited since this Government reopened the Garda College in September 2014. It will also provide additional funding for Garda Surveillance, special operations and targeted, intelligence-led policing. This additional recruitment and budget allocation builds on the current high level of investment in Garda vehicles. We have invested over €34 million in new Garda vehicles since 2012 with over 640 new vehicles coming on stream in 2015, ranging from more Garda patrol cars to

high-powered vehicles for armed units. The Government's Capital Plan 2016-2021 provides for a further €46 million of investment in vehicles as well as an additional €200 million for Information and Communications Technology which will allow An Garda Síochána to deploy the latest cutting edge technologies in the fight against crime. We are also investing in airborne surveillance. Taken together, this step-change in investment in policing will ensure that the Gardaí can be mobile, visible and responsive, on the roads and in the community.

Operation Thor entails a broad range of activities to tackle burglars, organised crime gangs and prolific offenders as well as working with communities to prevent crime. These activities include: additional high-visibility patrols in identified burglary hot-spots; increased use of checkpoints to tackle the criminal gangs using the national road network; the use of new high powered vehicles by the armed Regional Response Units; efforts to disrupt the stolen goods market; programmes to help reduce re-offending by prolific offenders; a high-profile national crime prevention awareness campaign, and targeted crime prevention advice for local communities and enhanced supports for victims.

The Commissioner, in consultation with her senior management team, is responsible for the detailed allocation of resources, including the additional allocation of the €5 million to support Operation Thor. The Commissioner has assured me that she will aim to maximise the use of these additional resources. A large proportion of domestic burglaries are committed by serial offenders. Figures from the Garda Síochána Analysis Service indicate that 75% of burglaries are committed by 25% of burglars. Targeting these prolific offenders is a priority, consequently the allocation of resources under Operation Thor will be intelligence led and based on analysis of crime patterns by An Garda Síochána. The aim is to deploy resources in advance of where An Garda Síochána anticipate crime might take place in order to prevent the crime occurring.

In this context the Deputy will appreciate that it is not possible to detail the additional resources that will be made available to any one County under Operation Thor. However the Commissioner will continually review the allocation of resources under the Operation, taking into account crime trends and policing priorities across the Garda Regions so as to ensure that the best possible use is made of these resources. I am confident that this comprehensive operation by An Garda Síochána, supported by Government investment, will help disrupt the activities of burglars, organised crime gangs and prolific offenders and will improve the safety of all our communities across the country.

Garda Deployment

95. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda Síochána stations and the number of gardaí in each station in the Gurrabraher and Mayfield Cork city Garda Síochána districts on 1 November 2010 and on 1 November 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42408/15]

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

I have been informed by the Garda Commissioner that list of stations and the number of Gardaí assigned to those stations in the Gurrabraher and Mayfield Garda Districts on the 31 October 2010 and on the 31 October 2015, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was as set out in the tables.

This Government is committed to ensuring that An Garda Síochána has the capacity to provide effective, visible policing throughout the country. A crucial element of the Government's strategy is ongoing seamless recruitment to renew An Garda Síochána. With this in mind Budget 2016 made provision for the recruitment of 600 new Gardaí next year bringing to 1,150 the number of new Gardaí that will be recruited since the reopening of the Garda College in Templemore in September 2014. So far 295 of those new recruits are fully attested and are on the ground in communities nationwide.

I was very pleased to announce the commencement of the recruitment campaign for 2016 last Friday, 27 November. It is being organised by the Public Appointments Service on behalf of the Garda Commissioner. Applications must be made through www.publicjobs.ie. The closing date for applications is Tuesday 5 January 2016. Successful candidates can expect to enter the Garda College from June 2016 onwards.

Gurrabraher and Mayfield Garda Districts October 2010

| Division | District | Station | Total |
|-----------|---------------|-------------------|-------|
| | | BALLINCOLLIG | 22 |
| | | BLARNEY | 17 |
| | | GURRANABRAHER | 60 |
| | | RATHDUFF GRENAUGH | 2 |
| | GURRANABRAHER | Total | 101 |
| | | MALLOW ROAD | 5 |
| | | MAYFIELD | 59 |
| | | MC CURTAIN STREET | 0 |
| | | WATERCOURSE ROAD | 48 |
| CORK CITY | MAYFIELD | 8 Stations Total | 112 |

Gurrabraher and Mayfield Garda Districts on 31 October 2015

| Division | District | Station | Total |
|-----------|---------------|------------------|-------|
| | | BALLINCOLLIG | 20 |
| | | BLARNEY | 18 |
| | | CARRIG NA BHFEAR | 1 |
| | GURRANABRAHER | GURRANABRAHER | 54 |
| | | Total | 93 |
| | | GLANMIRE | 19 |
| | | MAYFIELD | 51 |
| | MAYFIELD | WATERCOURSE ROAD | 47 |
| Cork City | | Total Stations | 7 117 |

Crime Prevention

96. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she, independently or in conjunction with other Departments or agencies, administers supports such as information, advice or grant assistance to householders on safety and security issues, particularly in the context of burglaries; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42378/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): My Department does not provide grant assistance to householders of the type referred to by the Deputy. However, there are extensive measures supported by my Department and by An Garda Síochána to

provide information and advice for householders and communities in relation to home security and crime prevention generally. I recently announced a doubling of the funding for Crime Prevention Initiatives supported by my Department, including the important work carried out by Crimestoppers and the Community Alert programme, and a total of €397,000 will be provided for this purpose in 2016.

My Department has for many years provided funding to support the Community Alert Programme, which is operated by Muintir na Tire in partnership with An Garda Síochána. This funding is not used to provide direct assistance to local Community Alert (or Text Alert) Groups, but is allocated for the employment and associated costs of the national Community Alert programme, including the employment of regional Development Officers. These Development Officers provide support to Community and Text Alert schemes and offer advice on how to establish new schemes. The long-standing view has been that this is the best use of the resources available to the Department to support effective community crime prevention actions.

An Garda Síochána provide extensive crime prevention and home security advice as part of their Community Policing role. In addition, Garda crime prevention officers are available to give advice to householders, community groups and businesses and there is also a range of crime prevention advice published on the Garda website.

As part of the recently announced drive to counteract burglary under Operation Thor, An Garda Síochána have implemented a public awareness campaign to inform people on how they can enhance the security of their homes and property. The theme of the campaign is “Lock Up. Light Up.” and includes a national and local advertising campaign including coverage on radio, in newspapers and on social media, including An Garda Síochána’s social media channels which have over 300,000 followers. In addition, crime prevention officers are currently distributing 100,000 leaflets with key information and An Garda Síochána are using all media opportunities on local and national radio to promote the campaign.

The media campaign ran initially during the week of 16 November 2015 and it is envisaged that it will run again in January and February 2016.

Garda Operations

97. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the additional resources that will be made available to An Garda Síochána in County Mayo under Operation Thor; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42401/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Operation Thor is a multi-stranded national operation which builds on previous and current Garda operations to tackle crime, particularly burglaries the number of which, as we know, increase with the advent of the long winter nights, in both urban and rural communities nationwide. In excess of €5 million is being committed to support Operation Thor. This allocation, which includes funding for Garda overtime will support a combination of additional patrols, checkpoints, rapid armed response and public awareness measures.

This special, targeted operation has to be seen in the context of the major investment that this Government is making in An Garda Síochána. The 2016 Budget allocation of €1.5 billion for An Garda Síochána includes over €67 million in additional funding which will allow the recruitment of 600 new Gardaí next year on top of the 550 Gardaí recruited since this Government reopened the Garda College in September 2014. It will also provide additional funding for Garda Surveillance, special operations and targeted, intelligence-led policing. This

additional recruitment and budget allocation builds on the current high level of investment in Garda vehicles. We have invested over €34 million in new Garda vehicles since 2012 with over 640 new vehicles coming on stream in 2015, ranging from more Garda patrol cars to high-powered vehicles for armed units. The Government's Capital Plan 2016-2021 provides for a further €46 million of investment in vehicles as well as an additional €200 million for Information and Communications Technology which will allow An Garda Síochána to deploy the latest cutting edge technologies in the fight against crime. We are also investing in airborne surveillance. Taken together, this step-change in investment in policing will ensure that the Gardaí can be mobile, visible and responsive, on the roads and in the community.

Operation Thor entails a broad range of activities to tackle burglars, organised crime gangs and prolific offenders as well as working with communities to prevent crime. These activities include: additional high-visibility patrols in identified burglary hot-spots; increased use of checkpoints to tackle the criminal gangs using the national road network; the use of new high powered vehicles by the armed Regional Response Units; efforts to disrupt the stolen goods market; programmes to help reduce re-offending by prolific offenders; a high-profile national crime prevention awareness campaign, and targeted crime prevention advice for local communities and enhanced supports for victims.

The Commissioner, in consultation with her senior management team, is responsible for the detailed allocation of resources, including the additional allocation of the €5 million to support Operation Thor. The Commissioner has assured me that she will aim to maximise the use of these additional resources. A large proportion of domestic burglaries are committed by serial offenders. Figures from the Garda Síochána Analysis Service indicate that 75% of burglaries are committed by 25% of burglars. Targeting these prolific offenders is a priority, consequently the allocation of resources under Operation Thor will be intelligence led and based on analysis of crime patterns by An Garda Síochána. The aim is to deploy resources in advance of where An Garda Síochána anticipate crime might take place in order to prevent the crime occurring.

In this context the Deputy will appreciate that it is not possible to detail the additional resources that will be made available to any one County under Operation Thor. However the Commissioner will continually review the allocation of resources under the Operation, taking into account crime trends and policing priorities across the Garda Regions so as to ensure that the best possible use is made of these resources. I am confident that this comprehensive operation by An Garda Síochána, supported by Government investment, will help disrupt the activities of burglars, organised crime gangs and prolific offenders and will improve the safety of all our communities across the country.

Garda Deployment

98. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if there is a plan to increase the number of gardaí on the beat in all areas; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42284/15]

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

This Government is committed to ensuring that An Garda Síochána has the capacity to provide effective, visible policing throughout the country. A crucial element of the Government's

strategy is ongoing seamless recruitment to renew An Garda Síochána. With this in mind Budget 2016 made provision for the recruitment of 600 new Gardaí next year bringing to 1,150 the number of new Gardaí that will be recruited since the reopening of the Garda College in Templemore in September 2014. So far 295 of those new recruits are fully attested and are on the ground in communities nationwide.

I was very pleased to announce the commencement of the recruitment campaign for 2016 last Friday, 27 November. It is being organised by the Public Appointments Service on behalf of the Garda Commissioner. Applications must be made through www.publicjobs.ie. The closing date for applications is Tuesday 5 January 2016. Successful candidates can expect to enter the Garda College from June 2016 onwards.

The recruitment of additional trainee Garda is essential to renew An Garda Síochána and to ensure the delivery of effective policing services throughout the country.

There are currently over 2,000 full-time-equivalent civilian support staff in the Garda Síochána making up 14% of the overall Garda workforce. Civilian personnel wholly or largely staff several vital operational support areas such as the Garda Central Vetting Unit, the Garda Information Services Centre, and the Fixed Charge Processing Office. These also provide vital support services in a wide range of areas, such as human resources, training & development, IT and telecommunications, finance and procurement, internal audit, research and analysis, accommodation and fleet management, scene-of-crime support and medical services. In doing so, they release highly trained Gardaí from administrative tasks to operational policing.

Garda Deployment

99. **Deputy Helen McEntee** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if there is a need for a greater Garda Síochána presence in three County Meath communities (details supplied), one of which is policed at night by gardaí who are based at a Garda Síochána station 46.1 kilometres away; her views on the security requirements of those communities, including at night; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42286/15]

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

I have been informed by the Garda Commissioner that Kilcock is in the Kildare Garda Division and forms part of Leixlip Garda District and as of 31 October 2015, the latest dates for which figures are readily available there are 9 Gardai assigned to Kilcock Garda station. This station is open 3p.m. to 6p.m. Friday to Saturday and from 3p.m. to 5p.m. on Sundays subject to manpower availability with a Public Access Call Box (P.A.C.B.) to Leixlip, which is approximately 19Km away.

The number of Gardaí assigned to Ashbourne and Duleek on the 31 October 2015, was 43 and 4 respectively. Duleek Garda station is opened subject to manpower availability with a Public Access Call Box (P.A.C.B.) to Ashbourne which is opened 24 hours a day. I have also been informed by the Garda Commissioner that Dunore is patrolled by members attached to the neighbouring Drogheda District, which is approximately 6Km away.

I can assure the Deputy that this Government is committed to delivering an effective, responsive police service to protect our communities and respond to emerging crime trends.

An essential component of our strategy to achieve this is on-going, seamless recruitment of trainee Gardaí. To this end the first intake since 2009 of new recruits commenced training at the Garda College, Templemore, in September of last year. To date there have been six intakes of Garda Trainees to the Garda College, giving a total intake of 550. So far 295 of the new Garda Trainees have attested as members of An Garda Síochána. On attestation, new probationer Gardaí are assigned to stations throughout the country by the Garda Commissioner, where they are assigned to mainstream uniform policing duties. I am assured by Garda management that the needs of all Garda Divisions are fully considered when determining the allocation of newly attested Gardaí and that 15 and 5 of these newly attested Gardaí have been assigned to the Kildare and Meath Garda Divisions respectively.

The Deputy will be aware that I announced the opening of a recruitment campaign for new members of An Garda Síochána last Friday 27 November. This new campaign is necessary to fulfil the Government's commitment to recruit 600 Gardaí in 2016. The 600 new Gardaí to be recruited next year will bring to 1,150 the total number of new recruits since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014. The Public Appointments Service (PAS) is organising the recruitment competition on behalf of the Garda Commissioner and applications may be made through the PAS website at www.publicjobs.ie. The closing date for applications is Tuesday 5 January 2016.

In relation to emerging crime trends, Operation Thor, which was launched by the Garda Commissioner recently is a multi-stranded national operation which builds on previous and current Garda operations to tackle crime, particularly burglaries the number of which, as we know, increase with the advent of the long winter nights, in both urban and rural communities nationwide. Operation Thor is made possible by the increased investment in policing by this Government, including an allocation of €5 million to specifically support this new Operation.

It entails a broad range of activities to tackle burglars, organised crime gangs and prolific offenders as well as working with communities to prevent crime. These activities include: additional high-visibility patrols in identified burglary hot-spots; increased use of checkpoints to tackle the criminal gangs using the national road network; the use of new high powered vehicles by the armed Regional Response Units; efforts to disrupt the stolen goods market; programmes to help reduce re-offending by prolific offenders; a high-profile national crime prevention awareness campaign, and targeted crime prevention advice for local communities and enhanced supports for victims.

I am confident that this comprehensive operation by An Garda Síochána, supported by Government investment in Garda resources and personnel, will disrupt the activities of burglars, organised crime gangs and prolific offenders and will improve the safety of all our communities across the country.

Legislative Measures

100. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when legislation reducing bankruptcy terms from three years to one year will be introduced to Dáil Éireann; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42377/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will be aware, the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice, Defence and Equality reported to me earlier this year with recommendations in relation to bankruptcy matters, including the bankruptcy term.

I and my officials have now completed consideration of those recommendations and I expect to be in a position to announce further details in relation to this shortly.

International Terrorism

101. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her assessment of the threat of a terrorist attack taking place here, similar to the attack in Paris in France; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42396/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As I have stated in the House, Ireland, just like other democratic states, cannot be considered to be immune from the threat posed by international terrorism and extremism. The current assessment of the threat to Ireland from this source is that while an attack here is possible, it is unlikely and there is at present no specific information that an attack on Ireland is planned. The level of threat from this source is kept under constant review by An Garda Síochána, particularly in the light of ongoing developments and the current international climate.

The Garda Authorities are taking the security measures necessary, proportionate to the threat, and all the relevant agencies here co-operate closely in respect of any threats identified. Unfortunately, there is a small number of people here whose activities are a cause for concern in terms of supporting terrorism and extremism. They will continue to be monitored and, where evidence is available of criminality, they will face the full rigour of the law.

The Deputy will understand that, of their very nature, the detail of security measures should not be disclosed publicly. However, in general terms, An Garda Síochána will take all possible steps to deal with any threat to this country combining its intelligence base with a well-trained, armed special intervention capacity and a range of other national policing resources. Where necessary, the considerable skills and resources of the Defence Forces are also available in aid to the civil power. Of course, this is an international problem and the Garda Authorities will continue to co-operate very closely with their EU and other international security and intelligence counterparts in responding to it.

Garda Station Closures

102. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will review the decision to close 139 Garda Síochána stations in recent years, given that the savings are only around €4,000 per station per year. [42458/15]

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

The Garda District and Station Rationalisation Programme was implemented in An Garda Síochána during 2012 and 2013. The direct savings from the Programme as highlighted by the Deputy are modest. However, it is important to recall that the primary objective of the Programme was to identify opportunities to introduce strategic reforms to enhance service delivery, increase efficiency and streamline practices within An Garda Síochána.

In its review of the Garda Station Network, Garda management concluded in relation to certain stations, 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 the Garda Síochána policing model, including the deployment of personnel, the utilisation of modern technologies and the overall operation of Garda stations.

The Programme supports the provision of a modern 21st century policing service for both urban and rural areas and allows front line Gardaí to be managed and deployed with greater mobility, greater flexibility, and in a more focused fashion, particularly with regard to various targeted police operations. As a result of the Programme, communities have benefited from increased Garda visibility and increased patrolling hours which has enabled An Garda Síochána to deliver an improved policing service to the public.

In tandem with the rationalisation of stations, efforts have been directed towards ensuring that An Garda Síochána has the resources to deliver highly-mobile and responsive Garda patrols in both rural and urban communities. In renewing the Garda fleet to support front line Garda responses over 640 new vehicles are coming on stream since the start of 2015. So far this year 370 new vehicles have come on stream including new specialised vehicles with a further 260 vehicles between now and the end of the year. This investment will provide the Gardaí with additional high powered vehicles, marked and unmarked patrol cars, cars for surveillance and covert operations, motor cycles for high visibility road policing and vehicles for public order policing. This investment in a modern, effective and fit-for-purpose Garda fleet will continue under the Government's Capital Plan 2016-2021 which provides an additional €46 million for new Garda vehicles over the life time of the Plan. The increased budget allocation for 2016 will also facilitate additional funding for Garda surveillance, special operations and targeted, intelligence-led policing.

This substantial level of investment will be accompanied by the continued renewal of Garda personnel with 600 new Garda to be recruited next year on top of the 550 to be recruited by the end of this year. As the Deputy will be aware, I recently announced the commencement of the 2016 recruitment campaign for new members of An Garda Síochána. It underscores the Government's commitment to seamless ongoing recruitment to An Garda Síochána to ensure that the Service is renewed and has the capacity to provide effective policing services throughout the country. The 600 new Gardaí to be recruited next year will bring to 1,150 the total number of new recruits since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014. So far 295 of these recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and are on the ground in communities nationwide.

The totality of this investment will ensure that Gardaí have the necessary tools and manpower to tackle the scourge of highly-mobile criminal gangs and to disrupt crime, particularly burglaries, across our communities.

Garda Deployment

103. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí and Garda Síochána stations in the Kilkenny district division on 1 November 2010 and on 1 November 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42428/15]

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

Questions - Written Answers

I have been informed by the Garda Commissioner that list of stations and the number of Gardaí assigned to those stations in the Kilkenny/Carlow Division on the 31 October 2010 and on the 31 October 2015, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was as set out in the tables.

This Government is committed to ensuring that An Garda Síochána has the capacity to provide effective, visible policing throughout the country. A crucial element of the Government's strategy is ongoing seamless recruitment to renew An Garda Síochána. With this in mind Budget 2016 made provision for the recruitment of 600 new Gardaí next year bringing to 1,150 the number of new Gardaí that will be recruited since the reopening of the Garda College in Templemore in September 2014. So far 295 of those new recruits are fully attested and are on the ground in communities nationwide.

I was very pleased to announce the commencement of the recruitment campaign for 2016 last Friday, 27 November. It is being organised by the Public Appointments Service on behalf of the Garda Commissioner. Applications must be made through www.publicjobs.ie. The closing date for applications is Tuesday 5 January 2016. Successful candidates can expect to enter the Garda College from June 2016 onwards.

Kilkenny/Carlow Garda Division 2010

| Division | District | Station | Total |
|----------|----------|-----------------|-------|
| | | BALLON | 1 |
| | | BORRIS | 2 |
| | | CARLOW | 79 |
| | | HACKETSTOWN | 1 |
| | | LEIGHLINBRIDGE | 2 |
| | | MUINEBHEAG | 11 |
| | | MYSHALL | 1 |
| | | RATHVILLY | 1 |
| | | TULLOW | 18 |
| | CARLOW | Total | 116 |
| | | BALLYRAGGET | 0 |
| | | CALLAN | 6 |
| | | CASTLECOMER | 14 |
| | | FRESHFORD | 1 |
| | | JOHNSTOWN | 3 |
| | | KILKENNY | 109 |
| | | URLINGFORD | 1 |
| | KILKENNY | Total | 134 |
| | | BALLYHALE | 1 |
| | | BENNETSBRIDGE | 1 |
| | | GLENMORE | 1 |
| | | GORESBRIDGE | 2 |
| | | GRAIGUENAMANAGH | 7 |
| | | INISTIOGE | 1 |
| | | KILMACOW | 1 |
| | | KILMOGANNY | 1 |
| | | MOONCOIN | 8 |
| | | MULLINAVAT | 6 |
| | | PILTOWN | 2 |

1 December 2015

| Division | District | Station | Total |
|-----------------|------------|-------------|-------|
| | | STONYFORD | 1 |
| | | THOMASTOWN | 43 |
| | THOMASTOWN | Total | 75 |
| KILKENNY/CARLOW | Total | 29 Stations | 325 |

Garda Division of Kilkenny/Carlow on 31 October 2015

| Division | District | Station | Total |
|-----------------|------------|-----------------|-------|
| | | BALLON | 1 |
| | | BORRIS | 2 |
| | | CARLOW | 75 |
| | | HACKETSTOWN | 1 |
| | | MUINEBHEAG | 11 |
| | | MYSHALL | 1 |
| | | RATHVILLY | 1 |
| | CARLOW | TULLOW | 15 |
| | | Total | 107 |
| | | CALLAN | 5 |
| | | CASTLECOMER | 12 |
| | | FRESHFORD | 1 |
| | | KILKENNY | 104 |
| | KILKENNY | URLINGFORD | 2 |
| | | Total | 124 |
| | | BENNETSBRIDGE | 1 |
| | | GLENMORE | 1 |
| | | GORESBRIDGE | 2 |
| | | GRAIGUENAMANAGH | 4 |
| | | KILMACOW | 1 |
| | | KILMOGANNY | 1 |
| | | MOONCOIN | 11 |
| | | MULLINAVAT | 2 |
| | | PILTOWN | 1 |
| | THOMASTOWN | THOMASTOWN | 30 |
| KILKENNY/CARLOW | | Total | 54 |
| | Total | 23 Stations | 285 |

Garda Deployment

104. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí and Garda Síochána stations in the Thomastown district division on 1 November 2010 and on 1 November 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42430/15]

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

I have been informed by the Garda Commissioner that list of stations and the number of Gardaí assigned to those stations in the Thomastown District on the 31 October 2010 and on

the 31 October 2015, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was as set out in the tables.

This Government is committed to ensuring that An Garda Síochána has the capacity to provide effective, visible policing throughout the country. A crucial element of the Government's strategy is ongoing seamless recruitment to renew An Garda Síochána. With this in mind Budget 2016 made provision for the recruitment of 600 new Gardaí next year bringing to 1,150 the number of new Gardaí that will be recruited since the reopening of the Garda College in Templemore in September 2014. So far 295 of those new recruits are fully attested and are on the ground in communities nationwide.

I was very pleased to announce the commencement of the recruitment campaign for 2016 last Friday, 27 November. It is being organised by the Public Appointments Service on behalf of the Garda Commissioner. Applications must be made through www.publicjobs.ie. The closing date for applications is Tuesday 5 January 2016. Successful candidates can expect to enter the Garda College from June 2016 onwards.

Thomastown Garda District 31 October 2010

| Division | District | Station | Total |
|-----------------|------------|-------------------|-------|
| | | BALLYHALE | 1 |
| | | BENNETSBRIDGE | 1 |
| | | GLENMORE | 1 |
| | | GORESBRIDGE | 2 |
| | | GRAIGUENAMANAGH | 7 |
| | | INISTIOGE | 1 |
| | | KILMACOW | 1 |
| | | KILMOGANNY | 1 |
| | | MOONCOIN | 8 |
| | | MULLINAVAT | 6 |
| | | PILTOWN | 2 |
| | | STONYFORD | 1 |
| | | THOMASTOWN | 43 |
| KILKENNY/CARLOW | THOMASTOWN | 13 Stations Total | 75 |

Thomastown Garda District 31 October 2015

| Division | District | Station | Total |
|-----------------|------------|-------------------|-------|
| | | BENNETSBRIDGE | 1 |
| | | GLENMORE | 1 |
| | | GORESBRIDGE | 2 |
| | | GRAIGUENAMANAGH | 4 |
| | | KILMACOW | 1 |
| | | KILMOGANNY | 1 |
| | | MOONCOIN | 11 |
| | | MULLINAVAT | 2 |
| | | PILTOWN | 1 |
| | | THOMASTOWN | 30 |
| KILKENNY/CARLOW | THOMASTOWN | 10 Stations TOTAL | 54 |

Departmental Expenditure

105. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the amounts paid to the companies contracted to run each State-owned direct provision centre, from the inception of the system to present, by centre, by contractor and by start and end dates of each contract, in tabular form; and her plans to read this into the record of Dáil Éireann. [42438/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The information in relation to State-owned centres is not readily available.

While RIA maintains a table of information on commercially owned accommodation centres, with information in the format sought by the Deputy, it is not compiled in respect of State-owned accommodation centres. The information sought by the Deputy would entail the examination of 15 years of data in order to collate the data. The Reception & Integration Agency (RIA) of my Department has stated that the retrieval and examination of the records concerned would cause a substantial and unreasonable interference in the day-to-day work of the office.

The Deputy may be interested to know that the Annual Reports of the Reception and Integration Agency from 2007 to 2013 provide a breakdown of yearly expenditure into the broad headings of 'Commercial', 'State-owned', 'Self-catering', 'Additional Costs', 'Transport' and 'Miscellaneous'. These Annual Reports are published on RIA's website - www.ria.gov.ie

Tenders for the management of these centres have been published in the e-Tenders website and the OJEU since 2004. RIA is scheduled to re-tender for these particular services shortly and is currently working with the Office of Government Procurement (OGP) on this matter. It would not be appropriate to publish any additional information that could compromise the integrity of that tendering process.

Garda Strength

106. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda Síochána stations and the number of gardaí in each station in County Galway on 1 November 2010 and on 1 November 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42420/15]

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

I have been informed by the Garda Commissioner that list of stations and the number of Gardaí assigned to those stations in the Galway Division on the 31 October 2010 and on the 31 October 2015, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was as set out in the tables.

This Government is committed to ensuring that An Garda Síochána has the capacity to provide effective, visible policing throughout the country. A crucial element of the Government's strategy is ongoing seamless recruitment to renew An Garda Síochána. With this in mind Budget 2016 made provision for the recruitment of 600 new Gardaí next year bringing to 1,150 the number of new Gardaí that will be recruited since the reopening of the Garda College in Templemore in September 2014. So far 295 of those new recruits are fully attested and are on the ground in communities nationwide.

I was very pleased to announce the commencement of the recruitment campaign for 2016

Questions - Written Answers

last Friday, 27 November. It is being organised by the Public Appointments Service on behalf of the Garda Commissioner. Applications must be made through www.publicjobs.ie. The closing date for applications is Tuesday 5 January 2016. Successful candidates can expect to enter the Garda College from June 2016 onwards.

Galway Garda District 31 October 2010

| Division | District | Station | Total |
|----------|-------------|--------------|-------|
| | | AHASCRAUGH | 1 |
| | | BALLINASLOE | 46 |
| | | BALLYGAR | 3 |
| | | CREGGS | 1 |
| | | KILCONNELL | 1 |
| | | KILTORMER | 0 |
| | | MENLOUGH | 1 |
| | | MOUNT BELLEW | 10 |
| | | MOYLOUGH | 1 |
| | BALLINASLOE | Total | 64 |
| | | CARNA | 2 |
| | | CLIFDEN | 30 |
| | | LENNAUN | 1 |
| | | LETTERFRACK | 1 |
| | | MAAM | 2 |
| | | RECESS | 1 |
| | | ROUNDSTONE | 1 |
| | CLIFDEN | Total | 38 |
| | | ATHENRY | 5 |
| | | CARN DOLLA | 1 |
| | | GALWAY | 216 |
| | | KILTULLAGH | 0 |
| | | LOUGH GEORGE | 1 |
| | | MONIVEA | 1 |
| | | ORANMORE | 35 |
| | GALWAY | Total | 259 |
| | | ARDRAHAN | 1 |
| | | CRAUGHWELL | 6 |
| | | GORT | 29 |
| | | KILCHREEST | 0 |
| | | KILCOLGAN | 1 |
| | | KINVARA | 2 |
| | | SHANAGLISH | 1 |
| | GORT | Total | 40 |
| | | EYRECOURT | 1 |
| | | KILLIMOR | 0 |
| | | KILRICKLE | 1 |
| | | LOUGHREA | 39 |
| | | NEW INN | 1 |
| | | PORTUMNA | 10 |
| | | TYNAGH | 1 |
| | | WOODFORD | 1 |

1 December 2015

| Division | District | Station | Total |
|----------|----------|--------------|-------|
| | LOUGHREA | Total | 54 |
| | | CARRAROE | 4 |
| | | CILL RONAIN | 3 |
| | | INVERIN | 1 |
| | | LEITIR MOR | 1 |
| | | MOYCULLEN | 3 |
| | | ROS MUC | 1 |
| | | SALTHILL | 58 |
| | | SPIDDLE | 3 |
| | | UACHTARARD | 6 |
| | SALTHILL | Total | 80 |
| | | BALLYMOE | 1 |
| | | BARNADERG | 0 |
| | | COROFIN | 1 |
| | | DUNMORE | 6 |
| | | GLENAMADDY | 1 |
| | | HEADFORD | 5 |
| | | KILCONLY | 1 |
| | | MILLTOWN | 1 |
| | | TUAM | 56 |
| | | WILLIAMSTOWN | 1 |
| | TUAM | Total | 73 |
| GALWAY | Total | 57 Stations | 608 |

Garda Division of Galway 31 October 2015

| Division | District | Station | Total |
|----------|-------------|---------------|-------|
| | | AHASCRAUGH | 1 |
| | | BALLINASLOE | 41 |
| | | BALLYGAR | 1 |
| | | CREGGS | 1 |
| | | KILCONNELL | 1 |
| | | MOUNT BELLEW | 7 |
| | BALLINASLOE | MOYLROUGH | 1 |
| | | Total | 53 |
| | | AN MÁM | 3 |
| | | CARNA | 2 |
| | | CLIFDEN | 26 |
| | | CLOCH NA RÓN | 1 |
| | | LETTERFRACK | 1 |
| | CLIFDEN | SRAITH SALACH | 1 |
| | | Total | 34 |
| | | ATHENRY | 6 |
| | | GAILLIMH | 212 |
| | | LOUGH GEORGE | 2 |
| | | MONIVEA | 1 |
| | GALWAY | ÓRÁN MÓR | 41 |
| | | Total | 262 |
| | | CRAUGHWELL | 4 |

Questions - Written Answers

| Division | District | Station | Total |
|----------|----------|-----------------|-------|
| | | EYRECOURT | 1 |
| | | GORT | 28 |
| | | KILLIMOR | 1 |
| | | KILRICKLE | 1 |
| | | KINVARA | 2 |
| | | LOUGHREA | 34 |
| | | PORTUMNA | 7 |
| | LOUGHREA | WOODFORD | 1 |
| | | Total | 79 |
| | | AN CHEATHRÚ RUA | 5 |
| | | AN SPIDÉAL | 2 |
| | | CILL RÓNÁIN | 4 |
| | | INDREABHÁN | 1 |
| | | LEITIR MÓIR | 1 |
| | | MAIGH CUILINN | 1 |
| | | ROS MUC | 1 |
| | | SALTHILL | 49 |
| | SALTHILL | UACHTARARD | 3 |
| | | Total | 67 |
| | | BARNADERG | 1 |
| | | COROFIN | 1 |
| | | DUNMORE | 7 |
| | | GLENAMADDY | 1 |
| | | HEADFORD | 2 |
| | | TUAM | 54 |
| | TUAM | WILLIAMSTOWN | 1 |
| GALWAY | | Total | 67 |
| | Total | 43 Stations | 562 |

Traveller Community

107. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the Government intends to make a statement recognising the ethnicity of the Traveller community as recommended by the Oireachtas Committee on Justice, Defence and Equality over a year ago. [42459/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy Aodhán Ó Ríordáin): The Deputy will be aware that there is a consultation process underway led by my Department to develop a new National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy. Phase 1 (identification of key themes for the new Strategy) has been completed, and Phase 2 (identification and agreement of high-level objectives under each agreed theme) will commence shortly. The final Phase, Phase 3 (identification of detailed actions to achieve each agreed objective, with associated timescales, Key Performance Indicators, institutional responsibilities and monitoring arrangements), will commence in early 2016 and conclude also in early 2016 with the presentation of a new Strategy for Government approval.

This process will give us a new Traveller Inclusion Strategy and a set of very real actions that need to be taken to bring about a real improvement in quality of life for Travellers. The question of whether revised institutional arrangements for delivery of services to Travellers

are necessary to bring about greater coherence in and improve the effectiveness of statutory services for the Traveller community has been raised during the ongoing consultation process and, as indicated on behalf of the Government during the recent debate in the House on the question of recognition of Travellers as an ethnic group, will be considered in the drafting of the new Inclusion Strategy.

Garda Strength

108. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda Síochána stations and the number of gardaí in each station in County Kildare on 1 November 2010 and on 1 November 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42410/15]

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

I have been informed by the Garda Commissioner that list of stations and the number of Gardaí assigned to those stations in the Kildare Division on the 31 October 2010 and on the 31 October 2015, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was as set out in the tables.

This Government is committed to ensuring that An Garda Síochána has the capacity to provide effective, visible policing throughout the country. A crucial element of the Government's strategy is ongoing seamless recruitment to renew An Garda Síochána. With this in mind Budget 2016 made provision for the recruitment of 600 new Gardaí next year bringing to 1,150 the number of new Gardaí that will be recruited since the reopening of the Garda College in Templemore in September 2014. So far 295 of those new recruits are fully attested and are on the ground in communities nationwide.

I was very pleased to announce the commencement of the recruitment campaign for 2016 last Friday, 27 November. It is being organised by the Public Appointments Service on behalf of the Garda Commissioner. Applications must be made through www.publicjobs.ie. The closing date for applications is Tuesday 5 January 2016. Successful candidates can expect to enter the Garda College from June 2016 onwards.

Kildare Garda Division October 2010

| Division | District | Station | Total |
|----------|----------|--------------|-------|
| - | - | ATHY | 28 |
| - | - | BALLYTORE | 2 |
| - | - | CASTLEDERMOT | 3 |
| - | - | KILDARE | 34 |
| - | - | MONASTEREVIN | 4 |
| - | - | NEWBRIDGE | 45 |
| - | - | RATHANGAN | 4 |
| - | KILDARE | Total | 120 |
| - | - | CARBURY | 4 |
| - | - | CELBRIDGE | 20 |
| - | - | KILCOCK | 8 |

Questions - Written Answers

| Division | District | Station | Total |
|----------|----------|----------------------|-------|
| - | - | LEIXLIP | 35 |
| - | - | MAYNOOTH | 16 |
| - | LEIXLIP | Total | 83 |
| - | - | BALLYMORE EUSTACE | 1 |
| - | - | CLANE | 11 |
| - | - | KILCULLEN | 2 |
| - | - | KILL | 4 |
| - | - | NAAS | 102 |
| - | - | ROBERTSTOWN | 5 |
| - | NAAS | Total | 125 |
| KILDARE | Total | 18 Stations | 328 |

Kildare Divison on 31 October 2015

| Division | District | Station | Total |
|----------|----------|--------------|-------|
| - | - | ATHY | 30 |
| - | - | CASTLEDERMOT | 3 |
| - | - | KILDARE | 30 |
| - | - | MONASTEREVIN | 3 |
| - | - | NEWBRIDGE | 50 |
| - | KILDARE | RATHANGAN | 3 |
| - | - | Total | 119 |
| - | - | CARBURY | 8 |
| - | - | CELBRIDGE | 12 |
| - | - | KILCOCK | 9 |
| - | - | LEIXLIP | 38 |
| - | LEIXLIP | MAYNOOTH | 12 |
| - | - | Total | 79 |
| - | - | CLANE | 7 |
| - | - | KILCULLEN | 3 |
| - | - | NAAS | 102 |
| - | NAAS | ROBERTSTOWN | 3 |
| KILDARE | - | Total | 115 |
| - | Total | 15 Stations | 313 |

Garda Resources

109. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the additional resources that will be made available to An Garda Síochána in the Toghher district in the Cork city Garda Síochána division under Operation Thor; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42411/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Operation Thor is a multi-stranded national operation which builds on previous and current Garda operations to tackle crime, particularly burglaries the number of which, as we know, increase with the advent of the long winter nights, in both urban and rural communities nationwide. In excess of €5 million is being committed to support Operation Thor. This allocation, which includes funding for Garda overtime will support a combination of additional patrols, checkpoints, rapid armed response and public awareness measures.

This special, targeted operation has to be seen in the context of the major investment that this Government is making in An Garda Síochána. The 2016 Budget allocation of €1.5 billion for An Garda Síochána includes over €67 million in additional funding which will allow the recruitment of 600 new Gardaí next year on top of the 550 Gardaí recruited since this Government reopened the Garda College in September 2014. It will also provide additional funding for Garda Surveillance, special operations and targeted, intelligence-led policing. This additional recruitment and budget allocation builds on the current high level of investment in Garda vehicles. We have invested over €34 million in new Garda vehicles since 2012 with over 640 new vehicles coming on stream in 2015, ranging from more Garda patrol cars to high-powered vehicles for armed units. The Government's Capital Plan 2016-2021 provides for a further €46 million of investment in vehicles as well as an additional €200 million for Information and Communications Technology which will allow An Garda Síochána to deploy the latest cutting edge technologies in the fight against crime. We are also investing in airborne surveillance. Taken together, this step-change in investment in policing will ensure that the Gardaí can be mobile, visible and responsive, on the roads and in the community.

Operation Thor entails a broad range of activities to tackle burglars, organised crime gangs and prolific offenders as well as working with communities to prevent crime. These activities include: additional high-visibility patrols in identified burglary hot-spots; increased use of checkpoints to tackle the criminal gangs using the national road network; the use of new high powered vehicles by the armed Regional Response Units; efforts to disrupt the stolen goods market; programmes to help reduce re-offending by prolific offenders; a high-profile national crime prevention awareness campaign, and targeted crime prevention advice for local communities and enhanced supports for victims.

The Commissioner, in consultation with her senior management team, is responsible for the detailed allocation of resources, including the additional allocation of the €5 million to support Operation Thor. The Commissioner has assured me that she will aim to maximise the use of these additional resources. A large proportion of domestic burglaries are committed by serial offenders. Figures from the Garda Síochána Analysis Service indicate that 75% of burglaries are committed by 25% of burglars. Targeting these prolific offenders is a priority, consequently the allocation of resources under Operation Thor will be intelligence led and based on analysis of crime patterns by An Garda Síochána. The aim is to deploy resources in advance of where An Garda Síochána anticipate crime might take place in order to prevent the crime occurring.

In this context the Deputy will appreciate that it is not possible to detail the additional resources that will be made available to any one County under Operation Thor. However the Commissioner will continually review the allocation of resources under the Operation, taking into account crime trends and policing priorities across the Garda Regions so as to ensure that the best possible use is made of these resources. I am confident that this comprehensive operation by An Garda Síochána, supported by Government investment, will help disrupt the activities of burglars, organised crime gangs and prolific offenders and will improve the safety of all our communities across the country.

Traveller Accommodation

110. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her views on establishing a Traveller agency to drive urgent improvements in Traveller accommodation and to implement existing Traveller health, education and employment policies; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37697/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy Aodhán Ó

Ríordáin): The Deputy will be aware that there is a consultation process underway led by my Department to develop a new National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy. Phase 1 (identification of key themes for the new Strategy) has been completed, and Phase 2 (identification and agreement of high-level objectives under each agreed theme) will commence shortly. The final Phase, Phase 3 (identification of detailed actions to achieve each agreed objective, with associated timescales, Key Performance Indicators, institutional responsibilities and monitoring arrangements), will commence in early 2016 and conclude also in early 2016 with the presentation of a new Strategy for Government approval.

This process will give us a new Traveller Inclusion Strategy and a set of very real actions that need to be taken to bring about a real improvement in quality of life for Travellers. The question of whether revised institutional arrangements for delivery of services to Travellers are necessary to bring about greater coherence in and improve the effectiveness of statutory services for the Traveller community has been raised during the ongoing consultation process and, as indicated on behalf of the Government during the recent debate in the House on the question of recognition of Travellers as an ethnic group, will be considered in the drafting of the new Inclusion Strategy.

My Department's role is that of policy coordination; implementation of policy in the areas of health, education and employment is a matter for the Departments with responsibility for each of these areas.

Garda Strength

111. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda Síochána stations and the number of gardaí in each station in the north and west Cork Garda Síochána divisions on 1 November 2010 and on 1 November 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42406/15]

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

I have been informed by the Garda Commissioner that list of stations and the number of Gardaí assigned to those stations in the North and West Cork Divisions on the 31 October 2010 and on the 31 October 2015, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was as set out in the tables.

This Government is committed to ensuring that An Garda Síochána has the capacity to provide effective, visible policing throughout the country. A crucial element of the Government's strategy is ongoing seamless recruitment to renew An Garda Síochána. With this in mind Budget 2016 made provision for the recruitment of 600 new Gardaí next year bringing to 1,150 the number of new Gardaí that will be recruited since the reopening of the Garda College in Templemore in September 2014. So far 295 of those new recruits are fully attested and are on the ground in communities nationwide.

I was very pleased to announce the commencement of the recruitment campaign for 2016 last Friday, 27 November. It is being organised by the Public Appointments Service on behalf of the Garda Commissioner. Applications must be made through www.publicjobs.ie. The closing date for applications is Tuesday 5 January 2016. Successful candidates can expect to enter the

Garda College from June 2016 onwards.

Cork North Division October 2010

| Division | District | Station | Total |
|------------|----------|------------------|-------|
| - | - | CARRIG NA BHFEAR | 1 |
| - | - | CARRIGTWOHILL | 3 |
| - | - | COBH | 39 |
| - | - | GLANMIRE | 21 |
| - | - | GLENVILLE | 1 |
| - | - | WATERGRASSHILL | 1 |
| - | COBH | Total | 66 |
| - | - | BALLYNOE | 1 |
| - | - | CASTLETOWNROCHE | 2 |
| - | - | FERMOY | 60 |
| - | - | KILDORRERY | 1 |
| - | - | KILWORTH | 2 |
| - | - | MITCHELSTOWN | 23 |
| - | - | RATHCORMAC | 1 |
| - | FERMOY | Total | 90 |
| - | - | BUTTEVANT | 2 |
| - | - | CHARLEVILLE | 18 |
| - | - | DONERAILE | 2 |
| - | - | GLANTAINE | 1 |
| - | - | LISCARROLL | 1 |
| - | - | MALLOW | 47 |
| - | - | MILFORD | 2 |
| - | MALLOW | Total | 73 |
| - | - | BALLYCOTTON | 1 |
| - | - | CLOYNE | 1 |
| - | - | KILLEAGH | 1 |
| - | - | MIDLETON | 55 |
| - | - | WHITEGATE | 1 |
| - | - | YOUGHAL | 24 |
| - | MIDLETON | Total | 83 |
| CORK NORTH | Total | 26 Stations | 312 |

Cork West Division October 2010

| Division | District | Station | Total |
|----------|----------|---------------|-------|
| - | - | BALLINEEN | 2 |
| - | - | BALLINHASSIG | 2 |
| - | - | BALLINSPIITTE | 0 |
| - | - | BALLYFEARD | 1 |
| - | - | BANDON | 84 |
| - | - | INNISHANNON | 1 |
| - | - | KILBRITTAIN | 1 |
| - | - | KINSALE | 16 |
| - | - | TIMOLEAGUE | 1 |
| - | BANDON | Total | 108 |
| - | - | ADRIGOLE | 1 |

Questions - Written Answers

| Division | District | Station | Total |
|-----------|------------|----------------|-------|
| - | - | BALLYDEHOB | 1 |
| - | - | BANTRY | 36 |
| - | - | CASTLETOWNBERE | 4 |
| - | - | DRIMOLEAGUE | 1 |
| - | - | DURRUS | 1 |
| - | - | GLENGARRIFF | 1 |
| - | - | GOLEEN | 1 |
| - | - | KEALKIL | 0 |
| - | - | SCHULL | 4 |
| - | BANTRY | Total | 50 |
| - | - | BALLYGURTEEN | 0 |
| - | - | BALTIMORE | 1 |
| - | - | CASTLETOWNSEND | 1 |
| - | - | CLONAKILTY | 28 |
| - | - | DRINAGH | 1 |
| - | - | DUNMANWAY | 8 |
| - | - | ROSSCARBERY | 2 |
| - | - | SKIBBEREEN | 10 |
| - | CLONAKILTY | Total | 51 |
| - | - | BALLYDESMOND | 0 |
| - | - | BOHERBUE | 1 |
| - | - | KANTURK | 33 |
| - | - | KNOCKNAGREE | 1 |
| - | - | MEELIN | 1 |
| - | - | MILLSTREET | 12 |
| - | - | NEWMARKET | 3 |
| - | - | RATHMORE | 1 |
| - | KANTURK | Total | 52 |
| - | - | BALLINGEARY | 1 |
| - | - | BALLYVOURNEY | 3 |
| - | - | COACHFORD | 2 |
| - | - | CROOKSTOWN | 6 |
| - | - | INCHIGEELA | 1 |
| - | - | MACROOM | 42 |
| - | - | STUAKE | 1 |
| - | - | TARELTON | 1 |
| - | MACROOM | Total | 57 |
| CORK WEST | Total | 43 Stations | 318 |

Cork North and West Garda Divisions on 31 October 2015

| Division | District | Station | Total |
|----------|----------|-----------------|-------|
| - | - | BALLYNOE | 1 |
| - | - | CASTLETOWNROCHE | 2 |
| - | - | FERMOY | 55 |
| - | - | KILDORRERY | 1 |
| - | - | KILWORTH | 1 |
| - | - | MITCHELSTOWN | 21 |
| - | - | RATHCORMAC | 2 |

| Division | District | Station | Total |
|------------|------------|--------------------------|-------|
| - | FERMOY | WATERGRASSHILL | 2 |
| - | - | Total | 85 |
| - | - | BUTTEVANT | 1 |
| - | - | CHARLEVILLE | 19 |
| - | - | DONERAILE | 1 |
| - | - | GLANTAINE | 1 |
| - | - | KANTURK | 20 |
| - | - | LISCARROLL | 1 |
| - | - | MALLOW | 53 |
| - | - | MILFORD | 1 |
| - | MALLOW | NEWMARKET | 2 |
| - | - | Total | 99 |
| - | - | BALLYCOTTON | 1 |
| - | - | CARRIGTWOHILL | 2 |
| - | - | CLOYNE | 1 |
| - | - | COBH | 34 |
| - | - | KILLEAGH | 1 |
| - | - | MIDLETON | 51 |
| - | - | WHITEGATE | 1 |
| - | MIDLETON | YOUGHAL | 23 |
| CORK NORTH | - | Total | 114 |
| - | - | Total 25 Stations | 298 |
| - | - | BALLINEEN | 2 |
| - | - | BALLINHASSIG | 2 |
| - | - | BANDON | 84 |
| - | - | INNISHANNON | 1 |
| - | - | KILBRITTAIN | 1 |
| - | - | KINSALE | 16 |
| - | BANDON | TIMOLEAGUE | 1 |
| - | - | Total | 107 |
| - | - | BANTRY | 33 |
| - | - | CASTLETOWNBERE | 5 |
| - | - | DRIMOLEAGUE | 1 |
| - | - | DURRUS | 1 |
| - | - | GLENGARRIFF | 1 |
| - | - | KEALKIL | 1 |
| - | BANTRY | SCHULL | 4 |
| - | - | Total | 46 |
| - | - | BALTIMORE | 1 |
| - | - | CLONAKILTY | 32 |
| - | - | DRINAGH | 1 |
| - | - | DUNMANWAY | 10 |
| - | - | ROSSCARBERY | 1 |
| - | CLONAKILTY | SKIBBEREEN | 14 |
| - | - | Total | 59 |
| - | - | BAILE BHUIRNE | 2 |
| - | - | BÉAL ÁTHA AN GHAORTHA | 2 |

| Division | District | Station | Total |
|-----------|----------|-------------------|-------|
| - | - | BOHERBUE | 1 |
| - | - | COACHFORD | 1 |
| - | - | CROOKSTOWN | 10 |
| - | - | MACROOM | 32 |
| - | - | MILLSTREET | 13 |
| - | - | RATHMORE | 1 |
| - | - | STUAKE | 1 |
| - | MACROOM | TARELTON | 1 |
| CORK WEST | - | Total | 64 |
| - | - | Total 30 Stations | 276 |

Garda Resources

112. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the additional resources that will be made available to An Garda Síochána in County Longford and in County Westmeath under Operation Thor; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42421/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Operation Thor is a multi-stranded national operation which builds on previous and current Garda operations to tackle crime, particularly burglaries the number of which, as we know, increase with the advent of the long winter nights, in both urban and rural communities nationwide. In excess of €5 million is being committed to support Operation Thor. This allocation, which includes funding for Garda overtime will support a combination of additional patrols, checkpoints, rapid armed response and public awareness measures.

This special, targeted operation has to be seen in the context of the major investment that this Government is making in An Garda Síochána. The 2016 Budget allocation of €1.5 billion for An Garda Síochána includes over €67 million in additional funding which will allow the recruitment of 600 new Gardaí next year on top of the 550 Gardaí recruited since this Government reopened the Garda College in September 2014. It will also provide additional funding for Garda Surveillance, special operations and targeted, intelligence-led policing. This additional recruitment and budget allocation builds on the current high level of investment in Garda vehicles. We have invested over €34 million in new Garda vehicles since 2012 with over 640 new vehicles coming on stream in 2015, ranging from more Garda patrol cars to high-powered vehicles for armed units. The Government's Capital Plan 2016-2021 provides for a further €46 million of investment in vehicles as well as an additional €200 million for Information and Communications Technology which will allow An Garda Síochána to deploy the latest cutting edge technologies in the fight against crime. We are also investing in airborne surveillance. Taken together, this step-change in investment in policing will ensure that the Gardaí can be mobile, visible and responsive, on the roads and in the community.

Operation Thor entails a broad range of activities to tackle burglars, organised crime gangs and prolific offenders as well as working with communities to prevent crime. These activities include: additional high-visibility patrols in identified burglary hot-spots; increased use of checkpoints to tackle the criminal gangs using the national road network; the use of new high powered vehicles by the armed Regional Response Units; efforts to disrupt the stolen goods market; programmes to help reduce re-offending by prolific offenders; a high-profile national crime prevention awareness campaign, and targeted crime prevention advice for local communities and enhanced supports for victims.

The Commissioner, in consultation with her senior management team, is responsible for the

detailed allocation of resources, including the additional allocation of the €5 million to support Operation Thor. The Commissioner has assured me that she will aim to maximise the use of these additional resources. A large proportion of domestic burglaries are committed by serial offenders. Figures from the Garda Síochána Analysis Service indicate that 75% of burglaries are committed by 25% of burglars. Targeting these prolific offenders is a priority, consequently the allocation of resources under Operation Thor will be intelligence led and based on analysis of crime patterns by An Garda Síochána. The aim is to deploy resources in advance of where An Garda Síochána anticipate crime might take place in order to prevent the crime occurring.

In this context the Deputy will appreciate that it is not possible to detail the additional resources that will be made available to any one County under Operation Thor. However the Commissioner will continually review the allocation of resources under the Operation, taking into account crime trends and policing priorities across the Garda Regions so as to ensure that the best possible use is made of these resources. I am confident that this comprehensive operation by An Garda Síochána, supported by Government investment, will help disrupt the activities of burglars, organised crime gangs and prolific offenders and will improve the safety of all our communities across the country.

International Terrorism

113. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide an assessment of Ireland's exposure to terrorist activities; the extent to which the national security agencies co-operate with each other in this area; if a new risk analysis will be carried out in view of the atrocities in Paris last week; the additional funding that will be made available going forward to enhance the State's ability to prevent any such incidents occurring domestically; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41187/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will know the primary security threat in this State is posed by the co-called 'dissident' republican paramilitary groups. An Garda Síochána continues to work to disrupt and to bring an end to the activities of these groups and will continue to give priority to this. They work in very close co-operation with their counterparts in Northern Ireland in this regard.

Ireland, like other democratic states, cannot consider itself immune from the threat posed by international terrorism and extremism. The current assessment of the threat from this source is that while an attack here is possible, it is unlikely. There is not at present any specific information that an attack on Ireland is planned. The level of threat from this source has been reviewed since the attacks in Paris on 13 November. It is kept under constant review by An Garda Síochána, particularly in the light of ongoing developments and the current international climate.

The Garda Authorities have been taking all necessary security measures proportionate to the threat and all the relevant agencies here co-operate closely in respect of any threats identified. The Deputy will understand that, of their very nature, the detail of security measures should not be disclosed publicly. In general terms, An Garda Síochána will take all possible steps to deal with any threat to this country combining its intelligence base with a well-trained, armed special intervention capacity and a range of other national policing resources. Where necessary, the considerable skills of the Defence Forces are also available in aid to the civil power.

Of course, this is an international problem and the Garda Authorities will continue to co-operate very closely with their EU and other international security and intelligence counterparts in responding to this shared threat.

In respect of the resources available, given that the threat from international terrorism and extremism is an evolving one the Garda Commissioner is carrying out a review at present and will let me know what additional requirements may arise.

Garda Resources

114. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the additional resources that will be made available to An Garda Síochána in the Thomastown district under Operation Thor; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42429/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Operation Thor is a multi-stranded national operation which builds on previous and current Garda operations to tackle crime, particularly burglaries the number of which, as we know, increase with the advent of the long winter nights, in both urban and rural communities nationwide. In excess of €5 million is being committed to support Operation Thor. This allocation, which includes funding for Garda overtime will support a combination of additional patrols, checkpoints, rapid armed response and public awareness measures.

This special, targeted operation has to be seen in the context of the major investment that this Government is making in An Garda Síochána. The 2016 Budget allocation of €1.5 billion for An Garda Síochána includes over €67 million in additional funding which will allow the recruitment of 600 new Gardaí next year on top of the 550 Gardaí recruited since this Government reopened the Garda College in September 2014. It will also provide additional funding for Garda Surveillance, special operations and targeted, intelligence-led policing. This additional recruitment and budget allocation builds on the current high level of investment in Garda vehicles. We have invested over €34 million in new Garda vehicles since 2012 with over 640 new vehicles coming on stream in 2015, ranging from more Garda patrol cars to high-powered vehicles for armed units. The Government's Capital Plan 2016-2021 provides for a further €46 million of investment in vehicles as well as an additional €200 million for Information and Communications Technology which will allow An Garda Síochána to deploy the latest cutting edge technologies in the fight against crime. We are also investing in airborne surveillance. Taken together, this step-change in investment in policing will ensure that the Gardaí can be mobile, visible and responsive, on the roads and in the community.

Operation Thor entails a broad range of activities to tackle burglars, organised crime gangs and prolific offenders as well as working with communities to prevent crime. These activities include: additional high-visibility patrols in identified burglary hot-spots; increased use of checkpoints to tackle the criminal gangs using the national road network; the use of new high powered vehicles by the armed Regional Response Units; efforts to disrupt the stolen goods market; programmes to help reduce re-offending by prolific offenders; a high-profile national crime prevention awareness campaign, and targeted crime prevention advice for local communities and enhanced supports for victims.

The Commissioner, in consultation with her senior management team, is responsible for the detailed allocation of resources, including the additional allocation of the €5 million to support Operation Thor. The Commissioner has assured me that she will aim to maximise the use of these additional resources. A large proportion of domestic burglaries are committed by serial offenders. Figures from the Garda Síochána Analysis Service indicate that 75% of burglaries are committed by 25% of burglars. Targeting these prolific offenders is a priority, consequently the allocation of resources under Operation Thor will be intelligence led and based on analysis of crime patterns by An Garda Síochána. The aim is to deploy resources in advance of where An Garda Síochána anticipate crime might take place in order to prevent the crime occurring.

In this context the Deputy will appreciate that it is not possible to detail the additional resources that will be made available to any one County under Operation Thor. However the Commissioner will continually review the allocation of resources under the Operation, taking into account crime trends and policing priorities across the Garda Regions so as to ensure that the best possible use is made of these resources. I am confident that this comprehensive operation by An Garda Síochána, supported by Government investment, will help disrupt the activities of burglars, organised crime gangs and prolific offenders and will improve the safety of all our communities across the country.

Crime Data

115. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the extent to which the number of reported incidents of the various categories of crime has fluctuated and the extent to which the strength of An Garda Síochána has altered over the past 12 years to date; if a correlation has been established between the number of gardaí and criminal activity; her plans to address such issues; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42347/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will be aware the Central Statistics Office (CSO), as the national statistical agency, is responsible for the publication of recorded crime statistics. I have requested the CSO to provide the available statistics in relation to the matters referred to directly to the Deputy.

As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the deployment of personnel, among the Garda Regions, Divisions, and Districts. Garda management keep this distribution under continuing review taking into account crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the best possible use is made of these resources.

I have been informed by the Garda Commissioner that the personnel strength of An Garda Síochána on the 31 December 2003 and on the 31 October 2015, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was 12,017 and 12,866, respectively.

The Deputy will also be aware that this Government is strongly committed to providing communities throughout the country with the reassurance that comes from a visible and determined police force. This commitment is most clearly seen in the Government's decision to resume Garda recruitment and by the end of 2016 a total of 1,150 new recruits will have been taken in to the Garda College in Templemore.

While there is clearly a link between the effectiveness of our policing arrangements and the number of Gardaí available, the provisions of resources for modern vehicles, technology and information systems, is also an important factor in stepping up our efforts to confront and disrupt criminal activity. In this regard the Deputy will be aware of the very significant investment which the Government is making to update and upgrade Garda vehicles and technology with a total of €205 million being provided in the Capital Plan 2016 – 2021.

All of these important investments in policing capacity are supporting enhanced Garda measures to deal with crime, in particular through the recently launched Operation Thor which is providing a coordinated and robust response to criminal gangs engaged in burglary and related criminality.

Proposed Legislation

116. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality why the Mediation Bill has not progressed through the houses of the Oireachtas over the past three years. [42457/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Mediation Bill, which is currently being drafted in the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel, will introduce an obligation on solicitors and barristers to advise any person intending to commence legal proceedings to give consideration to using mediation as an alternative means of resolving disputed issues. It will also provide that a court may, following the commencement of any such proceedings, on its own initiative or at the request of a party to the proceedings, invite the parties to consider mediation as an alternative option and suspend the proceedings to facilitate that process.

I very much regret that it has not been possible to publish this Bill to date. This has been due to the extensive programme of progressive law reform undertaken by my Department in accordance with the ambitious targets set out in the Programme for Government. However, while it is not possible to give a specific date for publication of the Bill at this stage, I intend to proceed quickly with enactment of the Bill following its publication in due course.

Garda Resources

117. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the additional resources that will be made available to An Garda Síochána in County Laois and in County Offaly under Operation Thor; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42415/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Operation Thor is a multi-stranded national operation which builds on previous and current Garda operations to tackle crime, particularly burglaries the number of which, as we know, increase with the advent of the long winter nights, in both urban and rural communities nationwide. In excess of €5 million is being committed to support Operation Thor. This allocation, which includes funding for Garda overtime will support a combination of additional patrols, checkpoints, rapid armed response and public awareness measures.

This special, targeted operation has to be seen in the context of the major investment that this Government is making in An Garda Síochána. The 2016 Budget allocation of €1.5 billion for An Garda Síochána includes over €67 million in additional funding which will allow the recruitment of 600 new Gardaí next year on top of the 550 Gardaí recruited since this Government reopened the Garda College in September 2014. It will also provide additional funding for Garda Surveillance, special operations and targeted, intelligence-led policing. This additional recruitment and budget allocation builds on the current high level of investment in Garda vehicles. We have invested over €34 million in new Garda vehicles since 2012 with over 640 new vehicles coming on stream in 2015, ranging from more Garda patrol cars to high-powered vehicles for armed units. The Government's Capital Plan 2016-2021 provides for a further €46 million of investment in vehicles as well as an additional €200 million for Information and Communications Technology which will allow An Garda Síochána to deploy the latest cutting edge technologies in the fight against crime. We are also investing in airborne surveillance. Taken together, this step-change in investment in policing will ensure that the Gardaí can be mobile, visible and responsive, on the roads and in the community.

Operation Thor entails a broad range of activities to tackle burglars, organised crime gangs and prolific offenders as well as working with communities to prevent crime. These activities include: additional high-visibility patrols in identified burglary hot-spots; increased

use of checkpoints to tackle the criminal gangs using the national road network; the use of new high powered vehicles by the armed Regional Response Units; efforts to disrupt the stolen goods market; programmes to help reduce re-offending by prolific offenders; a high-profile national crime prevention awareness campaign, and targeted crime prevention advice for local communities and enhanced supports for victims.

The Commissioner, in consultation with her senior management team, is responsible for the detailed allocation of resources, including the additional allocation of the €5 million to support Operation Thor. The Commissioner has assured me that she will aim to maximise the use of these additional resources. A large proportion of domestic burglaries are committed by serial offenders. Figures from the Garda Síochána Analysis Service indicate that 75% of burglaries are committed by 25% of burglars. Targeting these prolific offenders is a priority, consequently the allocation of resources under Operation Thor will be intelligence led and based on analysis of crime patterns by An Garda Síochána. The aim is to deploy resources in advance of where An Garda Síochána anticipate crime might take place in order to prevent the crime occurring.

In this context the Deputy will appreciate that it is not possible to detail the additional resources that will be made available to any one County under Operation Thor. However the Commissioner will continually review the allocation of resources under the Operation, taking into account crime trends and policing priorities across the Garda Regions so as to ensure that the best possible use is made of these resources. I am confident that this comprehensive operation by An Garda Síochána, supported by Government investment, will help disrupt the activities of burglars, organised crime gangs and prolific offenders and will improve the safety of all our communities across the country.

Immigration Controls

118. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the measures she is putting in place to analyse, assess and prevent the entry into this State of members of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41212/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The recent appalling attacks in Paris and elsewhere, inspired by ISIL, bring a sharp focus to bear on the potential threat that states face from violent extremists.

The current assessment of the threat to Ireland from this source is that while an attack here is possible, it is unlikely and there is no specific information at present that an attack on Ireland is planned. However, the level of threat from this source is kept under constant review by An Garda Síochána, particularly in the light of ongoing developments and the current international climate.

There is a small number of people here whose activities are a cause for concern in terms of supporting terrorism and extremism. They will continue to be monitored and, where evidence is available of criminality, they will face the full rigours of the law.

The Deputy will understand that, of their very nature, the detail of security measures should not be disclosed publicly. The Garda Authorities are taking all necessary security measures proportionate to the threat and all the relevant agencies here co-operate closely in respect of any threats identified. There is also very close co-operation between the Gardaí and their EU and other international police, intelligence and border control counterparts, including Interpol and Europol. This ongoing co-operation in terms of information-sharing is particularly valuable in identifying persons seeking to gain entry to the State who may pose a threat.

As the Deputy will understand there is a particularly close relationship of co-operation with the UK authorities in this regard in the context of managing the security of the Common Travel Area. Enhanced information-sharing between border control authorities here and in the UK is a strong feature of the shared efforts in this area.

Garda Resources

119. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the additional resources that will be made available to An Garda Síochána in County Kildare under Operation Thor; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42409/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Operation Thor is a multi-stranded national operation which builds on previous and current Garda operations to tackle crime, particularly burglaries the number of which, as we know, increase with the advent of the long winter nights, in both urban and rural communities nationwide. In excess of €5 million is being committed to support Operation Thor. This allocation, which includes funding for Garda overtime will support a combination of additional patrols, checkpoints, rapid armed response and public awareness measures.

This special, targeted operation has to be seen in the context of the major investment that this Government is making in An Garda Síochána. The 2016 Budget allocation of €1.5 billion for An Garda Síochána includes over €67 million in additional funding which will allow the recruitment of 600 new Gardaí next year on top of the 550 Gardaí recruited since this Government reopened the Garda College in September 2014. It will also provide additional funding for Garda Surveillance, special operations and targeted, intelligence-led policing. This additional recruitment and budget allocation builds on the current high level of investment in Garda vehicles. We have invested over €34 million in new Garda vehicles since 2012 with over 640 new vehicles coming on stream in 2015, ranging from more Garda patrol cars to high-powered vehicles for armed units. The Government's Capital Plan 2016-2021 provides for a further €46 million of investment in vehicles as well as an additional €200 million for Information and Communications Technology which will allow An Garda Síochána to deploy the latest cutting edge technologies in the fight against crime. We are also investing in airborne surveillance. Taken together, this step-change in investment in policing will ensure that the Gardaí can be mobile, visible and responsive, on the roads and in the community.

Operation Thor entails a broad range of activities to tackle burglars, organised crime gangs and prolific offenders as well as working with communities to prevent crime. These activities include: additional high-visibility patrols in identified burglary hot-spots; increased use of checkpoints to tackle the criminal gangs using the national road network; the use of new high powered vehicles by the armed Regional Response Units; efforts to disrupt the stolen goods market; programmes to help reduce re-offending by prolific offenders; a high-profile national crime prevention awareness campaign, and targeted crime prevention advice for local communities and enhanced supports for victims.

The Commissioner, in consultation with her senior management team, is responsible for the detailed allocation of resources, including the additional allocation of the €5 million to support Operation Thor. The Commissioner has assured me that she will aim to maximise the use of these additional resources. A large proportion of domestic burglaries are committed by serial offenders. Figures from the Garda Síochána Analysis Service indicate that 75% of burglaries are committed by 25% of burglars. Targeting these prolific offenders is a priority, consequently the allocation of resources under Operation Thor will be intelligence led and based on analysis of crime patterns by An Garda Síochána. The aim is to deploy resources in advance of where

An Garda Síochána anticipate crime might take place in order to prevent the crime occurring.

In this context the Deputy will appreciate that it is not possible to detail the additional resources that will be made available to any one County under Operation Thor. However the Commissioner will continually review the allocation of resources under the Operation, taking into account crime trends and policing priorities across the Garda Regions so as to ensure that the best possible use is made of these resources. I am confident that this comprehensive operation by An Garda Síochána, supported by Government investment, will help disrupt the activities of burglars, organised crime gangs and prolific offenders and will improve the safety of all our communities across the country.

Census of Population Data

120. **Deputy Regina Doherty** asked the Taoiseach the number of applicants over 70 years of age who applied for the position of field supervisor for census 2016; the number who were employed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42664/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Census Field Supervisor competition was advertised in the national press on 17 September, 2015. A total of 2,327 applications were received and 1,143 were called for interview. Offers of appointment will be made over the coming weeks.

All appointments from this competition are subject to the Public Service Pensions (Single Scheme and Other Provisions) Act, 2012 whereby members of the scheme must retire at age 70. Accordingly, persons who were aged 70 years or over at the time of application, or those who would reach this age before the end of the contract term, were not considered. Of the 2,327 applications received a total of fourteen applicants were not considered on these grounds. No applicants that fall into this category have been considered for appointment as Census Field Supervisor.

Dáil Reform

121. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Taoiseach the Dáil reform that has been achieved since this Government took office in 2011 and his future plans for Dáil reform; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42352/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The process of parliamentary reform is an ongoing one. The Programme for Government outlined an ambitious agenda for Dáil Reform to be introduced in a phased process over the lifetime of the Government. On foot of this, since 2011 the operation of the Dáil has been steadily reformed to enhance the legislative role of elected members and improve the working of the House. The measures introduced have included the following.

The number of Dáil sitting days has been significantly increased by reducing the length of Dáil breaks at Christmas, Easter, public holidays and the summer and introducing regular Friday sitting days. During the 45 months the FF, Green & PD Government was in office the Dáil sat 349 days – an average of 93 days a year. The FG & Labour Government has been in office 56 months and the Dáil has sat for 576 days – an average of almost 124 days a year, an increase of 31 more sitting days per year.

The first phase of the Dáil Reform Programme was introduced in the summer of 2011 and

included:

- An additional Leaders' Questions session on Thursdays, taken by the Tánaiste
- Topical Issues Debates to replace the outmoded Adjournment Debates, so as to give Deputies an opportunity to raise issues direct with Ministers from the relevant Department
- Friday sittings to enable Deputies to play a fuller role in the legislative process by introducing their own Bills and having those Bills debated on the floor of the Dáil
- A mechanism for appeal to the Ceann Comhairle if a Deputy is unhappy with the reply received to a Parliamentary Question
- A Pre-Legislative review system whereby Ministers could provide the Heads of a Bill to the relevant Oireachtas Committee to review before the Bill was published
- Restructuring of the Oireachtas Committee system by reducing the number of Oireachtas Committees from 25 to 16
- Introducing a new Oireachtas Committee chaired by an Opposition Deputy to work with Ombudsmen's offices and review petitions.

In the summer of 2012, further reforms to the Oireachtas Committee system were introduced, which streamlined the structure and provided an additional focus on areas of priority such as Jobs and Agriculture.

In September 2013 the Government announced the second phase of Dáil Reforms and the Dáil debated and approved changes to Standing Orders in October 2013. These reforms are being phased in and include changes to enable more public involvement in the law-making process:

- A Pre-Legislative Stage at an Oireachtas Committee is now a general requirement for non-emergency legislation. A Minister who does not bring a Bill to Committee for Pre-Legislative Stage is required to explain that decision to the Dáil.
- The new Pre-Legislative Stage allows for an unprecedented and extensive engagement by the public in law-making. The Committee can consult with experts and civic society groups; crucially, this takes place before the legislation is drafted.
- Where there has been a Pre-Legislative Stage, the Chair or Vice Chair of the Committee has an opportunity to outline the Committee's work to the members of the Dáil during the Second Stage debate after the Minister and main opposition spokespeople have spoken on the Bill.

In addition, each year the Taoiseach and Tánaiste will address the Dáil setting out the Government's annual priorities, with Ministers setting out their Department's plans.

The role of Oireachtas Committees in the Budget process has also been expanded.

There has been a reduction in the number of Legislative Programmes to two per year.

The time available for legislative debate in the Dáil has been increased, by increasing the total number of sitting days, extending the length of sitting days and starting at 9.30 am on Wednesdays and Thursdays.

The way legislation is debated in the Chamber has been improved:

- At First Stage, the proposer of a Private Member's Bill now has five minutes to outline the purpose of the Bill to the Dáil and explain the reasons for proposing it.

- Where proposed legislation has been the subject of Pre-Legislative Scrutiny, at Second Stage the Chair or Vice Chair of the Committee which considered the Bill at Pre-Legislative Stage has a speaking slot, of the same length as that of the Minister and Opposition Spokespeople, to report to the Dáil on the Committee's findings.

- At the end of the Second Stage debate, 45 minutes may be allowed for concluding remarks by Deputies, chosen by the Ceann Comhairle, who have previously spoken.

The number of Friday sittings has been expanded and the Dáil now sits every second Friday to debate Private Members' Bills and Committee Reports selected using a lottery system. This has encouraged a rapid growth in the number of Bills introduced by Deputies, from 14 published in 2010 to 53 published in 2014. The new Friday sittings also allow Committees, for the first time, to seek directly to have their own reports debated in the Dáil.

The system of Topical Issues now requires the Minister or a Minister of State from the relevant Department to reply; if this is not the case, the Deputy who raised the issue can have it deferred until a Minister or Minister of State from that Department is available.

The time allocated to Oral Parliamentary Questions to Ministers has been standardised to 75 minutes. An ordinary Oral Question will be answered only if the Deputy tabling the Question is in the Chamber when it is reached, and the Deputy is given a brief period, of 30 seconds, to outline the question.

The Government also passed the Houses of the Oireachtas (Inquiries, Privileges & Procedures) Act 2013 and the Standing Orders to establish an Oireachtas Inquiry system are now in place. The Banking Inquiry is the first Oireachtas Inquiry established under this new legislation.

The Convention on the Constitution's 7th Report, on the issue of Dáil Reform, is currently being considered and a response is expected on this over the next few months.

Dáil Reform is an ongoing process and the Government intend to bring forward a further package of reforms for consideration.

Unemployment Data

122. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Taoiseach the number of persons under the age of 24 who were unemployed and on the live register, who were in employment, who were on activation schemes and who were in tertiary education, over the past 18 months, in tabular form. [42604/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The exact information requested by the Deputy is not available.

The Live Register series gives a monthly breakdown of the number of people claiming Jobseeker's Benefit, Jobseeker's Allowance and other registrants as registered with the Department of Social Protection.

The most recent Live Register figures available are for October 2015.

Table 1a below shows the number of persons under 25 years of age (24 years and under) on

the Live Register for the months from May 2014 to October 2015.

It should be noted that the Live Register is not a definitive measure of unemployment as it includes part-time workers, and seasonal and casual workers entitled to Jobseeker's Benefit or Allowance.

The most recent data on numbers on Live Register Activation Programmes are for September 2015. It is not possible to provide an age breakdown for persons on the Live Register Activation Programmes.

Table 1b shows the number of persons on Live Register Activation Programmes from April 2014 to September 2015.

The Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) is the official source of estimates of employment (ILO) and unemployment (ILO) in the State.

The most recent figures available are for Quarter 3 2015.

Table 1c shows the number of persons aged 15 to 24 years of age in employment and unemployed from Q2 2014 to Q3 2015.

Table 1d shows the number of persons aged 15 to 24 years of age in education (including persons on holidays from regular education) where level of education is Third level non-honours degreee/Third level honours degree or above.

Table 1a Number of persons aged under 25 years of age on the Live Register

| | |
|-----------|--------|
| 2014 | - |
| May | 58,516 |
| June | 61,448 |
| July | 62,082 |
| August | 61,494 |
| September | 55,138 |
| October | 51,196 |
| November | 48,872 |
| December | 47,928 |
| 2015 | - |
| January | 49,289 |
| February | 48,524 |
| March | 47,058 |
| April | 45,857 |
| May | 47,086 |
| June | 49,497 |
| July | 50,316 |
| August | 49,865 |
| September | 45,173 |
| October | 41,112 |

Source: CSO Live Register

Table 1b Live Register Activation Programmes April 2014-September 2015

| - | April 2014 | May 2014 | June 2014 | July 2014 |
|--|-------------|----------------|--------------|---------------|
| Back to Work Schemes | 7 | 6 | 6 | 5 |
| Back to Work allowance scheme - Employee strand1 | 10,406 | 10,419 | 10,517 | 10,643 |
| Back to Work Enterprise allowance scheme -self employed strand | 518 | 546 | 558 | 583 |
| Short-term Enterprise Allowance2 | 10,931 | 10,971 | 11,081 | 11,231 |
| Total Back to Work payments | - | - | - | - |
| Other Activation Programmes | - | - | - | - |
| DSP Part-time Job Incentive | 322 | 343 | 319 | 303 |
| TUS - Community Work Placement Initiative (2011) | 7,419 | 7,379 | 7,300 | 7,441 |
| JobBridge (From July 2011) | 6,750 | 6,977 | 6,782 | 6,333 |
| Gateway (2013)3 | 148 | 191 | 308 | 446 |
| Total Other Activation Programmes | 14,639 | 14,890 | 14,709 | 14,523 |
| Community Employment Schemes (excluding Supervisors) | 22,961 | 23,142 | 23,170 | 23,111 |
| FAS Full Time Training for Unemployed People(4) | 8,723 | 8,870 | 8,582 | 7,403 |
| Back to Education Courses | - | - | - | - |
| Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS)5 | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| Back to Education Allowance (BTEA)6 | 23,335 | 13,300 | 5,009 | 3,348 |
| Total Back to Education Courses | 28,335 | 18,300 | 10,009 | 8,348 |
| Total Activation Programmes | 85,589 | 76,173 | 67,551 | 64,616 |
| - | August 2014 | September 2014 | October 2014 | November 2014 |
| Back to Work Schemes | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 |

Questions - Written Answers

| - | August 2014 | September 2014 | October 2014 | November 2014 |
|--|-------------|----------------|--------------|---------------|
| Back to Work allowance scheme - Employee strand1 | 10,732 | 10,746 | 10,897 | 11,009 |
| Back to Work Enterprise allowance scheme -self employed strand | 580 | 570 | 516 | 492 |
| Short-term Enterprise Allowance2 | 11,317 | 11,321 | 11,418 | 11,506 |
| Total Back to Work payments | - | - | - | - |
| Other Activation Programmes | - | - | - | - |
| DSP Part-time Job Incentive | 317 | 357 | 384 | 393 |
| TUS - Community Work Placement Initiative (2011) | 7,477 | 7,494 | 7,683 | 7,860 |
| JobBridge (From July 2011) | 6,053 | 6,298 | 6,599 | 6,742 |
| Gateway (2013)3 | 610 | 819 | 1,138 | 1,463 |
| Total Other Activation Programmes | 14,457 | 14,968 | 15,804 | 16,458 |
| Community Employment Schemes (excluding Supervisors) | 23,124 | 22,941 | 22,815 | 23,035 |
| FAS Full Time Training for Unemployed People(4) | 6,534 | 7,662 | 8,434 | 8,910 |
| Back to Education Courses | - | - | - | - |
| Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS)5 | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |

| - | August 2014 | September 2014 | October 2014 | November 2014 |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|----------------|--------------|---------------|
| Back to Education Allowance (BTEA)6 | 3,115 | 14,515 | 21,201 | 22,714 |
| Total Back to Education Courses | 8,115 | 19,515 | 26,201 | 27,714 |
| Total Activation Programmes | 63,547 | 76,407 | 84,672 | 87,623 |

| - | December 2014 | January 2015 | February 2015 | March 2015 |
|--|---------------|--------------|---------------|------------|
| Back to Work Schemes | 3 | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| Back to Work allowance scheme - Employee strand1 | 11,166 | 11,180 | 11,260 | 11,372 |
| Back to Work Enterprise allowance scheme -self employed strand | 479 | 440 | 447 | 465 |
| Short-term Enterprise Allowance2 | 11,648 | 11,622 | 11,709 | 11,838 |
| Total Back to Work payments | - | - | - | - |
| Other Activation Programmes | - | - | - | - |
| DSP Part-time Job Incentive | 397 | 397 | 397 | 397 |
| TUS - Community Work Placement Initiative (2011) | 7,877 | 7,865 | 7,877 | 7,841 |
| JobBridge (From July 2011) | 6,371 | 6,220 | 6,140 | 6,015 |
| Gateway (2013)3 | 1,685 | 1,770 | 1,856 | 1,990 |
| Total Other Activation Programmes | 16,330 | 16,252 | 16,270 | 16,243 |
| Community Employment Schemes (excluding Supervisors) | 23,249 | 22,927 | 23,034 | 24,478 |
| FAS Full Time Training for Unemployed People(4) | 8,771 | 7,552 | 7,739 | 8,002 |
| Back to Education Courses | - | - | - | - |
| Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS)5 | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |

Questions - Written Answers

| - | December 2014 | January 2015 | February 2015 | March 2015 |
|--|---------------|--------------|---------------|------------|
| Back to Education Allowance (BTEA)6 | 23,366 | 23,497 | 23,873 | 24,143 |
| Total Back to Education Courses | 28,366 | 28,497 | 28,873 | 29,143 |
| Total Activation Programmes | 88,364 | 86,850 | 87,625 | 89,704 |
| - | April 2015 | May 2015 | June 2015 | July 2015 |
| Back to Work Schemes | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Back to Work allowance scheme - Employee strand1 | 11,490 | 11,523 | 11,621 | 11,739 |
| Back to Work Enterprise allowance scheme -self employed strand | 461 | 486 | 490 | 486 |
| Short-term Enterprise Allowance2 | 11,951 | 12,009 | 12,111 | 12,225 |
| Total Back to Work payments | - | - | - | - |
| Other Activation Programmes | - | - | - | - |
| DSP Part-time Job Incentive | 401 | 399 | 378 | 358 |
| TUS - Community Work Placement Initiative (2011) | 7,979 | 7,943 | 8,001 | 8,014 |
| JobBridge (From July 2011) | 5,895 | 5,778 | 5,338 | 4,969 |
| Gateway (2013)3 | 2,082 | 2,160 | 2,208 | 2,258 |
| Total Other Activation Programmes | 16,357 | 16,280 | 15,925 | 15,599 |
| Community Employment Schemes (excluding Supervisors) | 22,999 | 24,563 | 23,112 | 22,913 |
| FAS Full Time Training for Unemployed People(4) | 7,997 | 7,882 | 7,502 | 6,533 |
| Back to Education Courses | - | - | - | - |
| Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS)5 | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| Back to Education Allowance (BTEA)6 | 24,094 | 15,154 | 6,418 | 4,976 |
| Total Back to Education Courses | 29,094 | 20,154 | 11,418 | 9,976 |

1 December 2015

| | | | | |
|--|-------------|--------|----------------|--------|
| Total Activation Programmes | 88,398 | 80,888 | 70,068 | 67,246 |
| - | August 2015 | | September 2015 | |
| Back to Work Schemes | 0 | | 0 | |
| Back to Work allowance scheme - Employee strand ¹ | 11,738 | | 11,825 | |
| Back to Work Enterprise allowance scheme -self employed strand | 472 | | 469 | |
| Short-term Enterprise Allowance ² | 12,210 | | 12,294 | |
| Total Back to Work payments | - | | - | |
| Other Activation Programmes | - | | - | |
| DSP Part-time Job Incentive | 369 | | 411 | |
| TUS - Community Work Placement Initiative (2011) | 7,881 | | 7,827 | |
| JobBridge (From July 2011) | 4,640 | | 4,693 | |
| Gateway (2013) ³ | 2,315 | | 2,342 | |
| Total Other Activation Programmes | 15,205 | | 15,273 | |
| Community Employment Schemes (excluding Supervisors) | 22,839 | | 22,692 | |
| FAS Full Time Training for Unemployed People ⁽⁴⁾ | 5,843 | | 6,478 | |
| Back to Education Courses | - | | - | |
| Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) ⁵ | N/A | | N/A | |
| Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) ⁶ | 4,519 | | 12,537 | |
| Total Back to Education Courses | 9,519 | | 17,537 | |
| Total Activation Programmes | 65,616 | | 74,274 | |

1 This scheme was closed to new applications from 1st May 2009

2 This scheme was introduced from 1st May 2009. It provides immediate support for someone in receipt of Jobseekers Benefit who wants to start a business.

3 Gateway Scheme included from December 2013

4 Specific Skills Training/Local Training initiative/Traineeship/Return to Work.

5 VTOS figures are estimated at 5,000 each year.

6 BTEA figures include all schemes but participants from JA & JB are not entitled to BTEA during the summer holidays.

Includes MOMENTUM participants from February 2013.

Table 1c Persons aged 15 to 24 years of age in employment (ILO) and unemployed (ILO) Q2 2014 - Q3 2015 - '000

| | | | | | | |
|---------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| - | Q2 14 | Q3 14 | Q4 14 | Q1 15 | Q2 15 | Q3 15 |
| In employment | 142.5 | 160.5 | 152.4 | 140.7 | 145.2 | 161.5 |

Questions - Written Answers

| - | Q2 14 | Q3 14 | Q4 14 | Q1 15 | Q2 15 | Q3 15 |
|------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Unemployed | 52.6 | 48.4 | 38.8 | 38.6 | 41.9 | 42.2 |

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

Source: Quarterly National Household Survey, Central Statistics Office.

Table 1d Persons aged 15 to 24 years of age in education (including persons on holidays from regular education) where level of education is Third level non-honours degree/ Third level honours degree or above - '000

| - | Q2 14 | Q3 14 | Q4 14 | Q1 15 | Q2 15 | Q3 15 |
|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Persons aged 15 to 24 years in tertiary education | 116.7 | 109.8 | 136.3 | 119.4 | 117.6 | 103.9 |

Persons for whom education status is not known or persons for whom the level they are engaged at is unknown are excluded.

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

Source: Quarterly National Household Survey, Central Statistics Office.

Unemployment Data

123. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Taoiseach the number of persons under the age of 34 who were unemployed and on the live register, who were in employment, who were on activation schemes and who were in tertiary education, over the past 18 months, in tabular form [42605/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The exact information requested by the Deputy is not available.

The Live Register series gives a monthly breakdown of the number of people claiming Jobseeker's Benefit, Jobseeker's Allowance and other registrants as registered with the Department of Social Protection.

The most recent Live Register figures available are for October 2015.

Table 1a below shows the number of persons under 35 years of age (34 years and under) on the Live Register for the months from May 2014 to October 2015.

It should be noted that the Live Register is not a definitive measure of unemployment as it includes part-time workers, and seasonal and casual workers entitled to Jobseeker's Benefit or Allowance

The most recent data on numbers on Live Register Activation Programmes are for September 2015. It is not possible to provide an age breakdown for persons on the Live Register Activation Programmes.

Table 1b shows the number of persons on Live Register Activation Programmes from April 2014 to September 2015

The Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) is the official source of estimates of employment (ILO) and unemployment (ILO) in the State.

The most recent figures available are for Quarter 3 2015.

Table 1c shows the number of persons aged 15 to 34 years of age in employment and unemployed from Q2 2014 to Q3 2015.

Table 1d shows the number of persons aged 15 to 34 years of age in education (including persons on holidays from regular education) where level of education is Third level non-honours degreee/Third level honours degree or above.

Table 1a Number of persons under 35 years of age on the Live Register

| | |
|-----------|---------|
| 2014 | - |
| May | 168,882 |
| June | 174,689 |
| July | 176,045 |
| August | 173,916 |
| September | 157,989 |
| October | 149,014 |
| November | 144,791 |
| December | 144,899 |
| 2015 | - |
| January | 147,337 |
| February | 144,970 |
| March | 141,252 |
| April | 138,294 |
| May | 140,790 |
| June | 146,380 |
| July | 148,204 |
| August | 146,753 |
| September | 133,698 |
| October | 124,658 |

Source: CSO Live Register

Table 1b Live Register Activation Programmes April 2014-September 2015

| - | April 2014 | May 2014 | June 2014 | July 2014 |
|--|------------|----------|-----------|-----------|
| Back to Work Schemes | 7 | 6 | 6 | 5 |
| Back to Work allowance scheme - Employee strand1 | 10,406 | 10,419 | 10,517 | 10,643 |

Questions - Written Answers

| - | April 2014 | May 2014 | June 2014 | July 2014 |
|--|------------|----------|-----------|-----------|
| Back to Work Enterprise allowance scheme -self employed strand | 518 | 546 | 558 | 583 |
| Short-term Enterprise Allowance ² | 10,931 | 10,971 | 11,081 | 11,231 |
| Total Back to Work payments | - | - | - | - |
| Other Activation Programmes | - | - | - | - |
| DSP Part-time Job Incentive | 322 | 343 | 319 | 303 |
| TUS - Community Work Placement Initiative (2011) | 7,419 | 7,379 | 7,300 | 7,441 |
| JobBridge (From July 2011) | 6,750 | 6,977 | 6,782 | 6,333 |
| Gateway (2013) ³ | 148 | 191 | 308 | 446 |
| Total Other Activation Programmes | 14,639 | 14,890 | 14,709 | 14,523 |
| Community Employment Schemes (excluding Supervisors) | 22,961 | 23,142 | 23,170 | 23,111 |
| FAS Full Time Training for Unemployed People ⁽⁴⁾ | 8,723 | 8,870 | 8,582 | 7,403 |
| Back to Education Courses | - | - | - | - |
| Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) ⁵ | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) ⁶ | 23,335 | 13,300 | 5,009 | 3,348 |

| - | April 2014 | May 2014 | June 2014 | July 2014 |
|--|-------------|----------------|--------------|---------------|
| Total Back to Education Courses | 28,335 | 18,300 | 10,009 | 8,348 |
| Total Activation Programmes | 85,589 | 76,173 | 67,551 | 64,616 |
| - | August 2014 | September 2014 | October 2014 | November 2014 |
| Back to Work Schemes | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| Back to Work allowance scheme - Employee strand1 | 10,732 | 10,746 | 10,897 | 11,009 |
| Back to Work Enterprise allowance scheme -self employed strand | 580 | 570 | 516 | 492 |
| Short-term Enterprise Allowance2 | 11,317 | 11,321 | 11,418 | 11,506 |
| Total Back to Work payments | - | - | - | - |
| Other Activation Programmes | - | - | - | - |
| DSP Part-time Job Incentive | 317 | 357 | 384 | 393 |
| TUS - Community Work Placement Initiative (2011) | 7,477 | 7,494 | 7,683 | 7,860 |
| JobBridge (From July 2011) | 6,053 | 6,298 | 6,599 | 6,742 |
| Gateway (2013)3 | 610 | 819 | 1,138 | 1,463 |
| Total Other Activation Programmes | 14,457 | 14,968 | 15,804 | 16,458 |
| Community Employment Schemes (excluding Supervisors) | 23,124 | 22,941 | 22,815 | 23,035 |

Questions - Written Answers

| - | August 2014 | September 2014 | October 2014 | November 2014 |
|--|---------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|
| FAS Full Time Training for Unemployed People(4) | 6,534 | 7,662 | 8,434 | 8,910 |
| Back to Education Courses | - | - | - | - |
| Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS)5 | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| Back to Education Allowance (BTEA)6 | 3,115 | 14,515 | 21,201 | 22,714 |
| Total Back to Education Courses | 8,115 | 19,515 | 26,201 | 27,714 |
| Total Activation Programmes | 63,547 | 76,407 | 84,672 | 87,623 |
| - | December 2014 | January 2015 | February 2015 | March 2015 |
| Back to Work Schemes | 3 | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| Back to Work allowance scheme - Employee strand1 | 11,166 | 11,180 | 11,260 | 11,372 |
| Back to Work Enterprise allowance scheme -self employed strand | 479 | 440 | 447 | 465 |
| Short-term Enterprise Allowance2 | 11,648 | 11,622 | 11,709 | 11,838 |
| Total Back to Work payments | - | - | - | - |
| Other Activation Programmes | - | - | - | - |
| DSP Part-time Job Incentive | 397 | 397 | 397 | 397 |
| TUS - Community Work Placement Initiative (2011) | 7,877 | 7,865 | 7,877 | 7,841 |

| - | December 2014 | January 2015 | February 2015 | March 2015 |
|--|---------------|--------------|---------------|------------|
| JobBridge (From July 2011) | 6,371 | 6,220 | 6,140 | 6,015 |
| Gateway (2013)3 | 1,685 | 1,770 | 1,856 | 1,990 |
| Total Other Activation Programmes | 16,330 | 16,252 | 16,270 | 16,243 |
| Community Employment Schemes (excluding Supervisors) | 23,249 | 22,927 | 23,034 | 24,478 |
| FAS Full Time Training for Unemployed People(4) | 8,771 | 7,552 | 7,739 | 8,002 |
| Back to Education Courses | - | - | - | - |
| Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS)5 | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| Back to Education Allowance (BTEA)6 | 23,366 | 23,497 | 23,873 | 24,143 |
| Total Back to Education Courses | 28,366 | 28,497 | 28,873 | 29,143 |
| Total Activation Programmes | 88,364 | 86,850 | 87,625 | 89,704 |
| - | April 2015 | May 2015 | June 2015 | July 2015 |
| Back to Work Schemes | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Back to Work allowance scheme - Employee strand1 | 11,490 | 11,523 | 11,621 | 11,739 |
| Back to Work Enterprise allowance scheme -self employed strand | 461 | 486 | 490 | 486 |

Questions - Written Answers

| - | April 2015 | May 2015 | June 2015 | July 2015 |
|--|------------|----------|-----------|-----------|
| Short-term Enterprise Allowance ² | 11,951 | 12,009 | 12,111 | 12,225 |
| Total Back to Work payments | - | - | - | - |
| Other Activation Programmes | - | - | - | - |
| DSP Part-time Job Incentive | 401 | 399 | 378 | 358 |
| TUS - Community Work Placement Initiative (2011) | 7,979 | 7,943 | 8,001 | 8,014 |
| JobBridge (From July 2011) | 5,895 | 5,778 | 5,338 | 4,969 |
| Gateway (2013) ³ | 2,082 | 2,160 | 2,208 | 2,258 |
| Total Other Activation Programmes | 16,357 | 16,280 | 15,925 | 15,599 |
| Community Employment Schemes (excluding Supervisors) | 22,999 | 24,563 | 23,112 | 22,913 |
| FAS Full Time Training for Unemployed People ⁽⁴⁾ | 7,997 | 7,882 | 7,502 | 6,533 |
| Back to Education Courses | - | - | - | - |
| Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) ⁵ | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) ⁶ | 24,094 | 15,154 | 6,418 | 4,976 |
| Total Back to Education Courses | 29,094 | 20,154 | 11,418 | 9,976 |
| Total Activation Programmes | 88,398 | 80,888 | 70,068 | 67,246 |

| - | August 2015 | September 2015 |
|--|-------------|----------------|
| Back to Work Schemes | 0 | 0 |
| Back to Work allowance scheme - Employee strand ¹ | 11,738 | 11,825 |
| Back to Work Enterprise allowance scheme -self employed strand | 472 | 469 |
| Short-term Enterprise Allowance ² | 12,210 | 12,294 |
| Total Back to Work payments | - | - |
| Other Activation Programmes | - | - |
| DSP Part-time Job Incentive | 369 | 411 |
| TUS - Community Work Placement Initiative (2011) | 7,881 | 7,827 |
| JobBridge (From July 2011) | 4,640 | 4,693 |
| Gateway (2013) ³ | 2,315 | 2,342 |
| Total Other Activation Programmes | 15,205 | 15,273 |
| Community Employment Schemes (excluding Supervisors) | 22,839 | 22,692 |
| FAS Full Time Training for Unemployed People ⁽⁴⁾ | 5,843 | 6,478 |
| Back to Education Courses | - | - |
| Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) ⁵ | N/A | N/A |
| Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) ⁶ | 4,519 | 12,537 |
| Total Back to Education Courses | 9,519 | 17,537 |
| Total Activation Programmes | 65,616 | 74,274 |

1 This scheme was closed to new applications from 1st May 2009

2 This scheme was introduced from 1st May 2009. It provides immediate support for someone in receipt of Jobseekers Benefit who wants to start a business.

3 Gateway Scheme included from December 2013

4 Specific Skills Training/Local Training initiative/Traineeship/Return to Work.

5 VTOS figures are estimated at 5,000 each year.

6 BTEA figures include all schemes but participants from JA & JB are not entitled to BTEA during the summer holidays.

Includes MOMENTUM participants from February 2013.

Table 1c Persons aged 15 - 34 years of age in employment (ILO) and unemployed (ILO) Q2 2014 - Q3 2015 - '000

| - | Q2 14 | Q3 14 | Q4 14 | Q1 15 | Q2 15 | Q3 15 |
|---------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| In employment | 633.4 | 648.9 | 640.6 | 624.0 | 627.6 | 641.2 |
| Unemployed | 125.2 | 118.3 | 98.9 | 98.3 | 97.9 | 97.1 |

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

Source: Quarterly National Household Survey, Central Statistics Office.

Table 1d Persons aged 15 to 34 years of age in education (including persons on holidays from regular education) where level of education is Third level non-honours degree/ Third level honours degree or above - '000

| - | Q2 14 | Q3 14 | Q4 14 | Q1 15 | Q2 15 | Q3 15 |
|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Persons aged 15 to 34 years in tertiary education | 163.9 | 152.0 | 186.2 | 171.4 | 164.3 | 143.4 |

Persons for whom education status is not known or persons for whom the level they are engaged at is unknown are excluded.

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

Source: Quarterly National Household Survey, Central Statistics Office.

Departmental Legal Cases Data

124. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Taoiseach the number of legal cases currently ongoing against his Department including State agencies under his aegis; the number of cases that took place during the years 2011 to 2014, inclusive; the cost of those that were contested and what damages were involved; the costs and damages of those that were settled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43271/15]

The Taoiseach: There are currently four legal cases pending against my Department (including State agencies under its aegis), two of which are being managed by the State Claims Agency. Four legal cases took place during the years 2011 to 2014. The total legal costs incurred by my Department from 2011 to 2014 in respect of these cases is provided in the table.

| Year | € |
|------|---------|
| 2011 | €43,535 |

| Year | € |
|------|-----------|
| 2012 | *€241,676 |
| 2013 | Nil |
| 2014 | €22,909 |

The table does not include any costs that have been incurred in relation to the Tribunal of Inquiry (Moriarty) or the Commission of Investigation (Fennelly).

*In 2012 my Department paid €241,676 in legal costs incurred in respect of the applicant's costs in proceedings taken against the previous Government about the holding of a by-election in Donegal South-West.

Departmental Staff

125. **Deputy Regina Doherty** asked the Taoiseach the number of employees under his remit who are classified under a contract of indefinite duration; the number of these who are receiving incremental salary payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43284/15]

The Taoiseach: No employee of my Department is classified under a contract of indefinite duration.

The National Economic and Social Development Office (NESDO) is the only State Agency under the aegis of my Department and is the body corporate for the National Economic and Social Council (NESC). Four employees of NESDO/NESC are classified under contracts of indefinite duration. None of these officials are receiving incremental salary payments as they have reached the top of their respective scales.

Carer's Allowance Appeals

126. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if an appeal under the carer's allowance scheme will be expedited for a person (details supplied) in County Longford; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42441/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Carer's Allowance (CA) is a social assistance payment, made to persons who are providing full-time care and attention to people who have a disability such that they require that level of care and who satisfy a means test.

A person can be considered to be providing full-time care and attention where they are engaged in employment, self-employment or on training courses outside the home for a maximum of 15 hours per week, provided that they can show to the satisfaction of a deciding officer that adequate care has been provided for the care recipient in their absence.

I confirm that the department received an application for CA from the person concerned on 1 September 2015.

The application was refused by a deciding officer on the grounds that the person concerned was working outside the home for more than 15 hours per week.

He was notified on 12 November 2015 of this decision, the reason for it and of his right of

review and appeal. There is no record of any CA review or appeal request being received in the department. If the person's circumstances have changed, it is open to him to re-apply for CA at any time.

Questions Nos. 127 and 128 withdrawn.

Insolvency Payments Scheme Payments

129. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 204 of 9 December 2014 and 185 of 14 July 2015 (details supplied), the status of the review taking place into situations where a company ceases trading, but is not liquidated and has outstanding payments to be given to employees; when the review will conclude; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42318/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Under the provisions of the Protection of Employees (Employers' Insolvency) Act, 1984 an employer company shall be regarded as being insolvent if the company is placed into receivership or if a winding-up order has been made or a resolution for the voluntary liquidation of the company has been passed. The former employer of the persons concerned has not engaged in any of these processes and therefore the persons are not covered by the provisions of the 1984 Act.

The Department continues to review the position to establish what, if anything, can be done to progress payments to individuals in situations where employers cease trading without engaging in a formal winding-up process and owe moneys to their employees. The Department is consulting a range of interested parties, including the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement, the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation and the Revenue Commissioners, in respect of these issues. Officials from the Department will continue to engage with all relevant parties to try to progress the matter. There are very difficult legal issues that need to be addressed and the potential impacts that any proposed policy development might have must be considered.

I am not in a position to indicate at this stage when the review will be completed. We do not yet have a legal solution to it because there are all sorts of consequences that might flow from taking a legal position that was not carefully worked out. It could damage other people as well as addressing the problems faced by some people. In addressing this, we must find a sensible and proportionate approach which does not have negative knock-on consequences for other workers' rights.

Carer's Allowance Applications

130. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the status of an application for a carer's allowance by a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42355/15]

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 3 November 2015. Once processed, the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

Carer's Allowance Appeals

131. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection when

a decision will be made regarding an application for a carer's allowance by a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42370/15]

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

In April 2013, the person concerned was refused CA on the grounds that the disability of the care recipient was not such that there was a requirement for full-time care and attention and that the carer was not providing full-time care and attention as required. The person in question appealed that decision to the Social Welfare Appeals Office and the appeal was disallowed by an appeals officer (AO) in March 2014.

Under Social Welfare legislation, the decision of an AO is final and conclusive and may only be reviewed in the light of additional evidence or new facts.

If the circumstances have changed, the person in question should submit a new application for CA. I have arranged for an application form (CR1) to issue by post to his given address. Following receipt of a fully completed application form and any necessary supporting documentation, the eligibility of the person concerned to CA will be determined and he will be notified directly of the outcome.

Back to Work Allowance Eligibility

132. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if a grant or lump sum funding is available to assist persons setting up in self-employment under the back to work enterprise allowance scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42373/15]

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

No lump-sum funds are available from the Department. The Department can provide up to 80% support for customer approved for the BTWEA for the purchase of items of business supports, mentoring, business equipment, public liability insurance, upgrading of premises owned by the applicant and accountancy, legal and related services through the Employment Support Grant (ESG) which is administered by the Department's Case Officers. Information on accessing finance and a range of other supports for start-up is available from Local Enterprise Offices. DSP Intreo centres and local development companies are also in a position to advise persons wishing to pursue self-employment opportunities.

Carer's Allowance Applications

133. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the status of an application for a carer's allowance by a person (details supplied) in County Mayo; if it will be expedited; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42384/15]

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 20

August 2015. The application is currently being processed and once completed, the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

Disability Allowance Payments

134. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection when payment of a disability allowance will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42392/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Disability allowance arrears issued to the person in question by her chosen payment method on 26 November 2015.

Free Travel Scheme Eligibility

135. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection why children (details supplied) under 16 years of age who have high dependency and medical issues, many of whom live in rural parts of Ireland and who must travel under the supervision of a parent or guardian to meet their medical teams on a regular basis, are not eligible to apply for a free travel pass; if she will change this regulation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42445/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): There are currently approximately 839,000 people in Ireland in receipt of free travel at an annual cost of €77 million per annum. The free travel scheme is available to all people aged over 66 living permanently in the State. Applicants who are under age 66, including those with learning disabilities, must be in receipt of a qualifying payment in order to qualify for the scheme. The qualifying payments for those aged under 66 are invalidity pension, blind pension, disability allowance, carer's allowance or an equivalent social security payment from a country covered by EC Regulations or one with which Ireland has a Bilateral Social Security Agreement. Free travel is provided for people in receipt of carer's allowance to facilitate their caring role and support their social inclusion.

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

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

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

Under the supplementary welfare allowance scheme (SWA) the Department of Social Protection may award a travel supplement in any case where the circumstances of the case so warrant. The supplement is intended to assist with ongoing or recurring travel costs that cannot be met from the client's own resources and are deemed to be necessary. Every decision is based on consideration of the circumstances of the case, taking account of the nature and extent of the

need and of the resources of the person concerned.

Where the travel costs are non-recurring, the SWA scheme provides for exceptional needs payments to be made to assist with essential, once-off expenditure in exceptional circumstances. There is no automatic entitlement to such payments. Again, every decision is based on consideration of the circumstances of the case, taking account of the nature and extent of the need and of the resources of the person concerned. The ENP scheme is not intended to cover circumstances where responsibility for the payment or the expenditure rests with another Government Department or Agency.

Fuel Allowance Eligibility

136. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the status of an application for a fuel allowance by a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42447/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned is a participant on a Community Employment (CE) Scheme. Participants on CE Schemes can only be paid Fuel Allowance where they had applied for, or were awarded the allowance prior to commencing on the scheme. They may not accrue an entitlement while on the scheme. As the client concerned was not in receipt of Fuel Allowance prior to commencing on the CE Scheme, he does not qualify for Fuel Allowance.

Carer's Allowance Payments

137. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if a decision will be made on an application for a carer's allowance by a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42474/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The application for carer's allowance in respect of the person concerned was awarded on 24 November 2015 and the first payment is due to issue to the person's bank nominated bank account on 3 December 2015.

Arrears of allowance due from 2 April 2015 have also issued to the bank for payment on 3 December 2015. The person concerned was notified on 24 November 2015.

National Internship Scheme Data

138. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 190 and 195 of 20 October 2015, if she will clarify that, as the JobBridge intern is not an employee of the company, the intern is covered by the host's employer liability insurance; and if she or the relevant JobBridge authority has viewed the host's insurance policy to ensure its validity and that it provides specific cover for the intern, both on-site and off-site of the employer. [42475/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): The primary purpose of the JobBridge scheme is to provide worthwhile work experience opportunities for unemployed people. Under the terms of the scheme interns continue to receive their Jobseeker payment and are not employees of the Host Organisation.

The Terms and Conditions of the scheme explicitly require Host Organisations to confirm that they have Public/Employer Liability Insurance (and Motor Insurance, if applicable) that will cover any JobBridge participants. They must also be fully compliant with workplace Health and Safety and all other legal and sectoral requirements. These are standard statutory requirements and all host organisations must self-certify that these requirements are met before an application is allowed to proceed. In addition all host organisations are required to return a monthly report confirming that the internship is progressing as per the terms and conditions outlined in the Standard Agreement and signed by both parties.

The Department does not inspect records of host organisations prior to accepting applications as to do so would impose a significant overhead in terms of processing times and cost. However random on-site inspections are conducted to ensure compliance with the terms and conditions of the scheme and the undertakings of the Host Organisation. Over 11,800 monitoring visits have been made since the scheme's inception - over 4,600 last year alone. There have been no reported instances of Public/Employer Liability insurance not being in place.

Water Conservation Grant Administration

139. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection why a letter to claim the water conservation grant was not issued to a person (details supplied) in County Wexford; if it will be re-issued and a late application permitted; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42515/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The eligibility criteria for the Water Conservation Grant are set out in the Water Services Act 2014 (Water Conservation Grant) Regulations 2015. Under regulation 5(1) a person who registers with Irish Water, as required under section 5(2)(a) of the Water Services Act 2014, on or before 30 June 2015 shall be eligible to receive the grant in 2015 if they were normally resident at the principal private residence on that date.

To date Irish Water has transferred details of over 1.3 million registered households to this Department including the details of the person concerned. A letter issued to the person concerned at the address given inviting them to apply for the grant before the deadline of 8 October 2015 and advising them that they could make this application either online or with the assistance of the Water Grant Support Team by telephone. Statutory Instrument 434 of 2015 provided for the extension of the deadline for the submission of a completed application for the Water Conservation Grant to the Department of Social Protection from 8 October 2015 to 22 October 2015. However, there is no record of the person having applied for the grant prior to the closing date.

Community Employment Schemes Eligibility

140. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the status of the eligibility of participants on community employment schemes who are over 55 years of age; her plans to overturn the recent amendments preventing those over 55 years of age from remaining on a scheme for six years or more; if she will provide clear guidelines to those who administer these schemes, particularly on the subject of extensions, to avoid discrepancies in the use of discretion and to ensure that persons are retained within the community who provide a valuable contribution to it, given the pride they take in their participation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42538/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): Community Employment (CE) is an active labour market programme designed to provide eligible long-term unemployed people and other vulnerable persons (including lone parents, recovering drug users and persons with a disability) with an opportunity to engage in part-time work and training within their communities on a temporary, fixed-term basis.

With effect from 3 April 2000, lifetime participation on CE by an individual is limited to:

- 3 cumulative years for persons under 55 years of age.
- 6 cumulative years for persons of 55 years of age up to State Pension age (inclusive of any time spent on CE while under 55).
- Eligible persons in receipt of a qualifying disability-linked social welfare payment will be eligible for **one** additional year on CE over the standard maximum participation caps, i.e. 4 years for those under 55 years of age (part-time Job Option only), and 7 years for those between 55 years of age and State Pension age (Part-time Job Option only).
- Participation on CE prior to 3 April 2000 is not counted.

These participation limits are strictly adhered to in order to maximise the utilisation of CE places. Part-time Integration Option participants, who qualify on the basis of being in continuous receipt of a social welfare payment for 12 months or more, can participate on CE for one year at a time and must leave and re-qualify in order to participate further (if they remain unemployed), subject to the participation caps outlined above. Part-time Job Option participants must be in continuous receipt of qualifying payments for a minimum of 3 years or more to participate for up to 3 years on annually renewable contracts if aged under 55, or 6 years if 55 or over.

The participation limits allow for the utilisation of places amongst qualifying persons, to ensure the benefit of the CE scheme is available to the widest possible number of jobseekers. The Department keeps all aspects of its activation programmes under review to ensure the best outcomes for participants.

Respite Care Grant Payments

141. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the status of an application for a respite care grant by a person (details supplied) in County Cork; when a decision will be made; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42553/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned was awarded the 2014 and 2015 Respite Care Grants on 25 November 2015. Payment of €2,750 (€1,375 for each year) will be sent to her nominated bank account over the next few days.

Respite Care Grant Applications

142. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the status of an application for a respite care grant by a person (details supplied) in County Cork; when a decision will be made. [42554/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): An application for Respite Care Grant from the person concerned was received in my Department on 2 September 2015. This application is currently being processed and a decision will be made as soon as

possible.

Question No. 143 withdrawn.

Social Welfare Appeals Waiting Times

144. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the average time it takes to hear and decide a social protection appeal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42564/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The average appeal processing time for 2014 and to date in 2015 broken down by all social welfare scheme types is as outlined in the tables.

Appeal processing times generally peaked in 2011 when the overall average time for an oral hearing was 52.5 weeks and 25.1 weeks for a summary decision. In 2014 average appeal processing times for an oral hearing had almost halved to 28.6 weeks and the average time taken to process appeals involving summary decisions had also significantly reduced to 21.1 weeks. This downward trend in overall appeal processing times has continued to date in 2015 to 25.9 weeks for an oral hearing and 18.3 weeks for a summary decision. Appeal processing times are closely monitored on an ongoing basis.

The reduction in processing times reflects the significant resources which have been invested in the Social Welfare Appeals Office over the last number of years.

In addition the Department has undertaken a process of reform in many of its scheme areas aimed at reducing the time taken to respond to requests for submissions in relation to appeals. Appeal processing times are kept under continual review in the Social Welfare Appeals Office.

In addition to the improvement in processing times, these measures have also led to a significant reduction in the number of appeals on hand from 20,414 at 1 January 2013 to 9,394 at 26 November 2015.

Appeal processing times are calculated from the registration date of the appeal to the date of its finalisation. They include all activities during this period including time spent awaiting any clarification from the appellant, time in the Department for comments by the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal put forward by the appellant, and any further investigation, examination or assessment by the Department's Inspectors and Medical Assessors that is deemed necessary. The system is flexible and accessible and allows multiple reviews and submissions of fresh evidence at all stages. For logistical reasons the process takes longer when an oral hearing is required.

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

Appeals processing times by scheme 01/01/2014 – 31/12/14

| - | Average processing times (weeks) Summary Decisions | Average processing times (weeks) Oral Hearings |
|------------------|--|--|
| Adoptive Benefit | 17.1 | - |
| Blind Pension | 20.5 | 24.9 |
| Carers Allowance | 30.1 | 34.4 |

| - | Average processing times (weeks)Summary Decisions | Average processing times (weeks)Oral Hearings |
|--|--|--|
| Carers Benefit | 22.9 | 23.1 |
| Child Benefit | 23.8 | 32.9 |
| Disability Allowance | 20.8 | 26.7 |
| Illness Benefit | 29.5 | 34.8 |
| Domiciliary Care Allowance | 22.6 | 29.1 |
| Deserted Wives Benefit | - | 64.7 |
| Deserted Wives Allowance | - | 41.8 |
| Farm Assist | 23.2 | 28.3 |
| Bereavement Grant | 25.6 | 31.9 |
| Family Income Supplement | 26.0 | 32.6 |
| Invalidity Pension | 25.9 | 31.2 |
| Liabile Relatives | 21.5 | 33.2 |
| One Parent Family Payment | 24.4 | 33.5 |
| Maternity Benefit | 22.4 | 44.7 |
| Partial Capacity Benefit | 48.5 | 48.5 |
| State Pension (Contributory) | 25.2 | 41.9 |
| State Pension (Non-Cont) | 20.3 | 29.4 |
| State Pension (Transition) | 27.0 | 35.1 |
| Occupational Injury Benefit | 33.6 | 33.7 |
| Disablement Pension | 23.6 | 30.6 |
| Occupational Injury Benefit (Medical) | - | 53.9 |
| Incapacity Supplement | 21.5 | 59.6 |
| Guardian's Payment (Con) | 25.9 | 24.9 |
| Guardian's Payment (Non- con) | 19.7 | 30.3 |
| Pre Retirement Allowance | 17.3 | - |
| Jobseeker's Allowance (Means) | 18.1 | 27.5 |
| Jobseeker's Allowance | 16.2 | 21.1 |
| JA/JB Fraud Control | 12.1 | - |
| Jobseeker's Benefit | 16.7 | 21.1 |
| Treatment Benefit | 20.8 | - |
| Respite Care Grant | 24.9 | 27.1 |
| Insurability of Employment | 45.0 | 62.3 |
| Supplementary Welfare Allowance | 14.4 | 22.1 |
| Survivor's Pension (Con) | 20.2 | 32.5 |
| Survivor's Pension (Non- Con) | 24.7 | 24.6 |
| Widowed Parent Grant | 22.2 | - |
| All Appeals | 21.1 | 28.6 |

Questions - Written Answers

| - | Average processing times (weeks)Summary Decisions | Average processing times (weeks)Oral Hearings |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|
| Blind Pension | 21.1 | 35.2 |
| Carers Allowance | 20.9 | 26.9 |
| Carers Benefit | 20.0 | 22.4 |
| Child Benefit | 24.9 | 35.5 |
| Disability Allowance | 15.9 | 21.6 |
| Illness Benefit | 25.9 | 33.6 |
| Partial Capacity Benefit | 27.0 | 43.4 |
| Domiciliary Care Allowance | 21.2 | 28.1 |
| Deserted Wives Benefit | 19.7 | 24.9 |
| Deserted Wives Allowance | - | 16.2 |
| Farm Assist | 19.3 | 29.7 |
| Bereavement Grant | 65.7 | 26.0 |
| Death Benefit (Pension) | - | 22.6 |
| Family Income Supplement | 20.3 | 27.3 |
| Invalidity Pension | 25.8 | 28.3 |
| Liabile Relatives | 22.5 | 31.2 |
| Maternity Benefit | 20.6 | 17.5 |
| One Parent Family Payment | 23.5 | 34.8 |
| State Pension (Contributory) | 25.9 | 48.2 |
| State Pension (Non-Contributory) | 20.0 | 29.7 |
| State Pension (Transition) | 80.1 | 53.4 |
| Occupational Injury Benefit | 21.6 | 38.8 |
| Disablement Pension | 23.8 | 33.2 |
| Incapacity Supplement | 37.7 | 51.5 |
| Guardian's Payment (Con) | 18.6 | 27.8 |
| Guardian's Payment (Non-Con) | 18.9 | 31.0 |
| Jobseeker's Allowance (Means) | 16.3 | 26.2 |
| Jobseeker's Allowance | 15.6 | 21.7 |
| JA/JB Fraud Control | - | 46.1 |
| BTW Family Dividend | 11.4 | - |
| Jobseeker's Transitional | 10.7 | - |
| Recoverable Benefits & Assistance | 12.7 | - |
| Jobseeker's Benefit | 14.8 | 21.9 |
| Pre Retirement Allowance | 15.0 | - |
| Treatment Benefit | 17.9 | - |
| Respite Care Grant | 20.6 | 25.3 |
| Insurability of Employment | 41.1 | 67.6 |
| Supplementary Welfare Allowance | 13.2 | 24.2 |
| Survivor's Pension (Con) | 29.9 | 25.9 |

| - | Average processing times (weeks)Summary Decisions | Average processing times (weeks)Oral Hearings |
|------------------------------|--|--|
| Survivor's Pension (Non-con) | 23.7 | 38.3 |
| Widows Parent Grant | 20.4 | - |
| All Appeals | 18.3 | 25.9 |

Back to Work Allowance Data

145. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the number of applications in 2015 to date under the back to work allowance scheme; the maximum, minimum and average time it takes to process an application; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42566/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): 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 (BTWEA). The Short Term Enterprise Allowance provides immediate access to those who qualify for jobseekers benefit wishing to set up a business. Payment under the scheme is at the same rate and for the same duration as their entitlement to jobseekers 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. Business proposals must be recommended by a local development company or enterprise office before an application is considered for payment of the allowance.

To date, there are 435 people availing of the Short Term Enterprise Allowance and 11,900 people availing of the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance, 6,228 of these were awarded in 2015. Given the nature of the application development process, the Department does not collate statistics on claim processing times with applications received being approved where the applicant is eligible. Generally, processing time for the award of the BTWEA is relatively short if the applicant has fulfilled the conditions of the scheme.

Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility

146. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection why a person in respect of whom an adult dependent allowance is paid cannot access assistance to re-train, upskill or educate for a return to the workforce, but a person claiming jobseeker's allowance is able to do so; her plans to address this; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42576/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): Given the level of unemployment, the key objective of activation policy and labour market initiatives over the past four years has been is to offer assistance to those most in need of support in securing work and achieving financial self-sufficiency. This policy objective prioritises scarce resources to those in receipt of qualifying welfare payments. Accordingly the employment services and schemes provided by the Department are focused in the first instance on this cohort of unemployed people.

A person in respect of whom an adult dependent allowance is paid under another's Jobseeker

Allowance payment is not required to be unemployed (i.e. available for and actively seeking employment). Such a person may however opt to apply for Jobseekers Allowance and become subject to the normal conditionality of the scheme. The Department facilitates such requests through a mechanism known as 'claim-splitting' whereby the total amount due to a couple is divided into two separate claims. In such situations both members of a couple hold a claim in their own right and have access to the full range of activation supports in line with the normal criteria.

In addition, in line with the commitment in Pathways to Work, a range of services are available to non-employed persons who are not in receipt of a qualifying social welfare payment. For example employment services, such as advice on job-search activities and the use of online job search tools, are available to people if they register with the Department's employment services offices, regardless of their social welfare status.

Unemployed persons not in receipt of payments may be eligible to avail of upskilling opportunities, for example through ETB training for unemployed people (at present there are 1,009 upcoming day courses and 552 upcoming evening courses). Although not eligible to receive a training allowance while undertaking the course, they may receive some support for expenses on travel, meals and accommodation.

An updated Pathways to Work 2016-2020 strategy is under development within the Department of Social Protection and it is intended to bring this strategy to Government for approval shortly. While the new strategy is still being formulated I expect that it will reflect labour market changes in our economy. In particular whereas the existing strategy was formulated during a period of very high unemployment and focussed on supporting people who are unemployed the new strategy is likely, given the reduction in unemployment and on-going growth in employment, to augment this focus by, in addition, seeking to support an increased level of labour market participation in order to ensure that economic growth can be sustained. The strategy will therefore focus on consolidating previous reforms and on continued prioritisation of key cohorts; as well as considering the expansion of activation services to other cohorts.

Community Employment Schemes Review

147. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection in relation to her Department's Estimates for 2008, if a sum of €3.75 million was accrued under provision of a review of community employment schemes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42581/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): In July 2008 the Labour Court recommended that an agreed pension scheme should be introduced for Community Employment (CE) scheme supervisors and assistant supervisors, and that such a scheme should be adequately funded by FÁS (LCR19293). It must also be noted that the employer in this situation is the sponsoring organisation and not FÁS (or the Department of Social Protection (DSP) which now has responsibility for CE).

The annual cost of introducing a defined contribution scheme for CE Supervisors was estimated at €3.75m in 2008 by FÁS. In line with good accrual accounting practice, a one-year provision for the pension claim was made in the FÁS accounts should the debt materialise. The system of accounting used in FÁS is the Accrual Accounting method which recognises potential economic events regardless of when the actual cash transaction occurs. This meant that the accrual of €3.75m in 2008 for CE supervisor pensions was simply a provision for an

event that may occur (i.e. no actual cash was transacted). No subsequent provisions were made on transfer of responsibility for the CE programme to the DSP in October 2010. The Department works under the Cash Accounting method.

Community Employment Schemes Operation

148. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she granted relativity with Civil Service grades to community employment scheme supervisors and assistant supervisors; the grade they have been aligned with; and the benefits that have accrued to them as a consequence. [42582/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): Community Employment (CE) supervisors are generally employees of private companies limited by guarantee and are neither public nor civil servants. There is no relativity with civil service grades. The employment arrangements that accrue for a supervisor or assistant supervisor are a contractual matter between the individuals concerned and their legal employer, subject to compliance with Department of Social Protection CE operational procedures.

Community Employment Schemes Operation

149. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she is aware of the impact increasing insurance costs are having on budgets of community employment schemes and their ability to deliver a service; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42583/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): This Department has become aware in recent times of increases in insurance premiums for CE schemes. The main reasons cited for this is an increase in claims frequency over recent years by such schemes. The Department has been in consultation with the main insurers about the proposed increase and to seek to limit the incidence of future claims.

The Department recommends that schemes seek alternative quotes to ensure they get value for money in the first instance. Insurance premiums costs are reimbursed from the CE materials budget for the scheme. Schemes are asked to be especially mindful of their obligations under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005.

The Department is not in a position at present to allocate additional monies to the materials budget in 2015. Materials budgets are allocated on an annual basis and are managed at divisional level. However, if there is a scheme experiencing particular difficulties, the sponsor should contact their local office in relation to this matter.

Schemes whose premiums are loaded due to their claims history will have to be reviewed by the Department on a case-by-case basis.

Community Employment Schemes Eligibility

150. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection why an application for renewal and extension of a community employment scheme at a place of work was rejected for a person (details supplied) in Dublin 7; if she will review the application and appeal, with a view to re-instating it; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42593/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Under Community Employment (CE) regulations, the term of participation for persons commencing a CE scheme when less than 55 years of age is one year. However, this can be increased with annual extensions to a maximum of three cumulative years. The person concerned commenced participation on a CE scheme on 12 November 2012 when aged 54. His total eligibility was therefore limited to these three cumulative years, and he completed, via extensions, this maximum permitted term on 20 November 2015 at which point he was no longer eligible to participate on CE. Unfortunately under the regulations a further extension cannot be granted.

Community Employment Schemes Eligibility

151. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her views on widening the eligibility for community employment schemes in areas where places are unfilled; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42594/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): The Department keeps the eligibility criteria for Community Employment (CE) places under review to ensure that these are effective in targeting long-term unemployed jobseekers.

The number of unemployed persons (seasonally adjusted) has dropped from 267,000 (12.4%) in October 2013 to 192,400 (8.9%) in October 2015 (CSO). With the numbers of unemployed falling, demand for CE places may vary.

In terms of duration of participants on CE, the programme provides extended durations for certain cohorts, up to three years for persons between 35 and under 55 years of age and six years for persons of 55 years of age depending on duration of unemployment on entering CE. Persons with a disability-linked social welfare payment can qualify for an additional year on the above. These durations of participation support schemes as well as providing valuable work placements and training to participants. There are no plans to widen the eligibility further for CE.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications

152. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the status of an application for a domiciliary care allowance by a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath; when a decision will issue. [42603/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): An application for domiciliary care allowance was received from the person concerned on the 11th December 2013. This application was not allowed as the child was not considered to satisfy the qualifying conditions for the allowance. A letter issued on the 18th February 2014 outlining the decision of the deciding officer to refuse the allowance.

A review of this decision was requested on 29th June 2015 and additional information on this child's condition/care needs was supplied on 2nd November 2015. A letter issued on the 25 November 2015 outlining the decision of the deciding officer that a revised decision was not warranted as the child is not considered to satisfy the qualifying conditions for the allowance.

Community Services Programme

153. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if a recently submitted application for funding by a community and enterprise centre (details supplied) in County Donegal, which sought funding through the community services programme for additional staffing for the centre and which funding was only partially granted, will be re-appraised; if she is aware that the facility requires these additional staff members if it is to continue to provide services to the local community; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42617/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The applicant applied to the Community Services Programme (CSP) for funding to support the management and staffing of a community service facility. The CSP provides direct funding support in the form of subsidies for the employment of permanent staff to deliver a broad range of services. The service providers supported by this programme operate on a community business or social enterprise model and generate the majority of the income needs for their operations from non-public sources.

Based on an assessment of the application submitted, other DSP staffing resources committed to the company and the financial standing of the company, the level of resources offered are considered adequate. Significant public resources are already committed to services at this centre under other programmes. Should the company take up the offer of the contract, additional funding for permanent staff can be considered as services at the centre develop further.

Social Welfare Benefits

154. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the status of the provision of an adequate social protection safety net for self-employed persons whose businesses fail or for whom work is not continuous; if the lack of adequate protection for the self-employed has historically been one of the greatest injustices in the Irish social protection system. [42620/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Self-employed persons who earn €5,000 or more in a contribution year are liable for PRSI at the class S rate of 4%, subject to a minimum payment of €500. These contributions entitle them to access social insurance benefits, including State pension (contributory), widow's, widower's or surviving civil partner's pension (contributory), guardians payment (contributory), maternity benefit and adoptive benefit. This contrasts with a combined employer and employee PRSI rate of 14.75% paid in respect of most employees, who can then access the full range of social insurance benefits.

Self-employed workers who become unemployed or ill can establish entitlement to assistance-based payments such as jobseeker's allowance or disability allowance. In the case of jobseeker's allowance they can apply for the means-tested jobseeker's allowance if their business ceases or if they are on low income as a result of a downturn in demand for their services. As in the case of a non-self-employed claimant for jobseeker's allowance or disability allowance, the means of husband/wife, civil partner or co-habitant will be taken into account in deciding on entitlement to a payment.

In its 2013 report, the Advisory Group on Tax and Social examined issues relating to the provision of social insurance cover for the self-employed on a cost-neutral or cost-reducing context.

The Group was not convinced that there was a need to extend cover for jobseeker's benefit

to the self-employed as almost 9 out of every 10 self-employed people who claimed the means tested jobseeker's allowance during the three-year period from 2009 to 2011 received payment. The Group did, however, find that extending social insurance for the self-employed was warranted, in cases related to long term sickness or injuries, through the invalidity pension and the partial capacity benefit schemes.

In this regard the Group recommended that the rate of contribution for class S should be increased by at least 1.5 percentage points. Based on the 2010 report on the Actuarial Review of the Social Insurance Fund an increase in the region of 17% would be required for the core contributory State pension plus invalidity pension for the self-employed. This takes account of the 15% needed to provide the core full-rate State pension, which compares favourably with the 4% rate currently paid by the self-employed.

While I am anxious to expand the level of social insurance entitlements for the self-employed, any such change would have to be funded by an appropriate level of contribution.

Carer's Allowance Applications

155. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection why a carer's allowance was not approved for a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny. [42626/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person in question is currently in receipt of a contributory State pension.

Carer's Allowance (CA) is a social assistance payment made to persons who are providing full-time care and attention to a person with a disability requiring such care and whose income falls below certain limits.

I confirm that the department received an application for CA from the person concerned on 4 February 2015. Additional information required to establish the person's means was requested by the deciding officer (DO) on 23 April 2015 and the person concerned was afforded 21 days to reply. As the information was not provided by 15 June 2015, the person concerned was notified that his claim for CA could not be processed to completion and was being withdrawn. No further correspondence has been received from the person concerned.

It is open to the person in question to provide the information required by the DO to carry out a means test so that his application may be reviewed.

Disability Allowance Applications

156. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the status of an application for a disability allowance by a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42659/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Department is in receipt of an application for disability allowance (DA) from the above named person on 6 November 2015. On completion of the necessary investigations on all aspects of the claim a decision will be made and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

The processing time for individual disability allowance claims may vary in accordance with their relative complexity in terms of the three main qualifying criteria, the person's

circumstances and the information they provide in support of their claim.

Any person who is awaiting a decision on their disability allowance application may apply for means-tested supplementary welfare allowance from their local community welfare officer.

Money Advice and Budgeting Service

157. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if there is a need to provide a permanent accessible Money Advice and Budgeting Service office in Athy in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42660/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): The Citizens Information Board (CIB) is the statutory body responsible for supporting the provision of information, advice (including money and budgeting advice) and advocacy services on a wide range of public and social services. It delivers on its remit through a network of delivery partners which includes 42 local Citizens Information Services (CIS) and 51 local Money Advice and Budgeting Services (MABS). Additionally, the MABS helpline (0761 07 2000) is open 5 days a week, from 9am until 8pm, and the MABS website can be accessed 24 hours a day at *www.mabs.ie*.

MABS clients from the Athy area of Co. Kildare are served by an outreach office, one day per week, operated by Carlow MABS, in the Resource Centre on Woodstock Street, Athy. Appointments can be booked through Carlow MABS.

Carlow MABS has served Athy for 20 years, during which time around 540 clients from the Athy area have availed of its service. Carlow MABS currently has 90 active clients from the Athy area on its books. In September 2015 there were 5 new clients from Athy, none in October, and 6 in November. Accordingly, given the level of demand, the existing service is considered to be adequate.

CIB, together with local MABS management, will continue to monitor demand to ensure that client needs are being adequately met.

Disability Allowance Appeals

158. **Deputy John Paul Phelan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection when a decision will be made for a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny who has appealed a refusal of an application for a disability allowance and who has been waiting several months for a decision; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42670/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was referred to an Appeals Officer on 12 November 2015, who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

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

Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility

159. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will address a matter (details supplied) regarding entitlements; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42671/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned should contact the Intreo Centre at Parnell Street, Dublin 1, which is appropriate to her address. There she can meet with a Case Officer, and upon full disclosure of her circumstances any possible entitlements to social welfare payments can be explored.

Disability Allowance Payments

160. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection when arrears will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Donegal who was awarded a disability allowance from 2 July 2014; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42673/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Disability allowance arrears for the period in question, less any overlapping social welfare payment and-or outstanding overpayment, will issue to the person in question by cheque in the next few days.

Free Travel Scheme Data

161. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the amount of money paid to each private bus operator for the operation of the free travel scheme, by route, in 2014. [42700/15]

162. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the routes served by each private non-Bus Éireann and non-Dublin Bus operator on which eligible persons can use the free travel pass. [42701/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 161 and 162 together.

The 2014 and 2015 budget allocation for the Free Travel Scheme was €77 million and for 2016 it has been increased to €80 million.

In 2014 approximately €61.2 million was paid to the CIÉ group in respect of free travel on Irish Rail, Bus Éireann and Dublin Bus, €10.83 million to other operators, €1.5 million for the Rural Transport Programme and the remainder was allocated for the cross-border and All-Ireland travel schemes.

The Department does not now provide information on the amount of money paid to each private bus operator for the operation of the Free Travel Scheme by route as it can cause difficulties for the Department's engagement with those operators who view such information as commercially sensitive. It can also result in some of the Department's negotiating position being disclosed. The Deputy will appreciate that the Freedom of Information Act 2014 recognises these concerns as it facilitates the withholding of such information under section 30 where the State's negotiating position could be compromised and under section 36 where the information is of a commercially sensitive nature.

The details of the routes served by each private operator within the Free Travel Scheme have been forwarded to the Deputy by email.

Community Employment Schemes Review

163. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the status of the community employment schemes; if there are changes in the policy relating to these schemes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42722/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): From January to the end of October 2015, approximately 30,000 people have benefitted from a Community Employment (CE) place, of which 23,876 are currently engaged in around 1,000 separate schemes throughout the country. The budget for CE for 2015 is €373.3 million.

Significant improvements have been made to the operation and governance of CE since 2012 and these continue in 2015. These improvements have taken place in the context of a changing profile of participants on CE in a challenging economic environment.

In the past two years, the Department has introduced a special programme for participants entering CE to work on schemes providing early childhood services. A similar programme is being introduced for participants entering social care services. The conditions of participation for these groups have been adjusted to accommodate participants engaging in FETAC Major Awards at Level 5 which is the basic entry requirement to employment in these sectors. CE participants on these schemes are permitted to remain for up to a maximum of 3 years continuous participation, on annually renewable contracts and subject to satisfactory engagement in the completion of training and work practice. These conditions apply to all CE participants in these streams.

The Department recently launched a new Programme Framework for CE Drug Rehabilitation schemes. The community and voluntary sector and CE sponsoring organisations have made a valuable contribution to the design and content of the programme. Workshops have been provided to CE sponsors and to Departmental staff on the objectives and operation of the Framework which will commence in mid-January 2016. Referred clients can have up to 4 years duration on a rehabilitation scheme and support workers can have up to 3 years continuous participation with annual review provided they are engaged in a relevant major award.

The Department seeks to improve its labour market programmes, including CE, on an ongoing basis.

Carer's Allowance Applications

164. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the status of an application for a carer's allowance by a person (details supplied) in County Mayo; if it will be expedited. [42726/15]

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 30 October 2015. Once processed, the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

Question No. 165 withdrawn.

Carer's Allowance Appeals

166. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she

will examine an appeal by a person (details supplied) in County Longford to ensure the person is granted a carer's allowance, given the circumstances set out; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42734/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 23 November 2015. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought. When these papers have been received from the Department, the case in question will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral appeal hearing.

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

Departmental Contracts

167. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the remit and purpose of the study she commissioned the London-based Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion to carry out in 2012, at a cost of approximately €190,000 to the taxpayer; the impact of this study on the design of the JobPath programme; if she will publish the study. [42747/15]

168. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 89 of 17 November 2015, the details of the rigorous public procurement process that led to the awarding of the JobPath tenders; her plans to publish the successful bids submitted and the criteria she used in the procurement process to select the companies concerned; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42748/15]

169. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her views that according to an investigation (details supplied) carried out in the United Kingdom, one of the bidders she selected was the worst performing out of all of the companies engaged in the provision of welfare to work programmes; the implications this has for the company's operations; and if she was cognisant of this company's performance when it was selected to operate the JobPath scheme. [42749/15]

170. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her views on the 2012 investigation in the United Kingdom into a company (details supplied), which forms part of one of the JobPath providers, and that alleges widespread and systemic fraud within that company; further to Parliamentary Question No. 89 of 17 November 2015, if she is aware that the investigations into fraud were carried out internally by the company that, according to testimony to the Public Accounts Committee in the United Kingdom, is characterised by unethical behaviour, mismanagement and inadequate corporate governance and risk management. [42750/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 167 to 170, inclusive, together.

In November 2012, following a public procurement competition, the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion (CESI) was appointed to provide the Department with expert advice and assistance relating to the design and delivery of an employment service model ("JobPath"). CESI is the UK's leading not-for-profit company dedicated to tackling disadvantage and promoting social inclusion in the labour market. Based on its knowledge of how contracted employment

services operate in other States CESI provided advice with regard to the design of the JobPath model including detailed financial modelling of a payment by results approach in Ireland. CESI also assisted with the preparation and delivery of presentations at open consultation fora prior to and during the procurement process for JobPath itself, with responding to queries from actual and potential tenderers during the procurement process and with the assessment of tenders, in particular the modelling of contract finances based on the prices and performance offers received from tenderers. Given the nature of the financial analysis I believe that publication of the CESI work would undermine the State's ability to secure best outcomes from the existing contracts or indeed from any contracts that might be placed in future years. Accordingly I do not plan to publish the analyses provided by CESI.

With regard to the procurement process for JobPath the Department issued a Prior Information Notice (PIN) on 1 July 2013 in which it advised the market that it was considering the potential of contracting third party providers of employment services. The Department held 2 information sessions on 26 July 2013 at which it outlined its thinking in relation to how JobPath might operate and invited attendees to provide feedback. There were over 200 attendees at these sessions. On 7 November 2013 Enterprise Ireland hosted a capacity building and networking event for those interested in providing JobPath services. On 12 December 2013 the Department published a Request for Tenders (RFT). In conjunction with CESI the Department held a "technical information session" on 9 January 2014 at which a detailed explanation was provided to potential bidders on how to complete the "JobPath Tenderer Bid Spreadsheet" which was required to be submitted as part of a JobPath tender. Over 50 attendees were present. The closing date for receipt of tenders was 28 February 2014. Contracts were awarded on the basis of the most economically advantageous tender based on the following criteria (i) cost, (ii) implementation of services, (iii) delivery of services and (iv) contract management and governance. Full details of the JobPath procurement requirements and evaluation criteria used during the tender process are set out in the "Request for Tenders for the Provision of Employment Services (JobPath)", which is available on the Department's website at <http://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/JobPath.aspx>.

The procurement process was conducted in accordance with Irish and EU procurement rules. The procurement process was overseen by a board that was chaired at Assistant Secretary level and included an independent external member who was formerly a commissioner of a regulatory body. The board was advised by the Attorney General's Office and the Chief State Solicitor's Office as well as the National Development Finance Agency. The outcome of the process and the recommendation to award contracts were reviewed with D/PER and the final decision to proceed to contract was made by Government. The successful companies were Turas Nua and Seotec. As is the case with CESI analyses it is not intended to publish the successful tenders as they contain commercially sensitive information and the bid process is confidential. In any event, to do so would place the State at a disadvantage both in terms of the contracts now in place and any future procurement that may be undertaken.

Turas Nua is a new joint venture between FRS recruitment, based in Roscrea, and Working Links, a not for profit UK service provider. It has been acknowledged by Working Links that some members of its staff incorrectly recorded employment and training placement for jobseekers under the 'New Deal', the precursor programme in the UK to the Work Programme. However the Department of Work and Pension (DWP) has publicly stated that the errors occurred in 2008 as a consequence of its heavy reliance on paper-based transactions and that it is satisfied that these cases were investigated thoroughly by Working Links (the amount involved represented less than 0.05% of the payments at the time) and that appropriate actions were taken, with the associated amounts being repaid. DWP has subsequently awarded additional contracts to Working Links.

Seetec was accused of fraudulent activity by former staff members in 2013. This alleged fraud related to claims that Seetec inflated employment outcomes for people with disabilities under the 'Work Choices' programme in the UK (referenced in the May 2014 article). The DWP has publicly refuted these claims and advised the UK's Public Accounts Committee that it has investigated the claims and found no wrongdoing. The Work Choice programme is designed for persons with disabilities - the clients selected for referral to JobPath do not include such clients.

It is important to note, that neither of the above companies has been sanctioned by the DWP for any fraudulent activity. The Department is however cognisant of experiences in other jurisdictions with regards to the provision of such services and these have influenced the design of JobPath. The Department is satisfied, for example, that the potential for the inflation of outcomes will be controlled in Ireland through the use of data matching with Revenue Commencement of Employment records and the Department's own welfare payment systems.

Significant safeguards have been built into JobPath. These include a service guarantee to ensure that all participants receive a baseline level of service. Both companies will be subject to regular on-site inspections and audits (including examination of financial records) to ensure that JobPath is delivered in accordance with contractual obligations and the Department will undertake customer surveys to determine the level of jobseeker satisfaction with the services provided by the JobPath providers. As payments are linked to sustained employment outcomes (jobs must provide work of at least 30 hours per week for a period of at least 13 weeks with a maximum of four outcome fees being paid in arrears over a 52 month period) providers are incentivised not just to find, but also to sustain, employment for clients. As part of the bid process providers offered and committed to target employment placement rates and payment penalties can be applied if performance is less than the level committed. Payment penalties can also be applied if service quality, as assessed through Department audits or customer surveys, does not meet required standards. In addition payment rates are linked to employment levels in the economy with automatic discounts being applied if employment levels exceed defined levels set out in the RFT. I am satisfied that these safeguards, that were not a feature of the Work Programme model in Great Britain, protect the State's interests.

Carer's Allowance Appeals

171. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will examine an appeal under the carer's allowance scheme from a person (details supplied), given that all medical evidence has been submitted; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42777/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 6 November 2015. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought. When these papers have been received from the Department, the case in question will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral appeal hearing.

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

Disability Allowance Applications

172. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the status of a disability allowance for a person (details supplied) in County Mayo. [42806/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The application for disability allowance (DA) from the person in question was disallowed by a deciding officer (DO) who decided that she did not satisfy the medical conditions for the scheme. Notification of this decision issued on 3 June 2015. Following a request for a review of this decision and following a review of all the available evidence, a DO upheld the original decision to disallow on medical grounds. The outcome of this review was notified to the person concerned on 5 August 2015.

The person in question has lodged an appeal with the independent Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO). All the relevant papers requested by that Office recently were submitted by the Department and the SWAO will be in touch with the person in due course in relation to the progress of the appeal.

Fuel Allowance Eligibility

173. **Deputy Emmet Stagg** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the reason for the delay in re-awarding a fuel allowance to a person (details supplied) in County Kildare. [42817/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): In order to qualify for a Fuel Allowance, a person on Jobseeker's Allowance must satisfy certain qualifying conditions including that the person must live alone or with a specified other, e.g. a qualified dependent and/or child. As the person concerned lives with another person, who is not a qualified dependent, and who does not have an entitlement in his own right, there is no entitlement to a Fuel Allowance.

Questions Nos. 174 and 175 withdrawn.

Social Insurance

176. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 231 of 6 October 2015, the status of her negotiations with the Social Welfare Branch Managers Association; the response issued to the association relative to its claims, in a comprehensive way; if there is a timeframe to resolve the issues; if further meetings are planned; if there is a need for a third party to assist or accommodate a resolution to the issues raised; the response from the Revenue Commissioners relative to the issues; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42863/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The PRSI issue in relation to payments by the Department to members of the Social Protection Branch Managers' Association is, following consultations with the Revenue Commissioners, now being settled. The Department's decision in this regard has been communicated to the individual Branch Managers and the Department is currently processing refunds of PRSI to Branch Managers for the period 2011 to 2014 inclusive. A refund will also be due in respect of 2015.

Since the 4th of September 2015, the Department has been engaged in separate discussions with Branch Managers in relation to operational matters under the auspices of the Scheme of Conciliation and Arbitration for Branch Managers of Employment Offices and these discussions

remain ongoing. The next meeting with the Branch Managers is due to be held shortly. These discussions do not relate to the PRSI issue referred to above.

Question No. 177 withdrawn.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications

178. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection when a decision on a review of a domiciliary allowance will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42888/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): An application for domiciliary care allowance was received from the person concerned on 28 July 2015. This application was not allowed as the child was not considered to satisfy the qualifying conditions for the allowance. A letter issued on the 27th October 2015 outlining the decision of the deciding officer to refuse the allowance.

A review of this decision was requested on 12th November 2015 and an appeal was registered on the 16th November 2015. The application together with the new information supplied with the appeal has been forwarded to a medical assessor for their professional opinion. Upon receipt of the Medical Assessor's opinion, the case will be further examined by a deciding officer, who will revise the original decision if warranted, or alternatively, forward the case for consideration by the Appeals Office. Such reviews can take up to 12 weeks to complete at present.

Question No. 179 withdrawn.

Illness Benefit Applications

180. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the options available to a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny regarding that person's special circumstances. [42923/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned made a claim to illness benefit from 8 Apr 2015.

Illness benefit is a payment for people who cannot work due to illness and who satisfy the pay related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions. One of the PRSI conditions is that a person must have a minimum of 39 reckonable contributions paid or credited in the governing contribution year. Claims made in 2015 are governed by the 2013 tax year, and only PRSI classes A, E, H, and P are reckonable for illness benefit purposes.

According to my Department's records the person concerned has no paid or credited contributions recorded in 2013 and therefore does not qualify for payment of illness benefit at this time. The person concerned continues to submit medical certs for credit purposes.

Back to education allowance scheme (BTEA) 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. Illness benefit (IB) customers wishing to avail of BTEA must be in receipt of IB for a minimum period of two years. The person concerned does not meet the qualifying criteria for this scheme.

However, the person concerned has been granted permission to pursue a training or

educational course without the assistance of BTEA. In considering this permission the person concerned may wish to check with the course provider regarding any funding available to them as they are not in receipt of payment from illness benefit.

Supplementary Welfare Allowance (SWA) provides a basic weekly allowance to eligible people who have little or no income, or where a claim for a social welfare benefit or pension has been made but has not yet been paid. Under the qualifying conditions of the scheme a person will not qualify for basic SWA if they are in full-time education. The person concerned made an application for SWA and was refused as they are in full-time education.

Rent Supplement Scheme Payments

181. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the steps she takes when evidence is brought to her Department that a tenant collects rent supplement fraudulently and fails to pass it on to the landlord, in order to ensure that the payment is made to the person to whom the money is owed. [42925/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): Rent supplement plays a vital role in housing families and individuals, with the scheme supporting approximately 63,000 people at a cost of €298 million in 2015.

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

It is open to the landlord to bring to the attention of the Department any instance where they suspect that a tenant is receiving rent supplement and is not paying their rent. Where the Department becomes aware that a person is not using rent supplement to meet the accommodation costs, payment of the supplement is generally suspended and the matter investigated. Where a landlord has a grievance in relation to the non-payment of rent by a tenant, s/he may apply to the Private Residential Tenancies Board to have the dispute resolved through the Board's dispute resolution process.

If the Deputy is referring to a particular case she should provide the details to the Department so that the matter may be investigated.

Public Services Card Authentication

182. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the legislation that was enacted to introduce the public services card; if a radio frequency identification microchip is embedded within the card and, if so, the legislation that was enacted to allow this; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42940/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Section 263 of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 (as amended), provides the legal basis for the issuance and use of the Public Services Card (PSC).

Depending on the variant, a PSC contains one or two secure chips.

All PSCs contain a contact chip, which can exchange information securely with a terminal (and, if the terminal is online, with remote servers), via a reader in which the PSC is inserted. This chip uses cryptographic protocols (using cryptographic keys protected within the secure hardware and by a secure operating system) to allow authentication of the card. It contains a limited amount of data relating to the card and the cardholder. Some of this data are publically available to any terminal capable of reading contact smart cards - broadly, the data that are visible on the face of the card, for example name, PPSN, facial image, card expiration date. Other data are private, for example, nationality and mother's birth surname. These data are only available to terminals or servers that have been provisioned with secret cryptographic keys in secure hardware by the Department. For security reasons, it is intended to only provide such keys in strictly limited and controlled circumstances associated with the statutory uses of the PSC.

The Free Travel Variant of the PSC also contains a contactless chip, containing high security features, that facilitates free travel for cardholders, using the infrastructure developed by the National Transport Authority (NTA) to support the Leap card. Each of these chips contains a unique identifier, which can only be obtained by a valid Leap reader, primed with a secret key that is stored in a secure chip within the reader. The transmission of the unique identifier between this chip and the Leap reader is encrypted.

Adult Education Provision

183. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection to examine the need for the provision of a comprehensive programme for jobseekers who require upskilling in numeracy and literacy following a PEX analysis at local Intreo centres; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42960/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): An assessment of a jobseeker's literacy or numeracy does not form part of the INTREO Case Management process. Where jobseekers declare a numeracy or literacy difficulty, INTREO Case Officers will guide them towards local Adult Literacy provision. Policy in relation to provision of Adult Literacy services comes under the remit of the Department of Education and Skills.

Departmental Programmes

184. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the number of participants in activation programmes who, because of their participation, are not included on the live register, by county, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42961/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The table shows the most recent end of month statistics on the number of people availing of a range of programmes targeted primarily at the long-term unemployed (over 12 months on a jobseeker payment) and recipients of other welfare payments, including One Parent Family Payment and Disability Allowance. These data are published by the CSO as part of its monthly Live Register release.

Figures relating exclusively to jobseekers and by county are not readily available.

| Activation Programmes | September 2015 |
|--|----------------|
| Back to Work allowance scheme – Employee strand (closed to new applications from 1st May 2009) | 0 |
| Back to Work Enterprise allowance scheme – self-employed strand. | 11,825 |
| Short-term Enterprise Allowance (Introduced from 1st May 2009) | 469 |
| Total - Back to Work schemes | 12,294 |
| Part-time Job Incentive | 411 |
| TÚS - Community Work Placement Initiative | 7,827 |
| JobBridge -National Internship Scheme | 4,693 |
| Gateway (2013) | 2,342 |
| Other Activation Programmes | 15,273 |
| Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) | 5,000 |
| Back to Education Allowance (figures include all schemes but participants from JA & JB are not entitled to BTEA during the summer holidays. Includes MOMENTUM participants from February 2013) | 12,537 |
| Total - Back to Education Courses: | 17,537 |
| Community Employment Schemes (excluding Supervisors) | 22,692 |
| ETB full-time training for the unemployed | 6,478 |
| TOTAL | 74,274 |

Disability Allowance Appeals

185. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the status of an appeal under the disability allowance scheme by a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42962/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that the appeal from the person concerned was referred to an Appeals Officer who has decided to hold an oral hearing in this case on 9 December 2015. The person concerned has been notified of the arrangements for the hearing.

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

Carer's Allowance Applications

186. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection when a decision on a review of a carer's allowance will issue to a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42967/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned is in receipt of CA at a reduced rate of payment and a review of their entitlement by the Department is currently underway to ensure that the correct payment is being made.

The person concerned has a UK social security pension. When a carer is getting a social security payment from another State, an amount up to the maximum rate of the Irish State contributory pension is exempt from the means test. Any income in excess of that is treated as income. For a single person, a disregard of €332.50 per week is then applied while a disregard of €665 per week applies to a couple.

In order to carry out this review, information was requested from the person in question on 5 October 2015 and some additional information was also requested on 11 November 2015. Once the review is complete, the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

Question No. 187 withdrawn.

Disability Allowance Applications

188. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection when a decision will be made on an application for a disability allowance by a person (details supplied) in County Carlow. [43016/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I confirm the department received an application for disability allowance (DA) on 12 October 2015. In order to determine the circumstances of the person concerned, his file was forwarded to his local Social Welfare Inspector (SWI). The SWI will arrange to meet with the person in question as soon as possible.

A decision on his entitlement to DA will be made on receipt of the SWI's report. The person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

Carer's Allowance Applications

189. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the status of an application for a carer's allowance by a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43017/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned is currently in receipt of carer's allowance (CA) in respect of one care recipient. The department received an application for CA from the person concerned on 19 October 2015 in respect of a second care recipient. Once processed, the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

Departmental Legal Cases Data

190. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the number of legal cases currently ongoing against her Department, including State agencies under her aegis; the number of cases that took place during the years 2011 to 2014, inclusive; the cost of those that were contested and what damages were involved; the costs and damages of those that were settled; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43270/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The information requested is currently being compiled within the Department and will be made available to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Departmental Staff

191. **Deputy Regina Doherty** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the number of employees under her remit who are classified under a contract of indefinite duration; the number of these who are receiving incremental salary payments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43286/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I am aware of two staff members employed in my Department on the basis of Contracts of Indefinite Duration awarded by the Department.

The Deputy will be aware that since 2011 more than 1,700 posts from the Community Welfare Services and FAS have been transferred to my Department, along with a significant number of staff who joined the Department using the redeployment arrangements agreed under the Public Service Agreements. Some of these staff may have been employed under a Contract of Indefinite Duration awarded by a previous employer, but this information is not currently stored in the central civil service HR management system.

Civil servants on a Contract of Indefinite Duration are treated as unestablished permanent staff, and are therefore paid on the relevant pay-scale and are entitled to receive increments on the same basis as all other staff.

VAT Rate Application

192. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Finance why the Revenue Commissioners do not consider the seaweed bath business to be entitled to the 9% value added tax rate, which was introduced specifically for the tourism business; if the list of businesses which the Revenue Commissioners oversee will be updated in order to allow tourism-focused businesses to obtain the reduced rate of value added tax; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42344/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by Revenue that the goods and services to which the 9% rate applies are those, and only those, listed in paragraphs 3(1) to (3), 7, 8, 11, 12, and 13(3) of Schedule 3 of the VAT Consolidation Act 2010. Examples of such goods and services include the supply of food and drink (excluding alcohol, soft drinks and bottled water) in the course of catering, hotel lettings, admissions to cinemas and theatres, printed matter, such as newspapers and magazines and hairdressing services. The goods and services to which the 13.5% rate applies are listed in the other paragraphs of Schedule 3 of the VAT Consolidation Act 2010 and include the supply of gas, electricity, solid fuel and home heating oil, photographic services, and beauty services such as seaweed baths, facials and nail treatments which are described in paragraph 21(1) of Schedule 3 as services consisting of the care of the human body.

EU VAT law permitted the application of the 9% rate to goods and services listed in Annex III of the VAT Directive; the treatments in question are not listed in this Annex and could not be included in the 9% category.

Tax Code

193. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the tax arrangements that apply in the scenario outlined in correspondence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42349/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Under section 819 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 an individual is resident in the State where the individual is present in the State for 183 days or more in the year of assessment; is present for 280 days or more in total in the year of assessment and the preceding year; or where they elect to be resident. A day is defined as one on which the individual is present in the State at any time during the day.

Individuals who are tax resident in the State are charged to tax on all income, whether earned or arising in Ireland or abroad, including income derived from an employment or a profession.

I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that, in relation to the case outlined in the details supplied by the Deputy, it would appear that, notwithstanding the proposed relocation of the place of work to Belgium, the individual in question will continue to be resident in Ireland for tax purposes and, therefore, taxable here on all income. Under the provisions of the Ireland Belgium Double Taxation Convention, Belgium will also tax the income derived by an Irish resident individual from a place of work in Belgium. Belgium will tax any income derived by an Irish resident from an employment which is exercised in Belgium if the individual spends more than 183 days there; the employer is tax resident there; or the income is directly borne by the employer's place of business there.

However, I am further informed by the Revenue Commissioners that under the provisions of the Ireland Belgium Convention, which seek to avoid or relieve double taxation, credit for any tax paid by the individual in Belgium will be granted against his or her tax liability in the State. The Irish resident may claim credit for such tax in their annual self assessment return or, if an employee, by way of a review of tax liability at year-end. If, however, the individual becomes resident for tax purposes in Belgium rather than Ireland, he or she could only be taxed in Ireland on so much of the income from any of his or her professional activities or duties as is derived from the performance of those activities or duties in Ireland.

In relation to the provision of information to taxpayers by the Revenue Commissioners, I am also informed that opinions or confirmations are provided to taxpayers in order to provide clarity and certainty in relation to the applicable tax/duty rules so that taxpayers can file a correct tax return and comply fully with their tax and duty obligations. While opinions/confirmations are not binding on Revenue, and it is open to Revenue officials to review the position when a transaction has been completed and all the facts are known, generally Revenue will follow an opinion/ confirmation once it can be shown that all relevant information was disclosed and the position did not diverge or deviate from that which was outlined in the information provided in relation to the request for the opinion/confirmation.

I am further informed that where, following a review or further consideration, Revenue revises its position, the taxpayer will be given notice of the revised position. In such a case, Revenue will not seek to retrospectively apply a tax/duty charge where it can be shown that all relevant information was disclosed, either at the time the application was made or following a request from Revenue for clarification, and that the information as then disclosed does not diverge from the actual facts.

I am informed also that, as part of its strategy to deploy compliance resources appropriately in order to maximise tax recoveries from the non-compliant and to minimise the administrative burden placed on largely compliant customers, the Revenue Commissioners, in 2013, initiated a

programme of interventions to address non-compliance by some individuals who were providing their services through personal services companies. In 2014, over 400 audits of contracting companies and a further 300 audits of their directors were concluded, yielding €10.5 million. Over 80% of the audits conducted on companies and their directors resulted in a tax settlement. In its Report on the Accounts of the Public Services 2014, the Comptroller & Auditor General found that the audits carried out by Revenue under this initiative were targeted effectively.

Should the Deputy and the individual wish, I will pass further details of the case to the appropriate area in the Revenue Commissioners who will be glad to assist the individual concerned in determining his or her tax position taking account of his or her particular circumstances.

Tax Collection

194. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the approach and steps taken by the Revenue Commissioners in pursuing a person for outstanding taxes where the person's business has failed and the person concerned is now dependent on basic social protection; how such a matter is finalised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42451/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by Revenue that situations of the type outlined by the Deputy are considered on a case by case basis having due regard to the specific circumstances of the individual taxpayer/business.

Revenue has also confirmed to me that where possible it will always seek to work with a taxpayer/business experiencing cash-flow difficulties in preference to deploying debt collection/enforcement measures. However any such discussions are predicated on open and honest engagement in identifying and agreeing a mutually acceptable solution.

In circumstances where a business has failed, it is very important that the taxpayer makes early contact with Revenue to clarify the situation and agree an approach in regard to any outstanding tax debts and cessation of the various tax registrations.

Finally, if the Deputy has a specific case in mind I would urge him to ensure that the taxpayer/business engages with Revenue as quickly as possible.

Tax Code

195. **Deputy Michael Lowry** asked the Minister for Finance for clarification on recent changes in budget 2016 on entrepreneurs' retirement relief (details supplied). [42494/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The question and the details supplied indicate some confusion as between CGT retirement relief, which has been in place for some time, and a newly revised CGT entrepreneur relief. These reliefs are separate and distinct.

Retirement relief is available to business owners over the age of 55, and allows them to dispose of business assets free from CGT within limits. The operation of CGT retirement relief differs as between persons aged 55 to 65 and persons aged 66 and over. For individuals aged 55-65, the relief applies to the disposal of assets valued up to €750,000 where the assets are transferred outside the family. Where the disposal is made to a child or favourite niece/nephew, there is no monetary limit to the relief. For individuals aged 66 years and over disposing of business or farm assets outside the family the relief applies to assets valued up to €500,000. For individuals aged 66 years and over disposing of business or farm assets to a child or nephew/

niece who has worked full time in the business/on the farm for the previous five years, the relief can be claimed up to a consideration or value limit of €3 million. No changes to these limits or other conditions of CGT retirement relief were introduced in Budget 2016 or Finance Bill 2015.

As part of Budget 2016 I announced the introduction of a revised CGT entrepreneur relief, which will allow for a reduced 20% rate of CGT on the disposal of qualifying business assets up to a lifetime limit of €1 million of qualifying gains with effect from 1 January 2016. There is no condition relating to the age of the entrepreneur. The relief is available to farmers in respect of the disposal of assets used in the farm business, subject to meeting the conditions of the relief. The legislative provisions giving effect to the CGT entrepreneur relief are included in section 35 of Finance Bill 2015, as passed by Dáil Éireann. This relief for entrepreneurs does not replace retirement relief, which continues to operate as before.

State Banking Sector

196. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of cash transfers made by Allied Irish Banks to the Exchequer in redemption of preference shares, bail-out funds and other Exchequer funding that has been advanced by the State to the bank since 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42533/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the deputy is aware, the State holds €3.5 billion of preference shares in AIB. The interest payable on these securities has been €280 million per annum and is payable in cash, or in ordinary shares in the event of non-payment in cash. AIB issued ordinary shares to the State in lieu of the dividend due each May between 2010 and 2014 but in 2015 received a cash dividend of €280m for the first time. When this cash dividend together with income on our Contingent Capital Instrument and all CIFS/ELG guarantee fee income are included, the State has received cash returns of around €2.7 billion from AIB to date.

In addition to this AIB recently secured SSM approval for a redemption of €1.36 billion of the Preference Shares for €1.7 billion, which when combined with accrued interest and the redemption of the EBS Promissory Note will yield approx. €1.64bn for the State in the coming weeks.

Between 2009 and 2011 the State invested around €20.7 billion in AIB, in order to bring stability and sustainability to the bank. These investments took a number of forms including equity and contingent capital, I have given a detailed breakdown of these in a table for the deputy's information. As I have indicated previously, I would expect that the state will be able to recoup the full value of its investment in AIB over the course of time.

| Year | Description | Instrument used | Cost €'000 |
|------|---------------------------------|--------------------------|------------|
| 2009 | AIB Recap - NPRF | Preference Shares | 3,500 |
| 2010 | EBS SIS | Special Investment Share | 625 |
| | Pro Note - EBS | Promissory Note | 250 |
| 2011 | AIB Recap - NPRF | Equity | 3,700 |
| | PCAR - AIB CoCo | Contingent Capital | 1,600 |
| | PCAR - AIB Capital Contribution | Capital Contribution | 2,283 |

| Year | Description | Instrument used | Cost €'000 |
|------|--|--------------------------------|------------|
| | PCAR - AIB Equity/ Capital Contribution - NPRF | Equity/Capital Contribution | 8,771 |
| | | Total Invested | 20,729 |

Mortgage Lending

197. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance when he or the Central Bank of Ireland will review the current lending restrictions on mortgage lending and, in the context of such a review, if he will consider extending the base 10% first-time buyer deposit limit to second-time buyers who are seeking to trade up to larger homes to accommodate increased family size. [42557/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Central Bank of Ireland, in line with its mandate to safeguard financial stability, has put in place macro-prudential measures for residential mortgage lending effective from last February. These measures apply proportionate loan-to-value and loan-to-income limits to mortgage lending by regulated financial service providers in the Irish market. The key objective of these measures is to increase the resilience of the banking and household sectors to the property market and to reduce the risk of bank credit and house price spirals from developing in the future.

The Central Bank is independent in the formulation and implementation of these new macro prudential measures. As indicated at the outset of this new framework, the Central Bank will continue to monitor the implemented measures on an on-going basis, particularly with regard to achieving the stated objectives of the measures and monitoring any unintended consequences. This monitoring is on-going and the Central Bank has indicated that it will inform any future decisions in this area.

State Banking Sector

198. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Finance the levies paid by the banks to the State, following the bank guarantee and recapitalisation, and the funds recouped by the State from these banks through the re-sale of shares or other assets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42579/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I can confirm for the Deputy that the following amounts have been received since the bank liability guarantee scheme and bank recapitalisation measures were taken:

Disposal of banking investments - €5.5bn

Income from banking investments - €1.8bn

Fees from bank liability guarantee schemes - CIFS/ELG - €4.4bn*

In addition to these amounts, which are directly related to banking stabilisation measures, a total of €125m was received in both 2014 and 2015 from AIB, BOI and PTSB, arising from the bank levy introduced in Finance Act 2014. Finally the State expects to receive another €1.64bn approximately from the recently announced capital reorganisation at AIB when this is complete.

*CIFS/ELG fees include €0.5bn from IBRC.

Questions - Written Answers
Property Tax Application

199. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the status of the local property tax in respect of those on social protection assistance (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42625/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Local Property Tax legislation provides a number of reliefs and exemptions from Local Property Tax (LPT) for such residential property owners as described by the Deputy in the details supplied with his Question. Firstly, an exemption is available for residential properties vacated for an extended period by a person with a long term mental or physical infirmity.

In addition, there are two different types of relief available in respect of properties that are occupied by people who are incapacitated or who have a disability. The first is an exemption from LPT for properties that have been constructed, adapted or acquired because of their suitability for occupation by individuals who are permanently and totally incapacitated to such an extent that they are unable to maintain themselves and whose condition is so severe that it dictates the type of property they can live in. The second relief takes the form of a reduction in the chargeable value of a property that has been adapted to make it more suitable for occupation by a person with a disability, where the adaptation work has resulted in an increase in the chargeable value of the property and the payment of additional LPT. I propose to bring legislation before the Oireachtas shortly to give effect to recommendations in the recent Report on the Review of the LPT in relation to changed approaches to the implementation of *inter alia* the reliefs from LPT in respect of properties occupied by persons with disabilities.

There are also payment deferral options available to certain property owners whose income is below specified thresholds or who have experienced personal insolvency or financial hardship, during a particular year. In these situations, a property owner is entitled to defer payment of his or her LPT liability, in full or partially. The thresholds for full deferral are €15,000 per annum for a single person or €25,000 for a couple and €25,000 (single) or €35,000 (couple) for deferral of 50% of the liability. These thresholds can also be increased by an amount equivalent to 80% of any annual mortgage interest payable on the person's main residence.

Interest is charged on LPT amounts deferred at a rate of 4% per annum instead of the 8% interest charge applied to late or non-payment of LPT.

For those who qualify for deferral but do not wish to defer their payment, or those who do not qualify for deferral because they do not meet the necessary criteria, Revenue has provided a wide range of payment options, some of which can be phased over the course of the year including deduction-at-source from payments received from the Department of Social Protection.

If the Deputy wishes to provide details of any particular case, I will ask my officials to pass this information to Revenue in order that a specific response can be provided regarding any options available.

Property Tax Assessments

200. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Finance the reason there has been an increase in charges of property tax for a person (details supplied) in County Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42755/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by Revenue that Section

20 of the Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 (as amended) allows local authorities to vary the basic LPT rate for residential properties situated within their respective residential areas. The LPT rate can be increased or decreased by up to 15% from the base rate.

With regard to the specific case to which the Deputy refers, Limerick County Council reduced the rate of LPT by 3% for 2015, but opted not to reduce the rate for 2016. I am advised that a member of the LPT team has already made direct contact with the person in question and clarified the reason for the increase in 2016 over 2015.

Tax Code

201. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he will amend the Finance Bill 2015 to bring tax justice to public servants, especially those who have an occupational pension (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42760/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The USC was introduced in Budget 2011 to replace the Income Levy and Health Levy. It was a necessary measure to widen the tax base, remove poverty traps and maintain revenue to reduce the budget deficit. It is a more sustainable charge than those it replaced, and is applied at a low rate on a wide base.

The USC, like the Income Levy before it, does not apply to social welfare payments, such as the contributory and non-contributory State pensions, or payments of a similar nature. However occupational pensions, including occupational pensions of retired civil servants, are liable to the USC if the payment is greater than the exemption threshold, which for 2015 is €12,012.

As the Deputy is aware, delivering on a commitment in the Programme for Government, the USC was reviewed by my Department in the lead up to Budget 2012. The report is available on my Department's website at www.finance.gov.ie. The issue of USC applying to occupational pensions of retired public servants who entered the public service before April 1995 was examined as part of that review. Such individuals are (or were) liable to modified rate PRSI, which does not generate an entitlement to the State Pension.

The Government decided not to exempt the occupational pensions of these individuals from the USC charge as it would be very costly and difficult to achieve, and it would involve all income earners with the equivalent income benefiting from the exemption. In addition, it would also undermine the principle of the USC being applied to income with few exceptions.

However, as a result of the review of the USC, the Government decided in Budget 2012 to increase the entry point to the Universal Social Charge from €4,004 to €10,036 per annum. Budget 2015 provided for a further increase in the exemption threshold to €12,012 and I announced in my recent Budget speech that this threshold will increase to €13,000 per annum from 1 January 2016. It is estimated that over 700,000 income earners will not be liable to USC at all from next year.

This exemption threshold equalises the position for single individuals whose sole source of income is the State Contributory Pension with Public Service pensioners whose pension is at an equivalent level. Furthermore, I intend to continue to reform the tax system in future budgets should we be returned to Government and subject to having the required fiscal space.

For the reasons outlined, I have no plans to amend Finance Bill 2015 to change the application of the USC on Public Service pensions. I would point out that the changes to the income tax system included in Budget 2015 mean that individuals who paid Income Tax and /or USC in 2014, including pensioners, are seeing a reduction in their tax bill this year where incomes

are equal. Budget 2016 is now continuing this process of reducing the tax burden on low and middle income earners including, among other changes, a decrease in the three lowest rates of USC announced to take effect from January 2016.

Tax Collection

202. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance the number of persons with incomes above €500,000 in the past tax year for which figures are available; the average effective tax rate that applied to this group; and the number of these persons who had an effective tax rate of less than 15%, 10%, 5%, 2%, and 1%, respectively. [42813/15]

203. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance the number of persons with incomes of between €250,00 and €500,000 in the past tax year for which figures are available; the average tax rate that applied to this group; and the number of these persons who had an effective tax rate of less than 15%, 10%, 5%, 2%, and 1%, respectively. [42814/15]

204. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance the number of persons with incomes of between €100,000 and €250,000 in the past tax year for which figures are available; the average tax rate that applied to this group; and the number of these persons who had an effective tax rate of less than 15%, 10%, 5%, 2%, and 1%, respectively. [42815/15]

205. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance the number of persons with annual incomes above €100,000 who paid no tax on their income in the past tax year. [42816/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 202 to 205, inclusive, together.

Unfortunately, having regard to the level of detail required, the Revenue Commissioners are not in a position to provide the information sought within the time available. However, I will arrange for the information to be supplied directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Universal Social Charge Yield

206. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the projected revenue from the universal social charge for 2015 and for 2016 [42826/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Universal Social Charge (USC) data requested by the Deputy are set out in the table below. As the Deputy will be aware, a significant USC package was introduced in Budget 2016, which will subsequently reduce the expected USC receipts in 2016.

| USC Receipts 2015 | USC Receipts 2016 |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| €m | €m |
| 4,225 | 3,995 |

Corporation Tax Regime

207. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 165 of 24 November 2015, the amount of corporation tax paid in 2014 by the bands identified; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42837/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the estimated amount of Corporation Tax paid in 2014, as per the bands identified in Parliamentary Question Number 165, are as set out in the table.

| Payment Band € | Amount Paid €m |
|---------------------|----------------|
| 1-50,000 | 236 |
| 50,001-100,000 | 116 |
| 100,001-500,000 | 362 |
| 500,001-1,000,000 | 221 |
| 1,000,001-5,000,000 | 712 |
| Over 5 million | 3,466 |

The total of the amount in the above table is €5,113 million. However, total net receipts of Corporation Tax for 2014 amounted to €4,617 million. The difference between these two amounts is due to the fact that a number of companies were in a position to claim repayments, which are not included in the table.

Tax Collection

208. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance if it is no longer the policy of the Revenue Commissioners to receive or issue payments in respect of tax liabilities or refunds arising thereto by way of cheque, which raises considerable administrative difficulties for sole traders and small businesses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42861/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by Revenue that it operates its tax payment and repayment systems in line with the Government's National Payments Plan, which includes migration from cheque usage to more cost effective electronic payment methods. A key priority for the National Payments Plan is to reduce overall cheque usage in Ireland to EU levels. In this regard Revenue is currently processing almost 98% of tax payments (by value) and 84% of tax repayments (by value) through electronic channels. Further system upgrades in early 2016 will increase the number of tax repayments suitable for repayment through electronic channels.

While Revenue's preference is for customers to pay and file online using Revenue's Online Service (ROS), payments can also be made by Direct Debit, Single Debit Authority, which operates like an 'electronic cheque' and enables once-off payments to be made directly a bank account, or by credit/debit card.

Revenue has confirmed to me that while its strong preference is to process all payments via the various electronic channels, this does not mean that it will refuse a cheque payment from a taxpayer. However cheque payments are more expensive for both the taxpayer and for Revenue and staff will always encourage customers to consider the cheaper electronic methods.

In regard to tax repayments, Revenue will transfer the amount owed directly to the taxpayer's bank account where systems permit and the relevant details are available. The electronic transfer means that the funds are available to the taxpayer/business much quicker than if repaid by cheque. However, in situations where it is not possible or the necessary bank account details are not available to facilitate an electronic transfer then a refund can be made by cheque.

Property Tax Rate

209. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance his views on recent reports that he is considering major increases in the household property tax over the lifetime of the next Dáil, and that such increases will double the property tax in the Dublin, Cork, Limerick and Galway urban regions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42882/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am very conscious of the concerns of homeowners over increasing property prices and the effects this will have on their Local Property Tax (LPT) liabilities, particularly in urban areas. For this reason I asked Dr Don Thornhill to review the operation of the LPT and, in particular, any impacts on LPT liabilities due to recent property price developments.

In my Budget 2016 statement, I announced that I would propose to Government the postponement of the revaluation date for the LPT from 2016 to 2019. This is one of the recommendations in the Review of the Local Property Tax submitted to me by Dr. Don Thornhill, which has been published on the Department of Finance website. The postponement of the revaluation date means that home owners will not be faced with significant increases in their LPT in 2017 as a result of increased property values and it gives sufficient time for the other recommendations in Dr Thornhill's report to be considered in full. I propose to bring legislation to give effect to the postponement before the Oireachtas shortly. This legislation will also give effect to two of the recommendations in the review report in relation to changed approaches to the implementation of the pyrite exemption from LPT, and reliefs from LPT in respect of properties occupied by persons with disabilities, both of which are being implemented on an administrative basis by the Revenue Commissioners at my request.

Issues relating to the implementation of other recommendations in the Report will be a matter for consideration by the next Government.

Mortgage Interest Rates

210. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance if he will report to Dáil Éireann on the Central Bank of Ireland's report in July 2015; if the report confirms the fears of standard variable mortgage holders that their mortgage agreements are being burdened with additional interest to subsidise the cost to banks of new mortgage and loan business; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43036/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Firstly, I need to acknowledge that it is not clear from the question which Central Bank report is being referred to. The Central Bank published two Economic Letters in July 2015; 'Switch and Save in the Irish Mortgage Market' and 'Mortgage Interest Rate Types in Ireland'. These reports are available on the bank's website at the following links:

https://www.centralbank.ie/publications/Documents/EL_2015_8.pdf and <https://www.centralbank.ie/publications/Documents/Economic%20Letter%20-%20Vol%202015,%20No.%209.pdf>. The report on switching examined how many borrowers could save by switching provider, the costs involved in switching, the numbers switching and initiatives that would benefit borrowers, including increased information and greater transparency on mortgage products. The report on mortgage interest rate types looked at the number of borrowers on different interest rate types, the propensity of contracts to change rate type over time and the level of instalments for different mortgage contract types.

These reports do not directly relate to the issues raised by the Deputy in his question. Nonetheless, as the Deputy will be aware, I have taken steps to ensure that the banks

provide options for mortgage holders to reduce their monthly repayments. Last May, I requested a report from the Central Bank on the topic which was subsequently published on my Department's website and on the Central Bank's website. This report was entitled 'Influences on Standard Variable Rate Pricing in Ireland' and is available here: <http://www.finance.gov.ie/sites/default/files/Influences%20on%20SVR%20Pricing%20in%20Ireland.pdf>.

This report found that the spread between official ECB rates and the standard variable rate is relatively high and that new lending rates are above average compared to European peers. However, they noted that the pricing of loans reflects three main factors: credit risk, competition and bank profitability. Credit Risk is influenced by the high level of non-performing loans and the lengthy and uncertain process of collateral recovery; Competition is weak and this is not unrelated to the credit risk as new entrants may be deterred from entering the Irish market; Bank profitability is constrained by legacy issues. Profitability is needed to build capital buffers and to meet increasing regulatory requirements.

It should also be noted that the interest rate charged by banks is determined taking into account a broad range of factors including European Central Bank base rates, deposit rates, market funding costs, the competitive environment and an institution's overall funding.

Last May I met with the six main mortgage lenders and outlined my view that the standard variable rate being charged to Irish customers was too high. The banks agreed to review their rates and products and, by the beginning of July, to have simple options to reduce monthly mortgage payments for SVR customers.

In September I concluded a series of follow up meetings with these banks and the reality is that the majority have put options in place to allow borrowers reduce their repayments. These options range from lower variable rates to new suites of variable rates based on loan to value and reductions in fixed rates.

While it is a matter for each individual borrower to decide what suits their circumstances, I encourage both new and existing borrowers to see what is available to them in their circumstances or, for existing customers, to consider moving to another bank, where possible, if the offer is not satisfactory. In this regard, the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) website www.consumerhelp.ie is a valuable source of information on the rates charged by various financial institutions.

You may also be aware that on 12 November the Central Bank published a consultation paper on proposed increased protections for variable rate mortgage customers. This is called Consultation Paper CP98 and is available on their website. The suggested measures fall under three broad categories:

- Lenders would be required to publish a summary statement of the factors that impact on their variable rate and the criteria and procedures that apply to setting such rates;
- On an annual basis lenders would be required to notify variable borrowers of alternative mortgage options. They would also have to notify borrowers of these options when increasing SVR rates and provide borrowers with a link to the Competition and Consumer Protection (CCPC) website to assist borrowers who wish to switch;
- The Central Bank is consulting on increasing the notification period for variable rate increases (it is currently 30 days) and they are also consulting on a proposal to require the lender to state the reason for changing the rate.

The closing date for submissions to the public consultation is 12 February 2016.

This initiative should increase transparency around the factors which influence a bank's standard variable rate pricing.

Alcohol Sales

211. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance his views on reports that online retailers of alcohol from outside of Ireland are offering lower prices, allegedly without paying the correct excise and value added tax; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43037/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by Revenue that the importation of alcohol into the State is subject to tight regulation. It is illegal under excise and VAT law to supply alcohol products in Ireland without accounting for the appropriate excise duty and VAT on the products concerned. This includes alcohol products sold on-line to Irish consumers.

A supplier located in another Member State who sells alcohol products directly to consumers in Ireland is required to appoint a tax representative and to register for VAT in the State for the purpose of paying duty and VAT on the products concerned.

Alcohol products supplied by non-compliant traders are liable to forfeiture and may be seized and any person concerned in the supply may be prosecuted for the offence of evading or attempting to evade payment of excise duty. I am informed by Revenue that they are aware of a number of websites offering alcohol products for sale and that they regularly seize alcohol products on their arrival into the State.

Universal Social Charge Application

212. **Deputy Pat Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Finance the reason fortnightly-paid workers who have a 27th payment date for the universal social charge in 2015 are being charged at a higher rate without the application of the lower rates and credits; the basis for this apparent overcharging on this specific payment; if the affected workers will receive a refund or a credit for having paid an additional universal social charge in this period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43042/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Deputy may be aware that I brought forward amendments to Finance Bill 2015 at Report Stage in the Dáil to address this issue, whereby an employee may suffer a fall in net income in their last payment of the year in a 'week 53' or 'fortnight 27' year. These amendments were passed by the Dáil.

USC rate bands for employees are divided equally across the year, assuming a 52-week or 26-fortnight year. However a calendar year consists of 52 weeks and 1 day, or 52 weeks and 2 days in a leap year. As a result, once every 5 to 6 years for weekly-paid employees the additional day will be a payday, resulting in 53 paydays falling within the calendar year. Similarly, once every 10 to 12 years a 'fortnight 27' arises for fortnightly paid employees. As no USC rate bands remain for that year, the full amount of the pay is liable to higher rates of USC, resulting in a lower net income for the employee in that week or fortnight.

The same issue arises for income tax purposes, and regulations provide for an additional set of credits and rate bands to be allowed in a 'week 53' or 'fortnight 27' year. The amendments that were made to the Finance Bill will provide for additional USC rate bands to cater for the

additional payday which falls within the calendar year, so that individuals will not have a larger USC liability solely because of the weekday on which their salary payment falls. This will bring the application of USC into line with that of income tax.

The amendments also ensure that those who are exempt from USC due to low income do not become liable to USC on all of their income solely as a consequence of the additional day in the calendar year being a payday. It similarly provides that those who benefit from the exemption from the higher rates of USC, including those over 70 and medical card holders whose income does not exceed €60,000, will not inadvertently become liable to higher rates of USC as a consequence of the additional payday falling within the calendar year.

These amendments will come into effect for the current year which means that individuals affected by this issue who are due to be paid on 31 December this year will benefit from the changes. In cases where payroll providers do not implement the changes within sufficient time for the benefit to be provided to employees in their last salary payment of this year, the relevant refund may be claimed back from the Revenue Commissioners.

Departmental Legal Cases Data

213. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Finance the number of legal cases currently ongoing against his Department, including State agencies under his aegis; the number of cases that took place during the years 2011 to 2014, inclusive; the cost of those that were contested and what damages were involved; the costs and damages of those that were settled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43266/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): It has not been possible in the time available to collate all of the information sought by the Deputy. However, the requested information will be collated and forwarded to the Deputy in writing.

Political Reform

214. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his future plans for political reform; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42352/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): A number of key future reform initiatives are underway in this area building on the significant progress achieved under the Programme for Government. For example:

- It is intended to publish a Public Sector Standards Bill which will provide a new and reformed legal framework for ethics for all public officials, significantly enhancing the existing framework for identifying, disclosing and managing conflicts of interest as well as minimising corruption risks and ensuring the institutional framework for oversight is robust and effective.

- It is intended to publish a Bill to facilitate greater data sharing between public bodies to occur under best-practice governance arrangements and fully consistent with data protection legislation.

- It is intended to publish a Statute Law Reform Bill which will repeal spent and obsolete Acts enacted between 1922 and 1950.

- Under my Open Data Initiative, the recently established Open Data Governance Board intends to further enhance the potential of access to information and data held by public bodies in order

to deliver real economic, social and democratic benefits across society.

- Under the Regulation of Lobbying Act 2015 lobbyists must have registered and made their first return with the Standards in Public Office Commission by 21 January 2016 if they have engaged in lobbying activities during the period 1 September 2015 to 31 December 2015. To date over 500 persons and organisations have registered on the lobbying register. Guidance notes and other supports are available on www.lobbying.ie.

- A range of initiatives to strengthen accountability including the development of a Code of Standards and Behaviour for Special Advisers are expected to be implemented. This Code will be supported by an induction programme. In addition, in conjunction with the Public Appointments Service, a review of the Guidelines on Appointments to State Boards, introduced in 2014, will be undertaken early in the new year.

- Development of the second action plan under the Open Government Partnership initiative will also be advanced.

Flood Relief Schemes Status

215. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of an area (details supplied) in County Mayo in respect of the Office of Public Works' recently published draft flood hazard and flood risk map; if he is aware that this area has experienced frequent flooding since 1960; his plans to alleviate the flood risk issue in this area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42336/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): Kilcummin Pier, Kilcummin, Ballina, Co. Mayo is not an Area for Further Assessment (AFA) within the Western Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) study, as it was not deemed to be an area of potentially significant flood risk under the Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment (PFRA) which was completed in 2011. For more information on the PFRA please see www.cfram.ie. It is not therefore covered by the scope of the CFRAM study.

Local flooding and coastal protection issues are matters for local authorities to investigate and address in the first instance. It is open to Mayo County Council to carry out flood mitigation and coastal protection works using its own resources. The Office of Public Works operates a Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme. The Scheme's eligibility criteria include a requirement that any measures are cost beneficial. Details are published on the OPW website www.opw.ie. It is not available for repair of damaged infrastructure or for maintenance of existing flood defence or coastal protection assets. It is open to the Council to submit a funding application under the Scheme. Any application received will be considered in accordance with the eligibility criteria and having regard to the overall availability of resources for flood risk management.

Public Sector Pay

216. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if all State employees are paid at or above the minimum living wage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42379/15]

217. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the additional cost to the Exchequer of paying all State employees a rate at least at the minimum

living wage from 1 January 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42381/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 216 and 217 together.

It is assumed that the Deputy is referring to the National Minimum Wage. Like all employers, public service employers must comply with the National Minimum Wage rate.

Following the outcome of the recent considerations by the Low Pay Commission, the statutory minimum wage rate will increase from the current rate of €8.65 to €9.15 per hour with effect from 1 January 2016. Any costs arising from the increase in the statutory Minimum Wage rate for public service employers will be met from existing allocations under Budget 2016. Estimations regarding the cost would be a matter for the individual public service sectors and employers, based on existing terms and conditions including weekly hours of state employees and position on relevant pay scales which vary across the public service.

The 2016 Budget allocations also make provision for the implementation of the terms of the Lansdowne Road Agreement, the terms of which are significantly weighted towards lower paid state employees.

Departmental Legal Cases Data

218. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform to set out the number of legal cases against his Department and State agencies under his aegis that took place during the years 2011 to 2014, and the number that are currently ongoing; the costs and the damages involved in those cases that were contested and in those cases that were settled; and if he will make a statement on the matter [42529/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Collating this information in the time available was not possible and I will reply directly to the Deputy shortly.

Flood Relief Schemes Status

219. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform to outline the status of his meetings with Kerry County Council on the matter of flood defence work at a location (details supplied) in County Kerry, given that the public infrastructure there is at the mercy of the sea and repairs will end up costing multiples of the protection works required; if he will put an action plan for the area in place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42541/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): The management of problems of coastal protection in the locations mentioned is a matter for Kerry County Council (KCC) in the first instance. KCC must thoroughly assess the problem and, if it is considered that specific measures and works are required, it is open to them to apply for funding to deal with coastal protection under the Office of Public Works' (OPW) Minor Flood Mitigation Works & Coastal Protection Scheme. Any application received will be assessed under the eligibility criteria, which include a requirement that any measures are cost beneficial, and having regard to the overall availability of funding.

Following the coastal storms which affected the western seaboard in December 2013 and January 2014, KCC requested funding of €3,000 from the OPW for repair works at Fahamore, which has since been provided. The Council also requested funding for the cost of strengthening

works at Kilshannig following that event, but, unfortunately this did not fall within the criteria for funding which had been approved by a Government decision in February 2014.

Question No. 220 withdrawn.

Flood Relief Schemes Status

221. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform further to a Topical Issue debate of 3 December 2014 and previous parliamentary questions relating to a flood relief project (details supplied) in County Clare, when the project will move to tender; the reason for the delay in commencing work; when it is envisaged that work will commence; the construction timescale envisaged; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42565/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): The Ennis South Flood Relief Scheme is being progressed by Clare County Council (CCC) as the contracting authority under its powers, with funding and advice as appropriate from the Office of Public Works (OPW).

CCC and the OPW are continuing discussions regarding technical aspects of the proposed works. When all outstanding technical matters are resolved CCC will proceed with issuing tender documents to a number of pre-qualified contractors. Pending this, it is not possible to give an accurate timeframe for commencement of or construction of works but it is anticipated that construction can commence in 2016 and will take about 18 months to complete.

The OPW remains committed to the progression of the works, and provision has been included in its multi-annual capital funding programme to this end.

Heritage Sites

222. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when competition for permits (details supplied) will be launched; the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42568/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): A competition for up to four new permits for Skellig Michael will be held early in the new year. The delay in making final arrangements has been due to legal matters.

The Office of Public Works (OPW) Heritage Service is proposing to meet with Oireachtas Members from the area soon to explain the issues involved and to outline the process that will be followed in allocating new Permits.

Commercial Rates Valuation Process

223. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if there is a statutory maximum period during which a valuation review of commercial properties must be undertaken by the Commissioner of Valuation; and the dates of the last valuation by the commissioner, by local authority. [42580/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Part 5 of the Valuation Act 2001, as amended by the Valuation (Amendment) Act 2015, provides for the

revaluation, for rates purposes, of all industrial and commercial properties other than those occupied by public utility undertakings (known as global valuations) which are valued on a different cycle prescribed in section 53 of the Acts.

Section 19(1) of the Act empowers the Commissioner of Valuation, after consultation with the Minister for the Environment and Local Government and the rating authority concerned, to make a Valuation Order specifying a rating authority area in which a revaluation is to be conducted. A valuation order specifies the date by reference to which the value of every property, subject of the valuation mentioned in the order, shall be determined.

The Valuation Office is currently undertaking a national revaluation programme on a rating authority area basis. The revaluation programme (valuation list publication dates in brackets) began with South Dublin County Council (31 December 2007), Fingal (31 December 2009) and Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council (31 December 2010) areas. First revaluations have now also been completed for the rating authority areas of Dublin City Council (31 December 2013), Waterford City and County Council (31 December 2013) and Limerick City and County Council (31 December 2014). Following the first revaluation, section 25 of the Valuation Act 2001 provides that subsequent revaluations of each rating authority area will be completed on a cyclical basis no sooner than five years and no later than ten years after the date on which the revalued list was last published.

The Commissioner, having conducted the statutory consultation process, signed valuation orders on 23 November, 2015 to commence the revaluation of all commercial properties in the rating authority areas of the Counties of Kildare, Leitrim, Longford, Offaly, Sligo and Westmeath. It is envisaged that valuations for each of the aforementioned rating authority areas will be published in September 2017.

Public Procurement Contracts

224. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding State procurement policy regarding office supplies and stationery provision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42621/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The OGP is at an advanced stage of planning a tender process for a new office supplies framework agreement to be delivered in Q1 2016. As part of the planning process a review of the existing office supplies framework has been completed, which included engagement with the wider office supplies market. It is expected that the new framework will be structured in a manner that addresses the issues highlighted by the existing framework while remaining compliant with all EU Procurement legislation, national guidelines and Circular 10/14. Circular 10/14 includes a number of policy measures which are specifically designed to enable SMEs to compete for government business, such as open tendering, electronic notifications and tendering through the national tendering platform for contracts in excess of €25,000, division of contracts into lots, guidance on turnover requirements and reasonable insurance requirements.

It is planned that once the strategy for the new framework has been finalised it will be communicated to both OGP clients and the market.

Public Procurement Contracts Expenditure

225. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the

savings that have been made by changes to the State's procurement policy; if such calculations recognise and factor in that small local rate payers and employers are being displaced by large tenderers; and if the State has over-estimated potential savings from the reform of the system. [42622/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The reform of the public procurement system across the public service is a key element of the reform programme for the public service. The fragmented procurement arrangements across the public service have facilitated amongst other things suppliers charging different public service bodies different prices for the same goods and services. This is not sustainable, as the State cannot afford to continue to purchase works, goods and services in a manner that undermines the level of services it can deliver.

The central procurement frameworks and contracts established by the Office of Government Procurement (OGP) have been designed to optimise benefits including savings to the State through the strategic aggregation of its buying power. Aggregation arrangements such as multi-supplier frameworks can, where appropriate, address local supplier issues.

The reform of public procurement in Ireland is being carried out in a manner that recognises the clear importance of small and medium-sized enterprises in this country's economic recovery. The Guidance to Contracting Authorities (Circular 10/14) issued by OGP in April 2014 encourages public bodies to break large contracts down into lots where reasonable to do so. Lots may be based on goods or services descriptions, usage patterns, size and nature of customer demand and/or geographical location. Lots enable smaller businesses to compete for smaller elements of a larger contract. However it has to be done in a way however that does not expose the State to undue risk or significant management overheads.

The implementation of procurement reform is still at a very early stage. Procurement savings of €100m over 2013 and 2014 have been reported by the OGP and its partner sector sourcing organisations. These forecast savings benefits represent only those cost reductions that can be estimated with a degree of confidence. I am confident that the Government target of between €450 - 500 million in procurement savings can be achieved as implementation of the programme progresses.

Public procurement savings are necessary to enable public service organisations deliver much needed services within tighter budgets and to deliver value for money to the taxpayer.

Public Sector Pay

226. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform to outline his views on overpayments and problems of data protection in the PeoplePoint human resource system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42744/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Overpayments to staff of salary, allowances and expenses can and do occur for a number of reasons in any organisation, be it private or public sector. These include, but are not limited to, delays in applying or approving or processing pay-impactful absences, or pay-impactful leave arrangements, or errors in calculating allowances, payroll or expenses.

PeoplePoint is the shared service centre that provides transactional HR and pension administration services on behalf of 35 Government Departments and Public Service Bodies for 30,000 civil servants.

An external analysis of overpayment cases conducted in February 2015 identified a number of factors that have contributed to an increase in overpayments in the Civil Service. It is the combination of these factors rather than any one factor that has contributed to an increase in overpayments.

1. Non-compliance with the standard self-service processes that were introduced as part of the roll out of shared services across the Civil Service. Employees are now responsible for notifying their own absences and forwarding medical certificates in a timely manner, and managers are responsible for updating the absence record and return to work notification process, all through self-service. These features are standard self-service processes in many other public and private organisations, but were only introduced as self-service responsibilities into the Civil Service for the first time in 2013. When these responsibilities that are part of the standard process are not completed in a timely fashion, this significantly increases the risk of overpayment.

2. The issue of non-compliance with procedures or missing medical certifications is being addressed by management in each participating Public Service Body. My Department continues to engage with local HR Departments to assist them address the issue of non-compliance with the absence reporting process itself and to have a positive impact on their own Departmental overpayment balance. The data is showing a positive trend.

3. The new Public Service Sick Leave Scheme (2014) whereby people are reaching the limits of paid sick leave quicker than they previously would have, has made a very significant contribution to reducing absenteeism across the Public Service. However, an unintended consequence of reduced access to paid sick leave has been an increase in the number of overpayments. This can also be seen in organisations that are not serviced by PeoplePoint. A review of this circular is currently underway within my Department to evaluate and address any operational difficulties with it.

4. Another key factor giving rise to overpayments is that the majority of staff are paid in advance as opposed to arrears. As a result there is an inherent overpayment built into the system when a sick leave limit is exceeded. Once an organisation becomes a customer of PeoplePoint, the responsibility for recouping any monies owed transfers to PeoplePoint, regardless of the cause or date of overpayment. A single civil service recoupment policy was developed by my Department in March of this year which sets out the standard procedure for recouping money from any staff member when an overpayment occurs. This policy addresses a number of issues including the principles underpinning the recoupment of overpayments; the recoupment process itself; non-standard arrangements and repayment options.

5. When PeoplePoint began operating in 2013, a large number of new staff were hired into PeoplePoint. The length of time required to upskill so many new staff contributed to some delays in processing leave and absence transactions in the past. This issue has been addressed through training and development and quality checks, and there is close monitoring of key performance indicators against service levels targets and these are being met.

Significant progress has been made on the issue through prioritisation and a highly collaborative effort across Accounting Officers, HR Departments and Payroll Centres. A robust communication plan is in place to educate and alert managers on the impact of failing to carry out their responsibilities in the absence process that causes overpayments. Monitoring and reporting on overpayments occurs on a monthly basis to the HR Shared Service Centre Programme Board and on a bi-monthly basis to the Shared Services Steering Board comprising Secretaries General.

In relation to data protection, a Data Protection Policy for Shared Services (March 2014)

is in place for all shared service centres, and this includes PeoplePoint. Each operation has a fully trained Data Protection Compliance Officer (DPCO) in place. The DPCO is supported by the Operations Governance Manager in Corporate unit of the National Shared Services Office. Compliance officers are ready to respond to any breach of security swiftly and effectively. All staff in operations receive data protection training at induction, and refresher training on an annual basis.

The reporting of data breaches within operations is managed through the DPCO who gathers the data on the breach. Any breach is treated with the utmost seriousness. A breach is investigated, reported and assessed through a root cause analysis approach. A process is in place in each operation to report breaches to the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner, the Customer Department Data Controller, the data subjects as appropriate under the guidance of the Customer Department Data Controller, D/PER Data Controller and the Department of Social Protection.

Public Sector Pensions

227. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding public service spouses and children schemes that provide insurance for contingency benefits; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42746/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The Deputy's correspondent seeks to dispute the funding basis of the Public Service Spouses and Children pension schemes on the grounds that it does not comply with practice in the insurance industry. However, this is a mistaken view of the situation. The Commission on Public Service Pensions, at paragraph 20.5.2 of its report, was clear that it accepted that the schemes are structured on a group insurance basis and that the member contribution rates take account of the fact that payment of benefits will not arise in respect of all members. I have no plans to alter this approach.

Flood Prevention Measures

228. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the rate of erosion from flooding for 2015; the body responsible for flood defences at a location (details supplied) in Dublin 13; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42762/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): The management of problems of coastal protection in the particular area indicated is a matter for Fingal County Council in the first instance. The Council must assess the problem and, if it is considered that specific measures and works are required, it is open to them to apply for funding under the Office of Public Works' (OPW) Minor Flood Mitigation Works & Coastal Protection Scheme. Any application received will be assessed under the eligibility criteria, which include a requirement that any measures are cost beneficial, and having regard to the overall availability of funding.

Fingal County Council applied for and was approved funding of €57,800 under this scheme in 2012 to carry out a Coastal Erosion Risk Management Study of Portrane to Rush which included Burrow Beach. The funding was drawn down in 2013 following completion of the study.

Following the severe storms of Winter 2013/2014 total funding of €200,000 was provided via the Vote of the OPW to Fingal County Council following a Government decision for repair works to damaged coastal protection infrastructure, which included projects at Burrow Beach.

No applications have been received for a project at Claremont beach.

It is a matter for the local authority to prioritise and progress works.

The OPW is currently undertaking a national public consultation on draft flood maps until 23rd December, 2015. Draft maps are available to view online at http://maps.opw.ie/flood_draftmap_consult/ or in the books of maps located at local authority principal offices. These are predictive draft flood maps in accordance with the requirement of the EU Floods Directive 2007 (2007/60/EC) and show risk from fluvial (river) and coastal flooding. They assume that the topography of the shoreline is constant and do not make allowances for erosion.

The OPW has undertaken a national assessment of coastal erosion (including erosion rates) under the Irish Coastal Protection Strategy Study (ICPSS) and the results of this study have been published on the OPW website. The relevant reports and associated predictive erosion hazard mapping (to 2050) may be viewed online at:

<http://www.opw.ie/en/floodriskmanagement/floodanderosionmapping/icpss/wp234ane/>.

Flood Relief Schemes Status

229. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of a flood defence project (details supplied) in County Clare; the remaining elements of the project which have to be concluded prior to moving to construction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42799/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): The Office of Public Works (OPW) very recently received from Clare County Council (CCC) a copy of the feasibility study report prepared by the engineering consultants engaged by CCC to examine the flooding issues at the location mentioned. The OPW will be responding to CCC in due course when it has completed a full review of the feasibility study report.

Departmental Staff Data

230. **Deputy Regina Doherty** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of employees under his remit who are classified under a contract of indefinite duration; the number of these who are receiving incremental salary payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42900/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): In response to the Deputy's question the table outlines the number of staff under my remit who are classified under contracts of indefinite duration and who are receiving incremental salary payments.

| Organisation | Number of staff | Incremental salary payments |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|
| Public Appointments Service | 1 | Yes |
| Special EU Programmes Body | 7 | Yes |
| The Valuation Office | 3 | Yes |

I am informed by the Commissioners of Public Works that contracts of indefinite duration (CIDs) can be applied to a number of the seasonal employees recruited annually. CIDs apply where seasonal workers have been successful in being re-employed, on fixed term contracts, over a number of years. Incremental salary payments are applied in these instances. Approximately 200 seasonal employees, mainly guide services at heritage sites, would fall within this category.

IDA Supports

231. **Deputy Michael McNamara** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation why the Industrial Development Agency Ireland's mid-west office logo and tag line at the end of its e-mails promote investment in County Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42462/15]

232. **Deputy Michael McNamara** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the geographical remit of the Industrial Development Agency Ireland mid-west office; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42463/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 231 and 232 together.

IDA Ireland actively markets and promotes Limerick as part of its Mid-West region, which comprises counties Limerick, Clare and North Tipperary. It is a long established and proven location for international business with a particularly strong track record as a centre for manufacturing excellence.

There are currently 116 FDI client companies employing 14,575 staff across the region. This represents 10% of IDA Ireland's total client company portfolio. The region's success has led it to become the 3 largest region by number of FDI companies, even though it is only the 6th largest regional population centre.

As Limerick is the gateway of the region, IDA Ireland's Mid-West regional office carries the logo 'Invest in Limerick', which allows e-mail recipients the option of clicking on the logo to follow a link to the Connect and Invest/Limerick web site. The logo is included as a means of encouraging extra traffic to the site and encouraging extra client meetings where the whole of the Mid-West region can be promoted, including Clare and North Tipperary.

'Invest in Limerick' is an interactive experience designed for use on tablet, smartphone and PC. Information on location, education, lifestyle and existing IDA Ireland client companies and indigenous companies is provided through images, video and text, which are continuously updated.

While significant new names businesses across a broad range of internationally-traded services have been attracted to the region in recent years, it has also maintained its position as a manufacturing location with newly arrived projects of scale from companies such as Regeneron, J&J, Ethicon Bio Surgery, Optel Vision and Amax Technologies complementing long established entities such as Analog Devices, J&J Vistakon, Cook Medical, Zimmer, Molex, Element Six and Proctor and Gamble.

IDA Ireland's FDI clients are primarily located in 4 Mid-West locations; Limerick City/County, Shannon, Ennis and Nenagh. Mid-West FDI employment represents 8.5% of IDA total employment with an average company size of 122 employees. Employment in Mid-West FDI

companies increased by 1,208 in 2014.

Finally, IDA Ireland assumed responsibility for FDI engagement with the Shannon area/companies in January 2014.

Cross-Border Co-operation

233. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the details of North-South co-operation between Enterprise Ireland and the Industrial Development Agency Ireland and their Northern counterparts in 2014 and 2015; the North-South co-operation that has been delivered by their foreign offices; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42592/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Both of our main development agencies, *Enterprise Ireland* (EI) and *IDA Ireland*, engage with relevant bodies in Northern Ireland to pursue areas of mutual advantage. Developing all-island initiatives and cooperation can, in certain circumstances, better build our competitive advantage internationally.

Extensive links have been forged by EI with various agencies and bodies in Northern Ireland and that Agency's work in this context has focused on liaison with, and participation in - the Ireland Fund; Joint Business Council; International Fund for Ireland; Special EU Programmes Body; the North South Secretariat; as well as local authority- led cross border networks.

In particular there is close co-operation between *Invest Northern Ireland* (INI) and EI. A Memorandum of Understanding is in place between EI and INI to enable clients of both agencies to access market services, trade missions/fairs, and seminars of one another and to provide INI clients with access to EI management development programmes such as *Leadership 4 Growth* and the *International Selling Programme*. Regular bi-lateral discussions and meetings are held between the various parties. There is also close collaboration between EI, INI and InterTrade Ireland (ITI) on the specific Cross Border programmes which are run by the latter body, in order to ensure effective operation and non-duplication.

Enterprise Ireland and Invest Northern Ireland cooperated in relation to a Trade Mission to Singapore in December 2013 which was specifically targeted at companies from both jurisdictions who are active in the aerospace sector. I was delighted to have been involved with the Northern Ireland Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Investment Ms. Arlene Foster MLA, in shared promotional events on that Trade Mission.

In relation to IDA Ireland, that Agency cooperates with INI in the context of regional and all-island economic development, recognising appropriate opportunities to pursue mutually beneficial cross border co-operation on aspects of economic policy and infrastructure/spatial planning. An example of shared co-operation between IDA and INI was the jointly developed North West Business Technology Zone (NWBTZ). The fundamental aim of this initiative was to capitalise on the combined strengths of Letterkenny and Derry City as an economic corridor. The focus was on developing compatible infrastructure and property solutions, which are now in place, to assist in the enhancement of the region's attractiveness for investment.

Where appropriate, IDA Ireland and INI co-operate on company visits where both jurisdictions are being considered by foreign companies. These visits are, in the main, usually initiated by IDA's network of overseas offices. However, it should be noted that IDA Ireland competes with INI Ireland for inward investment in certain areas.

The economies of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland both have a highly educated workforce and the IDA highlights this competitive advantage to perspective investors. To this end, the skills pool available both North and South of the Border are presented to potential investors as a key competitive advantage of investing in the Border region on the island of Ireland. For example, PayPal now located in Dundalk, made a decision to invest in this location based on the pool of skilled staff it could recruit from the large catchment area incorporating both sides of the Border. Its operation is now a significant employer in the region, having had a number of investment expansions since initially established.

Action Plan for Jobs

234. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation his views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding the city status of a location; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42639/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Government launched its long-term enterprise policy in November. It is an ambitious strategy, with the objective of delivering growth over the next decade that is sustainable, led by strong export performance, builds on our sectoral strengths, and that is underpinned by innovation, productivity, cost effectiveness and competitiveness. We aim to build resilience into our economy so that we do not suffer again as we have done in the past number of years.

We have 135,800 more people at work than when we launched our first Action Plan for Jobs in 2012. Our export performance has been exceptional, with exports by Enterprise Ireland clients at a record of €18.6 bn last year. Employment in EI and IDA supported firms has grown by over 40,000 since 2012.

We set a target in 2012 to increase employment by 100,000 by 2016. We achieved that ambitious target and have now exceeded it. We want to go further and to replace all the jobs lost during the recession and to realise sustainable full employment over the longer term.

Enterprise 2025 is a strategy that aims to build an economy that will not just achieve full employment but will sustain it in the long term. It has the commitment across government to take focused actions to deliver growth that is sustainable, led by strong export performance and underpinned by innovation, productivity and competitiveness.

The ambition in Enterprise 2025 is that unemployment in all regions will be within 1 percentage point of the national average. Although challenging, this can be realised and the strategy is about all regions benefitting from employment growth that is sustainable over the longer term.

The policy focus through the North East/North West Regional Action Plan for Jobs, the enterprise development agency strategies and the Local Economic and Community Plans, as well as the forthcoming Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies are directly pertinent in this regard (cohesive and connected strategies that take both a national, top-down perspective and a bottom-up approach to leverage regional strengths and commitment are crucial to achieving the ambition). A continued and sustained focus on addressing infrastructure bottlenecks, delivering broadband infrastructures, strengthening the interconnections between HEIs, research institutes and enterprises will all influence the outcome.

The North East/ North West Action Plan for Jobs, launched yesterday, 30 November, aims to deliver 28,000 extra jobs in the counties of Louth, Monaghan, Cavan, Leitrim, Sligo and Donegal by 2020. Key sectors targeted as part of the plan include traditionally strong sectors

for the region like agri-food, manufacturing/engineering and tourism, as well as areas targeted for future growth like digital payments, cleantech and creative services. Among the 152 actions in the plan to be delivered over the period 2015-2017 include:

- Achieve an increase of at least 25% in the number of start-ups in the region, and a 25% improvement in the survival rate of new businesses;
- Increase the number of IDA investments in the region by 30-40% up to 2019. This will result in a minimum of 61 additional projects for the North East/North West region by 2019;
- Progression of a Digital Payments Cluster along the M1, building on the success of companies such as PayPal, eBay, State Street, Vesta and Yapstone already established to act as a magnet to other indigenous and FDI companies in this sector;
- Establishment of a North East Regional Skills Forum to ensure the flow of critical skills to enterprises in the region;
- The Local Enterprise Offices will disburse over €2.2 million in grant funding, and provide training and mentoring support to over 1,500 business-people per year in the region;
- A Regional Innovation Forum for the North East/North West region to help support more companies to innovate and engage in R&D.

Industrial Development

235. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation further to Parliamentary Question No. 318 of 29 September 2015, to outline the details of any further developments relating to investment in the computer games industry; if it will involve amendments to the Finance Bill; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42658/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The games sector experienced considerable growth in Ireland in recent years, with many of the sector's largest global players having established operations in Ireland. The games sector in Ireland encompasses a breadth of areas including, for example games localisation, games development, platform development/porting, technology development/middleware, publishing and customer and community management activities and involving both foreign owned and Irish owned operations.

Because of how data is classified, and the nature of the sector itself, tracking of employment in the games industry and related activities proves challenging. Analysis undertaken by Forfás in 2011 estimated that total employment in the sector stood at around 2,200 having experienced a five-fold increase from a low base of an estimated 400 in 2004. This was driven mainly by rapid growth in foreign direct investment in the sector over the period, particularly in activities such as customer and technical support, community management and games localisation. In tandem with this growth, there has also been considerable expansion within the broader consumer internet sector (including social media and mobile internet) to which a large part of the games industry is inextricably linked and with other related activities such as software development, financial services, online gambling, information security, animation & film production, and creative arts (music, art, literature). This is a broad sector that continues to evolve and faces considerable disruptive competitive forces globally – forces that are shifting the nature of the activities, channels to market, players and competitors – although there are more recent indications of greater stability in the market.

Nevertheless, Ireland continues to attract foreign investment in the wider sector and continues to have a hotbed of very early stage start-ups and independent games designers, with new entrants every year. The Irish owned element of the Irish games cluster is still relatively young by international standards but its reputation is growing and awareness within the investor community to the attractiveness of the Irish games sector is increasing. A number of Irish games startups (in middleware and content) have raised seed and follow-on series 'A' funding investments over the last 24 months. Current exports from the Irish owned segment account for over 95 percent of their turnover and are oriented towards the UK and North American markets in the main.

In response to PQ 318 of 29 September (two months ago), I highlighted the fact that many of the actions set out in the Forfás report (2011) have been delivered upon since I established the Games Cluster Development Team in 2012. For example:

- a pilot "hothouse" initiative for undergraduate and Post-Leaving Certificate courses was devised and run in late 2013, which saw students from games, animation and multimedia courses working in multi-disciplinary teams on projects supported by an industry mentor;

- a leading games expert visited Ireland for six weeks in September and October 2014 as part of a Fulbright U.S. Specialist Award in conjunction with the HEA and carried out master classes and curriculum reviews of Digital Games courses at a number of Irish universities and colleges;

- EI's Competitive Start Fund (€50k equity) has had a significant impact on the early stage indigenous games sector since December 2010. Over this period, EI has funded over 20 Games companies to date. The cohort has also availed of a number of start-up management development programmes;

- IDA Ireland sees indications of a stronger pipeline for production activities in the closely related animation sector post the enhancement of section 481.

- CEOs are collaborating in a structured way to grow the cluster to the next stage of international growth through industry representative groups such as Games Ireland. Indigenous indie developers have recently set up a new representative body called 'Imirt'.

As with other companies in the technology and creative sectors, games companies can avail of the range of direct supports provided by the enterprise agencies such as the Seed Capital fund, In-market and Management development, R&D funding and tailored company expansion packages. A range of financial instruments also exists to assist companies which are not sector specific.

The enterprise development agencies have worked to heighten awareness within the sector of the existing R&D supports available to the Games sector. They held a number of R&D supports workshops and issued an enterprise friendly guide on R&D tax credits which included examples of relevance to games companies.

Games companies that can avail of existing R&D supports and R&D tax credits may be in a position to avail of the recently announced Knowledge Development Box (KDB) which will be provided for in the Finance Bill. There will also be a mechanism put in place to facilitate small and medium sized enterprises with income of less than €7.5 million arising from IP and group turnover of €50 million which will be introduced during 2016. The Capital Gains Tax Entrepreneur Relief introduced in Budget 2016 will also be available to those operating in the games sector (subject to certain criteria) as will the Earned Credit Income credit for self-employed and the extended 3 year corporation tax relief for start-up companies. Other

non-sector specific longstanding tax related investment incentives include the Employment and Investment Incentive (EII) and Start up Refunds for Entrepreneurs (SURE).

It is important to note that Ireland's attractiveness for business investment across a range of sectors involves range of factors that can influence location decisions. For example, the talent base associated with, and relevant to, the games sector is a significant attractiveness factor. Ireland also possesses a long history and tradition in technical and creative content development, through our innate storytelling abilities seen through the success of our animation industry to the international recognition of Ireland today as a centre of excellence for technology investment. Investment in Ireland's broadband/internet infrastructures also has had a strong role to play in underpinning new activity in the games sector in recent years.

We have recently launched Enterprise Policy 2025 which sets out the ambition to have 2.18 million people in employment by 2020. The strategy spans a range of sectors including the ICT and creative sectors, of which the games industry is a part. Through the enterprise development agencies, and together with the industry, and we will work to ensure the employment growth potential of this dynamic sector is realised.

State Properties

236. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the amount spent on lease private security, pest control and other services relating to the maintenance of Carrisbrook House at 122 Northumberland Road in Dublin D04 A295, a development which originally obtained planning permission around the time of the 50th anniversary of the 1916 Rising to replace a Victorian house and adjoining terrace that played a part in the Rising; if current and projected future expenditure in respect of Carrisbrook House represent value for money for the taxpayer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42757/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The lease on Carrisbrook House has been held by IDA Ireland since September 2013 following the completion of the assignment of properties from Forfás to IDA Ireland. Prior to this the lease passed through a number of State Agencies since 1969 when An Chomhairle Oiliuma (AnCo) first took out a 65 year lease on the building.

The Israeli Embassy is currently the only occupant of the premises, on a sub-lease which expires in 2025.

I am informed that the current rent due on Carrisbrook House is €1,180,000 per annum and the overall cost of maintenance and repair for building costs are approximately €90,000 per annum.

Over the past number of years every effort has been made by Forfás and IDA Ireland to lease the remainder of the building to a public or private sector client. However, there has been no interest in the building due to a number of factors including the state of repair of the building, and the fact that IDA Ireland cannot offer a prospective client vacant possession.

The Agency has assured me that they will continue to work towards addressing these issues.

Action Plan for Jobs

237. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the aspects of the north-west and north-east regional action plan that will target the chronic lack

of investment in County Donegal, which has led to low numbers of job creation in the past number of years in comparison with the rest of the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42824/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Since the start of the Action Plan for Jobs process in 2012, employment has increased by 135,800 across the economy as a whole and has exceeded the initial target set by the Government for 2016. Over 20,000 jobs have been created in the North East/North West region, which includes Donegal, since 2012. Jobs supported by the Enterprise Agencies in the region - IDA, Enterprise Ireland, and Údarás na Gaeltachta - have increased by 2,877 since the beginning of 2012. Unemployment in this region has fallen from a high of 17.8% to the current rate of 9.3% since the Action Plan for Jobs was launched.

The objective of the Regional Action Plans is to capitalise on the strengths and assets of each region to further maximise enterprise growth and job creation. The initiative is building on the success of the national Action Plan for Jobs, and encouraging regional stakeholders - including enterprise agencies, Local Authorities, higher education institutions, other public bodies and the private sector - to come forward with innovative ideas to boost job creation in their own region.

The purpose of these Regional Action Plans is to build on existing strengths and opportunities in each region, and while individual plans may reference infrastructure issues, it is not the intention to address such issues within these plans as these are prioritised within the Government's National Capital Expenditure Framework in the areas where it can achieve greatest benefit and value for money.

The Action Plan for the North East/North West, which includes Donegal, was launched on Monday 30 November. The plan identifies collaborative measures that will enable the region as a whole to realise its economic potential and create jobs.

Key targets for the North East/North West region are to increase employment by 10 to 15% over the period to 2020, win 61 FDI investments by 2019, increase the number of start-ups in the region by a minimum of 25%, and improve the survival rate of new businesses by 25%.

A number of actions target the particular strengths and assets of the North West. IDA will collaborate with Enterprise Agencies, ETBs and Institutes of Technology to develop a marketing proposition to support an Insurance and Technical Services cluster; Udaras na Gaeltachta will support the creation of 300-500 new jobs in Gaeltacht regions; a North West Skills Forum will be established to increase the flow of critical skills to the region; Fáilte Ireland will promote and market the Wild Atlantic Way and will examine the development of new loops to encourage a greater spread of visitors to the region; and the development of a Renewable Energy Innovation Centre at Killybegs will be explored to maximise the potential of the North West's natural resources.

In addition, as part of its property programme, IDA has committed to investing in new property solutions in Sligo and Dundalk, amongst other centres, over the next three years.

All regional Action Plans will be supported by investment of up to €250 million over the next five years, including €150 million for a property investment programme by IDA Ireland. The intention is that a further sum of up to €100 million will be made available over the next five years through three competitive calls to be administered by Enterprise Ireland. These competitive calls will be targeted at innovative and collaborative approaches to support job creation across the regions.

Work Permits Applications Data

238. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of new work permits and the number of existing permits that have been approved and that have been renewed for the meat industry in 2014 and 2015 to date; why the industry continues to require work-permitted labour; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42841/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Thirty-one permits were granted during 2014 (of which 14 were renewals) and eleven permits have been granted to date in 2015 (of which 2 were renewals).

In general, the Government's policy is that industry skills needs are met without recourse to the employment permit regime. Migration through the permits system is intended to complement the primary policy objective of Government, the up-skilling of the resident population at all levels.

Prior to September 2015, there were very limited options for meat boners to access the employment permits system. This is because the occupation was on the Ineligible Categories of Employment List (ICEL), which is set out in Regulations. This List is reviewed and updated bi-annually, a process that involves a formalised and evidence-based approach. My Department obtains and considers advice from the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN) and Skills and Labour Market Research Unit (SMLRU) in SOLAS, as well as consultation with key stakeholders including Government Departments, agencies and industry representatives. In their Annual Skills Bulletin 2015, the EGFSN states that attracting and retaining skilled butchers/de-boners remains a challenge for the meat industry in Ireland.

My Department, together with the Department of Social Protection, Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and the Department of Education and Skills, conducted extensive discussions over many months with the industry. During these discussions the meat industry made commitments to create additional employment and engage in training and upskilling of their existing employees, if they were given access to the permit system. On foot of these commitments, I signed Regulations on 1 September, providing for a limited number of employment permits for meat boners at a remuneration level of €27,500 or more per annum.

The Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine will report to me on the industry's progress in meeting their employment creation and training commitments and no further permits will be granted to the sector unless the Government is satisfied that these commitments are being met.

Enterprise Ireland

239. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the funding situation at Enterprise Ireland; its cash reserves; the commitments that have been entered into in terms of its routine support of business ventures to the end of 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42867/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Enterprise Ireland are striving for ambitious targets in 2015, building on the success of recent years, by aiming to support some 13,000 new jobs and increasing client exports to €20bn.

Enterprise Ireland received an exchequer spending allocation of €163.4m for 2015 to support industry, comprising €50m for subhead A7 and €113.4m for subhead B4. Enterprise Ireland's

(Subhead A7) baseline allocation was increased by €1m, from €49m to €50m to facilitate the delivery in 2015 of enterprise programmes such as the Seed and Venture Capital Scheme 2013-2018, Innovation Fund Ireland, Competitive Feasibility Funds, Competitive Start Funds, trade supports, Management Development Programmes and Lean Programmes.

The (Subhead B4) supports for research was also increased, by €3m, from €110.6m to €113.4m to meet the growing demand for EI R&D supports, such as HPSUs, Innovation Vouchers, Technology Centres and collaborative projects with Irish third level institutions.

Enterprise Ireland was also given sanction to spend €56m of Own Resource Income, comprising €50m to be earned in 2015 supplemented by a 2014 capital carryover of €6m. Own Resource Income refers to revenues derived from for example redemption of shares and dividends from equity investments, grant refunds, rental income etc.

EI received €77.5m exchequer funding for administration and general expenses for 2015.

EI does not maintain cash reserves over and above its working capital requirements. EI draws down its exchequer funding on a weekly basis from my Department. It only draws down funds that are expected to be paid during these periods less any estimated own resource income receipts. Where the estimated own resource income receipts plus exchequer funding exceeds the estimated expenditure the exchequer requirement is reduced accordingly. This ensures exchequer funds are only drawn down when required and EI's cash book balances are kept to a minimum where possible.

The anticipated end of year position is that EI will have spent the total exchequer and ORI allocations, thus fully meeting its 2015 commitments.

Departmental Legal Cases Data

240. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of legal cases currently ongoing against his Department, including State agencies under his aegis; the number of cases that took place during the years 2011 to 2014, inclusive; the cost of those that were contested and what damages were involved; the costs and damages of those that were settled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43269/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The State Claims Agency (SCA) is the delegated authority for handling certain claims against my Department. The SCA will provide the details sought by the Deputy in relation to any such claims for my Department through the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

In seeking to provide the Deputy with the information requested, other than the above-mentioned claims handled by the SCA, the assumption has been made that the question relates to civil proceedings taken against my Department or one of its offices.

There are currently twenty four legal cases, including judicial reviews, ongoing against my Department.

The costs of cases contested and damages involved, and the costs and damages of cases settled, which took place during the years 2011 to 2014 are:-

| No. of Cases in 2014 | Contested Cases | | Settled Cases | |
|----------------------|-----------------|-------------------|---------------|-------------------|
| 17 | Costs€ | Damages Involved€ | Costs€ | Damages Involved€ |
| | 69,359 | 0 | 205,759 | 0 |

| No. of Cases in 2013 | Contested Cases | | Settled Cases | |
|----------------------|-----------------|-------------------|---------------|-------------------|
| 17 | Costs€ | Damages Involved€ | Costs€ | Damages Involved€ |
| | 0 | 0 | 30,135 | 0 |

| No. of Cases in 2012 | Total Contested Cases | | Total Settled Cases | |
|----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| 16 | Costs€ | Damages Involved€ | Costs€ | Damages Involved€ |
| | 304,261 | 0 | 174,318 | 43,000 |

There were no relevant cases against my Department in 2011.

The issue of legal cases currently ongoing in Agencies under my remit is a day-to-day matter for the individual Agencies concerned, for which I have no direct function.

I have asked all Agencies under the aegis of my Department to advise me of any legal cases currently ongoing between the dates concerned, and I will communicate that information to the Deputy as soon as it is available.

Departmental Staff Data

241. **Deputy Regina Doherty** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of employees under his remit who are classified under a contract of indefinite duration; the number of these who are receiving incremental salary payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43282/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Aside from the Director General of the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) (formerly Chief Executive of the Labour Relations Commission (LRC)), there are no contracts of indefinite duration for any staff in my Department - the staffing of the WRC being part of my Department's staffing complement. The contract of the Director General of the WRC, whose contract has been extended over the years since his initial appointment to the LRC in 1991, may, in accordance with Section 13 of the Workplace Relations Act 2015, be terminated by the Minister for stated reasons. Remuneration is as may be determined by the Minister with the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform and is not on an incremental scale.

Personal appointments by Ministers (Special Adviser(s), Personal Assistant, Personal Secretary, Civilian Driver(s)) are co-terminous with the period of office of the relevant Minister and are not considered contracts of indefinite duration in the normal sense.

I have asked the Agencies under the aegis of my Department to advise me of the number of contracts of indefinite duration and incremental salaries as requested by the Deputy, and I will communicate that information to the Deputy as soon as it is available.

Ministerial Responsibilities

242. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine which Ministers were responsible for animal welfare matters prior to the commencement of the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013, which was commenced on 6 March 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42878/15]

287. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his Department had any responsibility for animal welfare matters prior to the commencement of the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013 on 6 March 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42838/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 242 and 287 together.

Following the commencement of the Animal Health & Welfare Act 2013 on 6 March 2014, all animal welfare matters now come within the remit of my Department. Prior to that date, the Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine was focussed on animal welfare as it related to farmed animals. Wider animal cruelty issues were dealt with under the Protection of Animals Act 1911 which was within the remit of the Minister for Justice.

The Animal Health and Welfare Act provides a framework within which the welfare of animals can be safeguarded and I am hopeful that the significantly increased levels of penalties for offences of animal cruelty provided for under the Act will act as a deterrent to animal welfare abuses. It is worth noting that the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013 has significantly expanded the range of legal requirements around animal welfare. New provisions include the requirement on owners to ensure that animals under their control had adequate supplies of food and water, shelter and veterinary care.

Scéimeanna Talmhaíochta

243. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den an Aire Talmhaíochta, Bia agus Mara cén uair a dhéanfar íocaíocht faoin scéim buníocaíochta agus faoi scéim na limistéar srianta nádúrtha do 2015 le feirmeoir i gContae na Gaillimhe (sonraí leis seo); cén fáth go bhfuil moill leis an íocaíocht seo; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [42283/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Fuarthas iarratas faoin Scéim Buníocaíochta i mo Roinn ón duine ainmnithe an 8 Aibreán 2015. Tar éis próiseála, nochtadh dhá cheist maidir le héileamh i dtaca le ceann de na dáileachtaí a dhearbhaigh an duine atá ainmnithe. Réitíodh an cheist seo le déanaí i ndiaidh comhfhreagrais idir mo Roinn agus an duine ainmnithe. Tá próiseáil an iarratais Buníocaíochta curtha i gcrích anois agus eiseofar íocaíocht chomh luath agus is féidir díreach chuig an gcuntas bainc a thug sé.

Maidir le Scéim na Limistéar Srianta Nádúrtha (ANC), tá an scéim sin comhtháite isteach san fhoirm iarratais ar an Scéim Buníocaíochta. Chun iarratas a dhéanamh ar an Scéim sin, iarrtar ar iarratasóirí tic a chur i mbosca ar fhoirm iarratais na Scéime Buníocaíochta. Tá limistéir ina bhfuil srianta nádúrtha sna dáileachtaí talún atá dearbhaithe ag an duine ainmnithe, ach ní dhearna sé iarratas ar an scéim ANC trí tic a chur sa bhosca. Bhí mo Roinn i dteagmháil leis an duine ainmnithe go luath i mí Lúnasa ag rá leis nach ndearna sé iarratas ar an Scéim ANC agus d'iarramar soiléiriú faoi cad a bhí i gceist aige a dhéanamh maidir le hiarratas a dhéanamh ar an Scéim. Go dtí seo ní bhfuarthas aon fhreagra ón duine ainmnithe.

Harbours and Piers Funding

244. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when he will provide the funding to complete the breakwater at Greencastle in County Donegal; and if he will support the plans to develop Greencastle Harbour as recently presented to his ministerial colleague and Department officials. [42311/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Greencastle Harbour is owned by Donegal County Council and responsibility for its development, repair and maintenance rests with that Local Authority in the first instance and its' parent Department, the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government.

My Department however provides funding for the development and repair of Local Authority owned piers, harbours and slipways under the annual Fishery Harbour and Coastal Infrastructure Development Programme subject to available Exchequer funding and overall national priorities.

Under the 2015 Fishery Harbour and Coastal Infrastructure Development Programme I am happy to confirm to the Deputy that funding of €93,750 has been approved for Greencastle Harbour under this Programme.

The primary focus of the Fishery Harbour & Coastal Infrastructure Capital Development Programme which the Department administers on an annual basis, is to provide funding for capital works at the six Fishery Harbour Centres for which my Department has responsibility for.

The suite of projects for inclusion in the 2016 programme including consideration of the amount that can be made available for a Local Authority element of that programme are being considered, and I will make an announcement on these issues in due course.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

245. **Deputy Noel Harrington** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payments under the basic payment scheme, the areas of natural constraint scheme and the agri-environment options scheme will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42316/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The persons named commenced their AEOS 1 contract on 1 November, 2010 and has been paid in full for the 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014 scheme years. Under the EU Regulations governing the Scheme, a comprehensive administrative check, including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System, must be completed before any payment can issue. It is expected that AEOS payments for the 2015 scheme year will commence shortly for those that have successfully come through the administrative checks and where there are no outstanding issues for those who had on-the-spot inspections in 2015.

In respect of the Basic Payments Scheme, my Department received a 2015 Transfer of Entitlement Allocation Right and Reference Value application from the person named requesting the transfer of his entitlement allocation right and corresponding reference value from his sole name into joint names with another person. As the Basic Payment Scheme application for the person named had been submitted before the herd number was changed into joint names, it was necessary for the person named to submit a Declaration of Undertaking form. My Department

wrote to the person named on 7 November 2015 requesting this form be submitted but it has not been received to date. Once the completed form has been received by my Department the application will be processed and payment under the Basic Payment Scheme will issue shortly thereafter.

An application under the 2015 Areas of Natural Constraints Schemes was received from the person named on 24 May, 2015. Processing of the application has recently been finalised and payment has issued directly to the nominated bank account of the person named.

Single Payment Scheme Appeals

246. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will receive payments following a successful appeal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42331/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Following the LPIS Review under the 2013 Single Payment Scheme the person named was identified as having an over declaration of greater than 20%, meaning no payment was due for 2013. Following an appeal to the LPIS Appeals Committee this penalty was partially overturned. A supplementary payment was raised for the person named to refund the amount due on foot of this decision, however, the amount due of €4,836.19 was netted against existing debts arising from the Agri Environment Option Scheme.

Basic Payment Scheme Payments

247. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when further single payments will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42338/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under the 2015 Basic Payment Scheme was received from the person named on 13 May 2015. The person named has received an advance payment of 70% on 43.62 entitlements under the Scheme.

Since then the person named has received a transfer of an additional 13.42 entitlements. A balancing payment of 27% is being made today on the original 43.62 entitlements and a payment of 97% is also now issuing on the remaining 13.42 entitlements.

A final balancing payment will be made in 2016 when the value of all entitlements will be updated.

Rural Environment Protection Scheme Appeals

248. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a refusal of an application under the rural environment protection scheme for a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42353/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named commenced his AEOS contract on 1 May 2013. Following an inspection on 26 November

20 14 issues arose in respect of his Species Rich Grassland and Natura options, resulting in deductions to his AEOS payment. He appealed these findings to the Regional Inspector, who reviewed the file and upheld the original decision. He was given the right of appeal to the Agriculture Appeals Office by letter dated 25 September 2015. To date no appeal has been received by the Agricultural Appeals Office.

Dairy Sector

249. **Deputy Michael Colreavy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the deadline for compliance with Bord Bia regulations for dairy farmers. [42357/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I presume the Deputy is referring to the Bord Bia *Sustainability Dairy Assurance Scheme*. This is a scheme run by Bord Bia which has been designed to provide the necessary proof to customers of Irish dairy products that milk has been produced under both sustainability and quality assurance criteria.

The scheme is open to all milk producers with a valid herd registration who supply to milk processors in the Republic of Ireland. Generally such suppliers apply to Bord Bia, through their milk purchaser, for participation in the Scheme. Bord Bia in turn process the application, provide an information pack and then assign the farm to an auditor. A farm visit will be conducted by an independent auditor on every member's farm at 18-month intervals at a time and day that suits the farmer. The purpose of these visits is to audit the farm against the quality assurance criteria and to collect data regarding the sustainability of the farm.

There is no specific deadline for application or the carrying out of the audit.

Scéimeanna Talmhaíochta

250. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den an Aire Talmhaíochta, Bia agus Mara cén uair a eiseofar íocaíocht d'fheirmeoir i gContae na Gaillimhe (sonraí leis seo) faoi scéim na limistéar srianta nádúrtha nó faoin scéim buníocaíochta do 2015; cén fáth go bhfuil moill leis an íocaíocht seo; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [42439/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Fuarthas iarratas faoin Scéim Buníocaíochta Scéim na Limistéar Srianta Nádúrtha (LSN) i mo Roinn ón duine a ainmnítear an 14 Aibreán 2015. Eisíodh réamhíocaíocht don duine maidir leis an Scéim Buníocaíochta, agus tá socruithe i bhfeidhm chun an íocaíocht chomhardaithe a eisiúint chomh maith.

Faoi Scéim na LSN 2015, tá ar iarratasóirí incháilithe íosdlús stocála 0.15 aonad beostoic a chomhlíonadh ar feadh tréimhse choinneála seacht mí i ndiaidh a chéile agus 0.15 aonad beostoic, ar an meán, a choimeád, a ríomhtar i gcaitheamh 12 mhí bhliain na Scéime. Níor eisíodh an íocaíocht faoi scéim na LSN sa chás seo, mar gheall, ag an tráth seo, níor shásaigh an gabháltas atá i gceist riachtanais íosdlús stocála na scéime. Bhí teagmháil dhíreach ag oifigeach ó mo Roinn leis an duine a ainmnítear chun é a chur ar an eolas ar na saincheistean na réitíodh go fóill.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

251. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason for the delay in issuing payment under the disadvantaged areas scheme and the single payment scheme to a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42444/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under the 2015 Basic Payment/Areas of Natural Constraints Schemes was received from the person named on 24 May 2015. Processing of the Areas of Natural Constraints application has recently been finalised and payment has issued directly to the nominated bank account of the person named.

In August 2015 my Department wrote to the person named regarding the transfer of Single Payment entitlements by way of inheritance under the Single Payment Scheme. Additional information was required in order to assist in the transfer of allocation rights and reference value to the new Basic Payment Scheme in 2015.

While the person named did respond to the Department letter, she did not provide sufficient information to allow for the transfer of allocation rights and reference value into her name. An official from my Department has contacted the person named to discuss the circumstances of the case with a view to resolving the issue to facilitate payment.

Basic Payment Scheme Applications

252. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a payment under the single payment scheme will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42471/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named submitted a 2015 Transfer of Entitlement Allocation Right and Reference Value and a 2015 Private Contract Clause application to my Department. These applications are being processed and payment under the Basic Payment Scheme will issue as soon as possible.

The person named has also submitted applications for the National Reserve and the Young Farmers Scheme. Processing of National Reserve and Young Farmers Scheme applications is well underway and involves administrative and on-farm checks and verification of land details submitted under the 2015 Basic Payment Scheme application. These checks are required under EU Regulations. When all checks have been completed and processing of applications has been finalised, my Department will correspond directly with each applicant to advise them of the outcome of their application. Payments to successful applicants under the National Reserve and Young Farmers Scheme will commence after the Basic Payment Scheme balancing payments issue in December.

Scéimeanna Talmhaíochta

253. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den an Aire Talmhaíochta, Bia agus Mara cén uair a dhéanfar íocaíocht faoi scéim na limistéar srianta nádúrtha agus faoin scéim buníocaíochta do 2015 le feirmeoir i gContae na Gaillimhe (sonraí leis seo); cén fáth go bhfuil moill leis an íocaíocht seo; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [42472/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Fuarthas iarratas faoin Scéim Buníocaíochta Scéim na Limistéar Srianta Nádúrtha ón duine a ainmnítear

an 25 Bealtaine 2015. Tá próiseáil an iarratais ar bun faoi láthair. Ar chríochnú an phróisis seo, déanfar athbhreithniú breise ar an iarratas ag féachaint le híocaíocht a eisiúint go díreach do chuntas ainmnithe baine an duine a ainmnítear ag an dáta is luaithe is féidir.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

254. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment under the basic payment scheme and the areas of natural constraint scheme will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42489/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under Basic Payment/Areas of Natural Constraint Schemes was received from the person named on 28 May, 2015.

Processing of the Basic Payment Scheme application has recently been completed. The relevant advance payment has issued directly to the nominated bank account of the person named. Arrangements are now also in place to process the balancing payment which is payable from 1 December.

Processing of the Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme application has recently been completed with payment due to issue directly to the nominated bank account of the person named at the earliest possible date.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Applications

255. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment under the 2015 areas of natural constraint scheme will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Galway; the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42490/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under Areas of Natural Constraints Schemes was received from the person named on 12 May, 2015. Processing of this application has recently been completed, and payment will issue directly to the nominated bank account of the person named at the earliest possible date.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

256. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment will issue under the 2015 areas of natural constraint scheme and the basic payment scheme to a person (details supplied) in County Galway; the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42491/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under the Basic Payment Scheme/Area of Natural Constraint Scheme was received in my Department from the person named on 24 February, 2015. Following processing, a commonage evidence issue was disclosed in respect of one of the parcels declared by the person named. An official from my Department has written to the claimants concerned and has been in direct contact with the person named in order to expedite the processing of this application.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

257. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment under the 2015 areas of natural constraint scheme and the basic payment scheme will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Galway; the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42492/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under the Basic Payment Scheme/Area of Natural Constraint Scheme was received in my Department from the person named on 24 February, 2015. Following processing, a commonage evidence issue was disclosed in respect of one of the parcels declared by the person named. An official from my Department has written to the claimants concerned in order to expedite the processing of this application.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

258. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment will issue under the 2015 areas of natural constraint scheme and the basic payment scheme to a person (details supplied) in County Galway; the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42493/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under the Basic Payment Scheme/Area of Natural Constraint Scheme was received in my Department from the person named on 30 April, 2015. Following processing, a commonage evidence issue was disclosed in respect of one of the parcels declared by the person named. This matter has now been resolved and payment is due to issue directly to the nominated bank account of the person named at the earliest possible date.

Departmental Correspondence

259. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when he will issue a final reply (details supplied) to correspondence sent to his office; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42513/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): A final reply in relation to the correspondence referred to by the Deputy will issue this week.

GLAS Applications

260. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to set out the number of farmers in hen harrier special protection areas; and the number of these who have entered the green low-carbon agri-environment scheme plus. [42518/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): There are 3,767 herd numbers with designated lands in the Hen Harrier Special Protection Areas across Ireland. Of these, 1,017 have already been approved for entry to GLAS under Tranche 1, while a further 300 or so applications have queries associated with them and will hopefully be approved into the scheme when these are resolved. I expect significant additional applications from hen harrier farmers under Tranche 2 of GLAS and these will of course receive priority access to the

scheme as Tier One candidates.

The calculations determining access to GLAS Plus will only be completed at pre-payment validation stage but it is important to note that in every case where the cost for a farmer of meeting the hen harrier action exceeds €5,000 annually, he or she will automatically qualify for GLAS Plus. A separate application is not necessary.

Special Protection Areas Designation

261. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to set down the number of hectares in hen harrier special protection areas that are commonage land and the number under privately-owned agricultural land for which applications have been made in 2015. [42519/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht is responsible in the first instance for the identification of areas important for the Hen Harrier sites, and these may include agricultural and non-agricultural land, as well as privately owned farmland and commonage.

However, the Hen Harrier action in GLAS only applies to privately-owned farmland and therefore this is the only category of land for which my Department maintains detailed records. In the first tranche of GLAS, applications to take the hen harrier action were made on a total area of 25,864 hectares of private land.

The first tranche of GLAS is now closed but we would encourage farmers with hen harrier habitat to apply to join the scheme under the second tranche, which is now open. All farmers with hen harrier habitat will receive priority access to GLAS as Tier One candidates.

Fisheries Protection

262. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to outline the penalties in place for super trawlers that switch off the automatic identification system such that they are not visible to the public eye in sea boat traffic; and the steps taken to ensure they operate transparently. [42523/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Under the CFP, control of the vessel within Ireland's Exclusive Fisheries Zone is a matter for the Irish control authorities who monitor fishing activity of all vessels operating the area. The Control authorities have on-going information in relation to the vessels operating in the Irish Exclusive Fisheries zone including their activities and characteristics. Under the Sea Fisheries and Maritime Jurisdiction Act, 2006, all operational issues of this nature concerning sea fisheries control are, as a matter of law, exclusively for the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority (SFPA) and the Naval Service. As Minister, I am precluded from getting involved in operational matters including in relation to law enforcement.

Article 10 of Control Regulation 1224/2009 requires all fishing vessels exceeding 15 meters in overall length to fit and maintain in operation an Automatic Identification System (AIS) which meets the performance standards of the IMO SOLAS Convention.

Monitoring of fishing vessels in the Irish Exclusive Fisheries Zone is undertaken by the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority and the Naval Service using the Fisheries Monitoring Centre which has access to both AIS and VMS data for fishing vessels. The use of AIS positioning data

through satellite technology enables vessels to be visible at all times. Public website systems do not have access to the same technology and because of this some vessels' AIS data will not always be visible on these public websites.

Monitoring of the AIS data for these vessels over the past number of weeks in the Fisheries Monitoring Centre has revealed no instances of non-compliance with the AIS regulations.

Any non-compliances with fisheries regulations in the Irish Exclusive Fisheries Zone will be dealt with under the parameters of the Sea Fisheries and Maritime Jurisdiction Act, 2006.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

263. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment under the 2015 area of natural constraints scheme and basic payment scheme will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Cork; the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42524/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named submitted a 2015 Basic Payment/Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme application on 27 May 2015. EU Regulations governing the administration of these schemes require that full and comprehensive administrative checks, including in some cases Remote Sensing (i.e. satellite) inspections, be completed before any payments issue.

The application of the person named was selected for a Remote Sensing eligibility inspection. This inspection has now been completed and the results are currently being finalised with the intention of issuing any payments due under the Direct Payments Schemes as soon as possible. In the event that any queries arise officials in my Department will be in contact with the person named.

Animal Disease Controls

264. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will consider the personal circumstances surrounding the late registration of calves by a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny. [42532/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The animals in question are registered correctly and the passports have issued in respect of each animal. In this case there are no adverse consequences arising directly from the late registrations with respect to these animals.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

265. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payments will issue under the 2015 area of natural constraints scheme, the basic payment scheme and the young farmer and national reserve schemes in respect of a farmer (details supplied) in County Mayo; the reason for the delay in issuing these payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42545/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named submitted a 2015 Basic Payment/Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme application on

31 March 2015. EU Regulations governing the administration of these schemes require that full and comprehensive administrative checks, including in some cases on farm inspections, be completed before any payments issue.

The application of the person named was selected for a ground eligibility inspection. This inspection is currently being processed with the intention of issuing any payments due under the Direct Payments Schemes as soon as possible. In the event that any queries arise officials in my Department will be in contact with the person named.

Single Payment Scheme Applications

266. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Galway will receive a single farm payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42555/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under the Basic Payment Scheme was received in my Department from the person named on 30 March, 2015. The advance payment under the Scheme has issued to the person named, and arrangements are now in place to issue the balancing payment directly to his nominated bank account.

Ash Dieback Threat

267. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to set out the status of ash tree disease given that nurseries are awaiting replies from his Department. [42556/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department has been engaged in a number of actions in combatting the ash dieback disease during the course of 2015. This has included a large scale systematic and targeted survey of forests, nurseries, hedgerows, agricultural environmental schemes and roadside plantings across the whole of the country which commenced at the beginning of July. The field element, laboratory testing, and analysis have recently been finalised and the outcomes of the survey and other work are currently being assessed.

In addition, a review of policy in relation to the disease is being carried out by my Department in co-operation with colleagues in DARD in Northern Ireland following the outcome of the summer surveys.

Preliminary results show that due to the high number of findings of ash dieback, especially in native hedgerows, Ireland would not be in a position to apply to the EU for Protected Zone status for the disease. The possibility of removing the embargo on ash sales under a plant passport system for nurseries, for plants which have been free of the disease for at least two years, is being considered.

GLAS Applications

268. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a decision on an application under the green low-carbon agri-environment scheme by a person (details supplied) in County Kerry will be reviewed, given a clerical error on the application;

and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42578/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The applicant concerned failed to meet the minimum score as set out in the Green Low-carbon Agri-environment Scheme (GLAS) Terms and Conditions. The applicant's Advisor appealed this decision on their behalf, claiming a clerical error when entering their application.

My Department officials have replied to this appeal, to both the Advisor and the applicant, upholding the original decision on the application. The person now has the option of appealing to the Agriculture Appeals Office or submitting an application for GLAS Tranche 2.

GLAS Appeals

269. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a decision on an application under the green low-carbon agri-environment scheme by a person (details supplied) in County Kerry will be reviewed, given a clerical error on the application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42584/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The applicant concerned failed to meet the minimum score as set out in the Green Low-carbon Agri-environment Scheme (GLAS) Terms and Conditions. The applicant's Advisor appealed this decision on their behalf, claiming a clerical error when entering their application.

My Department officials have replied to this appeal, to both the Advisor and the applicant, upholding the original decision on the application. The person now has the option of appealing to the Agriculture Appeals Office or submitting an application for GLAS Tranche 2.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Eligibility

270. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine how he determines that amounts claimed by a participant in the agri-environment options scheme for non-productive capital costs associated with tree planting are in excess of verified costs when the management standard, as per the scheme's guidelines, give a figure of €62.70 per tree; if he will provide a breakdown of this figure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42588/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The maximum payment that is eligible for reimbursement per unit (tree) under the AEOS non-productive capital investment action is €62.70. This figure is compiled from all the costs that can be associated with delivering the Action of planting trees, including the purchase of the trees (with purchase price depending on size, age etc.), the labour to plant the trees and all the associated cost that may be incurred, including the purchase of tree supports, fencing of the area and so on.

The rules around the verification of claims is set out in EU Regulation 65/2011. Claims received for payment must be accompanied by invoices for the purchase of trees and other goods and must have been endorsed as paid by the supplier of the goods. The Department may seek supporting documentation from claimants, such as copies of cashed cheques or other documentation that may be available. The requirement to assess the reasonableness of the costs claimed and the reality of the expenditure is also set out in the Regulation. The key issue is that only the actual amount paid by the participant for the approved number of units of the Action can be claimed.

Beef Data Programme

271. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Galway will receive payment under the beef genomics scheme for 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42589/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named applied to participate in the 2014 Beef Genomics Scheme on the 31 March 2014. Under the Terms and Conditions of the scheme applicants were required to tissue sample 15% of the animals in his/her herd.

The person named was issued with 5 tissue tags for sampling purposes by the Irish Cattle Breeding Federation. The person named only returned 3 tissue samples to the Irish Cattle Breeding Federation. As the person named did not comply fully with the Terms and Conditions of the 2014 Beef Genomics Scheme no payment is due.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Conditions

272. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to set out the number of on-site farm visits carried out in respect of the 400 farmers involved in the non-productive capital investment action associated with the agri-environment options scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42591/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Under the EU Regulations, there is a requirement on my Department to undertake a minimum inspection rate of 5% of participants in the Agri-Environment Options Scheme. In this case, I take it the Deputy is asking about the 400 or so farmers that my Department wrote to seeking verification of invoices that they had submitted as part of their non-productive capital investment claim under the Scheme.

111 inspections have taken place to date in respect of 96 of the participants involved in the invoice review.

Single Payment Scheme Applications

273. **Deputy Áine Collins** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a single payment will issue to a person (details supplied). [42616/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under the 2015 Basic Payment Scheme was received from the person named on 1 May, 2015. Processing of this application has recently been finalised and payment will issue shortly to the nominated bank account of the person named.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Payments

274. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a disadvantaged areas payment 2015 will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42619/15]

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

under the 2015 Basic Payment/Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme was received from the person named on 28 May 2015. Payment under the Areas of Natural Constraints Scheme has not issued to the person named as, at this stage, the holding concerned has not satisfied the Scheme's minimum stocking density requirements.

Eligible applicants are required to have met a minimum stocking density of 0.15 livestock units for a retention period of seven consecutive months and to maintain an annual average of 0.15 livestock units calculated over the twelve months of the scheme year. As the person named is an new entrant to farming in 2015, the annual average requirement will be calculated from the commencement date of their herd number. Once the holding concerned is confirmed as having met the relevant requirements, the case will be further processed with a view to payment issuing to the person named at the earliest possible date thereafter, provided all other Scheme requirements have been satisfied.

Fisheries Protection

275. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will put an observer on any vessel fishing in the exclusive economic zone, under the Law of the Sea to which Ireland is a party; when he last put an observer on a super-trawler, and, if not, to set out the reason. [42632/15]

296. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if an observer scheme is operational on Irish pelagic vessels and if, at the forthcoming fisheries negotiation, he will call on the European Union to make resources available to flag ships of member states to ensure they have observers on board when they enter Ireland's fishery zone to monitor the catch and to protect Ireland's marine resources; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42941/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 275 and 296 together.

The Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) is the fisheries policy of the EU. It is a set of rules for managing EU fishing fleets and for conserving stocks. The CFP operates within the international framework of the Law of the Sea.

Control of the vessel within Ireland's Exclusive Fisheries Zone is a matter for the Irish control authorities who monitor fishing activity of all vessels operating the area. The Control authorities have on-going information in relation to the vessels operating in the Irish Exclusive Fisheries zone including their activities and characteristics. Under the Sea Fisheries and Maritime Jurisdiction Act, 2006, all operational issues of this nature concerning sea fisheries control are, as a matter of law, exclusively for the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority (SFPA) and the Naval Service. As Minister, I am precluded from getting involved in operational matters including in relation to law enforcement.

In relation to the overall framework for fisheries control in the EU, in October 2009 a new regulation dealing with fisheries controls was adopted. Council Regulation 1224/2009 establishes a Community control system for ensuring compliance with the rules of the common fisheries policy. Control and inspection is now focused where it is most effective through an approach based on systematic risk analysis. Inspection procedures are standardised and harmonised for all stages in the market chain, including transport and marketing. The Control Regulations were introduced so that there is a common EU level playing field and to provide for an effective range of controls across EU waters.

One of the key elements of the reformed Common Fisheries Policy is the introduction of a phased ban on the discarding of unwanted fish catches. The first part of the landing obligation, the ban on discarding pelagic stocks such as herring and mackerel, came into effect on 1 January 2015. The EU Commission adopted a Delegated Regulation (EU) No 1393/2014 on 20 October 2014 which implements a discard plan for certain pelagic fisheries in north-western waters in line with the recommendation of the North West Waters Member States Group.

A Control Experts Group from the North West Waters Regional Group of Member States has been set up and has produced a draft set of recommendations on additional control measures for the pelagic sector in respect of the landing obligation in pelagic fisheries. The views of the Pelagic Advisory Council in accordance with article 18 of the CFP basic regulation (EU No 1380/2013) on the recommendations have been received and will be fully considered.

The draft recommendations are being considered by the NWW Member States Group. The measures recommended by the Control experts cover a range of actions including the use of cameras or other remote sensing equipment on all large pelagic vessels, both freezer vessels and our own RSW (Refrigerated Seawater Tank vessels) to support the landing obligation. It also recommends control observers “for individual trips to address dynamically - assessed risks of a more transient nature.” It is important to note that the flag Member State would be responsible for placing control observers on its vessels and funding is a matter for each Member State. I consider that any strengthened control measures must provide tools to both the flag Member State and the coastal Member State to better monitor and control fishing activities. We will continue to work closely with the North Western Waters Member States to identify the control actions that are most useful so that the landing obligation is fully respected.

Harbours and Piers Maintenance

276. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will report on the urgent need for dredging Howth Harbour in County Dublin; when dredging will commence; the estimated cost of the regular dredging and upkeep of the harbour; if dredging of the harbour is included in the 2016 capital Estimates or in the 2016 to 2018 capital envelope; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42661/15]

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.

While first and foremost a working fishery harbour, Howth, similar to the other five Fishery Harbour Centres, has its own unique features and is home to a broad range of diverse economic and social activities.

I am happy to advise the Deputy that, notwithstanding the prevailing economic environment in which we operate, 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. As part of that programme, I sanctioned €150,000 for site investigation works at Howth Fishery Harbour Centre, the report on this site investigation will include vital information on the nature of the material to be dredged in any future dredging project. It is anticipated that the Report on the Site Investigation will be issued in early 2016. This information is necessary for the preparation of a Dumping at Sea licence application which

will be required before any dredging project can commence.

The information from the report is also necessary before an informed estimate of the cost of a dredging project in Howth can be made. As with all other developments in the six Fishery Harbour Centres, a dredging project at Howth Fishery Harbour Centre will be considered under future Capital Programmes on the basis of available exchequer funding and competing priorities.

I am considering the suite of projects for inclusion in the 2016 programme, in addition to commitments on possible longer term projects and I will make an announcement on these issues in due course.

Ash Dieback Threat

277. **Deputy Emmet Stagg** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to explain the reason for the delay in responding to the concerns of a person (details supplied); and if he will issue a reply. [42662/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): In response to representations in July, the Minister of State with responsibility for Food, Forestry Horticulture and Food Safety replied in August 2015 to the person referred to in your question, setting out the actions already taken and that were proposed for the remainder of 2015 in combatting the ash dieback disease. This included a large scale systematic and wider targeted survey of forests, nurseries, hedgerows, agricultural environmental schemes and roadside plantings across the whole of the country which commenced at the beginning of July. The field element, laboratory testing, and analysis have recently been finalised and the outcomes of the survey and other work are currently being assessed.

In addition, a review of policy in relation to the disease is being carried out by my Department in co-operation with colleagues in DARD in Northern Ireland following the outcome of the summer surveys.

Preliminary results show that due to the high number of findings of ash dieback, especially in native hedgerows, Ireland would not be in a position to apply to the EU for Protected Zone status for the disease. My officials met a delegation from the IFA including the person referred to in your question on 18 November. At that meeting the Department provided a detailed update on the situation of the disease in the country. The possibility of removing the embargo on ash sales under a plant passport system for nurseries, for plants which have been free of the disease for at least two years, is being considered.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments

278. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to explain the reason for the delay in issuing payment under the agri-environment options scheme to a person (details supplied) in County Mayo; if it will be expedited due to the financial hardship this is causing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42668/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department is currently examining approximately 400 cases that submitted invoices from one particular company to verify and support claims under the non-productive capital investment action of AEOS. It is known that in some cases the invoices submitted were for amounts different to those actually paid by the participants.

Funding provided under the scheme comes partly from the EU and partly from the National Exchequer. There is a requirement and obligation to ensure that the expenditure claimed by scheme participants reflects the reality of what took place. For that reason my Department wrote to participants requesting alternative proof that the amounts claimed were in fact the amounts paid.

The person named above was written to on 30 September 2014 regarding the non-productive capital investment claim that they had submitted. This letter requested the submission of alternative verifiable proof to support one of the invoices that was included in the claim for expenditure incurred. A reply to this letter was received on 22 October 2014. No alternative evidence was included in the reply.

A further letter issued on 18 June 2015 requesting, once again, the submission of alternative verifiable proof. No reply was received and the person concerned was contacted by an official of my Department. As requested by the person named, my Department reissued the letter of 18 June 2015 on 16 September. To-date no reply has been received to this letter.

Basic Payment Scheme Payments

279. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment will issue under the 2015 basic payment scheme to a person (details supplied) in County Galway; the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42704/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department was required to issue a letter to the person named and to the personal legal representative of the deceased former holder of the herd number shown advising that the Department had processed an application for the transfer of Single Payment Entitlements to the person named by way of inheritance under the Single Payment Scheme. The purpose of my Department's letter to the person named was to establish if these inherited entitlements were transferred with or without land. This information was required in order to assist in the introduction of the new Basic Payment Scheme in 2015.

My Department has now processed the information provided by the person named and payment under the Basic Payment Scheme will issue shortly.

Harbours and Piers Maintenance

280. **Deputy John Perry** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide a clear direction to the local authority with regards to the replacement or maintenance of an existing winch which was damaged by the storms in 2010 at Aughris Pier in west Sligo, in view of health and safety; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42705/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Aughris Pier is owned by Sligo County Council and responsibility for the maintenance and development of the pier rests with that local authority in the first instance and its parent Department, the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government.

My Department, however, provides funding for the development and repair of local authority owned piers, harbours and slipways under the annual Fishery Harbour and Coastal Infrastructure Development Programme subject to available Exchequer funding and overall

national priorities.

My Department did receive an application for works at Aughris Pier from Sligo County Council under the 2015 Fishery Harbour and Coastal Infrastructure Development Programme. The works include repair to old concrete pier, underpinning, wall repairs and grouting works and winch house repairs.

I am happy to confirm to the Deputy that funding of €53,250 has been approved for Aughris Pier under this Programme for these purposes.

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

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Payments

281. **Deputy Noel Coonan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 129 of 13 October 2015, when payment under the disadvantaged areas scheme will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary; the reason for delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42782/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under Areas of Natural Constraints Schemes was received from the person named on 17 May, 2015. Processing of this application has recently been completed, and payment is due to issue directly to the nominated bank account of the person named at the earliest possible date.

A previous question (PQ Number 35584) was answered in October in relation to herd number V1270507 as provided in that question.

Departmental Correspondence

282. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a reply promised in a reply to a parliamentary question of 6 October 2015 (details supplied) will issue, given his response that the examination of the issue would be completed shortly; the reason for the delay in bringing this matter to a conclusion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42801/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): This matter has now been concluded and a letter issued recently to the person named.

TAMS Eligibility

283. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the financial assistance available to protect farm buildings prone to flooding, particularly within the Shannon Callows; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42805/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): There are no plans under the current TAMS II investment Schemes to introduce grant aid for flood defences for farm buildings.

Basic Payment Scheme

284. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when an application for the transfer of entitlements will be finalised for a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42831/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The application received from the person named to transfer entitlements has been fully processed and payment under the Basic Payment Scheme will issue shortly.

Equine Industry

285. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine why the rigorous inspections of the Irish draught horse breed have been suspended, given the importance of the breed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42834/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Horse Sport Ireland (HSI) maintains the Irish Horse Register which incorporates the Irish Sport Horse and the Irish Draught Horse Studbooks. HSI has received an approval from my Department for this purpose.

Breeding policy in relation to Irish Draught and Irish Sport Horse breeds is devised by a Sub Board of the HSI dealing specifically with breeding and related matter. It currently consists of 15 members with ten members elected by breeders through the Irish Horse Board Breeders Co-operative (an organisation that pre-existed HSI and which became affiliated to HSI on establishment), 2 members nominated by the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine and one representative each from the Northern Ireland Horse Board, the Connemara Pony Breeders Society and the Irish Pony Society.

The Breeding Sub Board has decided to conduct a fundamental review of the Stallion and Mare inspection regimes for the Irish Sport Horse and Irish Draught Horse Studbooks. Pending this review, the sub board decided to suspend the normal spring 2016 stallion inspections.

HSI have informed me that in the interim new applicants for stallion inspection for Irish Draught and Irish Sport Horse breeds will be provided with an opportunity to have their stallions undergo the Studbook veterinary examination and be classified accordingly. Also Irish Sport Horse Stallions who met the requirements for Stage 1 of the Irish Sport Horse inspections in previous years will be facilitated with a Stage 2 inspection.

Horse Sport Ireland will shortly be advertising for submissions in relation to the review, with a closing date of January 11, 2016.

Basic Payment Scheme Eligibility

286. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine why category B for force majeure did not apply to the allocation of entitlements for an application under the 2015 basic payment scheme (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42836/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named, who is now deceased, did not declare land on his Single Payment Scheme Application

in the years 2009 to 2011. Under EU Regulations each entitlement must be ‘used’ once in every two year period otherwise they are lost permanently to the National Reserve. For clarity, ‘used’ in this context means the declaration of a hectare of eligible land for each entitlement held. As the person named did not declare any land from 2009 to 2011, his entitlements became ‘unused’ and were reverted to the National Reserve in 2012. The person named received a letter on the 12 January 2012 informing him of this decision and of his right to appeal. No appeal was received in respect of this case.

An application was received on 29 May 2015 from a sister of the deceased who applied under the Force Majeure measure of the 2015 Basic Payment Scheme. This case was examined and was deemed ineligible as the scope of force majeure does not extend to the period 2009 to 2011. The applicant was notified of this decision on 19 October, 2015 and was given the right to appeal. No appeal has been received to date.

Question No. 287 answered with Question No. 242.

Animal Welfare Expenditure

288. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 183 of 19 May 2015 on an issue (details supplied) where he confirmed that these organisations stated that they had fully examined the matters that had been raised, but where there is no reference to the matters being investigated, if he will confirm if these matters were fully investigated by the organisations concerned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42839/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Horse Racing Ireland (HRI) is a commercial state body responsible for the overall administration, promotion and development of the horse racing industry. The Racing Regulatory Body (Irish Turf Club) is a private body charged under the current legislation with responsibility for the integrity and the reputation of Irish racing in Ireland and Internationally.

Horse Racing Ireland and the Turf Club have confirmed to my Department that they have fully investigated all matters under their remit in respect of the issues raised by the person to whom the Deputy refers.

As this matter is the subject of court proceedings it would not be prudent for me to comment any further.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments

289. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when persons (details supplied) in County Cork will receive the next payment under the agri-environment options scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42840/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The persons named commenced their AEOS 2 contract on 1 September 2011 and has been paid in full for the 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014 scheme years.

Under the EU Regulations governing the Scheme and other area-based payment schemes, a comprehensive administrative check, including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System, must be completed before any payment can issue.

It is expected that AEOS payments for the 2015 scheme year will commence shortly for those that have successfully come through the administrative checks and where there are no outstanding issues for those who had on-the-spot inspections in 2015.

Beef Industry

290. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to reconvene the beef forum, given recent developments in the beef market and given that some factories are reverting to unfair practices on issues such as weight penalties, which caused serious difficulties in the beef supply chain in 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42843/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The next meeting of the Beef Roundtable has provisionally been arranged to take place on 16 December next.

I established the Roundtable last year for the purpose of bringing all sectoral stakeholders together and facilitating open discussion between industry, farming organisations and others on the strategic path forward for the beef sector. The Forum has met on six occasions and stakeholders have agreed to a broad range of outcomes which address issues of concern for the sector in areas such as weight and age specifications, the Quality Payment system, live exports and producer organisations. At the November Roundtable last year, agreement was reached between MII and farm bodies on a range of outcomes covering a range of aspects in the beef sector. I expect all of the participants at the Beef Roundtable to adhere to the agreements reached.

Questions of price and market specifications are matters to be determined solely between the purchasers and the sellers of cattle. Prices paid for cattle are determined by supply and demand market dynamics and by a range of other factors such as disposable income, consumer preferences and competition from other meats and sources of protein. As with any Minister for Agriculture in the EU, I can have no role in influencing commodity prices in Ireland. I do note however that 2015 has been a relatively positive year for beef prices in Ireland with the yearly average to date up 8% on last year.

Of course, the best interests of this very important industry will ultimately be served by ensuring a continuing supply of high quality cattle to the processing sector, and, subject to market context, this objective can be best achieved by providing a reasonable level of remuneration to suppliers for their efforts. I would also encourage processors to ensure that their systems for determining price are as open and transparent as possible to the farmer and that any adjustments or changes regarding specification criteria are clearly communicated and have regard to the realities of the production cycle.

Basic Payment Scheme Payments

291. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine why penalties were applied on payments that were issued to a person (details supplied) in County Galway under the 2015 basic payment scheme and the areas of natural constraint scheme; if the person was given prior notice of these penalties; if an option to appeal was afforded; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42856/15]

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

under the Basic Payment Scheme / Area of Natural Constraint Scheme was received in my Department from the person named on 29 May 2015.

Payment under Areas of Natural Constraints scheme issued directly to the nominated bank account of the person named on 1 October 2015. Advance payment under the Basic Payment Scheme issued on 19 October. Both payments were subject to a 45% cross compliance penalty as the Department's records indicated that in 2014, the amount of nitrogen from livestock manure applied to land on the holding of the person named, (including that deposited by animals), was 252 kg per hectare. This exceeded the limit of 170 kg per hectare set down in the Nitrates Regulations.

My Department provided a written Nitrogen and Phosphorus statement to the person named on 28 May 2015, explaining how this figure was arrived at. A 2014 sheep quarterly breakdown form was enclosed with this letter, which gave the person named the opportunity to submit a more accurate sheep nitrogen figure, in the event the figure provided was incorrect.

As the sheep quarterly breakdown form was not returned, the person named was notified of the nitrates breach on 10 August 2015, and of his right of appeal to the Agriculture Appeals Office before 10 November 2015. I understand that the person named did not appeal this decision to the Agriculture Appeals Office.

Basic Payment Scheme Payments

292. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the agriculture reserve fund taken out of farmers' direct payments; the amount of funds to be reimbursed to farmers; when the payments will be made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42857/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): In the context of the annual budgetary procedure of the European Union, the financial discipline mechanism which is implemented by the Member States involves a monetary deduction from some direct payments thereby creating a financial Crisis Reserve for the European Union. The crisis reserve is intended to provide additional support for the agricultural sector in the case of major crises affecting agricultural production or distribution. Under the EU Regulations, the amount set for the 2015 financial year is 1.393041% applicable to all payments in excess of €2,000. This deduction has been applied to balancing payments under the Basis Payment Scheme (BPS) which commenced issuing today.

In the event that the Crisis Reserve is not activated in the financial year, or it is not fully utilised, the balance not used is refunded to farmers in the subsequent financial year. The amount of the 2014 Financial Discipline deduction allocated to each Member State for reimbursement to farmers was not known prior to the arrangements for the payment of the BPS balancing payments. This figure has just recently been set at €12.9 million.

My Department is putting procedures in place to issue the Financial Discipline reimbursement to farmers in early 2016.

Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme

293. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 386 of 6 October 2015, if he will include the refurbishment

and retrofitting of existing farm buildings under farm safety and animal welfare categories where there is a need to replace the sheeting on a roof or to retrofit galvanised gates, internal barriers and divisions as well as water facilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42889/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): In general the retrofitting and refurbishment of existing farm buildings is not being grant aided under the Animal Welfare, Safety and Nutrient Storage Scheme of TAMS II. The items mentioned by the Deputy, namely sheeting on roofs, retrofitting galvanised gates and internal barriers and divisions or water facilities are not included.

However, the retrofitting of safety cages underneath perspex sheeting and the installation of calving gates in existing houses are being grant aided on safety grounds.

Basic Payment Scheme Payments

294. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of farmers awaiting first instalments under the basic payment scheme and the areas of natural constraint scheme; the corresponding value of payments outstanding; if he will ensure that a partial payment is made to all farmers while outstanding issues are being resolved; and the corresponding number awaiting the final instalment. [42890/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): In relation to the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) and Greening Payment, I am pleased to confirm that advance payments began issuing in Ireland on 16 October, 2015. This is the earliest that payments can commence under the governing EU Regulations. In addition, I can confirm that the level of the advance payment was set at 70% for 2015 rather than the normal 50%. The increase in the advance payment for 2015 is, in particular, due to the difficulties encountered in the dairying and pigmeat sectors.

Ireland is among the earliest to pay the BPS in the European Union and to date, of the approximately 121,500 eligible applicants, 115,930 farmers have received payments totalling €1.006 billion.

In relation to the Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) Scheme, I can confirm that payments commenced, on schedule, on 23 September 2015. To date, of approximately 102,350 applicants with eligible designated lands, a total of 83,864 farmers have received payments totalling €178.6 million. There are no advance payments or instalments under this scheme. It should be noted that many farmers cannot be paid until early 2016 when they comply with the stocking requirements of the scheme.

As outstanding cases under the BPS, Greening and ANC are processed and are cleared of any outstanding error, they will be sent for payment. My Department is prioritising the processing of all such outstanding cases with regular payment runs continuing over the coming weeks.

Single Payment Scheme Payments

295. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment under the single payment scheme will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42927/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named submitted a 2015 Private Contract Clause application to my Department. This application has been fully processed and payment will issue shortly.

Question No. 296 answered with Question No. 275.

Basic Payment Scheme Payments

297. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason for the delay in issuing payment under the basic payment scheme to a person (details supplied) in County Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42943/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under the Basic Payment Scheme was received from the person named on 29 May 2015. Processing of this application is currently in progress. On completion of this process, the 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.

Animal Welfare

298. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if whales and dolphins in Ireland's 200 nautical-mile exclusive economic zone are adequately protected under the European Union habitats directive and national legislation, given the four super trawlers currently fishing in this area; and if observers from his Department or other State agencies are observing the impact of the super trawlers on whales and dolphins and their habitat; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42958/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): In terms of Natura sites under the Birds and Habitat Directives, sites are designated by Ireland inside our 6 miles coastal zone and the freezer fleets do not have access to this zone. In addition, within the 6 to 12 miles zone access is restricted to the south coast. Ireland has designated Natura sites in off shore waters to protect vulnerable deep-sea habitats. This Department is not responsible for the designation of Natura sites.

Under the Common Fisheries Policy, Council Regulation (EC) No 812/2004 of 26/4/2004 sets down measures concerning incidental catches of cetaceans in fisheries. The Regulation requires that, inter alia, Member States design and implement monitoring schemes for incidental catches of cetaceans using observers on board the vessels flying their flag and with an overall length of 15m or more, for defined fisheries. The fisheries subject to this requirement includes pelagic fisheries.

The Regulation does not require that every vessel carries an observer and the Regulation puts the obligation on the Flag Member State to design and implement the scheme rather than the vessel or the coastal state in whose waters the fishing takes place. It is a matter of competence for the Flag Member State of the vessel concerned to ensure that observers are onboard where required under their national scheme. Ireland has submitted its Annual report for 2014 to the EU Commission in respect of the Irish fishing fleet.

Fishing Industry

299. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if any super trawlers have been boarded for inspection by the Sea-Fisheries Protection Authority or by the Irish Naval Service this week; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42959/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Control of the vessel within Ireland's Exclusive Fisheries Zone is a matter for the Irish control authorities who monitor fishing activity of all vessels operating the area. The Control authorities have on-going information in relation to the vessels operating in the Irish Exclusive Fisheries zone including their activities and characteristics. Under the Sea Fisheries and Maritime Jurisdiction Act, 2006, all operational issues of this nature concerning sea fisheries control are, as a matter of law, exclusively for the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority (SFPA) and the Naval Service. As Minister, I am precluded from getting involved in operational matters including in relation to law enforcement.

The SFPA has advised me that it actively monitors the activity of the large pelagic freezer trawlers within Irish Exclusive Fisheries Zone and that these vessels have now left the area.

The SFPA has monitored the movements of these vessels when they were in the EFZ through VMS and declared catches through ERS. In general terms it advised that its monitoring indicated particular compliance risks around vessels with entitlements for individual species of fish. This risk assessment had informed the SFPA's identification of some of those vessels as a high priority for at-sea inspection, and aircraft surveillance.

The SFPA is reliant on the seagoing fishery patrol activity of the Naval Service to verify compliance of vessels not landing into Ireland. Boarding vessels of this size at sea creates specific challenges and during the period when the vessels were in the EFZ, the operational decision of the naval service has been that weather has been too severe.

In relation to the overall framework for fisheries control in the EU, in October 2009 a new regulation dealing with fisheries controls was adopted. Council Regulation 1224/2009 establishes a Community control system for ensuring compliance with the rules of the common fisheries policy. Control and inspection is now focused where it is most effective through an approach based on systematic risk analysis. Inspection procedures are standardised and harmonised for all stages in the market chain, including transport and marketing. The Control Regulations were introduced so that there is a common EU level playing field and to provide for an effective range of controls across EU waters.

Basic Payment Scheme Payments

300. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a farm payment to a person (details supplied) in County Mayo; if it will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43020/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS)/Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) Scheme was received from the person named on 15 April 2015. Payment under the ANC Scheme has issued directly to the nominated bank account of the person named. As regards the BPS, an advance payment under the scheme has issued directly to the nominated bank account of the person named and arrangements are in place to issue the balancing payment shortly.

Departmental Legal Cases Data

301. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of legal cases currently ongoing against his Department and State agencies under his aegis; the number of cases that took place during the years 2011 to 2014, inclusive; the cost of those that were contested and what damages were involved; the costs and damages of those that were settled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43259/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The number of legal cases currently ongoing against my Department is 22.

In relation to the number of legal cases involving the State Bodies under the aegis of my Department, this is an operational matter for the State Bodies themselves.

The remaining details requested by the Deputy are outlined in the table.

| Year | Number of cases | Contested Cases | | Settled Cases | |
|------|-----------------|---|------------|--|-------------|
| | | Awards made on foot of court judgment (Damages) | Legal Cost | Awards made where the case was settled prior to court judgment (Damages) | Legal Costs |
| 2011 | 15 | €5,000 | €302,772 | €673,462 | €395,176 |
| 2012 | 11 | Nil | €136,632 | €158,445 | €209,023 |
| 2013 | 14 | Nil | €4,000 | €496,611 | €133,556 |
| 2014 | 11 | Nil | €38,811 | €436,032 | €152,561 |

Departmental Staff Data

302. **Deputy Regina Doherty** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of employees under his remit who are classified under a contract of indefinite duration; the number of these who are receiving incremental salary payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43273/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): There are currently 34 staff members serving in my Department on contracts of indefinite duration, 23 temporary clerical officers (FTE 21.5) and 11 whole-time temporary veterinary inspectors (WTVI). The temporary clerical officers are in receipt of incremental salary payments in line with their terms and conditions of employment and the Haddington Road Agreement. WTVIs are contracted on a fee per test basis and therefore the issue of increments does not arise.

Written Answers Nos. 303-324

Defence Forces Personnel

303. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Defence the reason for the delay in obtaining security clearance for applicants to the 27th infantry battalion reserve (details supplied); if the delay is caused by Garda Síochána or military processes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42736/15]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): A large number of applicants have been medically examined, fitness tested and interviewed over 12 months ago. Applicants to the Reserve Defence Force are vetted by the Garda Central Vetting Unit as part of the recruitment process. Processing times for vetting of applications in this regard on average take up to 10 to 12 weeks. However, in some individual cases, additional enquiries may be necessary and this may result in processing times in excess of the average.

I am informed by the military authorities that a total of 15 applicants for the 27th Infantry Battalion reserve are currently waiting on security clearance. It would not be appropriate to comment further on individual applications.

Legal Costs

304. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Defence the number of legal cases currently ongoing against his Department including State agencies under his aegis; the number of cases that took place during the years 2011 to 2014, inclusive; the cost of those that were contested and what damages were involved; the costs and damages of those that were settled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43263/15]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Chief State Solicitor's Office, Attorney General's Office and the State Claims Agency deal with all legal matters on behalf of my Department. The main requirement for legal services in my Department is in the context of litigation, usually in the form of administrative law and personal injury proceedings. The Chief State Solicitor's Office and the State Claims Agency manage and provide legal representation in relation to all cases taken against the Minister for Defence.

The Chief State Solicitor's Office is responsible for the costs of the State's legal teams in cases that it manages on behalf of the Department. External legal costs incurred by the State Claims Agency arising from the defence of any claims managed by the Agency for the Department are refunded to the Agency by my Department. In addition, my Department may pay plaintiffs' legal costs as part of awards and settlements.

As at 30 November, 2015, there are 375 claims on-hand in this Department.

The table lists the information sought by the Deputy:

- The number of cases received and finalised during 2011 to 2014, inclusive;
- The total legal costs incurred during 2011 to 2014, inclusive;
- The total awards/settlements paid during 2011 to 2014, inclusive.

| Year | Cases Received | Cases Finalised | Legal costs | Awards/ Settlements |
|------|----------------|-----------------|-------------|------------------------|
| 2011 | 149 | 512* | €2,161,956 | €2,524,875 |
| 2012 | 127 | 228* | €1,199,689 | €1,588,500 |
| 2013 | 130 | 159 | €1,441,165 | €2,260,544 |
| 2014 | 167 | 137 | €1,363,182 | €2,651,899 |

The Deputy might note that expenditure is subject to a number of unpredictable variables including the timing of court hearings, the progression of cases and numbers, value and timing of awards and settlements. In cases where the State is considered liable or which involve an

apportionment of liability as between the State and the claimant, the Chief State Solicitor's Office and the State Claims Agency's approach is to settle such cases expeditiously in so far as it is possible to do so on reasonable terms. In cases where liability is fully disputed by the State, all necessary resources are applied to defending such claims robustly.

*During 2011/2012, the Department engaged with the Chief State Solicitor's Office and the State Claims Agency in a review of old cases. This identified many cases that had been finalised i.e. struck out for lack of prosecution, discontinued or settled.

Departmental Staff Data

305. **Deputy Regina Doherty** asked the Minister for Defence the number of employees under his remit who are classified under a contract of indefinite duration; the number of these who are receiving incremental salary payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43277/15]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Defence Organisation includes civil servants, military personnel, and civilian employees attached to military installations.

There are no employees in my Department who are classified under a Contract of Indefinite Duration.

International Agreements

306. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding the new visa deal between the European Union and Turkey; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37148/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The European Commission launched a visa liberalisation dialogue with Turkey on 16 December 2013, in parallel with the signature of an agreement between the European Union (EU) and Turkey on readmission of irregular migrants. A road-map of reforms to be undertaken by Turkey prior to the completion of visa liberalisation was agreed between the EU and Turkey as part of the process. I understand that the re-admission agreement is expected to be implemented in June 2016, and October 2016 has been set as the expected time-frame for completion of the lifting of the visa requirement.

These proposals relate to visa liberalisation between the EU member states operating visa free travel within the Schengen area. Ireland has not applied to participate in those aspects of the Schengen Aquis that provide for the abolition of internal border checks. This decision has been taken to maintain the Common Travel Area with the United Kingdom which remains a priority for Ireland.

International Terrorism

307. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her views on the need for better security, co-operation and sharing of intelligence across the European Union; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41151/15]

308. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if there is a split

at European Union Council level regarding how to deal with the threat of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41153/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 307 and 308 together.

Taking measures to combat terrorism is a shared priority for the Member States of the European Union and discussion on these issues have been at the top of the agenda at my regular meetings with my EU counterparts. The Justice and Home Affairs Council held an emergency meeting in the week following the appalling attacks in Paris on 13 November and Ministers were at one in seeking an appropriate and unified response to those attacks, including all reasonable measures to counteract the terrorism threat. In this regard, the Council Conclusions of 20 November 2015, agreed by all the Member States, underline the importance of accelerating the implementation of all areas covered by the statement on counter-terrorism issued by the Members of the European Council on 12 February 2015 and, in particular, of the following measures: the EU Passenger Name Record (PNR) directive, firearms, controls of external borders, information-sharing, terrorist financing and the criminal justice response to terrorism and violent extremism.

In referring to the critical importance of co-operation between the police and intelligence services in combating terrorism, I expressed my view that enhanced access for EU police and security services to data and intelligence-sharing has a critical role in the fight against terrorism. An Garda Síochána co-operates closely with its EU counterpart services and it makes full use of the range of information-sharing means available to them, including through Interpol, Europol and bi-lateral channels.

That said, opportunities that we consider could further enhance that co-operation must be pursued. In this regard, I am determined that An Garda Síochána will have access to the Schengen Information System for terrorism and criminal purposes and I am arranging that the necessary steps in this regard will now be taken as quickly as possible.

In relation to the EU PNR Directive, I confirmed at the Council that Ireland fully supports the aim of securing early agreement with the European Parliament given the importance of ensuring that for the purposes of combating terrorism and serious crime law, enforcement services can have access to PNR data in the context of a robust framework of safeguards for privacy and data protection.

Schengen Agreement

309. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the Schengen agreement; if members of the European Union Council want it dismantled; if it is under threat, given the atrocities in Paris in France; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41155/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Schengen Agreement is an agreement among certain European Member States. The Agreement allows for the abolition of systematic border controls between participating countries. It also includes provisions on common policy on the temporary entry of people (including the Schengen visa), the harmonisation of external border controls and cross-border police and judicial co-operation.

Ireland (and the United Kingdom) only takes part in the police and criminal judicial measures of the Agreement and does not participate in the common border control and visa provisions. This decision was taken in order to maintain the Common Travel Area with the United Kingdom

which remains a priority for Ireland.

I am not aware of any proposal coming before Council that the Schengen Travel Area be dismantled

International Relations

310. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the actions she is taking to ensure that extreme right-wing views on immigrants from Syria and other countries being branded as terrorists are tackled; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41152/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy is aware, the recent terrorist attacks in Paris and elsewhere have given rise to considerable and understandable concerns both in Ireland and across Europe. It is fortunate that in Ireland there appears to be little tolerance for the open expression of extremist views directed against individuals and minority groups. It is recognised that certain media, and in particular, social media, do provide a platform for the expression of views which can sometimes be characterised as intemperate or immoderate at best and at times, verging on the openly racist. However, this is a phenomenon that is certainly not limited to the area of concern raised by the Deputy.

It is widely recognised that it is very difficult to combat or address such viewpoints without engaging civil society in a broader discourse centred around the values of pluralism, civility and tolerance; qualities which in my view find abundant expression in our civil and political discourse. Unfortunately, there are those in every society who use tragedies such as the Paris attacks to denigrate those who are perceived as “different” or in some way perceived as “separate”. Fortunately, the overwhelming majority of people in our society actively oppose the expression of such extremist viewpoints. In addition, it is a feature of Irish political life that no political party espouses extreme right-wing views on immigrants which I take to indicate that there is little support amongst the public for such extreme opinions.

As part of the recent Government decision establishing the Irish Refugee Protection Programme, the Government asked for a Communications Strategy and Implementation Plan to be developed, bearing in mind the issues which might arise during the course of the Programme’s implementation. This matter will be considered at the next meeting of the Taskforce which the Government established to oversee the Programme. Without seeking to pre-empt what the Communications Strategy and associated Plan might propose, I anticipate that it will address the area of concern raised by the Deputy by ensuring the provision and widespread communication of accurate information thereby decreasing the opportunity for misinformation being used to peddle alarmist and extremist viewpoints.

Garda Operations

311. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if any embassies made requests to An Garda Síochána for additional security over recent times; and if those requests were adhered to. [42319/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Deputy will understand that it is not the practice for sound reasons of security to comment on the security or security arrangements of individual diplomatic missions in the State. I can inform the Deputy, however, that An Garda Síochána liaises on an ongoing basis with diplomatic missions.

Garda Compensation

312. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda Síochána compensation claims that are under assessment within her Department, from gardaí either previously or currently stationed or residing in County Kilkenny; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42321/15]

313. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda Síochána compensation claims that are under assessment within her Department from gardaí either previously or currently stationed or residing in County Carlow; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42322/15]

314. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda Síochána compensation claims that are currently under assessment within her Department from gardaí either previously or presently stationed or residing in the province of Leinster, by county; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42323/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 312 to 314, inclusive, together.

The Garda Compensation Acts 1941 and 1945 provide for compensation for malicious injury or death inflicted upon members of An Garda Síochána, while they are on duty or related to their service as such members.

Unfortunately, it is not possible to provide the Deputy with the breakdown of claims as requested above. Records are not maintained in a manner that facilitates a breakdown by the county in which each application was received and such information could only be obtained by the expenditure of a disproportionate amount of staff time and resources.

My Department is currently reviewing the Garda compensation caseload with the intention to reduce the processing time involved in assessing cases and to collate and publish statistics relating to the compensation process on the Department's website.

Visa Applications

315. **Deputy Joe Costello** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality why a person (details supplied) in Dublin 1 has been refused access to the third-level graduate scheme despite having a 12-month work experience offer from a company; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42390/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): An enhanced post study pathway for graduates has been available to non-EEA Students since October 2010 under which students graduating with an Irish accredited honours bachelor degree or higher can avail of a 12 month Graduate Scheme permission. This operates as an extension to their student permission and the holder can work full time during that period. Full details are published in the document entitled "Guidelines for Degree Programme Students" published on www.inis.gov.ie. Students who meet the above requirement and who are still within the 7 year overall limit for students in Ireland may avail of the Third Level Graduate Scheme starting on the date upon which they receive their exam results.

In the present case I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the student had already exceeded the 7 year limit and therefore was considered as an exception. The application was received on 3 July 2015 and, as an

exceptional measure, an extension of her student permission was authorised on 25 November 2015. Correspondence has issued to the person in question granting her permission up to 27 November 2016.

Taxi Regulations

316. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her plans regarding illegal taxis (details supplied) operating in towns. [42453/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The regulation of the Small Public Service Vehicles (SPSV) industry, which includes taxis, is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the remit of my colleague, the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that specific initiatives targeting the SPSV industry, including checking PSV licences and other matters relating to the enforcement of road traffic and road transport legislation/regulations in respect of drivers and vehicles, are conducted by An Garda Síochána in conjunction with enforcement officers from the Office of the Commission for Taxi Regulation.

I am further informed by the Garda authorities that as part of ongoing policy enforcement, a series of national taxi operations are scheduled throughout the year in conjunction with other agencies at both local and national level. An Garda Síochána also carries out planned multi-agency checkpoints with other agencies such as the Road Safety Authority, Taxi Regulator, Customs and Excise, Revenue Commissioners and Social Welfare.

Prisoner Rehabilitation Programmes

317. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the extent to which support services exist to rehabilitate, educate and upskill first-time juvenile offenders, with specific reference to the need to ensure they are not influenced by recidivists; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35494/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Statutory provision in relation to young offenders is set out in the Children Act 2001 (as amended). Accordingly, where a young person under the age of 18 comes into conflict with the law, the principles of the Act apply.

A key principle in the Children Act relating to young offenders is that detention should be a last resort. In support of this principle, the legislation facilitates the incremental application of a series of measures, ranging from diversion in the first instance through community based sanctions, to detention.

The first main filter in the youth justice system is the Garda Diversion Programme, involving at different stages and depending on the seriousness of the offence, the informal caution (without supervision) and the formal caution (with supervision), including possible involvement with a Garda Youth Diversion Project (GYDP).

The second main filter is the range of non-custodial sanctions available to the courts including court orders for dismissal; conditional discharge; the payment of fines or costs; compensation and the binding over of parents, and orders imposing a community sanction involving a suite of Probation Service supervised sanctions. In supervising community sanctions, the Probation

Service utilises a number of community based organisations with dedicated resources to work with young offenders.

Finally and as a last resort, detention may be used.

The operation of the above statutory framework is substantially supported by the significant investment by my Department in community based programmes which are directed at diverting young people from further involvement in criminal or anti-social behaviour. These youth justice community programmes proceed on the basis of evidence that diversion programmes in the form of high quality preventative intervention can do more to reduce crime than more costly custodial sanctions.

In 2015, just under €17 million was allocated to Irish Youth Justice Service Community Programmes to administer Garda Youth Diversion Projects (GYDPs), Young Persons Probation Projects (YPPs) and a number of other youth diversion community-based projects. These programmes are managed in partnership with An Garda Síochána in the case of the GYDPs and the Probation Service in the case of YPPs.

From 2015, all GYDPs and four of the YPPs are being co-funded under the European Social Fund Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning 2014-2020. They are being funded as a social inclusion measure to increase the education and employment opportunities available to young people and to divert them from any further involvement with the criminal justice system.

Legislative Process

318. **Deputy Peter Mathews** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the Civil Debt (Procedures) Bill 2015 will come into effect; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42464/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Civil Debt (Procedures) Act 2015 is to be commenced in two phases. The provisions which relate to the abolition of imprisonment of debtors will be commenced once the required amendments can be made to the relevant Rules of Court, which I anticipate will be made early in 2016. The remaining provisions, concerning attachment of earnings and deductions from social welfare payments, will be commenced on completion of the necessary preparations by the Courts Service and the Department of Social Protection. While I am not in a position to give the Deputy a definitive timescale, I am committed to making the necessary Commencement Orders as quickly as possible.

Deportation Orders Re-examination

319. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a decision on a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny regarding a deportation order will be revoked; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42473/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned is the subject of a Deportation Order signed on 8 March 2011.

However, if new information or circumstances have come to light, which has a direct bearing on their case, and which have arisen since the original Deportation Order was made,

there remains the option of a request that I use my discretion, pursuant to Section 3(11) of the Immigration Act, 1999 (as amended) to revoke the Deportation Order. However I wish to make clear that such a request would require substantial grounds to be successful. In the meantime, the Deportation Order remains valid and in place. The enforcement of the Deportation Order remains a matter for the Garda National Immigration Bureau.

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.

Garda Remuneration

320. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of a pay increase for members of An Garda Síochána (details supplied) due in 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42535/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): My colleague the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, yesterday signed the order to commence the provisions of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2015. The Act gives effect to the provisions of the Lansdowne Road Agreement and starts the process of the phased restoration of remuneration to public servants in accordance with the terms of that Agreement.

I have sought clarification in relation to the information requested by the Deputy from the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform and I will respond directly to the Deputy on receipt of a reply.

Pensions and gratuities paid on retirement are based on factors which may vary from person to person, including length of service and their date of commencement of pensionable employment, and in these circumstances it is advised that individuals seek their own advice.

International Terrorism

321. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the consultations she has had with the Department of Defence regarding the potential threats to domestic security that could be posed in the event of an Irish troop contingent being sent to Mali. [42546/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As I have stated to the House previously, Ireland, in common with other democratic states, cannot consider that it is immune from the threat from international terrorism. The current assessment is that while an attack here is possible, it is unlikely and there is no specific information that an attack here is planned. The level of threat from this source is kept under constant review by An Garda Síochána and the Garda Authorities have reference to all relevant information, including international developments, in carrying out their assessments. I discuss security matters on an ongoing basis with Minister Coveney and, as the Deputy will no doubt be aware, there is ongoing and close liaison at a senior level between our two Departments and between An Garda Síochána and the Defence Forces regarding security matters.

Airport Security

322. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the outcome of discussions at the Justice and Home Affairs Council of the European Council on 20 November 2015, with regard to the retention of passenger name records and increased border security; if she has concerns regarding the privacy implications of recent proposals around border security and the retention of passenger data; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42547/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): At the Justice and Home Affairs Council on 20 November 2015, the Council reiterated its view on the urgency and the priority in finalising agreement on the proposal for an EU Passenger Named Records (PNR) Directive before the end of 2015. In particular, the Council emphasised that the Directive should include internal EU flights in its scope, provide for a sufficiently long period during which the PNR data can be retained in non-masked-out form and that the Directive should not be limited only to crimes of a transnational nature.

I am satisfied that the Council's general approach on the PNR proposal, which was established in April 2012 and supported by Ireland, contains a robust set of bespoke safeguards for privacy and data protection in the context of a proportionate framework for providing law enforcement access to PNR data to support the fight against terrorism and serious crime.

Departmental Correspondence

323. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her views on correspondence (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42627/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I can advise the Deputy that my Department has been in correspondence with the person concerned.

The position of my Department has been extensively outlined in this correspondence and the person concerned has been informed that no further action can be taken in this case.

However if the person concerned wishes to submit additional, pertinent information, which they have not previously supplied, then my Department will examine this further.

Independent Review Mechanism

324. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question Number 598 of 3 November 2015 her views on correspondence in relation to same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42633/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Deputy is referring to a Parliamentary Question asked in relation to a person whose complaint has been considered by the Independent Review Mechanism.

I have explained on numerous occasions that the process of the Independent Review was not a Commission of Inquiry or Investigation designed to make findings. The purpose of the review was to triage the complaints to establish whether there was any action which I could take to further resolution of that complaint.

Recommendations by counsel were based on a review of the papers, and did not involve interviews or interaction with complainants or any other form of investigation, although

counsel could where necessary recommend that I seek further information from persons or bodies. The Panel was independent and therefore no restriction was placed on the nature of recommendations which they might make.

The position with regard to the conflict of interest highlighted in the attached correspondence has been explained to the person from whom the Deputy has received this correspondence, to their solicitor and to this House in reply to a number of Parliamentary Questions raising the matter. To reiterate, arrangements were put in place to ensure that if there is any conflict, or potential conflict, the conflicted counsel not only will not be involved in the particular complaint, but also will not be aware of which counsel was reviewing it.

As regards the reference in the correspondence to the complaint against the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, my position in this regard is as stated in the Parliamentary Question to which the Deputy refers, the DPP is independent and I, as Minister, have no legal role in relation to its function.

The Panel has provided recommendations to me in all 320 cases submitted to them and has therefore largely concluded its work. The issuing of notification letters to complainants commenced on 29 June. To date, 298 complainants have been notified of the outcome of the review of their cases. Letters will continue to issue to all complainants, including the case referred to by the Deputy, until the process is completed.

Residency Permits

325. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of a request for permission to remain by a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; if she has received documentation concerning this request, which was sent on 17 September 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42652/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the correspondence in question is receiving attention.

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.

Garda Equipment

326. **Deputy Seán Kenny** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will increase the number of mountain bicycles allocated to the Garda Síochána R district; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42653/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Decisions in relation to the provision and allocation of policing resources, including Garda transport, are an operational matter for the Garda Commissioner in the light of her identified operational demands and the availability of resources.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that there are currently 12 official issue mountain

bikes allocated to the DMR North Division. The breakdown of which is as follows:

| Garda Station | No of Mountain Bikes |
|------------------------|----------------------|
| Coolock Garda Station | 6 |
| Swords Garda Station | 4 |
| Malahide Garda Station | 2 |

An additional 100 mountain bikes have been purchased by An Garda Síochána recently and will be allocated across the country as determined by the Garda Commissioner having regard to operational requirements.

Drugs Crime

327. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she is aware of a new strain of the drug cannabis that makes persons more violent; the current strategies used to combat drug-related crimes and violence; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42723/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I understand the Deputy's question to relate in part to the ongoing emergence of new synthetic cannabinoid type substances as witnessed here and abroad.

Undoubtedly the dynamic world market in new synthetic cannabinoid type substances, the effects of the use of which are still often unknown, presents key challenges for the international and national control mechanisms.

In this regard, it is the Department of Health which examines on an ongoing basis the need to bring emerging substances under the drug control framework provided by way of the Misuse of Drugs legislation.

As my colleague Minister of State Aodhán Ó Ríordáin T.D. has indicated work is under way in the Department of Health on the preparation of a Bill the purpose of which is to strengthen the Misuse of Drugs Act so as to clarify the provisions under which Ministerial orders and regulations are made, and which will facilitate the further controlling of new psychoactive substances when deemed necessary.

More generally, the Deputy will be aware that the Government's overall response to the problem of drug misuse is set out in the National Drugs Strategy 2009-2016 which adopts a comprehensive and pillar based approach to the problem of drug misuse across the five pillars of drug supply reduction, prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and research. The Strategy is being led out under the stewardship of my colleague Minister of State Ó Ríordáin T.D.

In targeting the problems of drug related crime and associated violence, An Garda Síochána is continuing to target individuals and organisations involved in the trafficking and distribution of psychoactive substances at all levels utilising the Misuse of Drugs legislation, the Criminal Justice (Psychoactive Substances) Act 2010 and the full range of criminal justice legislation underpinning the response of An Garda Síochána to serious crime, where applicable.

I can also advise the Deputy that under the National Drugs Strategy, An Garda Síochána have in partnership with the national community based Family Support Network organisation introduced a national reporting framework to strengthen the response in dealing with issues of

drug related intimidation and violence experienced in our local communities.

Proposed Legislation

328. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress of legislation for the recognition of Irish Sign Language. [42731/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy Aodhán Ó Ríordáin): The Programme for Government includes a commitment to “examine different mechanisms to promote the recognition of Irish sign language” and this process has already commenced. The National Disability Authority (NDA) facilitated consultations with the Deaf Community in Ireland in 2012 at the Department’s request in relation to actions that could make improvements in the lives of deaf people and submissions received from them were considered for inclusion where possible and appropriate in the National Disability Strategy Implementation Plan (NDSIP) which was published in July 2013.

As part of the follow-up to that initiative, the first special themed meeting of the National Disability Strategy Implementation Group (NDSIG) focussed on the issue of Irish Sign Language on 28 November 2013. This meeting brought together representatives of relevant Departments, the NDA, the Deaf Community and other relevant stakeholders with a view to further progressing the implementation of the NDSIP in this regard.

The meeting reviewed the current situation across Government Departments and their Agencies with regard to promoting recognition of Irish Sign Language including in-service provision and provided the Deaf Community with the opportunity of presenting their experience of interaction with the Public Sector. It also provided a useful opportunity to examine mechanisms which could promote the further use and recognition of Irish Sign Language and understand practical implications for service users. Further to this meeting, the Deaf Community prepared a report to reflect their views on key actions and priorities. The intention is that the recommendations from this report will be reflected in the new National Disability Inclusion Strategy, through the incorporation of new actions and related performance indicators and timelines as appropriate. Progress on all relevant actions will then be monitored as part of the Inclusion Strategy’s monitoring process. The focus therefore remains on the identification of mechanisms for the further promotion and recognition of Irish Sign Language with a view to promoting and supporting its use, thereby improving service delivery on the ground, rather than on the introduction of legislation or its designation as an official language.

It should be noted that the existing supports for use of Irish Sign Language in Ireland give a level of recognition and practical measures equal to, or above that, in countries which have formally recognised sign language.

Garda Deployment

329. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current allocation of gardaí for the area covered by Cabra Garda Síochána station; if she will address the need for additional resources for this area as this station supplies gardaí for Áras an Uachtaráin, the American ambassador’s residence and Farmleigh House, and for events taking place in the Phoenix Park in County Dublin; and her views on the current numbers and the need for additional resources given the extent of the roles of gardaí in this station. [42758/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will

appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of personnel, among the Garda Regions, Divisions, and Districts. Garda management keep this distribution under continuing review taking into account crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the best possible use is made of these resources.

I have been informed by the Garda Commissioner that the personnel strength of Gardaí assigned to Dublin Metropolitan Region (D.M.R.) West on the 31 October 2015, the latest dates for which figures are readily available are 692 of which 68 are assigned to Cabra Garda station. There are also 56 Garda Reserves and 43 Civilians attached to the DMR West Garda Division.

I am further informed that local Garda management is satisfied that a full and comprehensive policing service is being delivered to the communities in the area concerned and that current structures in place meet the requirements of the delivery of an effective and efficient policing service.

This Government is committed to ensuring that An Garda Síochána has the capacity to provide effective, visible policing throughout the country. A crucial element of the Government's strategy is ongoing seamless recruitment to renew An Garda Síochána. With this in mind Budget 2016 made provision for the recruitment of 600 new Gardaí next year bringing to 1,150 the number of new Gardaí that will be recruited since the reopening of the Garda College in Templemore in September 2014. So far 295 of those new recruits are fully attested and are on the ground in communities nationwide. On attestation, new probationer Gardaí are assigned to stations throughout the country by the Garda Commissioner, where they are assigned to mainstream uniform policing duties. I am assured by Garda management that the needs of all Garda Divisions are fully considered when determining the allocation of newly attested Gardaí and that 30 of these newly attested Gardaí have been assigned to the DMR West Garda Division.

I was very pleased to announce the commencement of the recruitment campaign for 2016 last Friday, 27 November. It is being organised by the Public Appointments Service on behalf of the Garda Commissioner. Applications must be made through www.publicjobs.ie. The closing date for applications is Tuesday 5 January 2016. Successful candidates can expect to enter the Garda College from June 2016 onwards.

Stardust Fire

330. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality why the associated researchers of the Stardust tragedy have not been given recognition in the Stardust submission; when the final submission will be released in accordance with transparency and accountability guidelines (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42761/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy is aware, following my meeting with the Stardust Victims Committee last year I appointed an official in my Department to liaise with them in relation to matters about which they have expressed concern.

A researcher associated with the Committee submitted material relating to these events to my Department and a meeting was held with them and another researcher associated with the Committee, on 23 April this year. Following an examination of the material presented, a draft preliminary analysis was prepared in my Department and this draft was issued to the Committee in July of this year. The Committee were invited to examine this draft analysis and provide any commentary they wished to make on it. The Committee's response to this draft analysis was provided by way of a presentation made by researchers associated with

the Committee; this presentation was made on 30 September 2015. The views and materials presented at that meeting have now been examined in my Department and on 30 November further documentation was issued by my Department to the Committee in this connection; it is understood that the Committee will be responding to it in due course.

With regard to the concern expressed in relation to failure to give recognition to researchers associated with the Committee in any submissions, I can inform the Deputy that these researchers are mentioned by name in the most recent documentation issued to the Committee.

Asylum Seeker Accommodation

331. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if there are ongoing negotiations to house refugees with the owners of a property (details supplied) in County Kildare. [42767/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Deputy will be aware that the Government has established an Inter-Departmental and Inter-Agency Task Force to coordinate Ireland's response to the migrant crisis.

My Department has received offers of accommodation and services from commercial suppliers. These offers are being assessed at the moment taking into account a range of factors. I wish to inform the Deputy that for reasons of commercial confidentiality it would not be appropriate to make any further comment at this time.

Asylum Seeker Accommodation

332. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will identify all sites being examined for housing refugees, temporarily or in the long term. [42768/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy is aware, the Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP) was approved by Government Decision on 10 September 2015 in response to the migration crisis which has developed in Southern Europe and as an act of solidarity with other Member States. Under this decision, the Government confirmed that Ireland will take in up to 4,000 persons over the next two years in order to give to give effect to the EU legal instruments it has opted into, with approval of the Oireachtas, in respect of relocation and the solemn commitments Ireland has also entered into in respect of resettlement refugees.

Among the measures agreed under the Programme was the establishment of a Network of Emergency Reception and Orientation Centres (EROCs) which would be used to provide temporary accommodation in order to meet the basic needs of asylum seekers relocated from hotspots in Italy and Greece while their applications for refugee status are processed. Under the provisions of the EU relocation programme, persons considered for relocation who will be accommodated in EROCs upon arrival, must be from countries with a recognition rate for asylum of at least 75%. Accordingly, the expectation is that a large proportion of relocated persons will qualify for refugee status within a very short time and will leave the EROCs.

In addition, the Government has committed under the Programme to take in additional resettlement refugees who must also be temporally accommodated in EROCs for the purposes of reception, orientation and integration training, prior to being resettled in communities across Ireland.

Officials in my Department, responsible for implementing the Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP), were tasked with the sourcing of suitable accommodation and orientation services for the proposed network of EROCs. This involves an assessment of information regarding available State properties provided by the Office of Public Works and a request for expressions of interest from commercial accommodation providers. The commercial expressions of interest are being evaluated alongside the information provided by OPW in respect of State properties. This process remains ongoing and it would not be appropriate for reasons of confidentiality and commercial sensitivity to identify the sites being considered or examined.

As the Deputy may be aware, independent of the commitments under the above Government Decision, the numbers of persons applying for protection in the State has already significantly increased this year and this has placed great pressure on available accommodation. There is now a need to provide temporary accommodation for the new cohort of asylum seekers and programme refugees who are due to arrive in the State over the next two years under the IRPP. Ireland has always ensured that persons who applied for international protection were never left without bed and board by virtue of an inability to provide for themselves. If Ireland is to maintain this honourable practice then the State must be in a position to enter into contracts to give effect to its commitments and to avoid a situation where those seeking international protection and who cannot provide for themselves are effectively rendered homeless.

It is important to stress that under the IRPP the accommodation being sought for persons is for the limited period of time sufficient to determine their application for asylum and necessary orientation following the attainment of refugee status or in the case of resettlement refugees to allow for a period of orientation prior to resettlement. A sub-group of the Taskforce established by the Government to oversee the implementation of the Programme is considering how persons temporarily accommodated in EROCs are to be moved from EROCs and housed in communities across Ireland. I am informed that this sub-group is expected to report to the Taskforce in the near future. This aspect of the work of the Taskforce is being led by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government.

Residency Permits

333. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will examine an application for temporary and limited leave to remain in the State by a person (details supplied) in County Kerry given that all requested documents have been submitted; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42780/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that correspondence is due to issue shortly in this case.

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.

Wards of Court

334. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she has any plans to prepare draft legislation to put in place procedures that would facilitate the Comptroller and Auditor General in auditing the wards of court funds, as recommended in the report of the Committee of Public Accounts on 6 July 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42783/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy may be aware, jurisdiction in Wards of Court matters is vested in the High Court. Section 4(3) of the Courts Service Act 1998 provides that the Courts Service is independent in the performance of its functions, which are specified in section 5, and includes the management of the Courts. Court funds which are held for the benefit of Wards of Court are private funds under the control of the Courts Service which, through its offices in the High, Circuit and District Courts, has responsibility for the management and investment of funds in court.

The investment arrangements for all court funds operate under a structured framework. The Investment Committee of the Courts Service has an advisory role and its main function is to devise investment policy for court funds, oversee the recommendations received from its investment advisors, and to ensure compliance with best practice in the management of court funds. The Committee comprises members of the judiciary, representatives from the Courts Service and independent members. The Committee is chaired by the President of the High Court and is also supported by external investment advisors. The Courts Service also produces annual financial statements and is subject to both internal and external audit. The audited financial statements are published each year in accordance with the Superior Court Rules and published on the Courts Service website at www.courts.ie.

The Comptroller and Auditor General is not currently empowered to audit Ward of Court funds. There was a proposal to appoint the Comptroller and Auditor General as auditor of the funds included in a draft Bill in 2010. However it was not subsequently progressed as ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities led to the drafting of the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Bill 2013 which will, when enacted, abolish the wards of court system. This Bill is scheduled to go before the Seanad for Committee Stage on 9 December 2015 and the aim is that the Bill will be enacted by the end of this year.

Proposed Legislation

335. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the Coroner's Bill; when it will be progressed through the Houses of the Oireachtas; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42797/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will know, the Coroners Bill 2007 provides for a comprehensive reform of the Coroners Act 1962 and of the existing coroner system, including the establishment of a new Coroner Service. It incorporates many of the recommendations made by the Coroners Review Group in 2000, and by the Coroners Rules Committee in 2003, as well as a detailed review of reforms to coronial systems in other common-law jurisdictions (particularly New Zealand and Northern Ireland).

The 2007 Bill needs review in the light of:

- the changed public finances;
- the increased emphasis on delivering leaner, better integrated and more customer-focused public services; and

- developing coroner practice and caselaw, particularly on the application to coroners' inquests of Art. 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights

I can confirm to the Deputy that a review of the Coroners Bill 2007 has commenced, at my request, with a view to developing a plan for its progression.

As finalising the review is dependent on competing legislative priorities, I am not in a position, at present, to give a definitive indication on a timeframe for this project.

Drugs Seizures

336. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Question No. 114 of 7 October 2015 regarding the number of drug seizures by An Garda Síochána in the R district in 2014 and in 2015 to date, and the type and the monetary value of these, if the information is now available and if she will forward it to the Deputy before the Christmas recess in 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42804/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): On foot of a report received from the Garda authorities in the matter I wrote directly to the Deputy on 26 November 2015 providing the data sought in Parliamentary Question of 7 October 2015.

Garda Operations

337. **Deputy Shane Ross** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of arrests made by An Garda Síochána in each Dublin station under Operation Thor since its start date, in tabular form, and the number of arrests nationally under this operation. [42825/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Since it was launched on 2 November Operation Thor has led to a number of important arrests in various locations around the country, as well as the seizure of firearms and illegal drugs, since it was launched on 2 November 2015.

I have requested a report from the Garda authorities along the lines requested by the Deputy and will contact him directly when the report is to hand.

Garda Investigations

338. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Questions Nos. 192 and 193 of 17 April 2014, the status of her request to An Garda Síochána for a report on the status of this case (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42832/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): In reply to the Deputy's Questions of 17 April 2014 it was stated that many of the recommendations made by the Oireachtas Committee had been followed through. It was also stated that further information was being sought from the Garda authorities and that further communication would be made with the Deputy when the information was to hand. I received further information from the Garda authorities relating to the case to which the Deputy refers and I regret the delay that has arisen in finalising a reply to the issues raised which is due to an administrative oversight.

Following the Barron Inquiry's report, a dedicated team of Gardaí was appointed to re-examine the case to see if there was any possibility of bringing any or all of the four suspects who had come to light to justice. I am informed by the Garda authorities that all mechanisms were fully utilised by the Gardaí to liaise with the RUC and, later, the PSNI in respect of the investigation, including requests made in the framework of Mutual Legal Assistance. Liaison was established with the PSNI who co-operated fully with the Garda investigation team.

A number of new investigative lines of inquiry were developed and explored and a file on the matter was forwarded subsequently to the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) recommending prosecutions. However, the DPP directed on 8 October 2008 that no prosecutions should be taken on the basis of the evidence available. You will appreciate, of course, that the DPP is independent in the performance of her functions in accordance with the provisions of the Prosecution of Offences Act 1974.

I am further informed that the investigating Gardaí sought information and clarification in respect of a number of matters from the authorities in Northern Ireland, through the PSNI's HET and through the established Mutual Legal Assistance mechanism. The investigating Gardaí inquired into the circumstances in which the authorities in Northern Ireland received early information on suspects in the murder and in this regard the Garda authorities are satisfied that they received full co-operation from the PSNI.

While it is a matter of regret that those responsible for this case have not been brought to justice, I would reiterate that the Garda investigation file remains open and any credible new information that is brought to attention will be pursued vigorously by the investigators.

Garda Stations

339. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her plans for the development of Gorey Garda Síochána station in County Wexford and for making it more accessible for those with disabilities or mobility difficulties. [42847/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The programme of replacement and refurbishment of Garda accommodation around the country is progressed by the Garda authorities working in close cooperation with the Office of Public Works (OPW), which has the responsibility for the provision and maintenance of Garda accommodation.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that An Garda Síochána has provided the OPW with a prioritised list of Garda Stations, including Gorey Garda Station, which require universal access works.

Garda Misconduct Allegations

340. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a copy of a statement given to An Garda Síochána by a person (details supplied) in County Kerry will be made available to that person; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42851/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The position is as stated in my reply to Parliamentary Question 313 of 17 November 2015.

The person to whom the Deputy refers has been notified of the outcome of the review of her complaint under the Independent Review Mechanism. The person has been informed, amongst other things, of the position of any witness making a statement to An Garda Síochána who

subsequently requests a copy of such a statement. As I have previously explained, beyond that, I have, as Minister, no function in relation to the matter raised by the Deputy.

Garda Resources

341. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she is satisfied with the adequacy of the facilities available to An Garda Síochána to tackle modern crime, with particular reference to vehicles, electronic equipment and any other facilities that are required by police forces internationally; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42908/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Under the Garda Síochána Act 2005 the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of available Garda resources. This includes personnel, Garda vehicles and the various technologies utilised to support front-line Gardaí and intelligence-led operations against organised crime. This process takes account of annual policing priorities determined by me as Minister for Justice in consultation with the Garda Commissioner as provided for under section 20 of the Garda Síochána Act, 2005.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that they are continually looking to ensure that the latest information, communications and forensic technologies are sourced and deployed to achieve their strategic objectives as set out in the context of their annual policing plans, as provided for in section 22 of the 2005 Act. This policy is designed to ensure that the Garda Síochána will be properly resourced to meet the evolving needs of a modern effective police force and take advantage of proven up to date technological developments in crime detection and prevention as they occur.

More generally, it is also the case that the Garda Síochána Inspectorate, in its reports on An Garda Síochána, benchmarks the performance of the An Garda Síochána with best international policing practice.

In terms of existing technology, the Deputy will be aware that a considerable amount of new Garda ICT solutions has been delivered over the past number of years. These include the deployment of a secure national digital radio system (NDRS), the deployment and support of Garda and Community CCTV systems, an automated number plate recognition (ANPR) system, and the addition of many new functions to the PULSE system, which itself is further supported by a dedicated Garda data entry service in Castlebar. The substantial additional investment of €205 million in new technology and systems for An Garda Síochána provided under the Capital Plan 2016-2021 will facilitate progress on further important reforms arising from the Garda Inspectorate's report on Crime Investigation. Examples of the new systems to be developed through this investment include:

- new computer-aided dispatch to ensure responsive and coordinated deployment of Gardaí in the community;
- mobile technology to give the Gardaí secure mobile access to critical information when and where they need it;
- investigations management systems to ensure enhanced management of crime investigations; and
- upgrading the ANPR to enhance policing of road safety and compliance.

The 2016 Budget allocation of €1.5 billion for An Garda Síochána includes over €67 million in additional funding which will allow the recruitment of 600 new Gardaí next year on top of the 550 Gardaí recruited since this Government reopened the Garda College in September 2014. It will also provide additional funding for Garda surveillance, special operations and targeted, intelligence-led policing. This additional recruitment and budget allocation builds on the current high level of investment in Garda vehicles. We have invested over €34 million in new Garda vehicles since 2012 with over 640 new vehicles coming on stream in 2015, ranging from more Garda patrol cars to high-powered vehicles for armed units. The Government's Capital Plan 2016-2021 provides for a further €46 million of investment in vehicles, as well as investment in airborne surveillance. Taken together, this step-change in investment in policing will ensure that the Gardaí can be mobile, visible and responsive, on the roads and in the community.

In the area of forensics, the Garda authorities currently employ state-of-the-art automated fingerprint and ballistics identification systems which I am informed are at least on a par with those used by police forces in other EU jurisdictions. The Deputy will also be aware of the recent launch of the national DNA database which has capacity to revolutionise the investigation of crime in Ireland.

These and other new technological solutions, as well as the investment in resources, will ensure that An Garda Síochána has the capacity to provide effective policing services in respond to the evolving challenges of modern day criminal activity.

Garda Deployment

342. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she is satisfied with the strength of the emergency response unit, with particular reference to the need to meet the threat of urban crime and acts of terrorism; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42909/15]

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

I have been informed by the Garda Commissioner that for security and operational reasons, it is Garda policy not to comment on the number of Gardaí assigned to the Emergency Response Unit.

However, I have been informed by the Commissioner that the Emergency Response Unit has a national remit and is a highly trained and equipped specialist intervention unit capable of responding to crime in both urban and rural communities and preventing and responding to acts of terrorism.

Garda Resources

343. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she is satisfied that sufficient resources are available to augment the appropriate intelligence unit of An Garda Síochána, having particular regard to the potential threat of terrorist activity; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42910/15]

344. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she is satisfied that An Garda Síochána can provide a sufficiently rapid response to a terrorist threat or to a hostage situation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42911/15]

345. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the extent to which any augmentation of intelligence and surveillance facilities available to an Garda Síochána is required; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42912/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 343 to 345, inclusive, together.

In taking steps to deal with any threat to this State, An Garda Síochána deploys a strong intelligence base with a well-trained, armed special intervention and support capacity, and a range of other local and national policing and investigative resources.

Developing good intelligence domestically and enhancing intelligence-sharing internationally are essential in countering terrorism and An Garda Síochána has specialist units dedicated to this. The Garda authorities work closely with their EU and other international counterparts, including Europol and Interpol, in the exchange of intelligence. In this regard, as part of the major programme of investment in An Garda Síochána that I am bringing forward there will be considerable investment in Garda information and communications technology, including connecting to the European Schengen Information System. In the order of €330 million will be allocated over the lifetime of the Government's Capital Programme to support crime investigation and to enhance intelligence-led policing.

The primary special intervention capability is the Garda's armed Emergency Response Unit, which is specifically trained in counter-terrorism responses and hostage-type incidents. The armed Garda Regional Support Units can provide further support in such incidents, as well as the providing regionalised armed support to other policing operations. The Garda national units, including the Special Detective Unit, Organised Crime Unit and National Bureau of Criminal Investigation, play a key role in countering terrorism and serious crime and this is supported by the day-to-day policing work of every Garda member. As the Deputy will know, Ireland benefits greatly from having An Garda Síochána as both its national police and intelligence service.

The Garda authorities have the appropriate resources available to them to tackle threats from these sources but given the evolving nature of the terrorist threat and the need to adapt to respond to them, the Garda Commissioner is carrying out a review at present and will let me know of any additional requirements that may arise.

Garda Strength

346. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the strength of An Garda Síochána in each of the past ten years to 2015 to date; the extent to which she will be in a position to augment the numbers in line with the improved economic situation in the coming years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42913/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will appreciate the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of personnel, including new probationer 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 strength of An Garda Síochána for 31 December 2005 to 31 December 2014 and 31 October 2015, the latest date for which figures are readily available are as set out in the table.

This Government is committed to ensuring that An Garda Síochána has the capacity to provide effective, visible policing throughout the country. A crucial element of the Government's strategy is ongoing seamless recruitment to renew An Garda Síochána. With this in mind Budget 2016 made provision for the recruitment of 600 new Gardaí next year bringing to 1,150 the number of new Gardaí that will be recruited since the reopening of the Garda College in Templemore in September 2014. So far 295 of those new recruits are fully attested and are on the ground in communities nationwide.

I was very pleased to announce the commencement of the recruitment campaign for 2016 last Friday, 27 November. It is being organised by the Public Appointments Service on behalf of the Garda Commissioner. Applications must be made through www.publicjobs.ie. The closing date for applications is Tuesday 5 January 2016. Successful candidates can expect to enter the Garda College from June 2016 onwards.

Strength of An Garda Síochána

| Year | Strength | Reserve |
|------------|----------|---------|
| 31/12/2005 | 12,264 | N/A |
| 31/12/2006 | 12,954 | 30 |
| 31/12/2007 | 13,755 | 205 |
| 31/12/2008 | 14,412 | 319 |
| 31/12/2009 | 14,547 | 478 |
| 31/12/2010 | 14,377 | 700 |
| 31/12/2011 | 13,894 | 877 |
| 31/12/2012 | 13,424 | 991 |
| 31/12/2013 | 13,093 | 1,164 |
| 31/12/2014 | 12,799 | 1,124 |
| 31/10/2015 | 12,866 | 988 |

Crime Investigation

347. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of various categories of crime reported in each Garda Síochána division in each of the past ten years to date; her plans to address any issues arising; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42914/15]

348. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of various categories of crime reports in each Garda Síochána division in County Kildare in each of the past ten years to date; the extent to which she expects to be in a position to address any issues arising; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42915/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 347 and 348 together.

The Garda Síochána Act 2005 makes provision for the compilation and publication of crime statistics by the Central Statistics Office (CSO), as the national statistical agency, and the CSO has established a dedicated unit for this purpose.

I have requested the CSO to provide the available statistical information directly to the Deputy.

The Deputy will appreciate that the policing response to crime trends is a matter in the first instance for the Garda authorities. The Deputy will also be aware that the Government is strongly supporting an Garda Síochána through the provision of enhanced resources which facilitate a range of operational initiatives, such as the recently launched Operation Thor, as well as through updated legislation including the Criminal Justice (Burglary of Dwellings) Bill 2015 which is currently before the Houses of the Oireachtas.

Organised Crime

349. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the extent to which she expects to be in a position to identify and isolate the membership of criminal gangs, with a view to putting them out of business; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42916/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I can assure the Deputy that the operation of organised crime groups is closely monitored on an ongoing basis by An Garda Síochána and that tackling these groups remains a key ongoing priority for both the Government and An Garda Síochána. This priority is clearly reflected in the Garda Policing Plan for 2015.

In tackling organised crime activity, An Garda Síochána continues to develop and implement operations and strategies aimed at targeting, dismantling and disrupting criminal networks, utilising advanced analytical and intelligence methodologies. Multi-disciplinary approaches are also utilised to ensure the activities of individuals and groups involved in criminal enterprise are effectively targeted, including the use of the proceeds of crimes legislation, money-laundering legislation, and the powers of the Criminal Assets Bureau.

In targeting such criminal groupings An Garda Síochána operate at local and community level, as well as national and international level in partnership with other policing agencies including Interpol and Europol.

While we should not underestimate the difficulties which the Garda authorities face in tackling organised crime activity, we continue to see the significant results of their efforts in the arrests made and persons being brought before the Courts, as well as the ongoing drugs and firearms seizures made.

I can also assure the Deputy that An Garda Síochána is committed to utilising all available resources in targeting such activity with significant recent investments being made through the recently launched Operation Thor. This Operation will entail a broad range of activities including; additional high-visibility patrols in identified burglary hot-spots; increased use of checkpoints to tackle the criminal gangs using the national road network; the use of new high powered vehicles by the armed Regional Response Units; efforts to disrupt the stolen goods market; programmes to help reduce re-offending by prolific offenders; a high-profile national crime prevention awareness campaign, and targeted crime prevention advice for local communities and enhanced supports for victims.

Finally with regard to the question of organised crime structures and membership, I am advised that membership of criminal groups tends to be fluid with groups merging and splitting on an ongoing basis. In addition many modern groupings are transnational in nature. With this in mind, the Deputy will appreciate that such structures do not allow for the easy identification

of precise numbers of such groupings and their members at any particular point in time.

Drugs Crime

350. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the extent to which drug trafficking continues; if specific provisions can be made to make a serious impact on this life-destroying activity; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42917/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Drug trafficking has long been recognised as one of the most profitable of criminal activities. Targeting drug trafficking and supply has therefore remained a priority for law enforcement authorities worldwide.

The Policing Plan of An Garda Síochána sets out the continued commitment of An Garda Síochána to pro-actively target groups and individuals engaged in criminal activity. In this regard multi-disciplinary approaches are utilised to ensure that those involved are effectively targeted including through the use of the Proceeds of Crime legislation, money laundering legislation and the powers of the Criminal Assets Bureau.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that, in line with the Policing Plan, the National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau continues to lead out the policing strategy for tackling drugs by demand reduction and supply reduction strategies. In this regard the Bureau continues its policy of working with Divisional Drug Units nationwide in tackling supply reduction at local level.

This integrated approach adopts best practice in implementing a co-ordinated use of Garda resources and in utilising available criminal law to its fullest extent in tackling all forms of organised crime, including drug trafficking.

An Garda Síochána also has in place a number of strategic partnerships both nationally and internationally including with the Irish Customs Service, the Health Products Regulatory Authority, the Irish Naval Service, Europol, Interpol and the Maritime Analysis and Operations Centre Narcotics based in Lisbon.

An Garda Síochána continues to record significant successes in intercepting substantial quantities of controlled drugs and in bringing those involved before the Courts.

More broadly, the National Drugs Strategy 2009-2016 seeks to address the harm caused to individuals and society by drug misuse by tackling the problem in a comprehensive and integrated way by implementing a pillar based approach which incorporates a wide range of drug supply reduction, prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and research measures.

Organised Crime

351. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the extent to which the activities of criminal gangs continues to be monitored throughout counties adjacent to County Dublin, such as County Kildare; if she is satisfied with the adequacy of resources available to An Garda Síochána to tackle this issue in line with demographic trends; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42918/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I can assure the Deputy that the operation of organised crime groups is closely monitored on an ongoing basis by An Garda Síochána and that tackling these groups remains a key ongoing priority for both the

Government and An Garda Síochána. This priority is clearly reflected in the Garda Síochána Policing Plan for 2015.

In targeting such activity An Garda Síochána continue to develop and implement strategies to dismantle and disrupt criminal networks, utilising advanced analytical and intelligence methods to facilitate targeted intelligence led operations.

On 2 November 2015 An Garda Síochána launched Operation Thor. This Operation will actively target burglars, organised crime gangs and prolific offenders through co-ordinated crime prevention and enforcement activity based on intelligence and the latest crime trends and patterns. Operation Thor will entail a broad range of activities including; additional high-visibility patrols in identified burglary hot-spots; increased used of checkpoints to tackle the criminal gangs using the national road network; the use of new high powered vehicles by the armed Regional Response Units; efforts to disrupt the stolen goods market; programmes to help reduce re-offending by prolific offenders; a high-profile national crime prevention awareness campaign, and targeted crime prevention advice for local communities and enhanced supports for victims.

As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of personnel, among the Garda Regions, Divisions, and Districts. Garda management keep this distribution under continuing review taking into account crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the best possible use is made of these resources.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that local Garda management in the area highlighted by the Deputy is satisfied that a full and comprehensive policing service is being delivered to the communities in the area.

I can also assure the Deputy that the Government is committed to ensuring that An Garda Síochána has the capacity to provide effective, visible policing throughout the country. A crucial element of the Government's strategy is ongoing seamless recruitment to renew An Garda Síochána. With this in mind Budget 2016 made provision for the recruitment of 600 new Gardaí next year bringing to 1,150 the number of new Gardaí that will be recruited since the reopening of the Garda College in Templemore in September 2014. So far 295 of those new recruits are fully attested and are on the ground in communities nationwide. The Commissioner has informed that 15 of these newly attested Gardaí have been assigned to the Kildare Division.

Garda Stations

352. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality in respect of the number of Garda Síochána stations closed over the past number of years, the number of such stations that were open on a part-time basis, a full-time basis or a 24-hour basis; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42919/15]

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

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

This was reflected in An Garda Síochána's Policing Plans 2012 and 2013 which set out the details of the closure of 39 Garda stations in 2012 and 100 Garda stations in 2013 that were approved by my predecessor. The status of these stations prior to the implementation of the Garda District and Station Rationalisation Programme was as follows:

- 8 stations were non-operational;
- 126 stations provided limited hours/part time service, which were dependent on the availability of resources or the condition of the premises; and
- stations were open on a full time basis.

The centralisation of services facilitates the introduction of enhanced patrolling systems that are operational and intelligence-led that deliver a high visibility and community-oriented policing service through:

- increased Garda visibility and patrol hours;
- increased mobility and flexibility within an area resulting in an improved policing service to the public;
- enhanced co-ordination of Garda activity resulting in a greater visibility and presence in the communities;
- more effective use of limited resources across a wider area; and
- continued Garda presence in communities.

The Garda Commissioner has advised that the current consolidation process is largely completed and there are no plans for any further station closures in 2016.

Prison Accommodation Provision

353. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the extent to which adequate prison accommodation is available, with particular reference to the needs of various categories of prisoners and the need for segregation of first-time offenders from recidivists; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42920/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Prison Service that as of 27th November 2015 there were 3,785 prisoners in custody with a bed capacity of 4,116 which allows for the safe and secure custody for all categories of prisoner. This equates to an occupancy rate of 92%.

As the Deputy will be aware there is a standard operational procedure in place to ensure that upon committal, all offenders are assessed and accommodated appropriately according to their needs and specific security status. Dedicated committal units have been established in all committal prisons for this purpose.

The Irish Prison Service provides a wide range of rehabilitative programmes that include education, vocational training, healthcare, psychiatric, psychological, counselling, welfare and spiritual services. To segregate first time committals from the general prisoner population would greatly reduce their access to rehabilitative programmes and services.

Prisoner Rehabilitation Programmes

354. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if provision is in place to grade applicants for rehabilitative training and education in order to ensure the maximum benefit to the prisoner, with the objective of encouraging the pursuit of a life outside crime; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42921/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the the Irish Prison Service that it provides a wide range of rehabilitative programmes to those in custody that include education, vocational training, healthcare, psychiatric, psychological, counselling, welfare and spiritual services. These programmes offer purposeful activity to those in custody while serving their sentences and encouraging them to lead law abiding lives on release. These programmes are available in all prisons and all prisoners are eligible to use the services.

On committal, all prisoners are interviewed by the Governor and are informed of the services available in the prison. Prisoners may be referred to services or they can self refer at a later date.

The development of prisoner programmes forms a central part of the Irish Prison Service Three Year Strategic Plan 2012 - 2015. There is a clear commitment to enhance sentence planning through Integrated Sentence Management and the delivery of prison based rehabilitative programmes.

The Department of Education and Skills provides an allocation of 220 whole time teacher equivalents in partnership with the Irish Prison Service through the Education and Training Boards (ETB). The focus is on providing education which is quality assured, student centred and facilitates lifelong learning through helping prisoners cope with their sentence, achieve personal development and prepare for life after release.

A top priority for the Irish Prison Service is ensuring help for those with reading and writing problems and peer mentoring programmes are currently active in all of our prisons.

The guiding principles which underpin the prisons' work and training service are to make available, work, work-training and other purposeful activities to all those in custody. Training activities are chosen to give as much variety as possible and also to give opportunities for those in prison to acquire practical skills which will help them secure employment on release.

The Irish Prison Service has also been expanding the number of accredited courses and opportunities available to prisoners in Work Training in recent years. Enhanced partnership arrangements with accrediting bodies such as City and Guilds, the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), and the Guild of Launderers and Cleaners and the centralising of coordination and quality assurance arrangements have enabled the Irish Prison Service to extend the number of available courses and activities with certification.

Legal Aid

355. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she has any plans to review the regulations governing the provision of free legal aid; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42922/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I wish to advise the Deputy that there is no waiting period associated with the granting of criminal legal aid under the Criminal Justice (Legal Aid) Act 1962; the Courts, through the judiciary, are responsible for the granting of legal aid upon the applicant's appearance in Court. A new Criminal Justice

(Legal Aid) Bill is currently being drafted which will update and strengthen the system of granting legal aid including transferring responsibility for the administration of the Scheme to the Legal Aid Board thus consolidating responsibility for legal aid schemes with the Board.

Civil legal aid is provided by the Legal Aid Board which is independent in the exercise of its functions, in accordance with Section 3 (3) of the Civil Legal Aid Act 1994.

However, in order to be helpful to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made of the Board and I have been advised that the Board has carried out a number of initiatives to improve the service it delivers:

- The Board continues to make effective use of private practitioners in District Court cases to help reduce the number of clients waiting for legal services. The use of private practitioners is designed to improve access to legal aid services in situations where a law centre is not in a position to provide a timely service. 5,194 cases were referred to the District Court Private Practitioner Scheme in 2014, a decrease of 8% on the 2013 figure of 5,640.

- The “triage” system of providing early advice to clients was implemented in 2012 as a means of responding to the increased demand. The objective of this approach is to ensure that every applicant gets an advice appointment with a solicitor on a timely basis. An evaluation of the triage approach took place in 2014 and determined that it was effective and it is now in place in all law centres.

- Since the Family Mediation Service came within the remit of the Legal Aid Board in November 2011 a very strong emphasis has been placed on reducing waiting lists nationally to ensure that the service complements that of the Board’s law centres and that people who wish to try and resolve matters through mediation are not waiting longer than three months for an appointment with a mediator. The total number of cases dealt with by the mediation service in 2014 was 2,262 which was 6% higher than the number of cases (2,131) dealt with in 2013. There were 888 agreements reached which is 15% higher than the 2013 figure of 769.

- The Dolphin House initiative which is a court related mediation initiative has achieved more than 1,200 agreements since its commencement and has been established on a permanent basis. The Board has also extended this service model to Naas and Cork and, more recently, Tipperary and Limerick in co-operation with the Courts Service.

- The piloting of mandatory information sessions about ADR/mediation as a pre-requisite to getting a legal aid certificate to go to court in family law disputes involving children commenced in Cork in July 2014, Athlone in October and Castlebar in January 2015.

- The approach to be adopted in the delivery of legal services in the Coroners Court was agreed by the Board and my Department in November 2014. The Board will grant legal aid certificates and has responsibility for the operation of the Private Practitioner Scheme whilst my Department will provide administrative assistance.

- The Refugee Documentation Centre provides an independent and confidential query and research service for Country of Origin Information to all agencies in the asylum process. It processed 1,394 queries in 2014. It also manages the Board’s library and information service.

- The Board continues in its efforts to reduce non-pay and non-legal costs in order to free up more resources for service delivery.

The table shows the numbers waiting for Civil Legal Aid for the last five years.

| Year | 2014 | 2013 | 2012 | 2011 | 2010 |
|----------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Number waiting | 3,412 | 5,067 | 5,014 | 4,443 | 3,153 |

I am pleased to inform the Deputy that the number of persons waiting for Civil Legal Aid at 1 October 2015 had dropped to 2,684 and I am assured that the Board keeps the delivery of its services under constant review with a view to getting legal services to those most in need of them as quickly as possible.

Garda Resources

356. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding the taking away of resources from the local Garda Síochána in Drogheda in County Louth, as stated by the local Garda superintendent (details supplied), and the urgent need to reverse this decision immediately in order to give An Garda Síochána the extra resources it requires, particularly the need to have more foot patrols in the town and in its environs; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42931/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of personnel, among the Garda Regions, Divisions, and Districts.

I have been informed by the Garda Commissioner that the personnel strength of Gardai assigned to County Louth Garda Division on the 31 October 2015, the latest dates for which figures are readily available are 281 of which 104 are assigned to the Drogheda Garda District. There are also 42 Garda Reserves and 23 Civilians attached to the Louth Garda Division.

I have also been informed by the Garda Commissioner that the allocations of Gardaí is continually monitored to ensure optimal use of Garda human resources. This process is periodically reviewed in light of particular incidents of concern or challenges and it is in this context that the Commissioner has directed the allocation of additional Gardaí to the Louth Division. I am advised that an additional 2 sergeants and 25 Gardaí have been allocated to the Louth Garda Division as an interim measure. These Gardaí have been transferred on a temporary basis from adjoining Garda Divisions and the Dublin Metropolitan Region to support the work of the members of An Garda Síochána assigned to the Louth Division.

This Government is committed to ensuring that An Garda Síochána has the capacity to provide effective, visible policing throughout the country. A crucial element of the Government's strategy is ongoing seamless recruitment to renew An Garda Síochána. With this in mind Budget 2016 made provision for the recruitment of 600 new Gardaí next year bringing to 1,150 the number of new Gardaí that will be recruited since the reopening of the Garda College in Templemore in September 2014. So far 295 of those new recruits are fully attested and are on the ground in communities nationwide. On attestation, new probationer Gardaí are assigned to stations throughout the country by the Garda Commissioner, where they are assigned to mainstream uniform policing duties. I am assured by Garda management that the needs of all Garda Divisions are fully considered when determining the allocation of newly attested Gardaí and that 10 of these newly attested Gardaí have been assigned to Co Louth Garda Division, 5 each to Dundalk and Drogheda Garda Stations.

I was very pleased to announce the commencement of the recruitment campaign for 2016 last Friday, 27 November. It is being organised by the Public Appointments Service on behalf of

the Garda Commissioner. Applications must be made through www.publicjobs.ie. The closing date for applications is Tuesday 5 January 2016. Successful candidates can expect to enter the Garda College from June 2016 onwards.

In relation to the crime of burglary, Operation Thor is a multi-strand, national operation which builds on previous and current Garda operations to tackle crime, particularly burglaries, the number of which, as we know, increase with the advent of the long winter nights, in both urban and rural communities nationwide. In excess of €5 million is being committed to support Operation Thor. This allocation, which includes funding for Garda overtime will support a broad range of activities to tackle burglars, organised crime gangs and prolific offenders as well as working with communities to prevent crime. These activities include: additional high-visibility patrols in identified burglary hot-spots; increased use of checkpoints to tackle the criminal gangs using the national road network; the use of new high powered vehicles by the armed Regional Response Units; efforts to disrupt the stolen goods market; programmes to help reduce re-offending by prolific offenders; a high-profile national crime prevention awareness campaign, and targeted crime prevention advice for local communities and enhanced supports for victims.

This special, targeted operation has to be seen in the context of the major investment that this Government is making in An Garda Síochána including over €34 million in new Garda vehicles since 2012 with over 640 new vehicles coming on stream in 2015, ranging from more Garda patrol cars to high-powered vehicles for armed units. The Government's Capital Plan 2016-2021 provides for a further €46 million of investment in vehicles as well as an additional €200 million for Information and Communications Technology which will allow An Garda Síochána to deploy the latest cutting edge technologies in the fight against crime. We are also investing in airborne surveillance. Taken together, this step-change in investment in policing will ensure that the Gardaí can be mobile, visible and responsive, on the roads and in the community.

Crime Prevention

357. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will consider the use of security cameras for strategic locations in rural communities that are must-pass areas for criminals targeting isolated areas in locations (details supplied), meaning a handful of cameras could provide added security to thousands of persons; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43034/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Section 38 of the Garda Síochána Act, 2005 lays down the conditions governing the operation of CCTV schemes in public areas. This includes the need for all such CCTV schemes to be authorised in writing by the Garda Commissioner. CCTV systems installed for the purposes of crime prevention, and as aids to policing in areas to which the general public routinely have access such as town centres, fall into two categories: Garda CCTV systems and community-based CCTV systems.

Garda CCTV systems are planned and implemented on the basis of the identified operational needs and priorities of An Garda Síochána. Accordingly, decisions in relation to the introduction or extension of such systems are a matter for the Garda Commissioner. The Garda authorities inform me that they keep the current Garda CCTV arrangements under ongoing review in the context of changing operational requirements.

I am very conscious of the value that communities, especially rural communities, place on CCTV as a means of deterring crime and assisting in the detection of offenders. With this in mind, I have instigated a review of the effectiveness of the Community CCTV Scheme in conjunction with the Garda authorities. The outcome of that review will inform future

decisions on the continuation of the Scheme. The Deputy may also be aware that my colleague, the Minister for Environment, Community and Local Government, has recently made an announcement in relation the provision of CCTV in rural areas, which is to be funded from the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020.

The Government is committed to ensuring that An Garda Síochána has the resources to deliver highly-mobile and responsive Garda patrols in both rural and urban communities. The 2016 Budget allocation of €1.5 billion for An Garda Síochána includes over €67 million in additional funding which will allow the recruitment of 600 new Gardaí next year on top of the 550 Gardaí recruited since this Government reopened the Garda College in September 2014. It will also provide additional funding for Garda Surveillance, special operations and targeted, intelligence-led policing. This additional recruitment and budget allocation builds on the current high level of investment in Garda vehicles. We have invested over €34 million in new Garda vehicles since 2012 with over 640 new vehicles coming on stream in 2015, ranging from more Garda patrol cars to high-powered vehicles for armed units. The Government's Capital Plan 2016-2021 provides for a further €46 million of investment in vehicles as well as an additional €200 million for Information and Communications Technology which will allow An Garda Síochána to deploy the latest cutting edge technologies in the fight against crime. We are also investing in airborne surveillance. Taken together, this step-change in investment in policing will ensure that the Gardaí can be mobile, visible and responsive, on the roads and in the community.

Departmental Staff

358. **Deputy Regina Doherty** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of employees under her remit who are classified under a contract of indefinite duration; the number of these who are receiving incremental salary payments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43283/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The information sought by the Deputy in respect of staff of my Department is as follows. There are some 11 staff who are classified under contracts of indefinite duration. All of these staff members are receiving incremental salary payments.

Foreign Adoptions

359. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of foreign adoptions that have taken place since legislation was introduced in November 2011 in relation to the Hague Convention. [42339/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): Ireland formally ratified the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Inter-country Adoption on 1 November 2010. The Adoption Act 2010 was commenced on the same date. The Adoption Authority of Ireland was also established on that day. The Authority has responsibility for maintaining the Register of Inter-country Adoptions.

The Adoption Authority of Ireland has advised me that the total number of entries in the Register of Inter-country Adoptions, pursuant to Section 57(2)(b)(ii) of the Adoption Act 2010 since 2010 up until the end of September 2015 is 675. This includes 200 adoptions registered in 2010 pre and post the introduction of the Adoption Act 2010 and the ratification of the Hague Convention. The breakdown per year is as follows:

| Year | Number of entries in the Register of Intercountry Adoptions |
|------|---|
| 2010 | 200 |
| 2011 | 188 |
| 2012 | 117 |
| 2013 | 72 |
| 2014 | 34 |
| 2015 | 64 (up to end of September) |

Adoption Authority of Ireland

360. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of staff members in place in the Adoption Authority of Ireland. [42340/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The Adoption Authority of Ireland has advised me that as of the 25th November, 2015 the Authority has 22 staff which comprise of employees directly employed by the Authority and employees on secondment from their substantive employers.

Adoption Services Provision

361. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the plans that have been put in place in relation to the winding down of Arc Adoption; and the number of foreign adoptions that took place over the five years prior to November 2011. [42341/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): Arc Adoption was accredited by the Adoption Authority of Ireland to provide adoption mediation services on February 8th 2011. Since accreditation, Arc Adoption has facilitated 13 adoptions. The Adoption Authority of Ireland advised my Department in mid-September that Arc Adoption would not be seeking re-accreditation next year. The Department's immediate concern was to ensure that there is a contingency plan in place, to ensure that any adoptions which are progressing are not adversely effected. With this in mind, I approved operational funding for Arc Adoption up to a maximum of €40,000 on 14 October 2015, for a limited period, towards staffing and overhead costs to facilitate the transfer of case files to the Adoption Authority.

The Adoption Authority of Ireland has been working with Arc Adoption regarding the transfer of client files to the Authority. The Adoption Authority of Ireland has advised my Department that all of Arc Adoption's client files have now been transferred to the Authority.

Both the Adoption Authority and Arc Adoption have been in contact with clients to advise them of the current position. If clients have additional queries, a number of contact points within the Authority have been provided to them.

I am advised by the Adoption Authority of Ireland that the total number of entries in the Register of Intercountry Adoptions in the five years prior to November 2011 is 1,576 are broken down by year below:

| Year | Number of entries in the Register of Intercountry Adoptions |
|------|---|
| 2006 | 298 |

| Year | Number of entries in the Register of Intercountry Adoptions |
|------|---|
| 2007 | 394 |
| 2008 | 397 |
| 2009 | 307 |
| 2010 | 200 |

Adoption Legislation

362. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs his plans to review the Irish interpretation of the Hague Convention, given that other European signatories to it are still able to adopt from countries such as Vietnam and Ethiopia. [42342/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The Adoption Act, 2010, provides for adoptions from countries that have ratified the Hague Convention on adoption and from countries where there is a bilateral agreement in place. During the drafting of the Act a considered and detailed transitional process to deal with the change from previous legislation to the new Act was put in place. Adoptions are ongoing from Vietnam, China, Thailand, the Philippines, Bulgaria and other countries that have ratified the Hague Convention.

Ethiopia is not a signatory to the Convention therefore a bilateral agreement between the Irish and Ethiopian authorities is required before inter country adoptions can take place.

Foreign Adoptions

363. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs his plans to facilitate the adoption of orphans from Syria as part of the Government's participation in the European Union's refugee resettlement programme. [42361/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The Adoption Act, 2010, provides for adoptions from countries that have ratified the Hague Convention on adoption and from countries where there is a bilateral agreement in place. Syria has not ratified the Convention and adoptions cannot currently take place from Syria.

The issue of refugee resettlement is matter for my colleague Frances Fitzgerald Minister for Justice Equality and Defence.

Departmental Expenditure

364. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the amount paid to each individual service provider of private residential services; the subhead for each payment, for example, capital costs of works, staff employed etc; the number of locations involved and the number of residents supported at each such location, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42391/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The information sought by the Deputy was requested from Tusla and is set out in the table.

The Deputy should note that residential care funding is based on the cost of placement. Placement costs are not broken down into sub-headings and no capital allocations are made

available to private providers.

| Private Provider | Amount | Number of Centres/ Locations | YP in Placements at 30/09/2015 |
|--|--------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| THREE STEPS PRIVATE SERVICES | 5,467,626.12 | 9 | 23 |
| DAFFODIL CARE SERVICES LTD | 4,988,435.47 | 9 | 26 |
| MMC CHILDRENS SERVICES | 4,607,676.42 | 7 | 20 |
| SOLIS T/A POSITIVE CARE IRELAND | 4,351,435.58 | 8 | 23 |
| FRESH START EIRE LTD | 3,603,612.70 | 8 | 17 |
| ASHDALE CARE LTD | 2,212,086.86 | 4 | 11 |
| GATEWAY ORGANISATION LTD | 1,752,768.80 | 5 | 9 |
| RAINBOW COMMUNITY SERVICES | 1,225,657.19 | 2 | 8 |
| GALTEE CLINIC | 1,070,351.00 | 2 | 6 |
| YERIA LTD | 1,041,790.74 | 2 | 5 |
| GALRO | 827,085.51 | 3 | 4 |
| KILDARE COMMUNITY KARE LTD (Pathways) | 793,815.04 | 2 | 6 |
| THE HAVEN | 779,976.00 | 2 | 5 |
| COMPASS CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES | 722,861.00 | 3 | 4 |
| SORCHA HOMES LTD/HORIZON HOUSE | 702,002.77 | 1 | 4 |
| TERRA GLEN RESPITE SERVICES LTD | 680,232.16 | 2 | 4 |
| KEYS CHILDCARE (IRELAND) LTD | 585,364.43 | 1 | 3 |
| KELLSGRANGE RESIDENTIAL SERVICES | 526,499.97 | 1 | 2 |
| NATIONAL CHILDCARE RESIDENTIAL | 522,124.00 | 1 | 3 |

| Private Provider | Amount | Number of Centres/ Locations | YP in Placements at 30/09/2015 |
|--|------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| NEW BEGINNINGS CHILDCARE AND | 497,214.76 | 1 | 3 |
| STEPPING STONES RESIDENTIAL CARE LT | 281,071.60 | 1 | 1 |
| CURAM NUA | 271,150.65 | 1 | 1 |
| Peter McVerry Trust - Maysal Lodge | 159,403.00 | 1 | 1 |
| ST BERNARDS GROUP HOMES | 190,000.03 | 1 | 1 |
| KEYS CHILDCARE LTD. | 159,749.34 | 1 | 3 |

Early Childhood Care and Education

365. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the status of the need to have a career path for those who take degrees in early childhood education and to have proper pay and conditions in the sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42478/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): Early years services in this country are provided by private commercial and community/ not-for-profit services and the remuneration provided to staff and the conditions of employment are matters for the management of these services. However, in recognition of the link between staff qualifications and the quality of early years services, the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme, which is provided in nearly all of the early years services in this country provides a higher rate of capitation to services that employ staff who hold a higher level of qualification. There are in the region of 4,300 early years services participating in the ECCE programme and more than 1,400 of these services were in receipt of the higher capitation in the 2014/2015 programme year.

The Deputy will be aware that, in Budget 2016, the Government committed a further €85 million to the early years sector in 2016. This additional funding, which will support the expansion of a number of childcare programmes implemented by my Department, has also enabled me to restore the capitation payments provided under the ECCE programme to pre-2012 levels from September 2016. This means that the higher rate of capitation provided to services will be increased from €73 to €75 per child per week with standard rate of capitation increasing from €62.50 to €64.50 per child per week.

The expansion of the childcare programmes in 2016 and the increased capitation levels will help providers to address some of the cost issues that impact on their services including remuneration costs. It will also provide support to services employing staff with Level 7 or higher qualifications and will provide a further incentive to other services to employ more qualified staff.

New qualification requirements for staff working directly with children in early years services will be introduced in 2016 under the Early Years Quality Agenda. All staff will be required to have a minimum Level 5 qualification on the National Qualifications Framework in

early years care and education, or an equivalent. In addition, pre-school leaders delivering the ECCE Programme, who are currently required to hold a Level 5 qualification, will be required to have a minimum Level 6 qualification, or equivalent. To support staff to meet these new qualification requirements, my Department established the Learner Fund which has already allocated €3.5 million to over 3,000 staff for the purpose of up-skilling.

Further funding to improve the qualifications of the early years sector was secured as part of Budget 2016. This includes:

- €1.5 million, which will be directed towards a Learner Fund in 2016. I will announce details of this Learner Fund shortly.

- €1.5 million, which will fund the delivery of a 'Higher Education Programme for Inclusion Co-ordinators in Early Years Settings' as part of the model of supports I recently announced to ensure children with a disability can access and meaningfully participate in the ECCE Programme. This funding will meet the costs for the first intake of participants (up to 900 early years practitioners) who are expected to commence in this Programme in April 2016. It is envisaged that, over the next four years, at least 80 per cent of ECCE services will avail of this training fund, which will cost €1.5 million per annum.

The Deputy may be interested to note new Government-funded posts for early years practitioners. These include posts for inspectors in the Early Years Inspectorate at the Department of Education and Skills and posts for Service Co-ordinators and Early Years Specialists in Better Start's Early Years Specialist Service.

Child Protection

366. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs his plans for Christmas festivities for the 1,500-plus children living in hotel rooms and guesthouses; if he has directed officials to organise an event in conjunction with the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42586/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): I and my Government colleagues are extremely concerned about the issue of homelessness. The Government continues to work hard to house families living in hotel rooms and guest houses.

A number of measures to strengthen supports for families with children have been included in the social welfare Budget package for 2016, which was announced by the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection. A Christmas Bonus payment (seventy five percent) to over 1.2 million long-term social welfare recipients, such as pensioners, people with disabilities, carers and long-term jobseekers, has been announced and will be paid at a cost of €197 million.

As regards areas under my remit, my officials and those of Tusla are working closely with colleagues on a cross-government basis regarding the issue of child protection in emergency accommodation. Tusla and the Dublin Region Homeless Executive are currently developing a joint protocol which includes guidance on working with families where child protection concerns arise within emergency homeless accommodation. Significant progress has been made to date and there is a commitment to finalising a draft of the protocol for consultation as soon as possible.

No plans have been made by my Department to organise a Christmas event for the children referred to in the Deputy's question.

Child Care Costs

367. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 243 of 22 October 2015, for details of the sources or the review of studies he undertook to make the claim (details supplied) that tax reliefs for child care have led to systematic inflation in child care costs in other jurisdictions, including in the Netherlands and in Australia. [42612/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The evidence supporting “demand-side” over “supply-side” subsidies referred to in my previous reply was drawn from several sources, including a report published by the OECD in 2006.

Following an in-depth study of 20 countries’ systems for early care and education, the OECD in this report - Starting Strong II - found that the most effective way to make early childhood care and education more affordable – while at the same time ensuring quality – is through “supply-side” subsidies. That means directly subsidising places in early years services so that fees are lower or fully covered (as is already the case for programmes funded by my Department). The OECD, in this report, concluded that tax credits – or other “consumer subsidies” – are less effective and that “direct public funding of services brings, in the majority of countries reviewed, more effective control, advantages of scale, better national quality, more effective training for educators and a higher degree of equity in access and participation than consumer subsidy models”.

Start Strong, in their Submission to Oireachtas Committee on Health and Children in May 2015 also presented compelling evidence in relation to this issue referencing both the experience of the Netherlands and Australia. More specifically, this submission demonstrated how “the Netherlands and Australia shifted from supply-side funding to childcare tax credits during the 2000s, and both subsequently saw rise in childcare costs outstripping inflation, and negating the benefit of the tax credits for parents”.

The references for the evidence presented by Start Strong are as follows:

- Prof. D. Brennan, ‘The Corporatization of Child Care in Australia’ (see http://www.cccabc.bc.ca/about/files/Brennan_Aust_Child_Care.ppt)

- D. Brennan and E. Adamson (2014) ‘Financing the Future’ (see https://www.sprc.unsw.edu.au/media/SPRCFile/Financing_the_Future.pdf)

- Prof. H. Penn and Prof. E. Lloyd (2013) ‘The Costs of Childcare, study for the UK Department of Education’ (see <http://www.cwrc.ac.uk/documents/CostsofchildcareJuly2013.pdf>, pp.38-42).

Early Childhood Care and Education

368. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs his views on correspondence regarding the early childhood care and education scheme and the revision to this scheme in budget 2016 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42624/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): At present, children qualify for the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme when they are within the qualifying age range which is 3 years and 2 months to 4 years and 7 months in the September of the relevant year. This means, for example, that children born between 2 February 2011 and

30 June 2012 qualified for free pre-school from September 2015. Children who turn 3 from 1 July 2012 are below the age range for eligibility for ECCE in the 2015/2016 programme year but will qualify for the 2016/17 programme year.

In Budget 2016 it was announced that, from September 2016, children will be eligible to start free pre-school when they turn age 3, and can continue in free pre-school until they start primary school (once the child is not older than 5½ years at the end of the relevant pre-school year i.e. end June).

This extension of free pre-school will increase the number of children benefiting from free pre-school from about 67,000 per annum, to 127,000 in a given programme year. Accommodating this increase requires a significant increase in capacity in the pre-school sector; pre-school services need time to consider and implement any needed infrastructural or service changes, and to put in place extra staff resources. The September 2016 implementation date was set to allow pre-school providers to put such measures in place.

It is appreciated that this does mean that a small cohort of children, including those mentioned by the Deputy, while continuing to avail of the 38 week entitlement to free pre-school currently provided under the ECCE programme, will not benefit from additional free pre-school provided under this new budgetary measure. However, should an earlier start date have been chosen, the likelihood is that there would not have been sufficient capacity in the sector to accommodate all children.

However, you will appreciate that this extended provision, when introduced, will ensure that, from the age of three, all children in Ireland will be able to access free education, either in pre-school or in primary school. This is a significant step forward for children and families.

Family Resource Centres

369. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs his views on proposals from the family resource centres, FRCs, that funding for the family resource programme is ring-fenced within the Túsla - Child and Family Agency programme; that funding is also secured to meet the basic operational costs of running FRCs; that FRC projects be funded to ensure each is resourced with three full-time-equivalent employees; ensuring the continuation of funding to support the family resource centre national forum, enabling FRCs to speak with one voice, access to suitable training through regional support agencies and the workforce development system and evaluation systems; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42498/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): There are currently 109 communities supported through the Family Resource Centre Programme which is funded by Túsla, the Child and Family Agency. Túsla provides core funding to Family Resource Centres to cover the employment of two to three members of staff and some overhead costs. In 2015, Túsla provided €13.09 million in funding for the Family Resource Centre Programme.

Family Resource Centres (FRCs) are front-line services rooted in the community they serve. Acting as a focal point within their community, Family Resource Centres provide a holistic service of child, family and community support and advocacy to all children and families in their community. While Family Resource Centres operate an open-door policy and provide many services and development opportunities at a universal level, they also proactively target specific cohorts within their communities.

In addition to funding individual Family Resource Centres in 2015, Túsla also provided

€60,000 in funding to the Family Resource Centre National Forum (FRCNF) to assist it in providing support to Family Resource Centres around the country.

The Family Resource Centre National Forum is recognised as a valuable asset in the overall operation of the Family Resource Centre Programme. It ensures a representative voice at national level and coherence within the programme. Meetings are held with Tusla on a regular basis to discuss issues of common concern. In recognition of the valuable contribution the Family Resource Centre National Forum makes to the work of Family Resource Centres, Tusla will continue to provide funding to the Forum.

In recent months the National Forum met with Tusla's Chief Operations Officer to whom they outlined the key priority areas that they believe are critical for their continued development as a valuable support service to the Programme. Tusla has welcomed the key proposals outlined by the Forum.

As the Deputy will be aware, I announced a significant increase in the funding allocation to Tusla for next year. Tusla will have available to it some €676 million in funding, representing an increase of €38 million (5%) over 2015.

The precise level of funding to be provided to Family Support Services for next year will now be considered by Tusla in developing its Business Plan for 2016, which will be sent to me for consideration.

The Government, since its establishment, has attached particular priority to supporting vulnerable children and families and the significant increase in funding being made available to Tusla next year represents further evidence of our delivery on this ambition.

Child and Family Agency Services

370. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs when 24-hour social work services will come into effect; how the service will work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42706/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): Tusla, the Child and Family Agency provides a range of services aimed at addressing emergency situations in the area of child welfare and protection. In the main, these emergency situations arise out of hours.

I am pleased to inform the Deputy that Tusla commenced the new Emergency Out-of-Hours Social Work Service last month. The 2016 allocation to Tusla includes provision for the full year cost of the Emergency Out-of-Hours Social Work Service. The key objective of the service is to co-operate with and support An Garda Síochána in the execution of its duties and responsibilities under the Child Care Act, 1991 and the Refugee Act, 1996.

Prior to this new development Tusla provided, in an emergency situation, for

- residential and foster care placements for children under Section 12(3) of the Child Care Act, 1991 and

- placements for children referred under Section 8.5 of the Refugee Act, 1996;

The additional service now available allows An Garda Síochána to contact a national emergency social work out-of-hours phone service for general advice or consultation. This on call service is staffed by social workers operating from the Out-of-Hours services in Dublin, supported by on-call social workers in different parts of the country.

The social workers are currently employed by Tusla in its children's services.

Tusla and An Garda Síochána are the key agencies empowered by law to protect and promote the welfare of children and they have separate yet complementary roles. Mutual understanding and cooperation is essential in ensuring that these roles are carried out effectively and in a child-centred manner.

The aim of the Emergency Out-of-Hours Social Work Service is to ensure that the disruption and upset to which children may be exposed in emergency situations are minimised and the rights of parents and guardians are respected. The introduction of the Emergency Out-of-Hours Social Work Service assists in maximising inter-agency co-operation and promoting the safety and welfare of children.

Early Childhood Care and Education

371. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will provide capital funding to enable early childhood education and care settings to expand, in keeping with the announcements made in budget 2016; when and how child care providers will be able to access this funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42707/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): Funding will be provided in 2016 as part of the Early Years Capital Programme. I am currently considering how best this funding can be targeted in the context of building capacity in the early years sector to meet the new demands for places under the extended Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. I hope to be in a position to announce the details of this programme of capital funding shortly.

In addition to this, the Inter-Departmental Group, which I established earlier this year to consider options for future investment in early years and after-school childcare set out a range of options for future investment to enhance affordability, increase the accessibility and improve the quality of early years and after-school childcare.

Several recommendations of the Group, including a number which relate to after-school childcare, were considered as part of the Estimates process for the Budget and will also be funded in 2016. These include a €3 million capital fund, which will be provided to enable both community/not-for-profit and private providers to develop after-school childcare services using existing school and other accessible community facilities. The terms and conditions for this €3 million capital fund are currently being drafted. It is envisaged that this programme of capital funding will be announced in the first quarter of 2016.

Child Care Costs

372. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if a person (details supplied) in County Limerick is exempt from paying child care costs under the child care employment and training support scheme while undergoing a course; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42745/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The Childcare Education and Training Support (CETS) programme, which is one of a number of childcare support programmes implemented by my Department, provides subsidised childcare places to qualifying trainees and students participating in certain Solas and Education Training Boards

(ETB) training and education courses. The eligibility criteria for CETS are determined by Solas and ETB.

Under the CETS programme, funding is provided by my Department to participating childcare services in return for the provision of subsidised childcare places to qualifying trainees and students. Parents are required to make a contribution which is dependent of the session type and the maximum parental contribution for each session type has been prescribed. Once a childcare place is approved, funding is committed for the entirety of the parent's course, subject to certain terms and conditions.

There are four session types of subsidised childcare places under the CETS programme which attract different rates of payments to the provider and different maximum rates of parental contribution. They are:

| | | |
|--|---------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Full-day care(maximum of 10 hours per day) | €145 | €25 |
| Part-time day care (maximum of 5 hours per day) | €80 | €15 |
| Session Type | Payment rate to provider* | Maximum parental contribution* |
| After-school (maximum of 3.5 hours per day) | €40 | €5 |
| After-school with pick-up (maximum of 5 hours per day) | €80 | €15 |

*The payments shown are in respect of 5 days of childcare per child. Pro-rata rates are applied where childcare is less than 5 days.

In relation to the specific query by the Deputy, I understand that two children of the parent in question are currently approved for full-day care places for 5 days a week under the CETS programme. The funding for these two children has been committed for a total of 43 weeks and represents a financial commitment of €12,470.00. The maximum parental contribution that the service provider may request from the parent in question is €25 per child per week.

Domestic Violence Services Funding

373. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will commit to re-establishing child contact centres to facilitate safe and supervised accessed visits between children and perpetrators of domestic violence in line with court orders, as advocated by Women's Aid; if the existing system can lead to ongoing abuse for parents who are victims of domestic violence during home access visits; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42752/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, is the statutory body with responsibility for providing effective responses to victims of domestic violence and sexual violence. At all times, Tusla's key priority is to ensure that the needs of victims of domestic violence and sexual violence are being met in the best way possible.

In 2015, Tusla provided over €19 million euro in funding for the provision of domestic and sexual violence services. This funding is allocated to specialist organisations responding

to sexual and domestic violence and includes funding for 60 domestic and sexual violence services throughout the country comprising:

- Over €15m for 44 organisations providing domestic violence support services, including 20 emergency refuges.

- €4m for 16 rape crisis centres.

Tusla has advised that it currently has arrangements in place to provide child-friendly, safe and neutral places where children can spend time with the parent(s) they do not live with in order to allow them to develop a relationship with the parent at their own pace in their own way. Tusla supports further developments in local areas in this regard.

I would like to assure the Deputy that Tusla will continue to examine appropriate responses to the needs of children who witness or directly experience violence within the family setting.

School Completion Programme

374. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the progress of the school completion programme; if he will implement the changes recommended by the Economic and Social Research Institute report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42753/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The review of the School Completion Programme was published by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) on 7 October. The review, which is available from the ESRI’s website, was undertaken for Tusla the Child and Family Agency under the remit of my Department. It presents the findings of an examination of the operation of the School Completion Programme and makes recommendations in relation to the future operation of the programme.

The review is now being considered by my Department and a range of actions has already been taken by Tusla aimed at strengthening the operation of the programme. Improvements have been introduced in the annual school retention plans so that there is a stronger focus on the outcomes to be achieved for children and young people in the locality. Focused discussions have commenced with all those involved in the delivery of the programme on the review findings and how to strengthen the core functions of the programme. In addition, a new governance structure is being put in place at national level to support local projects in the development of the programme and to improve integration with the related Home School Community Liaison Scheme and the Educational Welfare Officers.

My Department will work closely with Tusla to draw together the output from the ESRI review along with the perspectives of stakeholders, including the children and families who participate in the programme, to improve its effectiveness in responding to the needs of children at risk of educational disadvantage. In addition, my Department will participate in the Inter Departmental Group that the Minister for Education and Skills proposes to establish to consider the roles of different Government departments in delivering the DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) programme in a joined up way.

Tusla will have a key input to the work of the Group, in relation to the role of its education welfare services, as part of the cross departmental initiative aimed at securing improved education outcomes for children at risk of early school leaving.

Adoption Services Provision

375. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the safeguards in place to protect the deposits paid by clients to adoption agencies, such as the Arc Adoption agency; if these safeguards offer adequate protection; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42896/15]

376. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the assistance he is providing to clients who are seeking the return of deposits and registration fees paid to the Arc Adoption agency, which is in the process of winding down; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42897/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 375 and 376 together.

Arc Adoption is a company limited by guarantee, not having a share capital and operates on a “not-for-profit basis”. I am aware that there is an issue regarding the repayment to clients of refundable registration fees they are owed by Arc Adoption. These fees were paid as part of an agreement between Arc Adoption and its clients. My Department was not party to this agreement and therefore has no legal responsibility for repayment of these fees. While my Department made a once off payment of €10,000 to assist the Arc Adoption in repaying clients that were due their refundable registration fees in July 2014, repayment of these fees and any other legacy debts are clearly a matter for the Board of Arc Adoption. Despite this, my Department indicated to Arc Adoption last December that I was willing to examine the question of legacy debt relating to refundable registration fees.

This is a complex matter as it gives rise to a number of issues, some of which are legal issues. In this regard my Department has sought formal legal advice and we hope to reach a conclusion on the matter as soon as possible.

Early Childhood Care and Education

377. **Deputy Patrick O’Donovan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs to revert to this Deputy on (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43027/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): As I stated in my reply to the Deputy’s previous question, the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme is funded by my Department through the provision of capitation grants paid directly to participating services. This capitation payment is for the provision of services, including preparatory and supportive work such as engagement with parents, training, planning and organisation. For the purposes of clarification, this also includes administration.

At present, the standard capitation fee paid to participating services is €62.50 per week per eligible child. A higher capitation fee of €73 per week per eligible child is available to pre-school services with more highly qualified staff. With effect from September 2016, these capitation rates will be restored to pre-2012 levels of €64.50 and €75 respectively.

Child Care Services Data

378. **Deputy Patrick O’Donovan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs to

revert to this Deputy on (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43028/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): I indicated in my previous reply to the Deputy the various childcare support and capital programmes which are implemented by my Department and their availability to private providers. To summarise:

- The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme is provided through **both private and community/not-for-profit providers**

- The Training and Employment Childcare (TEC) programmes (i.e. Childcare Education and Training programme (CETS), Community Employment Childcare (CEC) programme and After-school Childcare (ASCC) programme) are provided through both private and community/not-for-profit providers, and

- The Community Childcare Subvention (CCS) programme is currently provided through **community/not-for-profit providers only**.

The original rationale for opening the CCS Programme to community/not-for-profit providers only was to ensure that children and families could access childcare in areas of market failure (i.e. in areas where private providers did not traditionally operate) and, due to economic constraints, Budget 2012 closed the CCS programme to new applications from providers wishing to enter the programme and to the expansion of services by existing providers.

However, as I also indicated in my previous reply to the Deputy, under Budget 2016, I lifted these restrictions and provided €16 million in additional funding to further expand the CCS programme, to include its roll-out to private providers, in a targeted manner. During 2016, work will also commence on developing a new simplified childcare subsidy programme. This programme, which will replace the existing CCS and TEC programmes, will be available through both private and community/not-for-profit providers in 2017.

- In 2012, capital funding of €6m was provided to fund a maintenance programme for services (i.e. to address remedial, maintenance and renovation work and to purchase equipment). This funding, which provided grants up to a maximum of €50,000, was available to **both private and community/not-for-profit providers**.

- In 2013, capital funding of €2.75m was provided to support the on-going improvement of services. Both **private and community/not-for-profit services** participating in one of the childcare support programmes implemented by my Department were eligible to apply.

- In 2014, capital funding of €2.5 million for the maintenance and upgrade of **community/not-for-profit services** to ensure that these previously-funded community/not-for-profit services remained fit-for-purpose thus protecting State investment. For this reason, private providers were not eligible to apply.

- In 2015, capital funding of €7 million was provided. Under Strands 1-3 of the 2015 programme, €5 million was made available to **community/not-for-profit services** to ensure that these previously-funded community/not-for-profit services remained fit-for-purpose thus protecting State investment. The remaining €2 million, which was made available under Strand 4 of the 2015 programme, was made available for **both private and community/not-for-profit providers**.

Preschool Services

379. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs to revert to this Deputy on (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43029/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The decision to extend free pre-school provided under the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme was based on recommendations set out in the Reports of the Expert Advisory Group on the Early Years Strategy in 2013 and Inter-Departmental Group on Future Investment in Childcare in 2015. Both Groups consulted widely with a range of stakeholders, including the early years sector, during the course of their work.

Under this extended Programme, there will be three opportunities for eligible children to enrol during the pre-school year: children who reach the age of 3 between April and August will have the opportunity to enrol in September; children who reach the age of 3 between September and December will have the opportunity to enrol in January; and children who reach the age of 3 between January and March will have the opportunity to enrol in April. As a result of this extension, the number of children benefiting from the Programme is expected to rise from around 67,000 to 127,000 in a given programme year. For the 2016/17 programme year, it is estimated that 89,500 children will be eligible to enrol in the Programme from September 2016, 22,000 from January 2017 and 15,500 from April 2017.

In order to provide the early years sector with the time to build capacity to meet this increased demand, a decision was taken to introduce this new measure from September 2016. As the increased demand for the Programme is not expected to peak until January and April 2017, this timeframe should allow pre-school providers to make any necessary infrastructural or service changes and to put in place extra staff resources to accommodate the additional demand.

I am satisfied that there is already additional capacity in the early years sector to cope with some of the increased demand. Indeed, the Annual Survey of Early Years Services, which was conducted in December 2014, estimates that there are more than 24,000 vacancies in early years services across the country with almost 13,000 of these vacancies in sessional services. I am also aware that every year a significant number of new pre-school providers apply to participate in this Programme, and, this increased demand for, and additional investment in, free pre-school provision should encourage a greater numbers of applicants.

The restoration of capitation rates to pre-2012 levels from September 2016 should also encourage a greater number of new applicants and encourage existing pre-school providers to expand.

I am clear that more capacity will be required and that building this capacity may pose a challenge for some pre-school providers. Officials in my Department are committed to assisting with these challenges. They are already working closely with the City and County Childcare Committees and the Voluntary Childcare Organisations on a range of measures, which will assist pre-school providers meet increased demand for free pre-school provision, particularly from January and April 2017. Further information on these measures will be available shortly.

With regard to payment for sick time for children availing of the ECCE Programme, the Programme contains provision for payment to continue in instances where the child is absent for periods of 4 consecutive weeks or less. It is only in instances where a child is absent for a period of more than 4 consecutive weeks that the pre-school provider is obliged to cease claiming payment. If the child subsequently returns to the service, payment will be re-instated.

With regard to payment for holiday time, pre-school providers voluntarily contract into the ECCE Programme on the basis of the capitation rates and number of payment weeks provided

for under the Programme. It is a matter for pre-school providers themselves to decide whether the terms of the Programme are suitable for their service and whether they operate for the 38 weeks of the ECCE programme only.

Child Care Services Funding

380. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs to revert to this Deputy on (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43030/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): As I stated in my reply to the Deputy's previous question, the Programmes Implementation Platform (PIP), which was introduced by my Department and launched in September 2014, provides for childcare providers to submit applications for childcare funding through an online facility.

For the purposes of further clarification, when a parent decides to register a child for participation in a childcare programme, the childcare provider in question gives the parent a Child Registration Form to fill out. In the case of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme, the parent will supply their own full name, the child's full name, PPSN details, date of birth, gender, the number of days the child will attend for and the starting and end dates of the child's participation in the programme. The childcare provider uses the information on the completed form to register the child on PIP. Once the child has been entered on PIP, the childcare provider must destroy the form in order to comply with data protection requirements.

Once the child has been registered on PIP, a Parental Declaration Form is printed and signed by both the parent and childcare provider. A copy is given to the parent and the original signed Parent Declaration Form is retained by the childcare provider for inspection during compliance visits, which are undertaken by Pobal on my Department's behalf.

Preschool Services

381. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs to revert to this Deputy on (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43031/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The decision to extend free pre-school provided under the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme was based on recommendations set out in the Reports of the Expert Advisory Group on the Early Years Strategy in 2013 and Inter-Departmental Group on Future Investment in Childcare in 2015. The latter Group consulted widely during the course of their work and all stakeholders in the early years sector were invited to make a submission. There is no record of a submission being received from the HSE (now Tusla).

With regard to the other questions raised by the Deputy, I can re-confirm that the Childcare Pre-School Regulations 2006 allow for children aged 0-6 years to be cared for in a pre-school and there is no requirement by Tusla that a child must be toilet trained before attending a private pre-school service or any pre-school service. The age range of children to be catered for in a pre-school service is a matter for each individual service.

Further, I, nor the HSE (now Tusla), are aware of any request by the HSE (now Tusla) having requested a review of the staffing levels allowed for in private pre-school providers to

take into account the different levels of needs for three- to five-year-olds.

Departmental Legal Cases Data

382. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of legal cases currently ongoing against his Department including State agencies under his aegis; the number of cases that took place during the years 2011 to 2014, inclusive; the cost of those that were contested and what damages were involved; the costs and damages of those that were settled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43261/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): I can inform the Deputy that there are ten legal cases currently ongoing against my Department. These do not include personal injury cases which are dealt with by the State Claims Agency. In addition, there is also one case before the Court of Justice of the European Union in respect of an Article 267 reference from the Irish Supreme Court.

The most significant legal proceedings against my Department since it was established in June 2011 concerned matters relating to the referendum on children's rights. All of those cases are complete. None involved damages. There were two cases in 2012 which involved total costs of €222,523.43 paid to the plaintiff. Two cases took place during 2013 and one in 2014 which was the consolidated Supreme Court Appeals in the Jordan case. No costs have been paid to date in respect of the 2013 or 2014 cases.

In the time available, my Department has not been in a position to compile the rest of the information sought by the Deputy and I will write to him separately with the relevant information at the earliest opportunity.

I will also ask each of the agencies under my remit, namely the Adoption Authority of Ireland, the Child and Family Agency and the Ombudsman for Children's Office, to write to the Deputy directly with the information sought.

Departmental Staff Data

383. **Deputy Regina Doherty** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of employees under his remit who are classified under a contract of indefinite duration; the number of these who are receiving incremental salary payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43275/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): One person in my Department is employed under a Contract of Indefinite Duration. This employee is in receipt of incremental salary payments.

My Department does not generally hold information relating to individual employees of the various agencies operating under the Department's remit, including the number of temporary contracts or contracts of indefinite duration sought or in place in the agencies. Accordingly, the information requested by the Deputy is not readily available. Officials of my Department have requested that the specific information requested be supplied directly to you by the agencies involved.

Health Services Funding

384. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the funds allocated to the Travel2Care scheme for 2016. [42305/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The National Cancer Control Programme made a grant of €3m to the Irish Cancer Society to assist with the cost incurred in the Travel2Care programme in 2015. It is planned to continue such funding in 2016.

Hospital Waiting Lists

385. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Health his plans to reduce the long waiting lists for patients with diabetes type 1 to see a consultant in Letterkenny University Hospital in County Donegal. [42307/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I can assure the Deputy that improving waiting times for out-patients and in-patient care is a key priority for the Government. In January, taking into account current pressures on acute hospital services, I put in place maximum permissible waiting times for in-patient and day case treatment and outpatient appointments of 18 months by 30 June and 15 months by year end. The HSE was provided with additional funding of €51m to ensure that these maximum waiting times would be achieved. The funding provided is intended to maximise capacity across public and voluntary hospitals as well as outsourcing activity where the capacity is not available to meet patient needs within the maximum allowable waiting time.

The HSE is addressing the areas of underachievement of maximum waiting times with Hospital Groups as part of the regular performance and accountability process, as well as seeking the support of the National Clinical Programmes to ensure that the appropriate referral and clinical pathways are used at all times. The main priority is the patients affected by any delays in waiting lists and the HSE will ensure that these patients are prioritised for treatment.

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 Transfers

386. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Health if he is aware of the policy of transferring children who have cancer from Our Lady's Children's Hospital in Crumlin in Dublin 12 to St. James's Hospital in Dublin 8 when they reach 16 years of age; and if a new policy will be considered that would not cause as much upheaval and at times distress for the families involved. [42308/15]

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

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

387. **Deputy Arthur Spring** asked the Minister for Health when an operation for a person

(details supplied) in County Kerry will be performed; if he is aware of delays in this case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42314/15]

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.

Ambulance Service Provision

388. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Health if it is acceptable for a Teachta Dála to repeatedly request a meeting with the national ambulance service to discuss matters of concern within that Teachta Dála's constituency and to no avail. [42324/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I understand that the National Ambulance Service are happy to meet with the Deputy; the Director will make contact with you shortly with a view to agreeing a suitable date.

Hospital Facilities

389. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Health if he is aware of reports of issues with some windows in the new medical block at Letterkenny University Hospital in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42325/15]

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.

Ambulance Service Provision

390. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Health if the national ambulance service has a policy of leaving deceased persons at the location of their death; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42326/15]

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 Groups

391. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Health if the name change from Letterkenny General Hospital to Letterkenny University Hospital means that the hospital has the same status as all other hospitals in the Saolta Group for funding and billing purposes. [42327/15]

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.

Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland

392. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health the protocols that are in place between his Department, the Health Service Executive and An Bord Altranais when An Bord Altranais is hearing a fitness-to-practise case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42329/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): When a fitness to practice complaint is initiated under the Nurses and Midwives Act, 2011 (No 41 of 2011), the arrangements for such fitness to practice hearings and related matters are as set out in Part 8 of the 2011 Act. In particular, section 82 of the 2011 Act requires that the Minister and the employer (including the HSE) are informed by the Board of the outcome of such hearings in certain circumstances - these includes:

- the removal, restoration, suspension, termination of suspension of a nurse's or midwife's registration;
- the attaching of conditions to a nurse's or midwife's registration;
- the censuring or fining of a registered nurse or midwife;
- the transfer of a nurse's or midwife's registration to another division of the register of nurses and midwives.

Please note that if a fitness to practice complaint is initiated under the Nurses Act, 1985 (No 18 of 1985), then the provisions of that Act would apply and, as per section 46 of that Act, which includes a requirement that the Board inform the Minister of names erased or restored from the Register and also suspensions and termination of suspension from the register and the attaching of conditions to a nurse's or midwife's registration.

Services for People with Disabilities

393. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the Health Service Executive's policy regarding paying the transport costs of a person with a disability who is attending adult day services with various service providers in Cork city and county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42330/15]

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 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.

Health Services

394. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if he will arrange for the Health Service Executive to address a matter raised in correspondence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42332/15]

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.

Long-Term Illness Scheme Eligibility

395. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Minister for Health his plans to extend the long-term illness scheme to asthma patients, given that this is a life-long illness which requires daily medical treatment along the lines of other illnesses which are covered under the scheme, such as epilepsy, diabetes, multiple sclerosis, leukaemia and intellectual disabilities; if he will explain any reasonable grounds for discrimination between a long-term illness such as asthma and the illnesses covered by the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42368/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Long Term Illness (LTI) Scheme was established under Section 59(3) of the Health Act, 1970 (as amended). Regulations were made in 1971, 1973 and 1975 specifying the conditions covered by the LTI Scheme. The conditions covered by the LTI Scheme are as follows: Acute Leukaemia; Mental handicap; Cerebral Palsy; Mental Illness (in a person under 16); Cystic Fibrosis; Multiple Sclerosis; Diabetes Insipidus; Muscular Dystrophies; Diabetes Mellitus; Parkinsonism; Epilepsy; Phenylketonuria; Haemophilia; Spina Bifida; Hydrocephalus; and conditions arising from the use of Thalidomide. There are no plans to extend the list of conditions covered by the LTI Scheme.

Primary Care Centres Provision

396. **Deputy Anthony Lawlor** asked the Minister for Health the status of the proposed primary care centre for Celbridge in County Kildare; when it will be open to the public; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42369/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): Your question has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply as the delivery of the health care infrastructure is a service matter.

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

Hospital Appointments Status

397. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Meath will receive an appointment for surgery. [42371/15]

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

The National Waiting List Management Policy, *A standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, January 2014*, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the Health Service Executive, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Hospital Appointments Status

398. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Meath will receive an appointment for surgery. [42372/15]

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

The National Waiting List Management Policy, *A standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, January 2014*, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the Health Service Executive, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Hospital Appointments Status

399. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Clare will have surgery, given that the person expected to have this surgery in September 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42375/15]

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.

In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Medical Card Applications

400. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Health if an application for a medical card by a person (details supplied) in County Longford will be expedited. [42440/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information has issued to Oireachtas members.

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

Hospital Appointments Status

401. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42448/15]

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.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Eligibility

402. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health where an applicant has a joint bank account with a niece or nephew, if the full balance or half the balance will be taken into account in the assessment of financial means under the nursing home support scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42449/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Nursing Homes Support Scheme, which commenced in 2009, provides financial support towards the cost of long-term residential care services in nursing homes. Under the Scheme, applicants contribute up to 80% of their assessable income and a maximum of 7.5% of the value of any assets per annum towards the cost of their care. In the case of a couple, the applicant's means are assessed as 50% of the couple's combined income and assets. The first €36,000 of an individual's assets, or €72,000 in the case of a couple, is disregarded from the financial assessment. The Scheme ensures that applicants retain at least 20% of their income. An applicant's principal private residence will only be included in the financial assessment for the first three years of their time in care.

Where there is a joint bank account involved, the HSE, when conducting the financial assessment, will make a determination as to the required contribution by the applicant on the basis of an examination of the circumstances, and the information provided, in each case.

Audiology Services Provision

403. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Health the waiting time in counties Wicklow, Carlow and Kildare for an appointment with community adult audiology services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42452/15]

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.

Vaccination Programme

404. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if he will introduce a programme of immunisation against meningitis, given the statistics that one in ten persons will die from it and one in three survivors will be disabled and given that a meningitis vaccine programme has been rolled out in Northern Ireland since September 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42466/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The immunisation programme in Ireland is based on the advice of the National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC). NIAC is a committee of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland comprising of experts in a number of specialties including infectious diseases, paediatrics and public health. The committee's recommendations are informed by public health advice and international best practice.

A vaccine against MenC is given to children at 4 months and 13 months of age as part of the Primary Childhood Immunisation Schedule (PCIS). A booster dose is given to children in 1st year of second level school to protect against Meningococcal C disease until early adulthood.

NIAC has recommended that if the Meningococcal B vaccine can be made available at a cost-effective price, it should be included in the PCIS. The HSE Service Plan includes additional

funding for the expansion of the PCIS in 2016, including the introduction of Meningococcal B vaccination. The HSE is engaging with the manufacturer to see to whether the manufacturer will agree to sell the vaccine at a cost-effective and sustainable price in Ireland. It is intended to introduce Meningococcal B vaccination into the PCIS in 2016 if agreement can be reached.

Hospitals Funding

405. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health if he will report to Dáil Éireann on proposed activity-based funding of hospitals in 2016; how he estimates the new system will impact on his overall budget; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42469/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The way that public hospital services are funded is in the process of being reformed through the implementation of an Activity Based Funding (ABF) system (also referred to as Money Follows The Patient). The purpose of ABF is to change the model of funding from the existing block grant budget system to a new approach where hospitals are paid based on the quantity and quality of the services they deliver to patients. Hospitals will be incentivised to pursue the most cost-effective means of achieving their performance targets and will also be subject to overall budgetary ceilings.

Implementation of ABF is a multi-year project and extensive preparatory work has been undertaken over the last 24 months. This work has allowed 2016 to be identified as the “conversion year” for inpatient and day case activity. This means that hospital budgets will be separated into ABF and non-ABF budgets for the first time. Hospital funding associated with inpatient and day case activity will effectively be withdrawn from hospitals and replaced with funding provided upon the delivery of activity in line with agreed targets. In order to maintain financial stability in the system, where appropriate, hospitals will be given transition adjustment payments to reflect the difference between their current costs and the national average cost. These transition payments will be phased out over time. All non-ABF activity will remain block funded during 2016. The ABF model will continue to evolve in subsequent years to encompass other aspects of hospital services, such as outpatient activity, before extending into community services.

It is important to note that ABF does not seek to reduce budgets. Instead, it will encourage hospitals to use the resources at their disposal more efficiently and will provide a more transparent funding mechanism that more fairly rewards hospitals for the activity they undertake.

The Government published details on this major element of its programme of health service reform in the *Money Follows the Patient Policy Paper on Hospital Financing*. In addition, the HSE has in recent months published the *Activity Based Funding Programme Implementation Plan 2015 – 2017* which outlines the timetable for implementation over the next two years. Both documents are available on my Department’s website.

Medical Card Eligibility

406. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health if income conditions to obtain a medical card need to be reviewed, given concerns by citizens that the rate of interest applied to savings during income assessments is much higher than current market rates; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42470/15]

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.

Nursing Home Services

407. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Health the status of an application under the fair deal scheme by a person (details supplied) in County Cork; the availability of suitable accommodation in the Cork city region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42479/15]

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

Health Services Charges

408. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health if he is aware of an extra cost of €2 patients attending the Inchicore health clinic have to pay for their blood samples to be sent to St. James's Hospital in Dublin 8; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42495/15]

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.

Hospital Appointments Status

409. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42520/15]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the

hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Prescriptions Charges

410. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if he will ensure that a married couple (details supplied) in County Kildare only pay €25 for their joint prescriptions charges each month. [42522/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the Health Service Executive (HSE) has statutory responsibility for the administration of the primary care schemes.

As the particular issue raised relates to an individual case, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the HSE for direct reply to you. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Hospital Appointments Status

411. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied) in County Mayo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42526/15]

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

The National Waiting List Management Policy, *A standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, January 2014*, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the Health Service Executive, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Hospital Appointments Status

412. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if he will ensure a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath is provided with an appointment for an operation without further delay. [42531/15]

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

413. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number and details for each occasion Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital in Drogheda, County Louth, had to avail of protected call during the past four years; when these events occurred; the reason they occurred; how long each lasted; if any specifically occurred because of excessive numbers in the accident and emergency department or because of difficulties in providing ambulance cover; the protocol for patients requiring hospital admission during an episode of protected call; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42539/15]

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.

Departmental Funding

414. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide funding to Grow, the world community mental health movement in Ireland so that it can continue supporting persons suffering from mental health problems. [42559/15]

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

Health Care Professionals

415. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health his plans to protect the status of the titles of physiotherapist and physical therapist; the consequences of protecting the title of physical therapist; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42570/15]

426. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health his plans to prescribe the title of physical therapist as a variant of the specified title of physiotherapist after an appropriate lead-in time; if he is aware that this proposal has been recommended by the State Regulator and the Physiotherapists Registration Board and that it is also supported by the Irish Society of

Chartered Physiotherapists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42629/15]

441. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 167, 175 and 198 of 19 November 2015, if he will define the terms physical therapist and physiotherapist which are not ambiguous internationally; his view of correspondence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42764/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 415, 426 and 441 together.

The Physiotherapists Registration Board will soon make the necessary bye-laws under the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005 to allow it to establish its register early next year. The title of *physiotherapist* will, as a consequence, be protected for the exclusive use of the board's registrants when the register's 2 year transitional period ends in 2018.

I am currently examining the issue of also protecting the title of *physical therapist* under the Act. In the rest of the English speaking world the titles of *physical therapist* and *physiotherapist* are interchangeable and their users are qualified physiotherapists. In Ireland, however, the title is used by a number of practitioners who are not physiotherapists but who are competing with physiotherapists in the private sector in the provision of musculoskeletal therapies.

Earlier this year, having consulted with the Health and Social Care Professionals Council, I wrote to a number of relevant organisations including the Physiotherapists Registration Board and the Irish Society of Chartered Physiotherapists, regarding my proposal to protect the title of *physical therapist* as a variant of the title of *physiotherapist* and invited them to submit their views. Protecting the title of *physical therapist* in this way would mean that practitioners who are currently using this title and are not registered as physiotherapists would not be entitled to use the title of *physical therapist* when the regulations come into effect.

The submissions are now being examined and I expect that I will make a decision on the matter before the end of the year that ensures public protection and appropriately addresses the legitimate concerns of all parties.

Hospital Waiting Lists

416. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health the waiting times and the number of adults and children waiting in each level four, three and two hospital for computerised axial tomography, CAT, scans, magnetic resonance imaging, MRI, scans, emergency and non-emergency ultrasound scans and X-rays; if the hospitals also provide these services to elective private patients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42577/15]

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 Appointments Status

417. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal will receive an appointment in Letterkenny University Hospital in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42595/15]

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.

In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Hospital Waiting Lists

418. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the progress of the 2014 national adult waiting list initiative; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42601/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I can assure the Deputy that improving waiting times for out-patients and in-patient care is a key priority for the Government. In January, taking into account current pressures on acute hospital services, I put in place maximum permissible waiting times for in-patient and day case treatment and outpatient appointments of 18 months by 30 June and 15 months by year end. The HSE was provided with additional funding of €51m to ensure that these maximum waiting times would be achieved. The funding provided is intended to maximise capacity across public and voluntary hospitals as well as outsourcing activity where the capacity is not available to meet patient needs within the maximum allowable waiting time.

The HSE is addressing the areas of underachievement of maximum waiting times with Hospital Groups as part of the regular performance and accountability process, as well as seeking the support of the National Clinical Programmes to ensure that the appropriate referral and clinical pathways are used at all times. The main priority is the patients affected by any delays in waiting lists and the HSE will ensure that these patients are prioritised for treatment.

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.

Dental Services Waiting Lists

419. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be called for a dental appointment; the reason for the delay; the waiting time for children in Counties Cavan and Monaghan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42602/15]

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.

Hospital Appointments Status

420. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Kildare will receive an appointment for an eye test; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42609/15]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Primary Care Centres Provision

421. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Health his plans for a primary health care centre (details supplied) in County Dublin; if a site has been identified; its location; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42610/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): Your question has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply as the delivery of the health care infrastructure is a service matter.

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

Health Services Staff

422. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health his plans to establish a national transfer panel for physiotherapists within the Health Service Executive; the status of the review on transfer methods for all staff grades in the executive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42613/15]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

423. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied) in County Laois. [42614/15]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition

warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Hospital Waiting Lists

424. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on the waiting list for orthopaedic surgery to treat scoliosis curves and the number of such surgeries carried out in Galway University Hospital, by month, from January 2011 to 2015 to date; the number of such surgeries it is planned to carry out in the hospital, by month, from December 2015 to June 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter [42623/15]

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 Waiting Lists

425. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Minister for Health while fully cognisant of section 6 of the Health Service Executive (Governance) Act 2013 and clarifying that this is not a request for him to intervene in the case of a person (details supplied), if he will clarify, as a matter of policy, his views on whether it is acceptable that a 14 year old patient would be left for over two years with an 80+ degree scoliosis curve, suffering significant deterioration of quality of life, general health and mental health, especially given that the delay in treatment may reduce the effectiveness of the corrective surgery; if he will identify any policy decision or funding decision he can take that will resolve the delay in cases like this, and having so identified the solution if he will implement it and if not, the reason; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42628/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Government is clear that long waiting times for scoliosis surgery both in Crumlin and in Galway, which have been highlighted in recent media reports, are unacceptable. I am determined that these waiting times will be addressed as a priority, through additional resources and increased capacity.

Scoliosis in children and young people is predominantly managed at Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin. Additional funding has been provided to Crumlin in 2015 for additional consultant posts including two consultant orthopaedic surgeons, anaesthetist and support staff. Capital funding has also been provided for a new theatre on site to expand theatre capacity further.

In the interim, patients from Crumlin are being transferred to other hospitals where capacity is available and where that is clinically appropriate. These include Temple Street, Cappagh, Tallaght and the Blackrock Clinic. External capacity has also been identified in the UK, at the Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital at Stanmore. These measures in total have more than doubled capacity for this surgery for patients on the Crumlin waiting list in 2015.

Additional consultant orthopaedic surgeons have also been appointed at Galway University Hospital to support the spinal service there. In the short term, Galway is planning to assign 5 dedicated beds to support this service and when the new ward block at Galway is completed, this will increase to 8 dedicated beds.

The HSE is continuing to work with the Children's Hospital Group, Saolta Hospital Group and the individual hospitals to identify all options to increase capacity further to improve access times for surgery, including identification of external capacity where appropriate.

Question No. 426 answered with Question No. 415.

Drug and Alcohol Task Forces

427. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Health his plans to provide funding to South Dublin County Council in 2016 to continue the important work of the estate management project in Fettercairn estate and of the safety forum in Killinarden estate in Tallaght; his views on the importance of these estate management initiatives; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42637/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Aodhán Ó Ríordáin): In line with the National Drugs Strategy, the Government is committed to continuing support for initiatives to tackle the drug problem. Drug and Alcohol Task Forces play a key role in assessing the extent and nature of the drug problem in their areas and coordinating action at local level, so that there is a targeted response to the problem of substance misuse in local communities.

The Department of Health allocated additional funding to Tallaght Local Drug and Alcohol Task Force in 2013 to support community safety fora in the Task Force area. This funding has helped to secure the long term sustainability of community safety initiatives developed by the estate management groups in Killinarden and Fettercairn in Tallaght.

Every effort has been made to protect the budgets of Drug and Alcohol Task Forces in recent years. The overall allocation to Tallaght Local Drug and Alcohol Task Force for community-based drugs initiatives from the Department of Health and the Health Service Executive in 2016 is €1,234,952. This is the same overall level of funding allocated in 2015. It is a matter for the Task Force to ensure that the budget is effectively deployed to address current priorities and locally identified needs, including in relation to the issue of community safety.

Hospital Consultant Recruitment

428. **Deputy Seán Kenny** asked the Minister for Health his plans to appoint a full-time consultant cardiothoracic surgeon at Beaumont Hospital in Dublin 9; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42655/15]

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.

Departmental Staff Data

429. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health the number of economists generally employed by his Department; and within that, the number of health economists employed. [42656/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The establishment of an Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES) is a central Government initiative to enhance the

capacity of the Civil Service to undertake evaluations of public expenditure, to provide economic analysis, and to improve the analytical resources available in the design and formulation of policy. It is led by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. This Department established an IGEES Unit this year and we currently have two economists employed in the Unit, one of which is a health economist. It is planned to build our IGEES Unit with the engagement of a further two economists early in 2016.

Hospital Appointments Status

430. **Deputy John Perry** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied) in County Sligo who is waiting more than two years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42663/15]

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

The National Waiting List Management Policy, *A standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, January 2014*, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the Health Service Executive, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Hospital Appointments Status

431. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42666/15]

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.

Home Care Packages Provision

432. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health why a care worker to provide morning care at appropriate times to a person (details supplied), as indicated by a care assessment, (details supplied) in County Donegal has not been appointed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42703/15]

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

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

Narcolepsy Issues

433. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Health his views on the case of a person (details supplied) who requires financial assistance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42708/15]

435. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Health the financial assistance available to parents of children who contracted narcolepsy as a result of the swine flu vaccine; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42729/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 433 and 435 together.

The HSE and the Department of Education and Skills are providing a range of services and supports to individuals diagnosed with narcolepsy following pandemic vaccination regardless of age, on an ex-gratia basis. These services and supports which are co-ordinated by the HSE National Advocacy Unit are intended to provide that individuals receive tailored assistance to address their specific requirements, where appropriate. It is acknowledged that treatment and individual medical needs may need to be reassessed over time to take account of changes in their condition or circumstances.

As of 30 October 2015, the Health Products Regulatory Authority has received 77 reports with clinical information confirming a diagnosis of narcolepsy in individuals who were vaccinated with Pandemrix® (76) and Celvapan® (1).

The ex-gratia health supports include clinical care pathways to ensure access to diagnosis and treatment, multi-disciplinary assessments led by clinical experts, counselling services for both the individuals and their families, discretionary medical cards for those who have been diagnosed have been provided to allow unlimited access to GP care and any prescribed medication, ex-gratia reimbursement of vouched expenses incurred in the process of diagnosis and treatment, including travel expenses for attending medical appointments; physiotherapy, occupational therapy assessments, dental assessments and dietary services all on a needs basis. Regional co-ordinators have been appointed by the HSE to assist individuals to provide advice, information and access to local services.

On the education side, the National Educational Psychological Services engaged with all of the schools being attended by children with narcolepsy to provide guidance and assistance on the condition and the supports available. These include special education home tuition, the provision of supplemental learning support/resource teaching support on a needs basis and the provision of Special Needs Assistants support if required. Furthermore, reasonable accommodations, including special examination centres and rest breaks were provided for students who sat state exams in June. Similar arrangements will be available on a needs basis to students sitting state exams in future years. The Department of Education and Skills issued circulars providing information to schools on the nature, likely symptoms, possible effect of the condition of narcolepsy on students and the supports available for students.

With regard to third level, students diagnosed with narcolepsy following pandemic vaccination can access the Disability Access Route to Education scheme, which is a college/university scheme which offers enhanced access routes to third level education.

All health and educational services and supports will continue to be provided on an ex-gratia basis. Those services and supports will be reassessed on an ongoing basis to take account of the individual's condition and circumstances.

Financial assistance for people who are not working is a matter for the Department of Social Protection.

Medical Card Reviews

434. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the delay in processing a review under the medical card scheme for a person (details supplied) in County Louth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42727/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information has issued to Oireachtas members.

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

Question No. 435 answered with Question No. 433.

General Practitioner Services Provision

436. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if he will support the efforts being made to maintain services at Bansha Medical Centre in County Tipperary; if he will instigate greater efforts to retain rural general practitioners; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42735/15]

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.

Nursing Staff Provision

437. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of new nursing staff recruited, the number of nursing staff who left, the total number of nursing staff, and the net increase or decrease in the number of nursing staff, in each hospital (details supplied) from 1 January to 30 September 2015, in tabular form [42737/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15

working days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Irish Blood Transfusion Service

438. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Health his plans to extend nationwide the programme set up with the Irish Blood Transfusion Service that allows persons in Cork and Dublin to have up to four free venesections a year, given that not all sufferers can travel to Cork or Dublin for treatment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42739/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The IBTS currently provides a haemochromatosis service at three centres, two in Dublin and one in Cork. The service is provided free of charge and, where patients meet all the normal blood donation criteria, they can become blood donors.

Where a regular donor (someone who has donated within the previous two years) is diagnosed with haemochromatosis, they can continue to donate and have their venesections performed by the IBTS in their own locality up to four times per year.

The HSE and the IBTS are currently working in partnership to develop the most appropriate model of care for the extension of a haemochromatosis service to the rest of the country.

Hospital Services

439. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if he will abolish the charges for ongoing treatment as inpatients in hospitals on hemochromatosis sufferers, given that the treatment takes less than 25 minutes, the sufferers are not admitted to hospital and, accordingly, they should be treated as outpatients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42741/15]

440. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health why a person (details supplied) in County Wexford is charged as an inpatient every time the person receives a venesection, despite the procedure taking less than 30 minutes and not requiring a doctor. [42751/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 439 and 440 together.

The Health Act 1970 (as amended) provides that all people ordinarily resident in the country are entitled, subject to certain charges, to public in-patient hospital services including consultant services and to public out-patient hospital services. As provided for by the Health (In-Patient Charges) Regulations (S.I. No. 543 of 2008), the current public hospital statutory in-patient charge is €75 per night, subject to a maximum of €750 in any twelve consecutive months.

These Regulations also underpin charges for persons admitted to hospital as a day case, i.e. the public in-patient charge also applies to in-patient day cases. On this basis, where venesection is classed as a day case procedure and is not carried out in an out patient setting, the public in-patient charge applies.

Question No. 441 answered with Question No. 415.

Medical Card Applications

442. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Health if he will review an application

for a discretionary medical card for a person (details supplied) in County Longford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42766/15]

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.

Maternity Services Provision

443. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health if he will meet with persons (details supplied) to discuss a family matter. [42781/15]

449. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health if there will be accountability for the events that led to an incident in a hospital (details supplied). [42818/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 443 and 449 together.

At the outset I would like to offer my sincerest condolences to the family involved in this case. The Deputy will appreciate that I have a limited role in individual cases and do not have access to individual patient files or personal information. I am informed that the HSE and the Coombe Hospital have been in contact with this family on an on-going basis over a number of years and has apologised to them for the death of their child 23 years ago.

I understand that, in 2012, the Coombe Hospital initiated a systems review to investigate the circumstances surrounding the death of this infant in 1992.

This review, which was undertaken in line with HSE Incident Management Policy and Guidelines, concluded that there were deficiencies in care, which contributed to the child's death.

It is important that we learn from these adverse incidents, as the single most important obligation for any health service is patient safety and improving the quality of care. That is why this Government is committed to improving the quality and safety of Ireland's maternity services.

A National Women's and Infant Health Programme will be established by the HSE to drive improvement and standardise care across all 19 maternity units. The Maternity Strategy currently under development will provide the policy to direct and underpin the work of the programme. Developing the strategy will help us identify how we can improve the quality and safety of care provided to pregnant women and their babies. There was also an additional €2 million provided to the HSE in 2015, to improve maternity services. This funding provided for the appointment of additional staff including obstetricians, midwives and other staff.

We will build on these improvements through the provision of further additional resources for maternity services in 2016, the detail of which will be set out in the HSE's National Service Plan.

I have previously written to the family of this child expressing my sincerest condolences. However, as you can appreciate, it would not be appropriate for me to intervene on an individual case.

Medical Card Applications

444. **Deputy John Browne** asked the Minister for Health when a medical card will be processed for a person (details supplied) in County Wexford, given that this application is with a deciding officer for the past three weeks and no decision has been made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42784/15]

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.

Meals-on-Wheels Services

445. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health if Crosscare has indicated to the Health Service Executive that it requires another agency to take over the delivery of the meals-on-wheels services in Dublin south inner city on its behalf, as a permanent measure. [42785/15]

446. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health if he has an alternative to the current temporary providers of meals-on-wheels in Dublin south inner city; when the Health Service Executive is going to establish a permanent provider of meals-on-wheels in this area. [42786/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I propose to take Questions Nos. 445 and 446 together.

As these are service matters they have been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Hospital Procedures

447. **Deputy Arthur Spring** asked the Minister for Health when an operation for a person (details supplied) in County Kerry will be carried out; if he is aware of delays in this case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42803/15]

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.

Medical Card Reviews

448. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health if a medical card will be re-instated for a person (details supplied) in Dublin 16. [42812/15]

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

Question No. 449 answered with Question No. 443.

Medical Card Applications

450. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the delay in processing an application for a medical card by a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42830/15]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

451. **Deputy Derek Keating** asked the Minister for Health if he will intervene in the case of a person (details supplied) to expedite a very urgent appointment in a hospital, given that the

urgency of this case requires him to directly intervene and not to send it to the Health Service Executive for a response, and given the performance of the executive on this matter to date. [42835/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 specifically precludes me from directing the HSE to prioritise a treatment for any individual. In these circumstances, the Deputy will appreciate that I cannot intervene on the lines suggested.

I should also draw the Deputy's attention to the National Waiting List Management Policy, *A standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, January 2014*. This policy sets out the processes that hospitals are required to implement in order to manage waiting lists. The policy seeks 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.

Health Services Staff

452. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 417 of 29 September 2015, regarding the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny and the reply issued by the Health Service Executive dated 19 October 2015, if he is aware that the person was given the contract for employment as chef grade 1 in the knowledge of the executive that the person was short by two months to qualify under the regulations; how can the executive now break the contract with the person given that it was agreed before a witness and with the executive having full knowledge of the circumstances of the case; if the executive will now confirm the person in the position as chef grade 1 and avoid an unnecessary human resources dispute involving an employee who has an excellent work record with the executive for over 35 years; if he will also note that replies from the executive do not issue in 15 days. [42845/15]

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

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

453. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 509 of 10 November 2015, if he is aware of the case of a person (details supplied) in County Meath, and if, given the exceptional circumstances, he will grant additional special needs assistant hours to allow this person to attend pre-school on a full-time basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42849/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme, is the responsibility of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. While certain flexibilities had been built in to the Programme to facilitate the inclusion of children with a disability the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* children and young people's policy framework contained a commitment to develop a plan to facilitate the full participation of such children in the ECCE Programme. The Department of Children and Youth Affairs has lead responsibility for the implementation of this commitment and has concluded an intensive process of deliberation and consultation on the matter in conjunction with the Departments of Health and Education and Skills and has brought forward a new model of supports to facilitate the full participation of children with a disability in the

ECCE Programme.

As part of Budget 2016, the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs announced the necessary funding to implement the new model of ECCE supports for children with a disability. The new model will provide supports including enhanced continuing professional development for early years practitioners; grants for equipment, appliances and minor alterations; and access to therapeutic intervention. Funding of €15m has been provided to phase these supports in during 2016. Full year costs for these supports are estimated to be €33m from 2017 onwards. This model of supports was launched on 18th November last by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs with my full support and the support of my Government colleague Jan O'Sullivan T.D., Minister for Education and Skills.

Improving access to therapy services for children in primary care and in disability services is a particular priority for the Government. Building on additional investment in recent years, funding of €8m is being provided to the HSE in 2016 to expand, inter alia, the provision of Speech and Language Therapy in primary care and the further development of early intervention therapy services under the Progressing Disabilities Programme to facilitate the inclusion of children with a disability in mainstream pre-school settings as part of the rollout of the new inclusive preschools model.

It should be noted that while the Health Service Executive has no statutory obligation to provide assistant supports for children with special needs wishing to avail of the ECCE scheme, it has, to date, worked at local level and in partnership with the relevant disability service providers to address individual needs as they arise. This has been 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.

Within this context, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy in relation to the individual case he has raised. 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 Care Professionals

454. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Health if he has responded to CORU on the first part in the two-part consultation process, which is required under section 4(2) of the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005, regarding the regulation of psychotherapists and counsellors. [42855/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Psychotherapists and counsellors are not currently regulated under the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005. However, the Act provides that the Minister for Health may, by regulation, designate a health and social care profession not already designated if he or she considers that it is appropriate and in the public interest to do so and if specified criteria have been met.

In accordance with the Act, the Health and Social Care Professionals Council has been consulted on the question of regulating counsellors and psychotherapists. Its detailed report on the matter is being examined carefully in my Department with a view to deciding the next steps in the coming months. These steps will, I envisage, include a wider round of consultation

involving the various professional bodies involved and other interested parties.

Hospital Services

455. **Deputy Michael Lowry** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide sufficient funding to facilitate persons with scoliosis who are categorised by their consultants as urgent cases needing immediate surgery; if he will intervene on behalf of a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary who has already suffered irreparable damage due to the inordinate delay in having this operation carried out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42862/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Government is clear that long waiting times for scoliosis surgery both in Crumlin and in Galway are unacceptable. As Minister for Health, I am determined that these waiting times are to be addressed as a priority, with the focus on additional resources and capacity.

Scoliosis in children and young people is predominantly managed at Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin. Additional funding was allocated in 2015 for additional consultant posts including two consultant orthopaedic surgeons, anaesthetist and support staff at Crumlin. Capital funding has also been provided for a new theatre on site to expand theatre capacity further.

In the interim, patients from Crumlin are being transferred to other hospitals where capacity is available and where that is clinically appropriate. These include Temple Street, Cappagh, Tallaght and the Blackrock Clinic. External capacity has also been identified at the Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital at Stanmore in the UK.

These measures in total have more than doubled capacity for this surgery for patients on the Crumlin waiting list in 2015.

Additional consultant orthopaedic surgeons have also been appointed at Galway University Hospital to support the spinal service there. In the short term, Galway is planning to assign five dedicated beds to support this service and when the new ward block at Galway is completed, this will increase to eight dedicated beds.

The HSE is continuing to work with the Children's Hospital Group, Saolta Hospital Group and the individual hospitals to identify all options to increase capacity further to improve access times for surgery.

As the specific issues raised are 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

456. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Health the details of the agreement and arrangement between Letterkenny University Hospital in County Donegal, the Health Service Executive and the private clinic in Ballykelly in County Derry in relation to public patients from County Donegal accessing health care and services at Ballykelly, especially in relation to magnetic resonance imaging, MRI, scans and computed tomography, CT, scans. [42865/15]

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 Waiting Lists

457. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Health the details of the inpatient and outpatient waiting list for orthopaedic surgery and procedures at Letterkenny University Hospital in County Donegal; and the steps being taken by management to deal with these waiting lists [42866/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) is responsible for the collection, collation and publication of Inpatient and Day Case waiting lists. Waiting list information is published on the NTPF website at the end of each month. The information is presented in different report formats, i.e. by National/Trend, by Hospital/Group, and by Specialty.

The most recent Inpatient/Day Case waiting list data for Letterkenny General Hospital, for end of October 2015, may be found at <http://www.ntpf.ie/home/pdf//2015/10/hospitals/in-patient/0500.pdf> and the most recent Outpatient Waiting List may be found at <http://www.ntpf.ie/home/pdf//2015/10/hospitals/out-patient/0500.pdf>.

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.

General Practitioner Services Provision

458. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health the measures that have been agreed to date to support rural general practitioners; his plans to provide further assistance to protect their viability; the level of ongoing negotiation between his Department and representatives of general practitioners; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42892/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): Under the General Medical Services (GMS) Scheme, where the doctor lives or practises in a centre with a population of less than 500 and where there is not a town with a population of 1,500 or more within a 4.83 kilometre radius of that centre, the doctor is entitled to special rural practice concessions, including a Rural Practice Allowance. The current annual Rural Practice Allowance is €16,216.07.

As a result of satisfying the criteria for payment of this allowance, the GP is also entitled to claim practice support subsidies towards the employment of a Practice Nurse, Practice Secretary and/or Practice Manager at the maximum applicable rate which the doctor would otherwise only be entitled to claim if he or she had a panel size of 1,200 and over. The GP would also be entitled to claim the maximum applicable contribution towards locum costs for periods of leave.

Where a GP currently holds the Rural Practice Allowance but the circumstances underpinning this have changed, the GP retains the allowance while they continue to practise in this location. However, an application for the allowance is considered afresh by the HSE when a new GP commences in the area.

The HSE has recently reviewed its guidelines for dealing with applications for a Rural

Practice Allowance. The purpose of the new guidance is to ensure consistency, transparency and fairness in decision-making in respect of the relevant discretionary provisions of the GMS contract pertaining to the granting or otherwise of the allowance to new applicants. The new guidance does not affect existing holders of the allowance.

The HSE, Department of Health and Irish Medical Organisation are currently engaged in a comprehensive review of the GMS and other publicly funded health sector contracts involving GPs. Among the many topics being looked at by this review process is the issue of supports for General Practice in remote rural areas.

Health Services Provision

459. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Health to provide essential physiotherapy treatment for a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42926/15]

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.

Hospital Services

460. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the details of inpatient and outpatient care services provided at Lifford Community Hospital in County Donegal, for each year from 2005 to 2015 to date, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42932/15]

461. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the details of the number of inpatient beds at Lifford Community Hospital in County Donegal, for each year from 2005 to 2015 to date, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42933/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I propose to take Questions Nos. 460 and 461 together.

As these are service matters they have been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Disability Services Provision

462. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the number of children waiting for appointments for physiotherapy, occupational therapy, and speech and language therapy in County Cavan and in County Monaghan for six months, 12 months, 18 months, 24 months, and 24 months plus, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42934/15]

463. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the status of the Cavan and Monaghan implementation plan for progressing disability services for children and young people, and the accessibility of therapy services and assessments for children in these counties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42935/15]

464. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the time frame for the services that are being restructured and proposed under the Cavan and Monaghan implementation plan for progressing disability services for children and young people; how this will help those children on waiting lists of over 29 months to get access to critical therapies in the short to medium term; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42936/15]

465. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the status of the additional posts that have been allocated to the specific services that are being restructured and proposed under the Cavan and Monaghan implementation plan for progressing disability services for children and young people in County Cavan and in County Monaghan; how these will be filled; how the network teams are being developed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42937/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I propose to take Questions Nos. 462 to 465, inclusive, together.

The Government is committed to the provision and development of services for children with special needs, including early intervention services, and to improving access by these children to assessments and therapeutic interventions insofar as possible within available resources. Health related therapy supports and interventions for children, such as speech and language therapy, can be accessed through both the HSE's primary care services and its disability services, depending on the level of need. Significant additional resources have been invested in recent years in the State's primary care and disability services with a view to enhancing therapy service provision.

Additional funding of €20m was allocated in 2013 to strengthen primary care services and to support the recruitment of prioritised front-line posts, including over 260 additional posts for Primary Care Teams. In addition, the HSE has introduced a number of initiatives specifically in relation to speech and language therapy services that are aimed at improving access to these services, such as therapists increasing clinic based work and providing family centred interventions in a group, as opposed to a one-to-one setting, whenever possible.

The HSE is also currently engaged in a major reconfiguration of its existing therapy resources for children with disabilities into multi-disciplinary geographically based teams, as part of its National Programme on Progressing Disability Services for Children and Young People (0-18 years). The key objective of this Programme is to bring about equity of access to disability services and consistency of service delivery, with a clear pathway for children with disabilities and their families to services, regardless of where they live, what school they go to or the nature of the individual child's difficulties. An additional €4 million was allocated in 2014 to assist in implementing the Progressing Disability Services Programme, equating to approximately 80 additional therapy posts. Further investment of €4 million (equating to €6 million in a full year) has been provided this year to support its ongoing implementation.

Improving access to therapy services for children in primary care and in disability services is a particular priority for the Government. Within this context, funding of €8 million is being provided in 2016 to expand the provision of speech and language therapy through primary care services and to support the reorganisation and expansion of speech and language and other therapies under the Progressing Disability Services Programme. Full implementation of the Progressing Disability Services Programme is expected before the end of 2016.

I have asked the HSE to reply directly to the Deputy in respect of the specific operational matters he has raised. 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.

Home Help Service Appeals

466. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health when a decision on an appeal under the home care package scheme by a person (details supplied) in County Cork will be made. [42942/15]

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

Alcohol Advertising

467. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health given the report published by Action Ireland sampling 700 schoolchildren from Dublin, Galway and Cork, and the findings that girls are now more likely to consume alcohol than boys, if he will commit to a multi-pronged approach, along with the Department of Education and Skills, to tackle the problem of under-age drinking; if he will follow the example of Finland and regulate online marketing aimed at this demographic, to improve general health of young persons and Ireland’s bad relationship with alcohol. [42952/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Ireland has a significant alcohol problem which needs decisive and innovative action to address it. A broad range of complementary measures is required to successfully reduce consumption of and the harms associated with alcohol misuse especially amongst young people. The *Steering Group Report on a National Substance Misuse Strategy, 2012* contains recommendations which take a multi-pronged approach to tackling the misuse of alcohol, focusing on supply, prevention, treatment and rehabilitation and research. The Government has approved an extensive package of measures to deal with alcohol misuse, based on the Report’s recommendations, to be incorporated in a Public Health (Alcohol) Bill. The General Scheme of the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill was approved by Government on the 3 February 2015. The Scheme includes provisions for minimum unit pricing, health labelling on products that contain alcohol, restrictions on the advertising and marketing of alcohol and the regulation of sponsorship. The Department of Health is continuing to work on the preparation of the legislation. It is expected that the Bill will be published shortly.

The Public (Health) Alcohol Bill will make it illegal to market or advertise alcohol in a manner that is appealing to children. It provides for the making of regulations regarding the marketing and advertising of alcohol and includes provisions, inter alia, for restrictions on broadcast marketing and advertising, cinema advertising, outdoor advertising, print media and the regulation of sponsorship by alcohol companies. The provisions in relation to marketing and advertising will be reviewed after three years to gauge their effectiveness.

The other measures set out in the *Steering Group Report on a National Substance Misuse Strategy, 2012*, were endorsed by Government and are to be progressed by the relevant Departments and organisations. The *Report* recommends that the Social Personal and Health Education Programme (SPHE) in schools and Youthreach centres is continued and developed. The Department of Education and Science is responsible for implementing this recommendation. The Department of Education and Science conducted a thematic evaluation of teaching and learning in SPHE. They reported that 98% of the schools visited had a substance misuse policy (*Looking at Social Personal and Health Education Teaching and Learning in Post Primary*

Schools, 2013). SPHE is mandatory in all primary schools and will also form part of the new mandatory 'Wellbeing' component of junior cycle in post primary schools.

The First Annual Report on the National Substance Misuse Strategy is due by the end of 2015. The report, which will be laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas, will outline progress on the implementation of the recommendations in the Steering Group Report on the National Substance Misuse Strategy, the target for reduction in annual per capita consumption of pure alcohol, and the key performance indicators recommended in the Steering Group report.

Vaccination Programme

468. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health if he will commit to meeting the group Regret to address its members' concerns about their daughters' health in relation to the human papilloma virus vaccine; given that he has previously expressed his confidence in the vaccine, if he will address the parents' concerns that the one common denominator in the emergence of some very serious health issues is the vaccine; if he will offer care plans or compensation given the hardships faced by these families; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42953/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As Minister for Health I consider meeting any organisation in the health area that requests to do so. However due to scheduling commitments and other diary events such as Cabinet and Dáil business I am not always available to meet all who request a meeting.

In Ireland, the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) is the regulatory authority for medicines in Ireland. There are 2 licensed HPV vaccines available in Ireland (Gardasil® and Cervarix®). Gardasil® is the vaccine used by the HSE in the School Immunisation Programme and over 100,000 girls have received this vaccine since its introduction. The vaccine protects against two high risk types of HPV (16 and 18) that cause 73% of all cervical cancers. Vaccinated women and girls will still be at risk from other high risk types of HPV that can cause cervical cancer and will therefore need to continue to have regular cervical smear tests.

Gardasil® is a fully tested vaccine which was licensed by the European Medicines Agency (EMA) in 2006. No medicine, including vaccines, is entirely without risk, there is therefore on-going pharmacovigilance and monitoring of medicinal products once they are authorised for use. The safety profile of Gardasil® has been continuously monitored since it was first authorised. The introduction of new vaccines is based on the expert advice of the National Immunisation Advisory Committee. Decisions on the supply of vaccines into the market are undertaken by specific expert agencies rather than being the responsibility of the Minister of the day.

The EMA has recently completed a review of the HPV vaccine. The review which the HPRA participated in specifically focused on rare reports of two conditions, complex regional pain syndrome and postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome associated with heart rate increase. The outcome of the review which was carried out by the EMA Pharmacovigilance and Risk Assessment Committee (PRAC) found no evidence of a causal link between the vaccine and the two conditions examined.

As part of its monitoring of the safety of medicines, the HPRA operates an adverse reaction reporting system, where healthcare professionals and patients are encouraged to report adverse reactions they consider may be associated with their treatment, through the range of options in place for reporting. All reports received are evaluated and considered in the context of

the safety profile of the product concerned, with reports followed up as necessary for further information, that may assist in the assessment of the case.

As of the 27 November, the HPRA has received 936 reports of suspected adverse reactions or events notified in association with the use of HPV vaccines. Of the 936 reports received, 933 were associated with use of Gardasil® and three were associated with Cervarix®. The vast majority have been consistent with the expected pattern of adverse effects for the vaccines, as described in the product information, such as gastrointestinal symptoms, malaise, headache, dizziness and injection site reactions. Parents of any child with a suspected adverse reaction following administration of a vaccine are advised to contact the HSE vaccination teams or their general practitioner for advice and are referred for further management if required.

The EMA has advised healthcare professionals that available data does not warrant any change to the use of HPV vaccines as there are no new safety concerns regarding HPV vaccines. Healthcare professionals should therefore continue using the vaccines in accordance with the current product information.

Cancer Screening Programmes

469. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health if he will extend the BreastCheck cut-off age from 65 to 70 years of age and increase health advertising on its importance, given the ageing population and the reduction in the number of women taking the check during the past year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42954/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Last year I announced the extension of BreastCheck, the free breast screening service, to women aged 65-69 years, in keeping with EU Guidelines. Previously, this service was available to women aged 50-64 years. I am pleased to confirm that the first invitations to the extended age range have issued and that the screening of 500 women in this cohort will take place this year.

Earlier this year, BreastCheck launched a new advertising campaign. It highlights the benefits and convenience of participating in BreastCheck and aims to encourage women to attend their first appointment, while normalising regular breast screening among all eligible women. The campaign has been featured on TV, radio, print, outdoor, social and digital media throughout the year and most recently in October, in support of Breast Cancer Awareness Month. A similar level of advertising activity is planned for 2016.

Accident and Emergency Departments

470. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health the short-term plans in place to relieve the overcrowding in accident and emergency departments; if he will reform the nature of these departments, for instance, by allocating intellectual disability nurses for patients presenting with mental health problems, with a separate triage for those presenting with alcohol and addiction issues; if staff are under increasing pressure due to poor management of departments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42955/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Last December I convened the ED Taskforce to assist in dealing with the challenges presented by ED overcrowding and significant progress has been made to date.

Additional funding of €117m has been provided in 2015 to relieve pressures on acute

hospitals including reducing delayed discharges, lowering the waiting time for Fair Deal funding and providing additional transitional care beds and home care packages. The HSE began its winter planning process early this year. Funding has been made available to support the acute hospital system over the winter period by providing additional bed capacity and other initiatives to support access to care. 197 hospital beds have opened nationally since October with another 38 due to open in the next few weeks. While it is still extremely challenging, the number of people waiting for nine hours or more on a trolley has fallen to, on average, 112 in Quarter 4. This compares with 127 on average in June, and 173 in February.

All hospitals have escalation plans to manage not only patient flow but also patient safety in a responsive, controlled and planned way that supports and ensures the delivery of optimum patient care. Last week I co-signed the ED Congestion Escalation Directive to ensure that progress made to date on overcrowding is sustained and improved upon. The Directive requires hospitals to implement their Escalation Plan whenever the Emergency Department experiences overcrowding and it is expected that this will add to the progress made on overcrowding so far.

The National Clinical Programme for Emergency Medicine encourages, and hopes to ensure, that the diagnosis and treatment of patients in Emergency Departments (ED) is conducted in a way that potential underlying causes for a patient's symptoms including serious underlying injuries and illness are ruled out. For this reason caution must always be taken in streaming of patients to separate areas before they have undergone a medical examination. The ED is the safest environment for the assessment of these patients. Emergency Medicine clinical expertise is required to differentiate between physical injury and the effects of alcohol or other substances and advanced diagnostic imaging is frequently required for such assessment.

Long-Term Illness Scheme

471. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health the supports in place for persons diagnosed with long-term degenerative diseases such as Parkinson's who do not qualify for a medical card; if there are significant financial demands on persons who are often on very modest incomes but are just above the threshold for a medical card; if State assistance is required for persons in this predicament. [42956/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): Parkinsonism is one of 16 long-term illnesses or disabilities covered by the Long Term Illness Scheme, which was established under Section 59(3) of the Health Act, 1970 (as amended). This scheme is administered by the Health Service Executive (HSE), and provides free

drugs, medicines, and medical and surgical appliances directly related to the treatment of the specific conditions covered.

In the medical card assessment process, the HSE can take into account medical costs incurred by an individual or a family. Furthermore, the HSE may exercise discretion and grant a medical card even though an applicant's means exceed the prescribed threshold, where deemed appropriate.

The HSE has also taken steps to ensure greater interaction between the medical card central assessment office and the Local Health Office and/or Primary Care Team to see if there are further circumstances or needs that would support a medical card application, and to ensure that assistance is provided to meet the individual's needs as far as possible (where they do not have a medical card).

The Drugs Payment Scheme (DPS) provides assistance for people who are not eligible for either a medical card or the Long-Term Illness Scheme. Under the DPS, an individual or family pays a maximum of €144 each month for approved prescribed drugs, medicines and certain appliances for use by that person or his or her family.

Hospital Appointment Delays

472. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health if a waiting time, in many cases in excess of 14 months, is too long for public patients waiting to see a gynaecologist; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42957/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Improving waiting times for scheduled care for patients is a key priority for the Government. In January, taking into account current pressures on acute hospital services, I put in place maximum permissible waiting times for in-patient and day case treatment and outpatient appointments of 18 months by 30 June and 15 months by year end.

The HSE was provided with additional funding of €51m to ensure that these maximum waiting times would be achieved. The funding provided is intended to maximise capacity across public and voluntary hospitals as well as outsourcing activity where the capacity is not available to meet patient needs within the maximum allowable waiting time.

In June, the HSE reported a performance against the 18 month maxima of 99.6% for in-patient/day cases (IP/DC) and 92% for out-patients (OPD). The latest NTPF figures, published on Friday 6 November, continue to show improvements. There are reductions in the total In-patient/Daycase waiting list, and in the numbers of patients waiting between 15–18 months and waiting over 18 months. This is very positive, as it is the first time that we have seen reductions in all 3 key categories.

Concerted efforts have been made to reduce outpatient waiting lists by facilitating additional clinics outside conventional working hours and outsourcing where capacity is limited. Improvements are also evident with the end of October seeing a reduction of almost 5000 in the overall Outpatient waiting lists and of over 3000 in the number of people waiting between 15–18 months for appointments. The total number of people waiting for outpatient appointments has fallen below 400,000 for the first time this year.

The HSE is addressing the areas of underachievement of maximum waiting times with Hospital Groups as part of the regular performance and accountability process, as well as seeking the support of the National Clinical Programmes to ensure that the appropriate referral and clinical pathways are used at all times. The main priority is the patients affected by any delays in waiting lists and the HSE will ensure that these patients are prioritised for treatment.

Health Services Staff

473. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 174 of 5 November 2015, why he has not introduced a statutory duty of candour rather than a purely voluntary open disclosure, as has been done in the United Kingdom. [42963/15]

474. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 174 of 5 November 2015 why he has not incorporated a statutory duty of candour into the contracts of medical staff that participate in reviews and investigations. [42964/15]

475. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 174 of 5 November 2015 and given the almost weekly medical negligence cases and the huge amount of money being spent on legal fees, if the failure to disclose should now be a criminal issue as well as an issue of professional misconduct. [42965/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 473 to 475, inclusive, together.

The safety of service users is of paramount importance and steps need to be taken to anticipate and avoid things going wrong and to reduce the impact if they do. All employees including medical staff are required to disclose and report incidents in line with the HSE's Safety Incident Management Policy. Creating a culture of open disclosure and learning from the things that go wrong is the bedrock of making systems safer. Open Disclosure is defined as 'an open consistent approach to communicating with patients and their families when things go wrong in healthcare. This includes expressing regret for what has happened, keeping the patient informed, providing feedback on investigations and the steps taken to prevent a recurrence of the adverse event'.

I recently announced that the Government has given its approval to the drafting of provisions to support open disclosure of patient safety incidents. This will be included in the Department of Justice and Equality's draft Bill on Periodic Payment Orders which is well advanced. The legislation is part of a broader package of reforms aimed at improving the experience of those who are affected by adverse events.

This legislation builds on the joint development by the HSE and State Claims Agency of the National Policy on Open Disclosure (2013). The HSE is progressing the implementation of the Policy across all health and social care services. We all know that when error or harm is experienced by a patient, the trust and confidence of that patient and their family are compromised. That is why honest, open disclosure and communication, which demonstrate empathy and sensitivity, are so essential. The intent of this legislation is to provide certain legal protections for healthcare staff for open disclosure, which is undertaken in good faith and in compliance with national standards. This will give further support to those staff in their communications with patients and family members if an adverse event occurs. The Ethical Code of Practice set out by the Medical Council also makes clear the responsibilities of doctors in relation to open disclosure.

Open disclosure is now HSE policy and therefore any unjustified breach of the policy (as with any HSE policy) will be managed in line with the HSE disciplinary procedures. Where potential deviations have been identified the Healthcare records must be reviewed to ascertain any documentation in relation to communication with the patient about the adverse event and to establish if any rationale for non-disclosure has been documented. Where there is no evidence that open disclosure has occurred the incident must be reviewed with the staff involved in the event. The patient must be informed of the event and the impact of the event explained and acknowledged. The patient should also be informed of the initial failure to disclose and an appropriate acknowledgement, explanation and apology provided.

From a patient safety perspective the key focus of open disclosure is on learning so that systems and processes can be improved in order to reduce potential future harms to patients. If a person is not satisfied that a health professional or administrator has fulfilled their obligations regarding open disclosure then that person has recourse to the HSE's complaints procedures. It is also open to a person to raise a complaint with the appropriate professional regulatory body or with the Ombudsman.

Maternity Services

476. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if he will increase support for neonatal care and, in particular, for the roll-out of a retro-transport service to be run in conjunction with the neonatal transport programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42966/15]

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.

Abortion Legislation

477. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Health his views on the letter signed by 838 doctors from 44 countries regarding the decriminalisation of abortion, that Amnesty International published recently (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42432/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As the Deputy is aware, Article 40.3.3 of the Irish Constitution states that: *‘The State acknowledges the right to life of the unborn and, with due regard to the equal right to life of the mother, guarantees in its laws to respect, and, as far as practicable, by its laws to defend and vindicate that right.’*

Article 40.3.3 of the Constitution, as interpreted by the Supreme Court in *Attorney General v X*, provides that it is lawful to terminate a pregnancy in Ireland if it is established as a matter of probability that there is a real and substantial risk to the life, as distinct from the health, of the mother, which can only be avoided by a termination of the pregnancy.

The Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act 2013 was enacted on 30 July 2013 and commenced on 1 January 2014. It regulates access to lawful termination of pregnancy in accordance with the *X* case and the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights in the *A, B and C v Ireland* case.

The Government does not intend to propose any amendments to Article 40.3.3 of the Constitution at present.

Pharmacy Services

478. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health if a doctor prescribes medication for a patient on a medical card that is available over the counter, does a pharmacist have to charge for that medicine; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43014/15]

480. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the regulations for doctors and pharmacists in circumstances where the doctor prescribes medication for a patient on a medical card and that medication is also available without prescription over-the-counter; if it is within the pharmacist’s discretion not to allow this medication to be covered by the medical card and to require the patient to incur the full cost of the over-the-counter medication; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43041/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I propose to take Questions Nos. 478 and 480 together.

Where a product prescribed for a patient with a Medical Card is the subject of an entry on the Reimbursement List, published pursuant to the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the pharmacist must dispense the product in accordance with the provisions of the Community Pharmacy Contractor Agreement.

Where a product is prescribed which does not appear on the Reimbursement List, but is available as an over-the-counter (OTC) item, the pharmacist could apply for authorisation under HSE Discretionary Hardship Arrangements. Alternatively, the pharmacist may indicate to the patient (or the patient's carer) that the product can be purchased.

Medicinal Products Expenditure

479. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health if he will retrospectively refund patients with multiple sclerosis for moneys spent on the drug Fampryra before 1 October 2015. [43018/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): Fampridine (brand name Fampryra®) has been reimbursed under the Long Term Illness Scheme on a conditional, responder-only basis since 1 October 2015. It is not possible to reimburse patients retrospectively for any medicine purchased before that medicine is added to the HSE's List of Reimbursable Items.

Question No. 480 answered with Question No. 478.

Services for People with Disabilities

481. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Minister for Health the progress that has been made in implementing each of the 31 recommendations in the 2011 Health Service Executive report, Time to Move on from Congregated Settings; the time frame for full implementation of these recommendations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42333/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The HSE's report "Time to Move on from Congregated Settings—A Strategy for Community Inclusion", (2011) proposes a new model of support in the community by moving people from institutional settings to the community, over a seven year time frame. The plan will be rolled out at a regional and local level and will involve full consultation.

In terms of housing, the Department of Health and the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government are working in collaboration to support the transition of people with a disability from institutions to social housing in the community under the Government's National Housing Strategy for People with Disability 2011 to 2016.

As part of the implementation process, in 2013 and 2014 one million euro was transferred from the Department of Health's Vote to the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government's Vote to provide for the ring-fenced social housing costs of up to 150 people leaving disability or mental health institutions. At the end of December 2014, it is estimated that there were around 3,000 people with a disability living in congregated settings. The HSE has prioritised the transition of 150 people from congregated settings in 2015. In 2015, one million euro has been allocated to the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government to continue this process.

As the HSE is responsible for leading out on the recommendations on "Time to Move

on from Congregated Settings—A Strategy for Community Inclusion”, 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 Legal Cases Data

482. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Health the number of legal cases currently ongoing against his Department, including State agencies under his aegis; the number of cases that took place during the years 2011 to 2014, inclusive; the cost of those that were contested and what damages were involved; the costs and damages of those that were settled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43268/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The information requested regarding the number of legal cases ongoing or which took place from 2011-2014 and associated costs is not immediately available and will be collated and forwarded to the Deputy at the earliest opportunity.

Details of legal cases taken by or against other bodies under the aegis of the Department are operational matters for the bodies concerned and the Deputy should contact the relevant Director/CEO/Registrar directly. I have requested the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy in this matter. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Departmental Staff Data

483. **Deputy Regina Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the number of employees under his remit who are classified under a contract of indefinite duration; the number of these who are receiving incremental salary payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43281/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): One employee in my Department is on a contract of indefinite duration and is on an incremental pay scale.

I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly on the aspect of the question that relates to their employees. In relation to Non-Commercial State Agencies under the remit of my Department, this information is being sought and will be forwarded to the Deputy when collated.

Human Rights Issues

484. **Deputy Anne Ferris** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will intervene in the case of a person (details supplied) who is imprisoned in Egypt in a manner contrary to the Irish Constitution; if he considers the ongoing and prolonged detention without trial of an Irish person to be acceptable to him as Minister and to the Government and the people of Ireland; the action he will take in response to this slight by a foreign nation on our Constitution and national values; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42756/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have intensively engaged with the Egyptian authorities regarding this citizen’s case, including the Egyptian Minister for Foreign Affairs and Egypt’s Ambassador to Ireland, and with EU and international

partners, including the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Ms. Federica Mogherini. The Taoiseach also raised the case in person on two occasions with Egyptian President al-Sisi. The information we receive from all of these contacts is carefully considered and regularly used in reviewing our approach to the management of this case.

The Government's key objectives in this case are firstly, to see this citizen released by the Egyptian authorities so that he can return to his family and his studies in Ireland and, secondly, to provide consular support for his welfare while he remains in detention. Significant resources in Cairo and in Dublin continue to be deployed in the furtherance of these objectives. I would note in this regard that Embassy officials frequently visit this citizen in detention, most recently on 23 November.

Irrespective of any views regarding the fairness or appropriateness of any arrest abroad, the reality is that where an Irish citizen is charged with an offence under the law of a foreign country, it is the foreign law that applies and it is the relevant foreign court which decides matters such as bail and release. Nonetheless, I can assure the Deputy that this case will continue to receive a high priority in my Department.

Passport Services

485. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade about the remedy available to a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath who has legally changed name by way of deed poll, who has changed all legal documents to reflect this and who now wishes to travel under the new name but where the Passport Office has refused for at least two years to issue a new passport to reflect the new identity, which effectively compels the person to travel using an old passport notwithstanding that the person has sworn on affidavit not to do so, and which will have consequences if the person becomes ill in the country visited; if in this context, he will permit the new passport to be issued in the new name; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42725/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): All passport applications are subject to the terms of the Passports Act, 2008, as amended (the Act). This provides a legal basis for the various policies and practices which are applied by the Passport Service in the processing of passport applications. Section 10 of the Act provides that a passport will issue in the name of a citizen as it appears on his/her birth certificate. However, a name change for a passport from that which appears on a person's birth certificate is permitted under the Act in situations such as marriage for example.

In cases where name change arises, other than by marriage, civil partnership, adoption or gender change, the Act specifically requires evidence of the use of this new name over a two year period. While there is discretion under the Act in accepting evidence of usage for less than two years, this has been normally applied in the past to serious cases such as those involving domestic abuse.

While the person in question may have changed her name by deed poll, this is not, of itself, evidence of a change of name. To determine a person's name at any given moment in time depends upon evidence to support the constant and sustained use of this new identity. A deed poll merely sets out an intention to change a person's name and does not, by itself, have the effect of changing that person's name. A deed poll is, therefore, not conclusive evidence of a change of name.

There is no record on the system of a passport application refusal to this person in her new name. It should, therefore, be noted that her current passport is a travel identity document that is issued under the provisions of the Act and which is accepted at all international border points. As indicated, it may be replaced with her new name if relevant evidence of the usage of that name is available to her. If this is the case, she should make a passport application in the new identity well in advance of any future travel that she may have planned. If not, she should plan her travel and insurance cover on the basis of the identity in her current passport.

Human Rights Issues

486. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to make a representation to the Egyptian authorities regarding a person (details supplied) who has been incarcerated without trial for almost three years and who is now on a hunger strike which is in danger of causing irreparable damage to the person's health and well being; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42740/15]

487. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to progress the issue of the ongoing imprisonment in Egypt of a person (details supplied); the supports he is providing to the person's family here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42879/15]

490. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the actions he has taken to pursue the case of a person (detail supplied); his plans in view of the pending trial; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43023/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 486, 487 and 490 together.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has a clear strategy in this case which is focused on achieving a positive outcome at the earliest time possible for this citizen. That strategy is based on two key objectives: Firstly, to see this citizen released by the Egyptian authorities so that he can return to his family and his studies in Ireland and, secondly, to provide consular support for his welfare while he remains in detention.

In furtherance of these objectives, I have intensively engaged with the Egyptian authorities, including the Egyptian Minister for Foreign Affairs and Egypt's Ambassador to Ireland, and with EU and international partners, including High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Ms Federica Mogherini. The Taoiseach also raised the case in person on two occasions with Egyptian President al-Sisi. The information we receive from all of these contacts is carefully considered and used in reviewing our approach to this case on a constant basis.

Significant resources in Cairo and in Dublin continue to be deployed in the provision of comprehensive consular assistance to both the citizen and their family. I would also note that Embassy officials visited this citizen in detention most recently on 23 November. Irrespective of any views regarding the fairness or appropriateness of any arrest abroad, the reality is that where an Irish citizen is charged with an offence under the law of a foreign country, it is the foreign law that applies and it is the relevant foreign court which decides matters such as bail and release.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade continues to review its approach and retains the flexibility to adjust it as and when that may be required, but the Government's approach is guided at all times by the two key objectives set out above.

Foreign Policy

488. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status of Irish policy on the recognition of independence for Kurdistan; if he has raised the welfare and rights of the Kurdish people in his contact with the governments of Turkey, Iran and Iraq; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42880/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Ireland continues to support the territorial integrity of Turkey, Iran and Iraq and does not propose to intervene in internal constitutional matters of those countries, which are for decision by the Turkish, Iranian and Iraqi people and their democratically elected leaders.

Ireland raises human rights issues, including the rights of minority communities, in its political dialogues with all countries bilaterally and through the EU and the UN.

Travel Documents

489. **Deputy Olivia Mitchell** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will open negotiations with his counterparts in the United States of America to obtain global entry cards to the United States of America for Irish passport holders, similar to what was recently negotiated by Great Britain; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42976/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): ‘Global Entry’ is a U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) program that allows expedited clearance for pre-approved, low-risk US travellers upon arrival in the United States. While the goal of Global Entry is to speed travellers through the process, no traveller is guaranteed expedited screening and members may be selected for further examination when entering the United States.

I understand that earlier this month this programme was extended to UK citizens with US citizens being given access to the UK’s equivalent ‘registered traveller’ programme. UK citizens still need to apply and go through various steps before being able to avail of the US programme.

Ireland has no equivalent programme for frequent visitors to this country and consequently there are currently no plans to open negotiations with the United States for access to the ‘Global Entry’ programme. However both Shannon and Dublin airports have arrangements in place for US flights which allow passengers to undergo US CBP clearance before leaving Ireland, thereby greatly expediting their arrival procedures at US airports.

Question No. 490 answered with Question No. 486.

Departmental Legal Cases Data

491. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of legal cases currently ongoing against his Department, including State agencies under his aegis; the number of cases that took place during the years 2011 to 2014, inclusive; the cost of those that were contested and what damages were involved; the costs and damages of those that were settled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43267/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Depending on the subject matter, litigation against my Department is dealt with by the Attorney General’s Office

and the Chief State Solicitor's Office or the State Claims Agency which may brief outside lawyers as necessary. The cost of any such external lawyers engaged to litigate these cases are not charged to my Department's Votes, but related costs, such as those paid to documentary counsel, may arise. Where the state successfully contests litigation, usually no costs will be awarded against the Department and the question of damages does not arise.

The table sets out the number of cases commenced against the Department since 2011. Where cases have been settled/struck out, the amount of money paid is included; where a case has proceeded to judgment, any legal costs or damages paid by my Department are listed. Where a case is ongoing, no total figure is available. Currently, there are 4 ongoing litigation cases against my Department.

| - | Number of cases commenced | Current Status | Cases concluded in a judgment (i) legal Costs | Cases concluded in a judgment (ii) legal damages | Cases settled/ struck out - Money paid out to plaintiff/ applicant |
|------|---------------------------|--|---|--|---|
| 2011 | 4 | 3 concluded1 struck out with no costs awarded | Nil | Nil | € 12,165.00€ 10,000.00€ 2,000.00 |
| 2012 | 5 | 2 settled3 concluded with no costs awarded | €10,889.19 | Nil | € 66,570.41€ 99,000.00 |
| 2013 | 4 | 1 closed1 settled2 concluded | €147,615.18 | Nil | € 5,000.00€ 10,607.00€ 7,380.00 |
| 2014 | 7 | 6 settled1 struck out and settled | €20,592.00€ 4,196.00€ 6,597.23€ 8,499.42€10,105.72 | Nil | €185,000.00€ 4,937.13€ 2,738.13€ 35,000.00€ 10,777.10€ 19,500.00€ 18,450.00 |
| 2015 | 1 | Settlement agreed for €5,000 but not paid to date. | Awaiting decision for award of costs. | | |

Departmental Staff

492. **Deputy Regina Doherty** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of employees under his remit who are classified under a contract of indefinite duration; the number of these who are receiving incremental salary payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43280/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): A total of 12 former Temporary Clerical Officers in my Department were awarded Contracts of Indefinite Duration

as permanent Clerical Officers. All of them were granted incremental credit for salary purposes for their previous service in the Civil Service.

Teachers' Remuneration

493. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the details of the pay provided to primary teachers recruited before 2011 in contrast to primary teachers recruited since 2011 in tabular format; the efforts to bridge the gap and provide specific figures; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42893/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The Teachers' Common Basic Scale and allowances available to newly employed teachers from 2010 onwards are set out in the attached table. Not all of the allowances listed are available to every teacher as entitlement is based on the qualifications held by the individual and/or the nature of the post for which they were employed.

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 will, through salary increases and a reduction in the Pension-Related Deduction, begin 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.

Teachers' Common Basic Scale

| Scale Point | 1/1/10 | Post-1/1/11 New Entrants to teaching - Applied 1/1/11 to 30/6/13 (Note a) | Post-1/1/11 New Entrants to teaching - 1/7/13 to 31/10/13 (Note b) | Post 1/1/11 New Entrants to teaching - 1/11/13 onwards (Note c) | Post 1/2/12 New Entrants to teaching - 1/2/12 to 30/6/13 (Note d) | Post 1/2/12 New Entrants to teaching - 1/7/13 onwards (Note e) |
|-------------|----------|---|---|--|--|---|
| 1 | € 30,904 | € 27,814 | € 27,814 | € 27,814 | € 30,702 | € 30,702 |
| 2 | € 31,972 | € 28,775 | € 28,775 | € 29,256 | € 32,198 | € 33,168 |
| 3 | € 33,041 | € 29,737 | € 30,702 | € 30,904 | € 33,168 | € 33,950 |
| 4 | € 34,113 | € 30,702 | € 31,924 | € 31,972 | € 34,136 | € 36,576 |
| 5 | € 35,775 | € 32,198 | € 33,168 | € 33,041 | € 36,576 | € 37,795 |
| 6 | € 36,853 | € 33,168 | € 34,136 | € 34,113 | € 37,795 | € 39,251 |
| 7 | € 37,929 | € 34,136 | € 36,576 | € 35,775 | € 39,251 | € 40,700 |
| 8 | € 40,640 | € 36,576 | € 37,795 | € 36,853 | € 40,700 | € 42,160 |
| 9 | € 41,994 | € 37,795 | € 39,251 | € 37,929 | € 42,160 | € 43,380 |
| 10 | € 43,612 | € 39,251 | € 40,700 | € 40,640 | € 43,380 | € 44,996 |
| 11 | € 45,222 | € 40,700 | € 42,160 | € 41,994 | € 44,996 | € 44,996 |
| 12 | € 46,844 | € 42,160 | € 43,380 | € 43,612 | € 44,996 | € 44,996 |
| 13 | € 48,200 | € 43,380 | € 44,996 | € 45,222 | € 44,996 | € 47,225 |
| 14 | € 49,996 | € 44,996 | € 44,996 | € 46,844 | € 47,225 | € 47,225 |
| 15 | € 49,996 | € 44,996 | € 44,996 | € 48,200 | € 47,225 | € 47,225 |
| 16 | € 49,996 | € 44,996 | € 47,225 | € 49,996 | € 47,225 | € 47,225 |
| 17 | € 52,472 | € 47,225 | € 47,225 | € 49,996 | € 47,225 | € 50,170 |
| 18 | € 52,472 | € 47,225 | € 47,225 | € 49,996 | € 50,170 | € 50,170 |
| 19 | € 52,472 | € 47,225 | € 47,225 | € 52,472 | € 50,170 | € 50,170 |
| 20 | € 52,472 | € 47,225 | € 50,170 | € 52,472 | € 50,170 | € 50,170 |
| 21 | € 55,744 | € 50,170 | € 50,170 | € 52,472 | € 50,170 | € 53,423 |
| 22 | € 55,744 | € 50,170 | € 50,170 | € 52,472 | € 53,423 | € 53,423 |
| 23 | € 55,744 | € 50,170 | € 53,423 | € 55,744 | | € 53,423 |
| 24 | € 55,744 | € 50,170 | € 54,339 | € 55,744 | | € 58,765 |
| 25 | € 59,359 | € 53,423 | € 55,514 | € 55,744 | | € 59,940 |
| 26 | | | | € 55,744 | | |
| 27 | | | | € 59,359 | | |

Notes:

(a) scale for post-1 January 2011 new entrants to teaching which applied from 1 January 2011 to 30 June 2013

(b) scale for post-1 January 2011 new entrants which applied from 1 July 2013 to 31 October 2013 (agreed as part of the Haddington Road Agreement)

(c) current scale for post-1 January 2011 new entrants - applies since 1 November 2013 (implementation of Clause 2.31 of the Haddington Road Agreement)

(d) scale for post-1 February 2012 new entrants to teaching which applied from 1 February 2012 to 30 June 2013

(e) current scale for post-1 February 2012 new entrants - applies since 1 July 2013 (agreed as part of the Haddington Road Agreement)

Allowances

Questions - Written Answers

| - | ACADEMIC QUALIFICATIONS ALLOWANCES | 1/1/10 | Post-1/1/11 New Entrants to teaching - 1/1/11 to 31/10/13 (Note e) | Post-1/1/11 New Entrants to teaching - 1/11/13 onwards (Note f) | Post-1/2/12 New Entrants to teaching - 1/2/12 to 31/10/13 (Notes g and h) | Post-1/2/12 New Entrants to teaching - 1/11/13 onwards (Notes g and i) |
|---|---|---------|--|---|---|--|
| 1 | (a) (i) H. Dip. in Ed. (Pass) | € 591 | € 532 | € 591 | | |
| | (ii) Higher Froebel Cert. | € 591 | € 532 | € 591 | | |
| | (b) (i) H. Dip. in Ed. (1st or 2nd Hons) | € 1,236 | € 1,112 | € 1,236 | | |
| | (ii) Ard Teastas Gaeilge | € 1,236 | € 1,112 | € 1,236 | | |
| | (c) Primary Degree (Pass) | € 1,842 | € 1,658 | € 1,842 | | |
| | (d) Masters Degree by thesis or exam (Pass) | € 4,918 | € 4,426 | € 4,918 | | |
| | (e) Primary Degree (1st or 2nd Hons) | € 4,918 | € 4,426 | € 4,918 | | |
| | (f) Masters Degree (1st or 2nd Hons) | € 5,496 | € 4,946 | € 5,496 | | |
| | (g) Doctors Degree | € 6,140 | € 5,526 | € 6,140 | | |

Notes on qualification allowances:

(i) Only one of the allowances at (a) or (b) may be held together with one of the allowances (c) to (g)

(ii) Teachers first employed between 5 December 2011 and 31 January 2012 (inclusive) will be assessed for allowances on the basis of their qualifications at entry to the profession to a maximum combined allowance equivalent to that payable for an Honours Primary Degree

| - | ACADEMIC QUALIFICATIONS ALLOWANCES | 1/1/10 | Post-1/1/11 New Entrants to teaching - 1/1/11 to 31/10/13 (Note e) | Post-1/1/11 New Entrants to teaching - 1/11/13 onwards (Note f) | Post-1/2/12 New Entrants to teaching - 1/2/12 to 31/10/13 (Notes g and h) | Post-1/2/12 New Entrants to teaching - 1/11/13 onwards (Notes g and i) |
|---|---|---------|--|---|---|--|
| 2 | Diploma for Teachers of Deaf/Blind/ Mentally | € 2,437 | € 2,193 | € 2,437 | | |
| | and Physically Handicapped Children | | | | | |
| | OTHER ALLOWANCES | | | | | |
| 3 | Teaching through Irish | € 1,583 | € 1,424 | € 1,583 | | |
| 4 | Gaeltacht Grant | € 3,063 | € 2,757 | € 3,063 | | |
| 5 | Island Allowance | € 1,842 | € 1,658 | € 1,842 | | |
| 6 | Allowance payable to teachers of apprentices in Dun Laoghaire and Co. Cork VECs | € 9,740 | € 8,766 | € 9,740 | | |

| - | ACADEMIC QUALIFICATIONS ALLOWANCES | 1/1/10 | Post-1/1/11 New Entrants to teaching - 1/1/11 to 31/10/13 (Note e) | Post-1/1/11 New Entrants to teaching - 1/11/13 onwards (Note f) | Post-1/2/12 New Entrants to teaching - 1/2/12 to 31/10/13 (Notes g and h) | Post-1/2/12 New Entrants to teaching - 1/11/13 onwards (Notes g and i) |
|---|--|---------|--|---|---|--|
| 7 | Honorarium Payable to Teachers in the Prison Service | € 4,773 | € 4,296 | € 4,773 | € 4,296 | € 4,773 |
| 8 | Secure Unit Allowance/Disturbed Adolescent Allowance | € 2,195 | € 1,976 | € 2,195 | € 1,976 | € 2,195 |
| | | 2012/13 | | | | |
| 9 | Supervision and Substitution Allowance (Note j) | | | | | |
| | Pre-2011 Entrants to teaching | € 1,769 | | | | |
| | Post-1/1/11 new entrants to teaching | € 1,592 | | | | |
| | Post-1/2/12 new entrants to teaching | € 1,592 | | | | |

Notes:

(e) rate of allowance for post-1 January 2011 new entrants to teaching which applied from 1 January 2011 to 31 October 2013

(f) current rate of allowance for post-1 January 2011 new entrants - applies since 1 November 2013 (implementation of Clause 2.31 of the Haddington Road Agreement)

(g) certain allowances were withdrawn by Government decision and are no longer payable to new beneficiaries post-1 February 2012

(h) rate of allowance for post-1 February 2012 new beneficiaries which applied from 1 February 2012 to 31 October 2013

(i) current rate of allowance for post-1 February 2012 new beneficiaries - applies since 1 November 2013 (implementation of Clause 2.31 of the Haddington Road Agreement)

(j) the Supervision and Substitution allowance was withdrawn with effect from 1 July 2013 under the Haddington Road Agreement

Emergency Works Scheme Eligibility

494. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will revisit her decision to refuse funding for essential emergency works to a national school (details supplied) in Cork city; the appropriate funding scheme for such works; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42315/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The scope of works required at the school to which the Deputy refers is outside the terms of my Department's Emergency Works Grant Scheme.

The works are appropriate for consideration under my Department's Summer Works Scheme

and the school was advised accordingly.

In addition to this, the minor works grant, which was recently paid, can be used by the school to address some of the priority works.

Disadvantaged Status

495. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if pupils attending a school that does not have delivering equality of opportunity in schools, DEIS, status (details supplied) following an amalgamation will continue to receive this status; if they will be recognised under the higher education access route scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42328/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): As the Deputy is aware the school in question was established on 1 September 2011 following the amalgamation of a DEIS post-primary school and Non DEIS post-primary school. In line with all such amalgamations, the new school continues to receive the current level of supports in respect of the number of eligible pupils from the former DEIS school until that pupil cohort have left the school. In the case of a post primary school, these supports continue to be supplied for 6 years following the amalgamation.

The Higher Education Access Route (HEAR) is a college and university admissions scheme which offers places on reduced points and extra college support to school leavers from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The scheme is operated by a number of higher education institutions and not by my Department. Admissions to the institutions are regulated by the institutions themselves. Individual students who have queries on this matter can contact HEAR Higher Education Institutions directly or at www.accesscollege.ie.

Schools Establishment

496. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the schools listed in the summary of new schools to open in 2017 and 2018 list, Appendix 1, are due to be operational in 2017 with the number of classes and students indicated on the list; if not, if she will provide a new list outlining when each new school on the list is expected to be operational; and the type of temporary accommodation she expects these schools to be housed in. [42337/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The schools included in the list to which the Deputy refers are new schools which will open in 2017 and 2018 to serve specific areas of demographic need. As indicated in the list nine of these schools will open in 2017 and four will open in 2018. In its first year of establishment, every new school starts operation with a class at intake level and then grows incrementally over a number of years to the long-term projected enrolment. In the case of the primary schools on the list, the long-term projections are stated in terms of the number of mainstream classes. In the case of the post-primary schools on the list, the long-term projections are stated in terms of student numbers.

Work is underway in the Department to ensure that suitable accommodation is available for each of these schools.

School Accommodation Provision

497. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will approve the provision of an extension for a school (details supplied) in County Kilkenny; and detail the status of the project. [42350/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I can confirm that the school referred to by the Deputy has submitted an application to my Department for capital funding for additional school accommodation. The application is currently being considered and a decision will be conveyed to the school authority shortly.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

498. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a person (details supplied) in Dublin 22 will be provided with a place at a school that meets that person’s special needs. [42364/15]

499. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide sufficient resources to a school (details supplied) in County Dublin to ensure that it can cater for all the children with special needs who are on its waiting list for a placement in 2016. [42365/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 498 and 499 together.

I wish to advise the Deputy that the policy of my Department is that children with special educational needs, including children with autism, should be included, where possible and appropriate, in mainstream school placements with additional supports provided. In circumstances where children with special educational need require more specialised interventions, special school or special class places are also available.

Children with autism over the age of four may be eligible for home tuition if a school placement is not available for them.

The Deputy will be aware that the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), is responsible for processing applications from primary and post primary schools for special educational needs supports, including the establishment of special classes in various geographical areas as required. The NCSE operates within my Department’s criteria in allocating such support.

SENOs engage with schools annually in order to plan for, and to open, new special classes each year, in order to ensure there are sufficient special class placements available at primary and post primary school level to meet demand in a given area. All schools have the names and contact details of their local SENO. Parents are encouraged to liaise with the local SENO to discuss placement options for their child.

The NCSE will continue to monitor and review the requirement for special class places in particular areas and has capacity to establish such new special classes, where necessary, subject to the willingness of schools to open classes. Where a school opens a special class the NCSE will allocate supports to the class to meet the educational and care needs of the students enrolled.

In addition to the mainstream educational provision provided for, there are over 1,000 special classes throughout the country at primary and post primary level. Each special class for autism at post-primary level has a 6:1.5 pupil teacher ratio.

The NCSE has advised that the school referred to by the Deputy opened an ASD class in September 2015. There are a number of vacancies in this class which will be filled in September 2016. The NCSE will continue to liaise with the parent of the child referred to by the Deputy in the context of their application for a placement in this school.

500. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of minority faith schools by county, by denomination, by primary or post-primary and by patronage, such as voluntary, comprehensive, community, etc., in tabular form. [42389/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The information requested by the Deputy is available in the attached tables.

Primary

| County | Ethos/ Religion | | | | | | | | |
|-----------|--------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------|--------|--------|----------------|--------|
| | Catholic | Church of Ireland | Inter- Denominational | Multi- Denominational | Presbyterian | Muslim | Jewish | Metho- dist | Quaker |
| Carlow | 38 | 3 | | 1 | | | | | |
| Cavan | 65 | 10 | | 1 | | | | | |
| Clare | 109 | 1 | | 3 | | | | | |
| Cork | 316 | 20 | | 8 | | | | | |
| Donegal | 140 | 22 | 3 | 1 | 9 | | | | |
| Dublin | 355 | 33 | 3 | 46 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | |
| Galway | 221 | 2 | | 6 | | | | | |
| Kerry | 131 | 2 | | 1 | | | | | |
| Kildare | 87 | 6 | 1 | 7 | | | | | |
| Kilkenny | 70 | 2 | | 1 | | | | | |
| Laois | 57 | 7 | 1 | 1 | | | | | |
| Leitrim | 36 | 3 | | | | | | | |
| Limerick | 134 | 3 | | 2 | | | | | |
| Longford | 35 | 3 | | | | | | | |
| Louth | 65 | 2 | | 3 | 1 | | | | |
| Mayo | 163 | 2 | | 1 | | | | | |
| Meath | 103 | 4 | 2 | 5 | | | | | |
| Monaghan | 54 | 5 | | | 3 | | | | |
| Offaly | 61 | 3 | | 1 | | | | | |
| Roscommon | 89 | 2 | | | | | | | |
| Sligo | 61 | 4 | | 1 | | | | | |
| Tipperary | 152 | 6 | | | | | | | |
| Waterford | 68 | 3 | | 2 | | | | | 1 |
| Westmeath | 67 | 4 | 1 | 1 | | | | | |
| Wexford | 94 | 6 | 1 | 2 | | | | | |
| Wicklow | 58 | 17 | 4 | 4 | | | | | |
| Total | 2829 | 175 | 16 | 98 | 15 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 |

Post Primary

| County | Post Primary School Type | Ethos/ Religion | | | | | | |
|----------|--------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|----------------------|----------------------|------------|--------|--------|
| - | | Catholic | Church of Ireland | Inter Denominational | Multi Denominational | Metho dist | Jewish | Quaker |
| Carlow | Community | | | 1 | | | | |
| | Secondary | 5 | | | | | | |
| | Vocational | | | 5 | | | | |
| Cavan | Community | | | 1 | | | | |
| | Comprehensive | | | 1 | | | | |
| | Secondary | 3 | 1 | | | | | |
| Clare | Community | | | 2 | | | | |
| | Comprehensive | | | 1 | | | | |
| | Secondary | 8 | | | | | | |
| Cork | Community | | | 10 | | | | |
| | Comprehensive | | 1 | 1 | | | | |
| | Secondary | 45 | 2 | | | | | |
| Donegal | Community | | | 6 | | | | |
| | Comprehensive | | 1 | 1 | | | | |
| | Secondary | 4 | | | | | | |
| Dublin | Community | | | 20 | | | | |
| | Comprehensive | 1 | 2 | | | | | |
| | Secondary | 96 | 8 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 1 | |
| Galway | Community | | | 6 | | | | |
| | Comprehensive | | | 1 | | | | |
| | Secondary | 24 | | | | | | |
| Kerry | Community | | | 3 | | | | |
| | Comprehensive | | | 1 | | | | |
| | Secondary | 14 | | | | | | |
| Kildare | Community | | | 3 | 1 | | | |
| | Secondary | 12 | | | | | | |
| | Vocational | | | 9 | 1 | | | |
| Kilkenny | Community | | | 1 | | | | |
| | Secondary | 6 | 1 | | | | | |
| | Vocational | | | 8 | | | | |
| Laois | Community | | | 3 | | | | |
| | Secondary | 2 | | | | | | |
| | Vocational | | | 3 | | | | |
| Leitrim | Community | | | 1 | 1 | | | |
| | Comprehensive | | | 1 | | | | |
| | Vocational | | | 3 | 1 | | | |
| Limerick | Community | | | 2 | | | | |
| | Comprehensive | | | 1 | | | | |
| | Secondary | 15 | 1 | | | | | |
| Longford | Community | | | 1 | | | | |
| | Secondary | 4 | | | | | | |
| | Vocational | | | 4 | | | | |

Questions - Written Answers

| County | Post Primary School Type | Ethos/ Religion | | | | | | |
|-----------|--------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|----------------------|----------------------|------------|--------|--------|
| - | | Catholic | Church of Ireland | Inter Denominational | Multi Denominational | Metho dist | Jewish | Quaker |
| Louth | Community | | | 1 | 1 | | | |
| | Secondary | 9 | 1 | | | | | 1 |
| | Vocational | | | 5 | 1 | | | |
| Mayo | Community | | | 3 | | | | |
| | Secondary | 15 | | | | | | |
| | Vocational | 1 | | 7 | 1 | | | |
| Meath | Community | | | 4 | | | | |
| Monaghan | Secondary | 6 | | | | | | |
| | Vocational | | | 9 | 2 | | | |
| | Secondary | 5 | 1 | | | | | |
| | Vocational | | | 6 | 1 | | | |
| Offaly | Community | | | 2 | | | | |
| | Secondary | 5 | | | | | | |
| | Vocational | | | 5 | | | | |
| Roscommon | Community | | | 1 | | | | |
| | Secondary | 4 | | | | | | |
| | Vocational | | | 3 | | | | |
| Sligo | Community | | | 1 | | | | |
| | Secondary | 6 | 1 | | | | | |
| | Vocational | | | 6 | | | | |
| Tipperary | Community | | | 1 | | | | |
| | Secondary | 19 | | | | | | |
| | Vocational | | | 11 | | | | |
| Waterford | Community | | | 1 | | | | |
| | Secondary | 10 | | 1 | | | | 1 |
| | Vocational | | | 5 | | | | |
| Westmeath | Community | | | 1 | | | | |
| | Secondary | 9 | 1 | | | | | |
| | Vocational | | | 4 | | | | |
| Wexford | Community | | | 2 | | | | |
| | Secondary | 11 | | 1 | | | | |
| | Vocational | | | 7 | 1 | | | |
| Wicklow | Community | | | 1 | | | | |
| | Comprehensive | | 1 | | | | | |
| | Secondary | 8 | 1 | | | | | |
| Wicklow | Vocational | | | 10 | 1 | | | |
| Total: | | 348 | 23 | 332 | 25 | 1 | 1 | 2 |

School Patronage

501. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when decisions will be made on the patronage and site of the new primary school in the Goatstown and Stillorgan area of County Dublin; if she will involve the parents in these decisions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42446/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): As the Deputy may be aware, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Department of Education and Skills and the County and City Managers’ Association (CCMA) in relation to the acquisition of sites has been in place since 2012. This MOU fosters increased levels of cooperation and

formalises the Local Authorities' part in identifying and securing sites for educational use. A copy of this MoU, which sets out the respective roles of the local authority and the Department, is available on my Department's website.

Officials in the Department are working with officials from Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council under the MOU in relation to the acquisition process for a suitable permanent site for the school to which the Deputy refers. The criteria for assessment of proposed school sites is set out in the Department's technical guidance documents.

As with all such new schools, my Department will shortly run an open patronage determination process to establish the patronage arrangements for the new school. It will be open to all patrons and prospective patrons to apply to run the school in question in line with established arrangements.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

502. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application for an electronic device for a person (details supplied) in County Cork. [42454/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I wish to advise the Deputy that the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) is responsible for processing applications from schools for special educational needs supports. SENOs also make recommendations to my Department where assistive technology is required. The NCSE operates within my Department's criteria in making recommendations for support, which is set out in my Department's Circular 0010/2013.

I understand that the NCSE is not in a position to make a recommendation to my Department for the provision of assistive technology for the pupil in question, as the application which was submitted did not meet the criteria set out in my Department's Circular 0010/2013. A letter has recently issued to the school in this regard.

Additional documentation which has been made available by the school, which was not available to the SENO when the initial application was made, has been forwarded to the school's assigned SENO. The school has been advised to contact their SENO further in this regard and my Department will consider the matter further if any revised recommendation is made.

It is open parents to contact their local SENO directly to discuss their child's special educational needs, using the contact details available on the NCSE website.

School Staffing

503. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will appoint a third teacher to a school (details supplied) in September 2016; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42461/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The criteria used for the allocation of teachers to primary schools is published annually on the Department's website. The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30 September. The staffing arrangements for the 2015/16 school year are set out in Circular 0005/2015 which is on the Department's website. The staffing process includes an appeals mechanism for schools to submit an appeal under certain criteria to an independent Primary

Staffing Appeals Board. The criteria for appeals are set out in Circular 0005/2015. The school referred to by the Deputy has a current staffing of Principal and 1 mainstream teacher, based on an enrolment of 46 pupils on 30th September 2014.

The Deputy will be aware that I have announced a one point improvement to the primary staffing schedule in the context of Budget 2016. The improved staffing schedule which is available on the Department website will be implemented for the 2016/17 school year. The staffing arrangements for all schools for the 2016/17 school year will be published early in 2016.

School Accommodation Provision

504. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her plans to address the health and safety issues in a school (details supplied) in Dublin 20; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42465/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I wish to advise the Deputy that the school in question was approved funding in June 2015 to provide a classroom and resource rooms. The school has since confirmed its acceptance of the funding being provided.

National Educational Psychological Service Administration

505. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the average response times for decisions by the National Educational Psychological Service under reasonable accommodation in the certificate examinations scheme for students requiring special arrangements to sit their leaving certificate examination in 2014 to 2015, or in the latest year available; the number of students who receive a response within one month, three weeks, two weeks, one week or otherwise prior to sitting the examination; the number of applicants in 2014 to 2015; and the percentage of applicants who were approved for full, partial, or no support. [42521/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The State Examinations Commission has statutory responsibility for operational matters relating to the certificate examinations.

The State Examinations Commission operates the scheme of Reasonable Accommodations in the Certificate examinations.

In view of this I have forwarded your query to the State Examinations Commission for direct reply to you.

Education and Training Boards

506. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will revisit the arrangement in education and training board schools with religious denominations to have a particular class time per week dedicated to religious instruction in a particular denomination’s teachings; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42534/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I think it would useful to set out the position in relation to second level schools that have an Education and Training Board

as Patron under the provisions of the Education Act 1998.

In all cases the Education and Training Board is the sole patron. Traditionally all of the schools have been multi denominational and provide for children of all religions and none. This applies equally to the second level schools where a legal agreement was entered into with a diocese or a diocese and religious order at the time the school was formed, often involving the amalgamation of a vocational school and a catholic voluntary secondary school.

These agreements included a provision relating to religious worship and instruction. Notwithstanding that the agreements were entered into with catholic bishops or orders the provision in the agreements requires that the religious worship attended by any pupil and the religious instruction given by the ETB school must be in accordance with the rites, practice and teaching of the religious denomination to which the pupil belongs. The arrangements regarding religious worship and instruction reflect the definition of the schools as being multi-denominational.

The term multi-denominational is also applied by Educate Together in relation to schools under its patronage but the usage can be distinguished from its application to ETB schools as Educate Together schools exclude any religious worship or instruction from the ordinary life of the school, and therefore could be described as non-denominational.

The position of ETB schools and religious worship and instruction is evolving with an agreement reached between one ETB and Educate Together in respect of one school and a second such school in planning by another ETB. The agreements underpinning these two school excludes religious worship and instruction and can be defined as non-denominational.

While I have no plans to seek to set aside the legal agreements referred to by the Deputy, as the demographics and composition of communities change in some communities a review of the configuration of second level provision could become timely.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

507. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her plans to extend the July provision; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42569/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): July Provision is available to all special schools and mainstream primary schools with special classes catering for children with autism that choose to extend their education services through the month of July. My Department also provides July Provision for pupils with a severe/profound general learning disability. Where school based provision is not feasible, home based provision may be grant aided.

There are no immediate plans to extend the July Provision Scheme. The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) has recently submitted their Policy Advice on Educational Provision for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders. In developing this policy advice, the NCSE has consulted widely with parents, professionals and other stakeholders and interested parties while also conducting research. The policy advice is currently under consideration in my Department.

My officials will consider and report to me on any recommendations in the report which relate to the issues raised by the Deputy.

School Staffing

508. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the details of improvements relating to guidance counselling in secondary schools, as announced in budget 2016; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42571/15]

509. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if guidance and special education needs positions in secondary schools will be classified as ex quota, given the impact that the current classification has on them; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42572/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 508 and 509 together.

The Deputy will be aware that I have made provision in Budget 2016 for some 2,260 additional teaching posts for our primary and post primary schools next year. This includes the allocation of a whole time equivalent of an additional 300 teachers to second level schools and brings the basis of allocation from 19:1 to 18.7:1 for the school year 2016/17. This improvement of 0.3 in PTR allocation is a restoration of 50% of the teaching resources that were removed when the allocation of guidance posts was brought within quota. The delivery of the 50% restoration through a change in the PTR allocation will allow each school to determine how best to allocate the additional resources to meet the guidance needs of the school.

I have no plans to return to a situation where there would be a separate allocation for guidance in schools. The Department’s Guidelines in relation to how Guidance should operate within schools will be updated for the next school year to reflect the change in the allocation process. The Guidelines will underpin the responsibility of every school to make sure that they use this additional staffing to meet their obligations to provide guidance counselling support to all students. When the allocation for guidance was brought within quota DEIS schools were protected from the change by providing for a 18.25:1 allocation compared to the general 19:1 allocation. The position of DEIS schools will be further enhanced by a change to an allocation on the basis of 17.95:1.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOS) for allocating resource teachers to schools to support children with special educational needs. The NCSE operates within my Department’s criteria in allocating such support.

The NCSE has recommended that a new model be developed for allocating resource teachers to schools. My Department has devised a pilot of the new model which is taking place in a number of schools during the 2015/16 school year. In taking the decision to conduct a pilot of the new model, I have been guided by the advice of the NCSE Working Group report, which recommended sufficient time be allowed for consultation before the new model is implemented. I therefore do not propose to amend the existing allocation process, pending the completion of the pilot project and the introduction of a new allocation model.

School Supervision and Substitution Scheme

510. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will cover the cost of first substitution days in secondary schools, as previously, given the financial and staffing impact the current system is having on schools; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42573/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The Supervision and Substitution scheme in schools was amended under the terms of the Haddington Road

Agreement. Since the commencement of the 2013/14 school year, participation in the scheme is compulsory for all teachers. The annual hours requirement for S&S duties has been increased to 43 hours and enhanced operational flexibilities have been introduced. The allowance that was previously payable for participation in the S&S scheme was discontinued. A limited opt-out from the scheme was made available and those teachers who opted out have an additional reduction applied to their salary on an ongoing basis until retirement. In addition to existing usage, the S&S scheme is now being used to cover all self-certified sick leave absences and the first day of force majeure leave and illness in family leave.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

511. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will prioritise further pupil-teacher ratio reductions in secondary schools in future budgets; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42574/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Teacher allocations to all schools are approved annually by my Department in accordance with established rules based on recognised pupil enrolment. The criteria for the allocation of posts are communicated to school managements annually and are available on the Department website.

The Deputy will be aware that I have made provision in Budget 2016 for some 2,260 additional teaching posts for our primary and post primary schools next year. These posts will provide for an improvement in the staffing schedules at primary and post primary levels, enhance the leadership and management roles of deputy principals at post-primary level by reducing their teaching time, an improvement to the scheme of release time for principal teachers at primary level and additional resource posts to meet special education needs.

The allocation of a whole time equivalent of an additional 300 teachers to second level schools brings the basis of allocation from 19:1 to 18.7:1 for the school year 2016/17. This improvement of 0.3 in PTR allocation is a restoration of 50% of the teaching resources that were removed when the allocation of guidance posts was brought within quota. The delivery of the 50% restoration through a change in the PTR allocation will allow each school to determine how best to allocate the additional resources to meet the guidance needs of the school.

I am determined that education should continue to be prioritised for investment as our economy recovers and I will be seeking to agree a set of priorities for further increased investment into the future.

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

School Equipment

512. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the funding and programmes available to secondary schools to upgrade information and communications technology hardware; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42575/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): There is currently no programme funding that schools can draw down for ICT upgrades. Under the Digital Strategy for Schools 2015 - 2020, €30m will be provided to schools in the 2016/2017 school year and multi annual grants will be provided to schools rising to €50m by the end of the Strategy.

Earlier this year, €7m was allocated to post primary schools to support the implementation of the Design Communications & Graphics syllabus.

Teacher Training Provision

513. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the training and support she is putting in place for primary and secondary school teachers who are teaching children who are experiencing homelessness; if she is conducting research into this area; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42587/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Inclusive education is a mandatory area of study for all student teachers who are undertaking programmes of initial teacher education at primary and post primary levels.

The Teaching Council of Ireland’s requirements for initial teacher education programmes set out learning outcomes for graduates of the programmes. The first learning outcome identified for graduates concerns ethical standards and professional behaviour and refers, amongst other things, to the teacher’s unique role as a professional in providing for the holistic development of students. This child-centred approach permeates the wide range of skills, competences and knowledge that the initial teacher education programmes should inculcate in future teachers.

The graduate is also required to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the factors that promote and hinder learning, the impact of pupils’ backgrounds and identities on learning and the need to provide for the holistic development of the learner, particularly through differentiated approaches.

My Department, through the teacher support services and the National Education Psychological Service (NEPS), also provide ongoing support to teachers and schools. Support in the area of well-being continues to equip teachers to deal with social issues they encounter in the classroom.

In terms of teaching and learning in schools, the issue of homelessness is covered in an age appropriate manner throughout the school curriculum, in particular within the area of Social, Personal and Health Education, with the focus on human rights and human dignity.

The Deputy will be aware that statutory responsibility for educational welfare lies with my colleague the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. The Educational Welfare Service of TUSLA, an agency of that Department, has statutory powers to work with children and their families who may be experiencing difficulty with school attendance including issues arising from homelessness.

I understand that the Educational Welfare Service of TUSLA is engaging with the Homeless Services in relation to children of school-going age and their families who are experiencing homelessness.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

514. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a person qualifies for a special rate student grant if he or she is within the threshold and meets all qualifying conditions but is in employment for two days a week; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42596/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The Deputy will appreciate that, in the absence of all of the relevant details that would be contained in an individual’s application form and supporting documentation, it is not possible to say whether or not a particular student would qualify for a grant.

The eligibility of the individual to which the Deputy refers is a matter for SUSI (Student Universal Support Ireland) to determine; upon receipt of the relevant application form and supporting documentation. However, for the Deputy’s convenience I have set out below some of the criteria which would be taken into consideration by SUSI in their assessment.

Under the terms of the student grant scheme, grant assistance is awarded to students who meet the prescribed conditions of funding, including those relating to nationality, residency, previous academic attainment and means.

Eligible candidates may receive funding provided they are attending an approved course at an approved institution. An approved course is defined as a full-time undergraduate course of at least two years duration or a full-time postgraduate course of not less than one year duration pursued in an approved institution.

The qualifying criteria for the special rate of maintenance grant, in the 2015/16 academic year, as specified under the 2015 student grant scheme is as follows:

1. The student must qualify for the standard rate of grant;
2. Total reckonable income, after income disregards and Child Dependant Increase(s) are excluded, must not exceed €22,703;
3. As at 31st December, 2014, the reckonable income must include one of the eligible long-term social welfare payments prescribed in the Student Grant Scheme.

Student Universal Support Ireland Administration

515. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of outstanding applications under the Student Universal Support Ireland scheme that remain to be processed despite all necessary documentation having been received; when the students who qualify will receive their grants; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42597/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): SUSI currently has 4,674 application on hand, where students have submitted their documentation. These applications will be processed in the coming weeks and those students who have been awarded, and had their registration confirmed by their institutions will be paid in December.

SUSI has received almost 107,700 student grant applications to date for the 2015/16 academic year of which 16,500 were received after the Priority Processing deadline.

90,500 (82%) applications have been processed to completion. Of which 73,100 applications have been awarded a grant and 17,400 have been refused or cancelled.

Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Board

516. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of persons who are employed by Caranua; if the service is adequately funded; and if she will make

a statement on the matter. [42598/15]

517. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the level of funding she has provided to Caranua for each year of its existence; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42599/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 516 and 517 together.

Caranua, the Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Board, is an independent statutory body established pursuant to the Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Act 2012 to oversee the use of the cash contributions of up to €110 million, pledged by the religious congregations, to support the needs of survivors of institutional child abuse. To date a total of €82.92 million, including €81.54m in contributions and €1.38m in associated interest has been lodged to the special Investment Account managed by the National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA) for the Fund in accordance with section 29 of the Residential Institution Statutory Act, 2012. Caranua accesses this funding directly as required. No Exchequer funds are provided to Caranua.

I understand that in the period from January 2014, when it began accepting applications, to end October 2015 Caranua has expended some €36m of the funds contributed on meeting the needs of survivors.

Caranua publishes regular updates regarding applications and expenditure on its website (www.caranua.ie) while more detailed information is set out in its Annual Report and audited accounts which may be also accessed on this website.

The authorised staffing complement for Caranua is 10 posts, 6 of which posts are currently filled. In addition, Caranua is utilising the services of an employment agency to provide temporary staff to assist in processing applications and to provide administrative support. A part-time accountant is provided by Caranua’s external accountancy service provider.

My Department is presently considering a request from Caranua to increase the number of authorised posts. If approved and implemented that proposal would lead to a reduction in the level of reliance placed on agency staff.

Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Board

518. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the complaints and appeals service operated by Caranua is robust and sufficient; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42600/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Caranua is an independent statutory body established under the Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Act 2012.

I understand that Caranua has a Customer Service Charter and Feedback and Complaints Policy which may be accessed on the organisation’s website (www.caranua.ie). The website allows applicants to provide feedback, submit comments and make formal complaints in cases where there is dissatisfaction with the quality of service provided.

Decisions of Caranua may be appealed to the independent Appeals Officer appointed under section 21 of the 2012 Act. Since his appointment in February 2014 the Appeals Officer has received 117 appeals of which 87 have been concluded. The 2014 annual report of the Appeals Officer is in the public domain and may be accessed on both my Department’s website (www.

education.gov.ie) and on Caranua's website.

I should point out that Caranua comes within the scope of the Ombudsman Acts 1980 to 2012 and its administrative actions are subject to review by the Ombudsman.

I am satisfied that there are sufficient options available for applicants to Caranua to appeal decisions if they are dissatisfied with the outcome of their applications.

Schools Amalgamation

519. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the amalgamation of both national schools in Kanturk, County Cork, given that planning permission has been granted; the next steps and the timelines involved; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42611/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I can confirm to the Deputy that a notification of a decision to grant planning permission has been received from Cork County Council for a 16 classroom-school to facilitate the amalgamation to which the Deputy refers.

However, there are conditions attaching to the grant which are outside of the control of my Department and my Department has concerns that these conditions could prevent the school from opening when it is completed.

Discussions are on-going with the County Council to address the issues involved. Failing a satisfactory outcome, my Department will have no option but to appeal the conditions to An Bord Pleanála.

SOLAS Administration

520. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a safe pass for a person (details supplied) in County Limerick; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42634/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): This is a day to day operational matter for SOLAS who manage the Safepass programme. I understand that SOLAS have been in contact with the individual concerned and that the matter has been resolved.

Teachers' Remuneration

521. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding teachers' wages; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42635/15]

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 will, through salary increases and a reduction in the Pension-Related Deduction, begin 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.

Land Swaps

522. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the land swap papers received from a club (details supplied) in Dublin 24; if the business will be passed to the Chief State Solicitor's office without further delay; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42638/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): With regard to the matter raised by the Deputy, I can confirm that my Department has received correspondence from the club referred to by the Deputy. This correspondence is currently under consideration. A response will issue in due course from my Department to the correspondent.

Written Answers Nos. 523-544

Schools Building Projects Status

523. **Deputy John Perry** asked the Minister for Education and Skills what priority has a new national school (details supplied) in County Sligo; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42665/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): As the Deputy is aware, an application for a new school building was submitted to my Department as part of the amalgamation process involving St Joseph's BNS and Mary Immaculate GNS. My Department's letter of approval in 2013 to the proposed amalgamation, from September 2014, noted that the amalgamation would proceed on a split campus basis.

As you will appreciate, the school's request must be considered in the context of the financial

constraints imposed by the need to prioritise available funding for the provision of essential school accommodation. In that regard, due to competing demands on my Department's capital budget, it is not possible to give an indicative timeframe for the progression of this school project at this time. I wish to advise the Deputy however that my Department has approved funding towards the provision of a mainstream classroom and resource room to meet the school's immediate accommodation needs.

Religious Discrimination

524. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of students not wishing to study religion at a school (details supplied) in County Limerick and related matters. [42667/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): Under the Constitution and in accordance with the Education Act 1998, parents have a right to have their children opt out of religion classes and it is expected that this right will be upheld by schools on foot of a parental request.

In relation to the school in question, I understand that following an initial decision of the school not to agree to a parent's request to allow his child opt out of religion classes, the school board of management recently considered this matter. The outcome of that consideration is that the school has since allowed the student in question opt out of religion classes in the school.

The Deputy may be aware that the forthcoming Admissions to School Bill includes a specific requirement that school enrolment policies must include details of the school's arrangements for any students who do not wish to attend religious instruction.

Proposed Legislation

525. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her views on the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission observations on the Education (Admission to School) Bill 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42724/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I met with the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission in June of this year to discuss a number of matters including the Education (Admission to Schools) Bill and I welcome the recently published observations of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission on the Bill.

The Commission welcomes the overall aims of the Bill and notes that it is an important development in Ireland's education law.

While the Bill has been published it has not yet been discussed in the Dáil or the Seanad and I will be considering any changes raised by the Commission and others in tandem with any amendments proposed by members of both houses during the passage of the Bill.

In relation to the Commission's views on changes to equality legislation I have made clear that the matters concerned are complex and that such changes will not be made in this particular bill.

Schools Building Projects Status

526. **Deputy Olivia Mitchell** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a school (details supplied) is on the list of building projects to proceed to construction between 2016 and 2021; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42733/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I wish to advise the Deputy that the building project for the school to which she refers was previously included in my Department’s 2015 Construction Plan. It was not therefore necessary to re-announce the project on the 2016-2021 Construction Programme.

A site for the new school was recently acquired and architectural planning for the development has now commenced. It is my Department’s intention that the project will proceed to tender and construction at the earliest possible opportunity.

Adult Education Provision

527. **Deputy Jonathan O’Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the funding allocated to adult literacy and basic skills during each year since 2007. [42738/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): My Department has provided funding in the region of €30 million per annum for the years from 2007 to 2013 for the Adult Literacy Programme. Since the beginning of 2014, funding for adult literacy has been provided through SOLAS to the Education and Training Boards and other bodies. In 2015, the SOLAS provision for the Adult Literacy Programme is €30.4 million.

In addition to the Adult Literacy Programme, my Department has also provided funding for the Skills for Work Programme since 2010. Annual funding of €2.8 million is provided for this programme from the National Training Fund. The Skills for Work programme provides basic skills tuition for those in employment.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

528. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application for a special needs assistant for a person (details supplied) that is still pending and if an observation of care is required to finalise the decision which was due to take place in September 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42779/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I wish to advise the Deputy that the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) for allocating Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) to schools to support children with special educational needs. The NCSE operates within my Department’s criteria in allocating such support, which is set out in my Department’s Circular 0030/2014.

All schools were asked to apply for SNA support for the 2015/16 school year by 18th March 2015. The NCSE also continued to accept applications after this date in recognition that enrolments may not have been completed or where assessments were not completed.

The NCSE has now published details of SNA allocations for schools for September 2015 on its website at www.ncse.ie.

Once allocated, the deployment of SNAs within schools is a matter for the individual Principal/Board of Management. SNAs should be deployed by the school in a manner which

best meets the care support requirements of the children enrolled in the school for whom SNA support has been allocated. It is a matter for schools to allocate support as required, and on the basis of individual need, which allows schools flexibility in how the SNA support is utilised.

Details of the manner in which a school or parent may appeal the level of SNA or resource teaching allocation which has been made to support a child in school, to the NCSE, is set out on the NCSE website.

All schools have the contact details of their local SENO, while Parents may also contact their local SENO directly to discuss their child's special educational needs, using the contact details available the NCSE website. I am advised by the NCSE that the school attended by the child to which the Deputy has referred has now been allocated an additional SNA to support this child's care needs.

Educational Disadvantage

529. **Deputy Noel Coonan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a school (details supplied) in County Tipperary will qualify for delivering equality of opportunity in schools, DEIS, status; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42788/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): As the Deputy may be aware, I have recently commenced a process to renew the DEIS programme. The review process is being undertaken over the course of the current school year and will consider all issues pertaining to educational disadvantage.

I hope to be in a position to make an overall proposal for the delivery of future interventions to tackle educational disadvantage after that. While this process is underway, I do not intend to make any changes to the current programme, including the addition of any further schools.

Home Tuition Scheme Eligibility

530. **Deputy Eoghan Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of home tuition eligibility (details supplied). [42802/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The purpose of the Home Tuition Scheme is to provide a compensatory educational service for children, who for a number of reasons such as chronic illness, are unable to attend to attend school. The scheme also provides a compensatory educational service for children with special educational needs seeking an educational placement. Provision is also made for early educational intervention for children with autism.

Eligibility for Home Tuition for children with a significant medical condition is assessed having regard to the pupil's attendance levels for the previous school year and, in the main, by reference to a completed medical report.

Based on the information provided in relation to the pupils attendance in the 2014/2015 school year my Department was not in a position to sanction Home tuition.

This decision has been appealed by the parents of the pupil. Further information, in relation to this appeal, has been sought from the pupil's parents by the Special Education Section of my Department.

School Accommodation Provision

531. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide funding for the provision of temporary accommodation in the Presentation College, Athenry, County Galway, in order that the school can accept the enrolment of children who have been refused due to the significant excess of demand for places over capacity; if she will intervene with the Industrial Development Agency Ireland to negotiate a withdrawal of its opposition to enable the new school to be constructed on the site the school purchased for that purpose; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42807/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department is working closely with Galway County Council to acquire a permanent site for the school to which the Deputy refers. Recent correspondence received by the Department from the Board of Management with regard to the project is currently under consideration. Matters will be kept under review with a view to the progressing of the building project as soon as possible.

I also wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has recently been in contact with the school in question in relation to its accommodation needs. As my Department is satisfied that there are sufficient school places in the area in question to cater for the overall pupil demand, the school was advised that my Department was not in a position to provide further additional accommodation.

I am aware that there were concerns raised by the Industrial Development Agency (IDA) Ireland regarding the proposed development of a site that was purchased by the school authorities. While it is open to the school authorities to engage with IDA Ireland, I do not propose to become involved in such discussions.

Psychological Assessments

532. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the position of a school psychologist will be filled in order to carry out a National Educational Psychological Service assessment for a person (details supplied) in County Wicklow; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42808/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I can inform the Deputy that my Department’s National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) provides educational psychology service to all primary and post primary schools through an assigned NEPS psychologist and in some cases through the Scheme for Commissioning Psychological Assessments (SCPA), full details of which are on the Department’s website. Under this scheme schools can have an assessment carried out by a member of the panel of private psychologists approved by NEPS, and NEPS will pay the psychologist the fees for this assessment directly.

In common with many other psychological services and best international practice, NEPS has adopted a consultative model of service. The focus is on empowering teachers to intervene effectively with pupils whose needs range from mild to severe and transient to enduring. Psychologists use a problem solving and solution focused consultative approach to maximise positive outcomes for these pupils. NEPS encourages schools to use a continuum based assessment and intervention process whereby each school takes responsibility for initial assessment, educational planning and remedial intervention for pupils with learning, emotional or behavioural difficulties. Teachers may consult their NEPS psychologist should they need to at this stage in the process. Only in the event of a failure to make reasonable progress, in spite

of the school's best efforts in consultation with NEPS, will the psychologist become involved with an individual child for intensive intervention or assessment.

This system allows psychologists to give early attention to urgent cases and also to help many more children indirectly than could be seen individually. It also ensures that children are not referred unnecessarily for psychological intervention.

If the parents of the child referred to in the Deputy's question have concerns about their sons educational development I would suggest that they raise them with the principal of the school concerned with a view to his or her discussing the situation with the local NEPS service.

Student Grant Scheme Delays

533. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will receive a decision on an application for a Student Universal Support Ireland grant, given that this application has been in the queue since 21 October 2015; the reason for the delay; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42809/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): As part of a comprehensive customer service and communications strategy provided by Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI), to ensure that all necessary avenues are open to applicants to receive the information they need, a dedicated email and phone line service is provided by SUSI for Oireachtas members. This was established to meet an identified need for applicants who choose to engage the assistance of their public representatives in making enquiries about their grant applications.

This service compliments the established channels provided by SUSI which include online application tracking, a dedicated website, a telephone helpdesk, email and social media, including Facebook and Twitter.

Enquiries may be emailed direct to SUSI at oireachtas@susi.ie. Staff in SUSI are responding to email queries within a matter of days.

If an individual applicant considers that she/he has been unjustly refused a student grant or that the rate of grant awarded is not the correct one, she/he may appeal, in the first instance, to SUSI.

Where an individual applicant has had an appeal turned down in writing by SUSI and remains of the view that the scheme has not been interpreted correctly in his/her case, an appeal form outlining the position may be submitted by the applicant to the independent Student Grants Appeals Board within the required timeframe.

Quality and Qualifications Ireland Administration

534. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the impact of the introduction of Quality and Qualifications Ireland fees on community-based education centres; if she has or if she will commission a regulatory impact assessment report. [42810/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): Re-engagement, or the formal agreement of quality assurance with Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), is a requirement for legacy providers under the 2012 Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act. The fees to be applied to legacy providers seeking to re-engage with QQI, such as the organisations referred to by the Deputy, have yet to be determined. The charging of fees

to providers is integrally linked with how QQI is implementing its quality assurance and quality improvement role. The principles and policy to inform QQI's application of fees were subject to extensive consultation.

At a meeting hosted by my Department on 9th December 2014 involving representatives from QQI and the community and voluntary sector, it was confirmed that QQI would convene a working group of representatives from the sector to consider the implications of re-engagement for that sector in more detail. It was agreed that 2015 would essentially be a lead-in time for the re-engagement process and that the issue of fees for community and voluntary providers would not therefore arise until 2016.

QQI established a Joint QQI /Community and Voluntary Working Group in partnership with the community and voluntary sector to enable a process of collaboration and engagement with key stakeholders and providers. The working group, which is facilitated by an independent facilitator with extensive experience in the community voluntary sector, had its first meeting on 3rd March 2015, and has subsequently met on 4 other occasions. A further meeting is scheduled for December 2015.

The working group also jointly hosted a consultative event on QQI's quality assurance guidelines and criteria relevant to this sector which took place on 30th June 2015. Through these initiatives, QQI and the community and voluntary sector are engaging on a range of operational, developmental and strategic matters in the specific context of quality assurance and re-engagement. There are no plans to conduct a regulatory impact analysis.

The work of the group will assist QQI in clarifying its operational requirements for future re-engagement with community and voluntary sector organisations.

Student Grant Scheme Delays

535. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will receive a decision on an application for a Student Universal Support Ireland grant; the reason for the delay; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42822/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): As part of a comprehensive customer service and communications strategy provided by Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI), to ensure that all necessary avenues are open to applicants to receive the information they need, a dedicated email and phone line service is provided by SUSI for Oireachtas members. This was established to meet an identified need for applicants who choose to engage the assistance of their public representatives in making enquiries about their grant applications.

This service compliments the established channels provided by SUSI which include online application tracking, a dedicated website, a telephone helpdesk, email and social media, including Facebook and Twitter.

Enquiries may be emailed direct to SUSI at oireachtas@susi.ie. Staff in SUSI are responding to email queries within a matter of days.

If an individual applicant considers that she/he has been unjustly refused a student grant or that the rate of grant awarded is not the correct one, she/he may appeal, in the first instance, to SUSI.

Where an individual applicant has had an appeal turned down in writing by SUSI and remains

of the view that the scheme has not been interpreted correctly in his/her case, an appeal form outlining the position may be submitted by the applicant to the independent Student Grants Appeals Board within the required timeframe.

Summer Works Scheme Applications

536. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an application under the summer works scheme in respect of a school (details supplied) in County Kerry will be prioritised for funding, given the condition of the school's roof; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42846/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The Deputy will be aware that I recently confirmed the provision of €80 million over 2016 and 2017 for a multi-annual Summer Works Scheme for schools. This funding was initially promised as part of the Budget 2016 investment in schools. The funding will allow schools to carry out small and medium scale building works such as gas, electrical and mechanical works, roof and window upgrades, structural improvements; works that will improve and upgrade existing school buildings.

It is open to schools to prioritise the works they wish to undertake within the terms of the Scheme. Schools can now submit an application to my Department using the online Esinet portal facility. The closing date for receipt of applications has now been extended to 12 noon on Wednesday 2nd December 2015.

I wish to advise the Deputy that commensurate with the level of funding available for the Summer Works Scheme, applications will be assessed on a top down basis in accordance with the prioritisation criteria outlined in the governing Circular Letter for the Scheme. This Circular Letter (0055/2015) is available on my Department's website www.education.ie.

School Enrolments Data

537. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she is satisfied with the provision of a secondary education school (details supplied) in Duleek, County Meath; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42854/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): As the Deputy may be aware, the Duleek area feeds into the post-primary schools in Drogheda. A new post-primary school, Ballymakenny College, opened in September 2014 to cater for the feeder area. The building project for this school, which will cater for 1,000 students, is expected to be completed shortly.

My Department recently completed a nationwide demographic exercise to determine where additional post-primary schools will be needed in 2017 and 2018. This exercise encompassed all areas of the country, including Duleek. On the 17th November last I announced the details of the new post-primary schools to be provided nationwide in 2017 and 2018 as a result of this exercise. I also announced the programme of capital investment in schools running from 2016 to 2021, which will result in the provision of an additional 62,000 school places nationwide.

As part of this announcement, I stated that the demographic data will be kept under ongoing review. Any changes in demographic projections for the Drogheda area, including Duleek, taking into account updated enrolment data and the impact of ongoing and planned expansion of capacity in the area will be kept under review by my Department.

Schools Amalgamation

538. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the plan and likely timeframe for the amalgamation of two schools (details supplied); the amount provided for the capital works; the details of the likely capital works; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42894/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): As the Deputy is aware, I announced details on Tuesday, 17th November, of the major school building projects that are scheduled to proceed to construction over the next six years, as part of the Government’s €2.8 billion capital investment programme.

I am pleased to advise the Deputy that a project for the schools to which he refers was included in this announcement to proceed to construction in the period 2019-21. The project will facilitate the amalgamation of the two primary schools in Dingle. A formal amalgamation proposal has been made to my Department in respect of the schools concerned. My Department is liaising with the schools and their Patron in relation to the amalgamation proposal and also the capital works involved. Information in respect of all schools included in the Six Year Programme is available on the Department’s website at www.education.ie

Teaching Contracts

539. **Deputy Regina Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills how many employees in the primary and secondary school system are classified under a contract of indefinite duration; how many of these are receiving incremental salary payments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42899/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): All teachers employed under a Contract of Indefinite Duration (CID) receive incremental salary in accordance with the rules governing payment of incremental salary.

The number of post primary teachers paid on the payroll issue of the 26th November 2015 who are employed under a CID is 6,357.

The number of primary teachers being paid on the payroll issue of the 3rd December 2015 who are employed under a CID is 315.

School Accommodation Provision

540. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she is aware of the urgent need to proceed with an extension at a school (details provided); that this school has sought permission to purchase an adjoining site; and that hardship is being imposed on the pupils. [42945/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I can confirm that my Department is in receipt of an application for additional accommodation that involves the purchase of an adjoining site at the school.

My Department has been in recent contact with the school authorities who have advised that an alternative proposal is to be submitted. Once received, my Department will consider the matter further and will be in direct contact with the school when the assessment process has

been completed.

Student Grant Scheme Applications

541. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will take steps to have an application for a higher education grant by a person (details supplied) dealt with; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42974/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): As part of a comprehensive customer service and communications strategy provided by Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI), to ensure that all necessary avenues are open to applicants to receive the information they need, a dedicated email and phone line service is provided by SUSI for Oireachtas members. This was established to meet an identified need for applicants who choose to engage the assistance of their public representatives in making enquiries about their grant applications.

This service compliments the established channels provided by SUSI which include online application tracking, a dedicated website, a telephone helpdesk, email and social media, including Facebook and Twitter.

Enquiries may be emailed direct to SUSI at oireachtas@susi.ie. Staff in SUSI are responding to email queries within a matter of days.

If an individual applicant considers that she/he has been unjustly refused a student grant or that the rate of grant awarded is not the correct one, she/he may appeal, in the first instance, to SUSI.

Where an individual applicant has had an appeal turned down in writing by SUSI and remains of the view that the scheme has not been interpreted correctly in his/her case, an appeal form outlining the position may be submitted by the applicant to the independent Student Grants Appeals Board within the required timeframe.

Departmental Legal Cases Data

542. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of legal cases currently ongoing against her Department including State agencies under her aegis; the number of cases that took place during the years 2011 to 2014, inclusive; the cost of those that were contested and what damages were involved; the costs and damages of those that were settled; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43264/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The information requested by the Deputy is not readily available in my Department. The information is currently being collated and will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as it is available.

Departmental Staff Data

543. **Deputy Regina Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of employees under her remit who are classified under a contract of indefinite duration; the number of these who are receiving incremental salary payments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43278/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The information requested by the Deputy is contained in the tabular statement below. The following is a tabular statement in relation to the Department of Education & Skills and bodies under its aegis whereby some staff have acquired contract of indefinite duration. It also give details of those contract holders that may qualify for increments where an incremental pay scale applies.

| Name of Body | No. of Contracts | Incremental Payscale |
|---|------------------|----------------------|
| Department of Education & Skills | 16 | 16 |
| Quality & Qualification Ireland | 5 | 5 |
| Caranua | 1 | 1 |
| Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse | 4 | 3 (see note below) |
| Higher Education Authority | 2 | 1 (see note below) |
| Comhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscoilaíochta | 0 | 0 |
| Grangegorman Development Agency | 0 | 0 |
| National Council for Curriculum & Assess | 0 | 0 |
| National Council for Special Education | 0 | 0 |
| Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) | 0 | 0 |
| SOLAS | 0 | 0 |
| State Examinations Commission | 0 | 0 |
| The Teaching Council | 0 | 0 |
| Residential Institutions Redress Board | 0 | 0 |
| Residential Institutions review Committee | 0 | 0 |

In the case of one staff member at the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse and one at the Higher Education Authority their contracts are on a single point scale.

Electromagnetic Fields Studies

544. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will report on any recent initiatives or studies his Department or its agencies have carried out in conjunction with the Department of Health on the health effects of electromagnetic radiation from mobile telephones and given a number of health issues raised by Oireachtas communications committee reports in the Twenty-ninth and Thirtieth Dáileanna Éireann; if he is continuing to monitor those health effects with the Department of Health in respect of the location of mobile telephone masts and the use of mobile telephones by children; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42296/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan

Kelly): My Department has commissioned a study to review and report on international developments on the potential health effects of electro-magnetic fields. This study is examining international research developments in to non-ionising radiation (NIR) and electromagnetic fields (EMF) which have taken place since the publication in 2007 of a report by the then Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources, entitled Health Effects of Electromagnetic Fields.

Representatives from a number of Departments, together with national and international experts, are overseeing the study which is being undertaken by RIVM, the Dutch National Institute for Public Health and the Environment. It is expected that the report will be completed in the near future. The 2007 Report noted that the majority scientific opinion was that no adverse short- or long-term effects have been demonstrated from exposure to electromagnetic fields at levels below the limits recommended by the International Commission on Non-Ionising Radiation Protection (ICNIRP). Extensive international research on the issue continues to be co-ordinated through bodies such as the World Health Organisation.

The Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg), the licensing authority for the telecommunications industry, commissions audit reports to verify that its licensed operators are in compliance with their licence conditions relating to emission limits for non-ionising radiation. The detailed measurement results from over 1, 0 00 transmitter sites surveyed to date have so far shown total compliance. Recorded levels of radio-frequency signals are typically measured as being within the range of 0.002% to 2% of the safe exposure levels set by the ICNIRP guidelines. The location of licensed telecommunications antennae and the results of individual site survey reports can be found on ComReg's website: <http://www.askcomreg.ie/mobile/siteviewer.273.LE.asp>.

Written Answers Nos. 545-567

Planning Issues

545. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the consultation his Department has undertaken with Fingleton White, with Dublin City Council and with Fingal County Council with regard to the necessity of building a 16 km aviation pipeline from Dublin Port to Dublin Airport. [42345/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): Neither I nor my Department have been consulted by Fingleton White, Fingal County Council or Dublin City Council regarding the construction of a 16 km aviation fuel pipeline from Dublin Port to Dublin Airport. I understand that Fingal County Council and Dublin City Council decided to grant planning permission for this development within their own administrative areas (on 7 July and 15 October 2015, respectively). The decision of Dublin City Council has been appealed to An Bord Pleanála, which will determine the planning application as if it had been made to the Board in the first instance.

Under section 30 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, I am specifically precluded from exercising any power or control in relation to any particular planning case with which a planning authority, or An Bord Pleanála, is or may be concerned. Accordingly I have no function in relation to this matter.

Commercial Rates Valuation Process

546. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if the taxation and valuation system of commercial properties via commercial rates is sufficiently transparent, given the significant variation in the efficiency and rate of collection; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42362/15]

560. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will amend the taxation and valuation system of commercial properties via commercial rates, through the introduction of a commercial site value tax; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42363/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 546 and 560 together.

Local authorities are under a statutory obligation to levy rates on any property used for commercial purposes in accordance with the details entered in the valuation lists prepared by the independent Commissioner of Valuation under the Valuation Act 2001. The Commissioner for Valuation has sole responsibility for all valuation matters, including the most appropriate method of valuation. The levying and collection of rates are matters for each individual local authority.

It is important to acknowledge that commercial rates, as a local tax, and the rating system generally are deeply embedded in the local government system. A large body of case law is well established and local authorities and ratepayers are, in the main, very familiar with, and generally accepting of, the operation and practice of the rating system. Rates are also a stable source of financing for local government which is not affected unduly by short-term changes in economic circumstances.

Commercial rates are legally payable in two moieties; the first moiety and arrears are payable on the date of the making of the rate and the second moiety is payable on 1 July. In practice local authorities facilitate payments of commercial rates by instalments including by direct debit. As with all local charges, the invoicing and collection of due amounts is a matter for the local authority concerned to manage in light of prevailing circumstances and in accordance with normal accountancy procedures.

I am aware of the continued need to restrain costs on businesses. My Department has in recent years requested local authorities to exercise restraint in setting, and where possible to reduce, ARVs and they have responded positively in this regard. The national average ARV decreased each year from 2010 to 2014; 2015 and 2016 are not directly comparable with previous years due to the local authority mergers and the necessity to harmonise rates across new local authority areas.

I have no immediate plans to amend the legislation governing commercial rates.

Water Charges Exemptions

547. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to exempt pensioners from the water charge; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42530/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): A revised water charging regime was announced by the Government on 19 November

2014. The capped annual charge is €160 for single adult households and €260 for all other households until the end of 2018. All households now know what their capped bills will be until the end of 2018, which is particularly important for larger households or those with high usage due to medical needs.

In addition, a water conservation grant of €100 per year is available to qualifying households. The Department of Social Protection is administering the grant on behalf of my Department, which is available to households (principal private dwellings) that complete a valid response to Irish Water's customer registration process.

The water conservation grant replaces the tax rebate and social protection measures previously announced and is a more straightforward means of addressing water issues for all households on equal terms and will reduce households' outlay on water services both now and in the future.

The charges structure was revised with a view to making it simpler and fairer, providing more clarity and certainty to households. The overall cost for those who register with Irish Water, net of the €100 water conservation grant, is either €1.15 a week for single adult households or €3 a week for all others. Water supply will not be reduced under any circumstance.

When it comes to payment, a range of easy pay options are in place, including direct debits, electronic funds transfer, payment by cash at any retail outlet with a paypoint or payzone sign or a post office where a bill can be paid in full or part payments of a minimum of €5 can be made. Irish Water also intends participating in the Household Budget scheme. This facility, operated by An Post on behalf of the Department of Social Protection, provides customers with a facility to have their household utility bills and social housing rents deducted directly from their weekly social welfare payment.

Motor Tax Collection

548. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the percentage of annual motor tax revenue spent on the administration and transaction costs involved in levying the tax. [42560/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Motor tax can be paid online or by post or in person in 26 local authority areas. Some 67% of vehicle owners now tax online. The annual cost of maintaining the National Vehicle and Driver File, including the online system and the technological facilitation of the collection of motor tax in local authorities, is €12.5m. The cost of administering the service via the network of motor tax offices is €41m annually. Annual gross receipts from motor tax were €1.159 bn in 2014. Costs, therefore, represented 4.6 % of total receipts.

Library Services Funding

549. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the status of funding for a library to be constructed in Kinnegad in County Westmeath. [42561/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): A draft Libraries Capital Investment Programme is being developed by my Department for investment in library infrastructure over the period 2016-2021. The proposed library at

Kinnegad has been identified by Westmeath County Council as a priority investment and, accordingly, will be considered in that context.

Library Services Staff

550. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding employment opportunities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42631/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Under section 159 of the Local Government Act 2001, it is a matter for each local authority Chief Executive, for the purposes of discharging responsibilities, under section 149 of the Act, for the efficient and effective operation of his or her authority, to make such staffing and organisational arrangements as are deemed necessary for the purposes of carrying out the functions for which he or she carries responsibilities. The Library service is one such responsibility under Chapter 3 of the Local Government Act 2001.

Posts in the Library service are filled using recruitment qualifications declared by the Minister pursuant to section 160 of the Local Government Act 2001 and these recruitment qualifications are currently under review by my Department.

Housing Adaptation Grant Applications

551. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government why there is such a delay in an application by a person (details supplied) in Dublin 4 for a home care grant. [42787/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The Housing Adaptation Grant Schemes for Older People and People with a Disability are administered by local authorities, in this case Dublin City Council, with funding from my Department. There is no difficulty with funding availability under the schemes from my Department and I understand that Dublin City Council is in contact with the applicant in the matter.

Leader Programmes Expenditure

552. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to allocate an additional €40 million over the coming years to enhance the Leader programme, given the high level of demand; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42891/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Ann Phelan): The LEADER element of the Rural Development Programme 2014–2020 will provide €250 million to support the development of sustainable rural communities. €220 million of this has been made available to the 28 sub-regional areas with €5m for the REDZ Initiative and €10 million for co-operation projects to be distributed in due course. An additional €15 million will be made available through LEADER for the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine Artisan Foods Initiative.

Ireland is conducting a two stage process for the selection of local development strategies

to support the delivery of the LEADER elements of the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020. Stage one of the process is now complete and those successful at stage one have moved to stage two of the process, which is the preparation of local development strategies for their areas. Indeed, the preparation and submission of local development strategies is under way in each of the 28 designated sub-regional areas. A minimum period of six months to end-January 2016 has been allowed for the submission of strategies by all Local Action Groups, with the majority expected to submit strategies within that timeframe. To date, four local development strategies have been received and these are being considered at present.

The focus is now on ensuring that all of the strategies are finalised so that Local Action Groups can begin accepting applications from both private promoters and community groups for projects. My priority is to begin distributing the existing €250 million in funding to those rural communities. As regards additional funding, the Deputy will be aware that I recently announced a €30m investment to support Town and Village regeneration. The new scheme will support the revitalisation of rural towns and villages with the aim of improving the living and working environment in rural communities and enhancing their potential to support increased economic activity into the future.

The new scheme is proposed as part of a concerted effort to support the development of rural towns and villages not only as a component of a broader approach to rural development but also to improve the environment of rural dwellers in a way that will increase their quality of life and simultaneously support potential economic activity in their area.

Political Reform

553. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the reforms he has achieved since this Government took office in 2011 and his future plans for political reform; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42352/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The process of parliamentary reform is an ongoing one. The Programme for Government outlined an ambitious agenda for Dáil Reform to be introduced in a phased process over the lifetime of the Government. On foot of this, since 2011 the operation of the Dáil has been steadily reformed to enhance the legislative role of elected members and improve the working of the House. The measures introduced have included the following.

The number of Dáil sitting days has been significantly increased by reducing the length of Dáil breaks at Christmas, Easter, public holidays and the summer and introducing regular Friday sitting days. During the 45 months the FF, Green & PD Government was in office the Dáil sat 349 days – an average of 93 days a year. The FG & Labour Government has been in office 56 months and the Dáil has sat for 576 days – an average of almost 124 days a year, an increase of 31 more sitting days per year.

The first phase of the Dáil Reform Programme was introduced in the summer of 2011 and included:

- An additional Leaders' Questions session on Thursdays, taken by the Tánaiste
- Topical Issues Debates to replace the outmoded Adjournment Debates, so as to give Deputies an opportunity to raise issues direct with Ministers from the relevant Department
- Friday sittings to enable Deputies to play a fuller role in the legislative process by introducing their own Bills and having those Bills debated on the floor of the Dáil

- A mechanism for appeal to the Ceann Comhairle if a Deputy is unhappy with the reply received to a Parliamentary Question

- A Pre-Legislative review system where by Ministers could provide the Heads of a Bill to the relevant Oireachtas Committee to review before the Bill was published

- Restructuring of the Oireachtas Committee system by reducing the number of Oireachtas Committees from 25 to 16

- Introducing a new Oireachtas Committee chaired by an Opposition Deputy to work with Ombudsmen's offices and review petitions.

In the summer of 2012, further reforms to the Oireachtas Committee system were introduced, which streamlined the structure and provided an additional focus on areas of priority such as Jobs and Agriculture.

In September 2013 the Government announced the second phase of Dáil Reforms and the Dáil debated and approved changes to Standing Orders in October 2013. These reforms are being phased in and include changes to enable more public involvement in the law-making process:

- A Pre-Legislative Stage at an Oireachtas Committee is now a general requirement for non-emergency legislation. A Minister who does not bring a Bill to Committee for Pre-Legislative Stage is required to explain that decision to the Dáil.

- The new Pre-Legislative Stage allows for an unprecedented and extensive engagement by the public in law-making. The Committee can consult with experts and civic society groups; crucially, this takes place before the legislation is drafted.

- Where there has been a Pre-Legislative Stage, the Chair or Vice Chair of the Committee has an opportunity to outline the Committee's work to the members of the Dáil during the Second Stage debate after the Minister and main opposition spokespeople have spoken on the Bill.

In addition, each year the Taoiseach and Tánaiste will address the Dáil setting out the Government's annual priorities, with Ministers setting out their Department's plans.

The role of Oireachtas Committees in the Budget process has also been expanded.

There has been a reduction in the number of Legislative Programmes to two per year.

The time available for legislative debate in the Dáil has been increased, by increasing the total number of sitting days, extending the length of sitting days and starting at 9.30 am on Wednesdays and Thursdays.

The way legislation is debated in the Chamber has been improved:

- At First Stage, the proposer of a Private Member's Bill now has five minutes to outline the purpose of the Bill to the Dáil and explain the reasons for proposing it.

- Where proposed legislation has been the subject of Pre-Legislative Scrutiny, at Second Stage the Chair or Vice Chair of the Committee which considered the Bill at Pre-Legislative Stage has a speaking slot, of the same length as that of the Minister and Opposition Spokespeople, to report to the Dáil on the Committee's findings.

- At the end of the Second Stage debate, 45 minutes may be allowed for concluding remarks

by Deputies, chosen by the Ceann Comhairle, who have previously spoken.

The number of Friday sittings has been expanded and the Dáil now sits every second Friday to debate Private Members' Bills and Committee Reports selected using a lottery system. This has encouraged a rapid growth in the number of Bills introduced by Deputies, from 14 published in 2010 to 53 published in 2014. The new Friday sittings also allow Committees, for the first time, to seek directly to have their own reports debated in the Dáil.

The system of Topical Issues now requires the Minister or a Minister of State from the relevant Department to reply; if this is not the case, the Deputy who raised the issue can have it deferred until a Minister or Minister of State from that Department is available.

The time allocated to Oral Parliamentary Questions to Ministers has been standardised to 75 minutes. An ordinary Oral Question will be answered only if the Deputy tabling the Question is in the Chamber when it is reached, and the Deputy is given a brief period, of 30 seconds, to outline the question.

The Government also passed the Houses of the Oireachtas (Inquiries, Privileges & Procedures) Act 2013 and the Standing Orders to establish an Oireachtas Inquiry system are now in place. The Banking Inquiry is the first Oireachtas Inquiry established under this new legislation.

The Convention on the Constitution's 7th Report, on the issue of Dáil Reform, is currently being considered and a response is expected on this over the next few months.

Dáil Reform is an ongoing process and the Government intends to bring forward a further package of reforms for consideration.

Vacant Sites Levy

554. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if there is a time limit on bringing properties into use (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42297/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): There is no time limit requirement under the planning laws relating to the bringing into use of properties after their completion.

However, the recently enacted Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015 introduced a new measure, the vacant site levy, which is aimed at incentivising the development of vacant, underutilised sites in urban areas. In the context of the Act, the term "site" includes residential land and any structures on such land. Under the provisions of the Act, with effect from 2019 - in respect of 2018 - a levy will be charged on the registered owners of vacant sites in designated areas in local development plans and local area plans as being in need of, and suitable for, housing. The levy – which will be applied at a rate of 3% of the market value of a vacant site with reduced rates applying in specific circumstances - will be charged each subsequent year until the site is no longer vacant. When operational, it is envisaged that the levy will be instrumental in bringing vacant, underutilised residential sites and structures into beneficial use for housing purposes and assist in increasing housing supply.

Leader Programmes Funding

555. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount of European Union funding from the Leader programme for the periods 2014 to 2020 and for 2008 to 2014, to allow for a comparison of funding for both periods. [42301/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Ann Phelan): The European Agriculture Fund for the Rural Development Programme for Ireland is valued at €2.190 billion for the 2014–2020 programming period. LEADER has been allocated approximately 7% of this, which is €157 million. €153 million of this will be delivered through LEADER funding from my Department while the remainder will be available through LEADER for the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine's Artisan Foods initiative.

The European Union allocation for the Rural Development Programme 2007-2013 is €2.434 billion. LEADER was allocated approximately 10% of this which is €243 million.

Housing Issues

556. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government when he will appoint an independent panel to investigate the issue of mica and defective blocks in County Donegal, as announced by the Minister of State (details supplied) earlier in 2015. [42309/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): I recently announced my intention to establish an expert group to investigate the problems that have emerged in the concrete blockwork of certain dwellings in Donegal and Mayo in order to assist the parties directly involved in reaching a satisfactory resolution to their difficulties.

While building defects are, in the first instance, matters for resolution between the relevant contracting parties, i.e. the homeowner, the builder, the supplier and/or their respective insurers, I propose to set up a small expert group, with a strong technical background, to establish, in so far as it is possible, the number of affected dwellings in Donegal and Mayo, the root cause of the problems and the technical solutions for remediation.

In this regard, the expert group will have the following terms of reference: -

(i) To identify, in so far as it is possible, the numbers of private dwellings which appear to be affected by defects in the blockwork in the Counties of Donegal and Mayo;

(ii) To carry out a desktop study, which would include a consultation process with affected homeowners, public representatives, local authorities, product manufacturers, building professionals, testing laboratories, industry stakeholders and other relevant parties, to establish the nature of the problem in the affected dwellings;

(iii) To outline a range of technical options for remediation and the means by which those technical options could be applied; and

(iv) To submit a report by 31 May 2016.

Arrangements are now under way within my Department to identify a suitable chair for the expert group and I will be seeking nominations shortly from a number of professional bodies for suitable persons to participate on the group.

Local Authority Housing Data

557. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of local authority houses in County Mayo that are vacant for up to six months, six months to 12 months and more than 12 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42312/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): General statistics on local authority housing stock, including vacant social housing units, are published annually by the Local Government Management Agency. The most recent such statistics are the Service Indicators in Local Authorities 2013 which are available on the Agency's website at the following link: www.lgma.ie/en/serviceindicators/2004to2013.

My Department is providing funding support to all local authorities, including Mayo County Council, to assist them in returning vacant social housing units to productive use. This funding is on top of work to deal with vacant units undertaken by local authorities from their own resources and it is not a substitute for the normal responsibilities of local authorities to maintain their social housing properties.

Mayo County Council returned 80 vacant units back into productive use in 2014, and the target for 2015 is 122,34 of which are being funded by my Department, with the remaining 88 being funded through resources provided by the Council itself. I am satisfied that both this support from my Department and the local authorities' own resources are bringing significant improvements to the issue of vacant social houses and making them available to those on the waiting list as soon as possible.

Local Authority Housing

558. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the action he is taking regarding vacant buildings (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42313/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): My Department has been actively supporting all local authorities, including Dublin City Council, to remediate vacant social housing units and return them to use for those on the housing waiting lists. Between 2014 and 2015, my Department has committed funding support to Dublin City Council to return 945 vacant social housing units to productive use. This is on top of the work already being undertaken by Dublin City Council and other local authorities under their own resources to re-tenant vacant social units.

€5 million of funding is also being provided to Dublin City Council covering the period 2014 to 2015, to convert decommissioned bedsit type properties into one bed units. My Department is also providing substantial funding support to the Council to advance new social housing construction projects and acquisitions.

Alongside these supports for new and remediated social housing units, I also put a Ministerial Direction in place earlier this year which requires key local authorities to prioritise homeless and other vulnerable households in the allocation of tenancies under their control. This applies until 31 January 2016 and the four Dublin local authorities have been directed to allocate 50% of all available dwellings to such households.

Planning Issues

559. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the regulations governing the construction and maintenance of aviation fuel pipelines; if these are adequate to ensure the safe functioning of any aviation fuel pipeline built here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42343/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The construction and maintenance of aviation fuel pipelines is subject to the normal planning processes provided for in the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, and Regulations made thereunder. Thus, planning permission is required for such development from the planning authority concerned, or An Bord Pleanála on appeal, and the process of determining whether permission should be granted for such type of development includes requirements relating to the submission of a detailed environmental impact statement and appropriate assessment, where necessary, as well as a safety and environmental impact evaluation which is effectively a risk analysis as to the safety of the proposal as against alternative options relating to the supply of aviation fuel at the airport. The determination of any such planning application would, as a matter of course, also generally involve internal consultation by the relevant planning authority with its own Fire Services Section as to the functioning of such a proposed development, if granted permission.

The proposed pipeline in question is presently the subject of an appeal to An Bord Pleanála. Under section 30 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, I am specifically precluded from exercising any power or control in relation to any particular planning case with which a planning authority, or An Bord Pleanála, is or may be concerned. Accordingly I have no function in relation to this matter.

Question No. 560 answered with Question No. 546.

Commercial Rates

561. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount of compensation that will be paid to each local authority as a result of the global rates revaluation, in tabular form; the amount each local authority stands to lose as a result of the process, before compensation; the way the level of compensation was calculated in each case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42514/15]

590. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the estimated figure for the reduction in revenue from commercial rates for each local authority as a result of the Valuation Office's global revaluation, if the commercial rates charged by each local authority were to remain the same in 2016, and no other source of revenue was found to substitute the lost revenue. [42951/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 561 and 590 together.

Local authorities are under a statutory obligation to levy rates on any property used for commercial purposes in accordance with the details entered in the valuation lists prepared by the independent Commissioner of Valuation under the Valuation Act 2001.

The Commissioner for Valuation has sole responsibility for all valuation matters, including the global valuation of property of public utility undertakings under Part 11 of the Valuation Act

2001, as amended. The Valuation Act 2001 comes under the remit of my colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

The Valuation Act 2001, as amended, provides for global valuations of utility undertakings, to be carried out by the Valuation Office every five years and entered on the central valuation list. The most recent global valuations carried out by the Valuation Office are in respect of Gas Networks Ireland, Iarnród Éireann and telecommunications companies BT Ireland, Eircom, Vodafone, Three Ireland and Meteor. On 4 November 2015 the Valuation Office issued a copy of the Valuation Certificate and a schedule setting out the apportioned value to each rating authority. The previous valuation for these utilities had taken place in 2010. The Global Valuation Certificates show a reduction in the combined valuations for these utilities of €112m. Moreover, the reduction in the global valuation of the ESB, following an appeal to the Valuation Tribunal, will reduce the rates payable by the ESB from 2016.

The levying and collection of rates are matters for each individual local authority. The annual rate on valuation (ARV), which is applied to the valuation for each property, determined by the Valuation Office, to obtain the amount payable in rates, is decided by the elected members of each local authority in the annual budget and its determination is a reserved function. This process has recently been concluded in each local authority as part of the budgeting process for 2016. The implications of the Commissioner of Valuation's global revaluation of utility infrastructure for individual local authorities will ultimately be dependent on each authority's ARV, and its overall income and expenditure decided on in its budget.

My Department engaged with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and there will be a once off adjustment in support from the Local Government Fund in 2016 to local authorities affected by the global valuations.

The estimate of the reduction in rates income arising from the new global valuations and the amount of the adjustment in the Local Government Fund in 2016 is set out in the table. The amount of the adjustment per local authority was calculated with reference to the reduction in valuation of each global utility (including the reduction in valuation of the ESB following an appeal to the Valuation Tribunal) in each local authority area, applying the latest available Annual Rate on Valuation (ARV) to obtain the estimated reduction in rates income and by reducing the amount by just over 28% to accord with the available funding.

| County Council | Estimate of reduction in income arising from new valuations | Amount of Adjustment in Local Government Fund |
|------------------------|---|---|
| Carlow | €243,887 | €175,549 |
| Cavan | €212,638 | €153,056 |
| Clare | €646,702 | €465,493 |
| Cork | €1,897,841 | €1,366,056 |
| Donegal | €717,503 | €516,455 |
| Dún Laoghaire Rathdown | €1,045,936 | €752,859 |
| Fingal* | €0 | €0 |
| Galway | €796,831 | €573,554 |
| Kerry | €835,463 | €601,362 |
| Kildare | €879,403 | €632,989 |
| Kilkenny | €361,120 | €259,932 |
| Laois | €252,149 | €181,495 |
| Leitrim | €122,730 | €88,341 |

| County Council | Estimate of reduction in income arising from new valuations | Amount of Adjustment in Local Government Fund |
|-------------------------|---|---|
| Longford | €222,631 | €160,249 |
| Louth | €399,540 | €287,587 |
| Mayo | €691,776 | €497,937 |
| Meath | €793,217 | €570,953 |
| Monaghan | €195,614 | €140,802 |
| Offaly | €315,895 | €227,379 |
| Roscommon | €322,133 | €231,870 |
| Sligo | €267,373 | €192,454 |
| South Dublin | €1,337,243 | €962,540 |
| Tipperary | €568,963 | €409,537 |
| Westmeath | €312,487 | €224,926 |
| Wexford | €533 | €383 |
| Wicklow | €749,197 | €539,268 |
| City Council | | |
| Cork | €1,638,904 | €1,179,674 |
| Dublin | €4,429,335 | €3,188,211 |
| Galway | €369,492 | €265,959 |
| City and County Council | | |
| Limerick | €1,655,398 | €1,191,546 |
| Waterford | €849,664 | €611,584 |

Local Authority Staff Recruitment

562. **Deputy Michael McNamara** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government when an application by Clare County Council to sanction the position of community warden will be considered and sanctioned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42525/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The application to sanction this post was received by my Department on 17 June 2015 and has been approved.

Local Authority Housing Maintenance

563. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount of funding allocated to Mayo County Council for energy efficiency measures in its housing stock between 2011 and 2014; the amount that has been paid; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42548/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Between 2011 and 2014, Mayo County Council was allocated €2.023 million toward energy efficiency measures for their social housing stock and drew down €1.8 million of this funding.

Social and Affordable Housing Data

564. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount of funding allocated to Mayo County Council for housing construction and acquisition between 2011 and 2014; the amount that has been paid; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42549/15]

589. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to address the need for social housing in County Mayo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42895/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 564 and 589 together.

My Department provides capital funding to local authorities to increase their supply of social housing stock through the construction and acquisition of houses and apartments. This is one of the methods for the delivery of social housing by both local authorities and by approved housing bodies and significant housing delivery is also achieved through a range of other programmes supported by my Department.

The Exchequer funding drawn down by Mayo County Council in the delivery of new social housing units through both the local authority housing programme and the Capital Assistance Scheme between 2011 and 2014 is outlined in the following table:

| Year | Local Authority Housing | Capital Assistance Scheme |
|------|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| 2011 | €1,101,258 | €281,063 |
| 2012 | €804,563 | €1,054,003 |
| 2013 | €295,791 | €2,499,474 |
| 2014 | €709,620 | €358,101 |

Allocations are not always issued to the authorities under these programmes as they are largely demand-led. In relation to future social housing in County Mayo, targets and provisional funding allocations for delivery under my Department's main capital and current programmes were issued to all local authorities, including Mayo County Council, in April this year. These targets were issued in the context of the Social Housing Strategy 2020, which provides a comprehensive response to the need for social housing and targets the provision of over 110,000 social housing units to 2020, through the delivery of 35,000 new social housing units and meeting the housing needs of some 75,000 households through the Housing Assistance Payment and Rental Accommodation Scheme.

The targets are for the period out to 2017 and the available funding is being invested in a combination of building, buying and leasing schemes by the local authorities designed to accommodate 25% of those currently on the housing waiting lists. Mayo County has a target of 566 units, supported by € 30.3 m of investment, broken down as follows:

| - | Local Authority Housing/ AHB delivery via CAS/ Return of vacant properties | | Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme | | Rental Accommodation Scheme |
|----------------------|--|------|--|------|-----------------------------|
| Period | 2015-17 | 2015 | 2016/7 | 2015 | 2016/7 |
| Social Housing Units | 146 | 50 | 137 | 115 | 118 |

The detailed implementation of the programmes and projects to deliver on targets is a matter for each individual local authority, but I am confident that good progress is being made in their achievement. When the targets were announced, it was indicated that the funding would support the refurbishment of vacant social housing units and support local authorities in both building and acquiring housing. Subsequently, I announced new social housing construction projects to the value of approximately half a billion euros, including 39 new units for Mayo at a cost estimate of €7.2 million. Details are available on my Department's website at the following links: <http://www.environ.ie/en/DevelopmentHousing/Housing/News/MainBody,41340,en.htm>

Housing Adaptation Grant Data

565. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount of funding allocated to Mayo County Council under the housing adaptation grant for people with disabilities scheme between 2011 and 2014; the amount paid; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42550/15]

566. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount of funding allocated to Mayo County Council under the mobility aids housing grant scheme between 2011 and 2014; the amount paid; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42551/15]

567. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount of funding allocated to Mayo County Council under the housing aid for older people scheme between 2011 and 2014; the amount paid; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42552/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 565 to 567, inclusive, together.

My Department provides funding under the Housing Adaptation Grant Schemes for Older People and People with a Disability. There are three separate grants available under the scheme and local authorities receive an overall allocation, with the responsibility for the apportionment between the 3 schemes being a matter for each authority. The allocations and drawdowns for Mayo County Council in the years requested are as follows:

| - | Allocation | Drawdown |
|------|------------|------------|
| 2011 | €2,274,400 | €2,268,000 |
| 2012 | €2,060,173 | €2,067,116 |
| 2013 | €2,060,173 | €2,143,834 |
| 2014 | €2,227,225 | €1,984,326 |

Information on the exchequer funding provided by my Department to each local authority for these schemes is available on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/StatisticsandRegularPublications/HousingStatistics/>, by selecting 'Social and Affordable Housing', 'Housing Adaptation Grants by Area 2008 to date'. Details of the 2015 allocations are contained on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.environ.ie/en/GeneralNews/MainBody,41581,en.html>.

Register of Electors

568. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if his Department is working to ensure that citizens and families experiencing homelessness will be able to vote in the upcoming general election, given that they are not in permanent accommodation because of the housing shortage; the criteria to be followed by those persons currently at temporary addresses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42585/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): In order to vote at an election or a referendum a voter must be registered in the appropriate register of electors for that election or referendum. The Electoral Act 1992 provides for the registration of voters where they are 'ordinarily resident'. Depending on the circumstances, the registration authority may consider it appropriate to register people experiencing homelessness at a particular address where they may be residing temporarily. The determination of 'ordinary residence' is a matter for decision by the registration authority in the light of the circumstances of each particular case.

Where people who are already on the register of electors have moved from one constituency to another or to another address within the same constituency and wish to be registered at their new address they can apply for inclusion in the supplement to the register. To do so, they should complete the RFA 3 form that is available for this purpose and send it to the registration authority for the area where they are currently registered. The RFA 3 form is available from any registration authority and is also available to download from www.checktheregister.ie.

While the registration of voters is a matter for the registration authorities, I would expect, in the circumstances, that they take a reasonable and common-sense approach to the inclusion of people experiencing homelessness in the register of electors.

Water Charges Arrears

569. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he or any body under his Department's remit is instructing approved housing bodies to actively pursue tenants to pay the water charges arrears; and if those same approved housing bodies are informed in any manner that if their tenants fail to pay the water charges

their funding will be affected. [42590/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Since 1 January 2014, Irish Water has statutory responsibility for all aspects of water services planning, delivery and operation at national, regional and local levels.

The occupier of a dwelling is liable to pay the water charges in respect of the dwelling, and legislation provides that the owner is the occupier unless the contrary is proven. Section 23A of the Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 places certain obligations on the owner of a dwelling to register with Irish Water. In the event that they do not register, Irish Water has the explicit legal authority to bill the owner of the dwelling in respect of any water charges relating to that dwelling. Irish Water is providing landlords with the opportunity to prove that they are not the occupier by providing the tenant's name. This will allow Irish Water to contact the tenant to complete the registration and to bill the tenant.

Arrears can be avoided by entering into a payment plan with Irish Water. Various easypay options are available through post offices or other payment providers. The overall net cost for those who register is either €1.15 a week for single adult households or €3 a week for all others. Water supply will not be reduced under any circumstance.

While approved housing bodies are owners of dwellings, no communication has issued from my Department linking the non-payment by tenants of water charges with funding from my Department to the bodies. Payment from my Department to approved housing bodies is generally in respect of specific housing developments or activities they are performing in relation to the delivery of social housing.

Housing Management Companies

570. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he is satisfied with the effectiveness of the existing arrangement of stipulating by planning condition the setting up of management companies to maintain residential housing estates; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42608/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): My Department advised planning authorities by way of Circular letter PD 1/ 2008 of 26 February 2008 that they should not include the establishment of a management company as a condition of planning permissions for the development of traditional residential housing estates (that is estates of houses with individual private gardens), except in the most exceptional circumstances, for example, to maintain a specific facility in the estate that is for residents' use only (such as a private playground) or in the case of a development comprising holiday homes.

The circular further advised that the attaching of conditions to planning permissions relating to the establishment of a management company for the purpose of maintaining and managing a development should generally be confined to multi-unit structures (i.e. apartments and/or apartments and duplex houses) for the purpose of maintaining shared exteriors of buildings such as external walls and roofs; shared internal areas such as stairways, lifts and lobbies; as well as for the maintenance of external private shared facilities that are exclusive to the development (e.g. boiler houses, switch rooms, bin storage areas, communal private gardens/private open spaces or playgrounds) where a management company is considered essential having regard to the nature and scale of such facilities.

I am satisfied that this advice is reasonable and proportionate.

Planning Issues

571. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if a review (details supplied) on planning matters has been completed; when it will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42636/15]

583. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if a consultancy company (details supplied) was appointed in February 2014 to carry out an independent planning review on the performance of planning functions of the six selected planning authorities in Carlow, Cork, Galway and Meath County Councils, and in Cork and Dublin City Councils; if the review has been completed and when it will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42811/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 571 and 583 together.

MacCabe Durney Barnes Consultants were appointed in February 2014 to carry out an independent planning review on the performance of planning functions having regard to specific planning issues in respect of six planning authorities (Carlow, Cork, Galway and Meath County Councils and Cork and Dublin City Councils) in accordance with section 255 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended.

I received the final report from the consultants in July 2015 and I intend to publish the report shortly having fully considered its contents.

Fire Service

572. **Deputy Seán Kenny** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide funding to Dublin City Council for the purchase of an additional hydraulic platform and turntable ladder appliance for Dublin Fire Brigade; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42654/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The provision of fire services in local authority areas, including the establishment and maintenance of fire brigades, the assessment of fire cover needs and the provision of premises, is a statutory function of the individual fire authorities under the provisions of the Fire Services Act 1981.

My Department supports fire authorities through the setting of general policy and guidance, and the provision of capital funding, including the recoupment (within the overall funding available) of costs incurred by fire authorities in relation to the approved purchase of fire appliances and emergency equipment, as well as construction and upgrading of fire stations.

Dublin City Council provides fire services on behalf of the four Dublin local authorities. Continued investment in the fire appliance fleet is one of the key national priorities for the Fire Services Capital Programme. I have recently announced a new national joint - procurement programme to purchase 20 fire appliances, under which Dublin Fire Brigade received an allocation for three new appliances. They subsequently requested and have received approval to substitute the cost of one of these 'Class B' appliances to upgrade one existing turntable ladder.

All requests for funding from my Department's Fire Services Capital Programme will be considered within the constraints of available resources and will have regard to local authorities'

priorities, the value for money offered by proposals and the totality of requests from fire authorities.

Traveller Accommodation

573. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government for an update on Dublin City Council drawing down funds for Traveller accommodation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42721/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): In accordance with the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998, statutory responsibility for the assessment of the accommodation needs of Travellers and the preparation, adoption and implementation of multi-annual Traveller accommodation programmes are a matter for individual housing authorities. My Department's role is to ensure that there are adequate structures and supports in place to assist the authorities in providing such accommodation, including a national framework of policy, legislation and funding. The efficient and effective use of funding is a matter for individual local authorities, in this case Dublin City Council.

The 2015 Dublin City Council allocation is €366,299, of which €44,795 has been drawn down to date. However, I understand that a number of claims have very recently been received from the Council and these are currently being processed for recoupment to the Council. My Department will continue to engage with Dublin City Council in relation to the drawdown of funding before year-end.

Fire Service

574. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he is aware that firefighters in County Kildare are not available to cut down trees, but that in neighbouring counties it is part of the job description. [42769/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Fire authorities have specific statutory responsibility to respond to fires and protect property. Additionally, there is statutory provision for fire services to respond to non-fire emergency operations, including response to road traffic accidents, incidents involving hazardous materials, and rescue operations, such as rescues from water, heights or confined spaces.

Other discretionary roles, such as dealing with fallen trees on roads, may be considered by each fire service, with a policy decision to be made on response to these types of occurrences, taking into account the need for the roles and the associated risks. In deciding to undertake a role, services should be conscious of the need to have safe systems of work in place, including appropriate equipment, procedures, training and instructions, as well as the effect any response to these roles may have on the availability of fire services for their core public safety roles.

Local authorities may have arrangements, other than use of fire services, for dealing with occurrences such as fallen trees on roads, and may consider that the additional costs associated with training of fire service personnel and maintenance of skills may not be justified when viewed alongside the frequency of incidents.

Waste Management

575. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans for waste enforcement in the southern region; how he anticipates enforcement will be carried out; if this will be done by private agencies or by public bodies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42771/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): *A Resource Opportunity, which sets out our national waste management policy*, contains a commitment to complete a review of the respective regulatory and enforcement roles of the Environment Protection Agency and local authorities. A Review Group, established for that purpose in 2013 and comprising representatives from local authorities, the regional waste management offices, the Environmental Protection Agency, the National Transfrontier Shipment Office, the National Waste Collection Permit Office and An Garda Síochána, identified the existing strengths and weaknesses in this area and made recommendations for the future. The review was also carried out in the context of the examination being undertaken by local government with respect to its existing service delivery models and cost base, and in identifying more efficient ways and means by which services could be delivered.

The Group recommended the establishment of three new regional lead authorities to drive improved performance and greater consistency in waste enforcement. My Department engaged subsequently with Local Authority Chief Executives and Directors of Service, through the Programme Management Office of the Local Government Management Agency and the Public Service Reform and Oversight Group, to develop the work of the 2013 Review and to invite expressions of interest from local authorities who wished to bid for the role.

On 9 October, following an open and highly competitive bidding process, Cork County Council, Dublin City Council and Leitrim & Donegal County Councils (in a combined bid) were selected as the new Waste Enforcement Regional Lead Authorities for the Southern, Eastern and Midlands, and Connacht /Ulster Regions respectively.

Each of these new Waste Enforcement Regional Lead Authorities (WERLAs) will have responsibility for co-ordinating waste enforcement actions within regions, setting priorities and common objectives for waste enforcement, ensuring consistent enforcement of waste legislation across the three existing waste management planning regions, while still leaving local authority personnel as first responders on the ground to specific breaches of waste legislation. This is intended to facilitate a transformation from process-driven enforcement, structured around separate implementation of individual regulations, to one that focuses greatest effort on the waste problems and issues that matter most and to take swift, proportionate and effective action.

This structure will also complement the existing regional waste management planning group structure and the co-operative multi-agency approach of the Network for Ireland's Environmental Compliance and Enforcement (NIECE). The establishment of lead regional enforcement authorities will also facilitate more streamlining of the tasks currently undertaken in the waste enforcement area.

The structures are to be put in place for an initial period of five years with a review as to their effectiveness carried out after Year Two. A key point to note is that no enforcement powers are being taken away or transferred from local authorities to the WERLAs and the current waste enforcement network will be maintained. Consequently, local authorities will continue to receive the same level of enforcement grant subvention as heretofore, with the additional costs of establishing and staffing the three regional enforcement offices being also met by my Department.

The work of the WERLAs will be overseen by a National Steering Committee which will be chaired initially by my Department. The National Committee will determine national waste enforcement priorities for WERLAs and drive consistency at a central level. The Committee will include representatives from a wide range of regulatory authorities. A National Steering Committee Contact Group will also be established to ensure that other stakeholders have a direct channel to the National Committee.

Rural Enterprise Development Zones

576. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will extend the deadlines to the 2015 budget for the rural enterprise development zones, issued to local authorities for 2016, so as to allow them to spend the allocations effectively. [42772/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Ann Phelan): 51 Projects have been awarded funding under the Rural Enterprise Development Zones (REDZ) Pilot initiative to a value of almost €3.8 million.

To date 50 of the 51 project contracts offered for the 2015 REDZ Pilot initiative have been agreed and signed off by the local authorities involved and are due to be completed by year end. In the case of the one remaining outstanding contract, my Department has been advised that it will be returned in the next few days.

I am not considering an extension of time at the moment but will keep the matter under review.

Social and Affordable Housing Data

577. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of housing units completed by approved housing bodies in 2015 to date. [42791/15]

578. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of local authority houses completed in 2015 to date. [42792/15]

579. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of houses purchased by local authorities in 2015 to date. [42793/15]

580. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of houses purchased by approved housing bodies in 2015 to date. [42794/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 577 to 580, inclusive, together.

Information on social housing units constructed and acquired in respect of all local authorities and approved housing bodies is published on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/StatisticsandRegularPublications/HousingStatistics/FileDownload,15291,en.xls>.

Social and Affordable Housing Applications Data

581. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of new applications approved for social housing in the first six months of 2015. [42798/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The assessment of households for social housing purposes is a matter for individual local authorities in accordance with the relevant legislative provisions and, in particular, the 2011 Social Housing Assessment Regulations.

My Department does not hold details of ongoing changes to individual housing authority social housing waiting lists. The numbers assessed as being eligible for and in need of social housing by individual local authorities at any single point in time is subject to ongoing fluctuation due to households being allocated housing and new households applying for housing support. For example, given the decrease in the unemployment rate there may well be people who while still appearing on local authority lists, may have secured employment or whose circumstances may have otherwise changed in the meantime, rendering them no longer eligible for or in need of social housing.

To accurately measure the number of qualified households on the waiting lists in individual local authorities the households must be subject to a comprehensive review. The last such review was carried out in 2013 and the 2013 Summary of Social Housing Needs Assessment results are available on my Department's website at the following link:

<http://www.environ.ie/en/PublicationsDocuments/FileDownload,34857,en.pdf>.

The Social Housing Strategy 2020 includes a commitment to undertake social housing assessments on an annual basis from 2016 onwards.

Tenant Purchase Scheme Administration

582. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the timeframe for laying the statutory instrument on the new tenant purchase scheme, which was signed on 17 November 2015, before the Houses of the Oireachtas; the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42800/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The Housing (Sale of Local Authority Houses) Regulations 2015 were signed on 30 October 2015 and were laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas on 4 November 2015.

Question No. 583 answered with Question No. 571.

Mortgage to Rent Scheme Administration

584. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his commitment to raise the cap from €220,000 for the mortgage to rent scheme, and if this commitment will come into force in the lifetime of this Government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42823/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The Approved Housing Body (AHB) Mortgage to Rent Scheme was launched nationally in June 2012. It is now properly established as part of the overall suite of social housing options and an important part of the arrears resolution process.

The package of commitments on mortgage arrears announced by Government in May 2015 included a number of amendments to the Mortgage to Rent Scheme which will enable more properties to qualify for the Scheme, and make it more flexible and accessible to borrowers. The principal amendment to the Scheme, which took effect from 1 July, is to increase the valuation thresholds applicable.

The revised property value thresholds are detailed in the following tables.

| Type | Higher Threshold Area | Normal Threshold Area |
|---------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| House | €350,000 | €250,000 |
| Apartment/Townhouse | €300,000 | €190,000 |

The location of the Higher and Normal Threshold Areas are specified in the following tables:

| | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------|---------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------|----------|-----------|
| - | County | County | County | County | County | County | County |
| Higher Threshold Area | Cork | Dublin | Galway | Kildare | Louth | Meath | Wicklow |
| - | County | County | County | County | County | County | County |
| Normal Threshold Area | Carlow | Cavan | Clare | Donegal | Kerry | Kilkenny | Laois |
| | Leitrim | Limerick | Longford | Mayo | Monaghan | Offaly | Roscommon |
| | Sligo | Tipperary | Waterford | Westmeath | Wexford | | |

Traveller Accommodation

585. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he is aware of an ongoing situation (details supplied); the steps he will take to resolve it; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42827/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): In accordance with the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998, statutory responsibility for the assessment of the accommodation needs of Travellers and the preparation, adoption and implementation of multi-annual Traveller accommodation programmes, designed to meet these needs, rests with individual housing authorities, in this case Donegal County Council. My Department's role is to ensure that there are adequate structures and supports in place to assist the authorities in providing such accommodation, including a national framework of policy, legislation and funding.

Accordingly, the issues raised in the report in relation to the two families are solely a matter for Donegal County Council. However, I understand that the Council is aware of the situation regarding these families and is working closely with them and Donegal Travellers Project on an ongoing basis with a view to addressing their long-term accommodation needs.

Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas

586. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the progress he has made in implementing the recommendations of the Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42829/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Ann Phelan): The Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas (CEDRA) identified the need to take a more tailored approach to planning at both a regional and local level and recognised that this approach should not be restricted by current administrative boundaries.

Minister Kelly and I are fully committed to supporting the development of rural Ireland and, in this regard, we are also committed to advancing the implementation of the CEDRA Report recommendations. To facilitate this, I established the CEDRA Interdepartmental Group (IDG), comprising senior representatives of all relevant Government Departments. The IDG is currently working in a co-ordinated way to ensure that each Department's policy development and implementation fully considers the needs of rural communities. In this context, the focus is on maximising the financial resources already available for rural development and ensuring that these resources are directed in a way that best supports the sustainable economic development of rural areas.

In order to maintain strong links with people in rural Ireland who are involved in or have a strong interest in the economic development of rural areas and communities, both Minister Kelly and I have also established an Expert Advisory Group to monitor progress and provide advice in respect of the implementation of the recommendations in the CEDRA report.

In addition, work is at an advanced stage on the preparation of a Charter for Rural Ireland, which will establish frameworks and practices to support the rejuvenation of the rural economy.

In line with the recommendations of the CEDRA report, I recently announced a Rural Economic Development Zone (REDZ) pilot scheme and I have made an amount of €3.8 million available to support the implementation of this pilot, which consists of 51 projects. This pilot scheme will complement the LEADER element of the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020, which will provide €250 million in financial resources to support the development of sustainable rural communities over the coming period.

The Deputy will also be aware that in line with the objectives of the CEDRA report, I also recently announced an additional €30 million investment package for rural Ireland, which will be rolled out over the coming months. This funding will support the revitalisation of towns and villages with a view to improving the living and working environment in these communities and enhancing their potential to support increased economic activity into the future.

Capital Assistance Scheme Funding

587. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if an announcement is imminent regarding the allocation of money for the construction of an on-site communal facility at Castleblayney Care Housing Association at Drumilliard in Castleblayney, County Monaghan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42850/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): My Department is providing €2.3 million through the Capital Assistance Scheme for the construction by Castleblayney Care Housing Association of 18 units of accommodation at Drumilliard, Castleblayney, County Monaghan, to cater for persons with disabilities. I understand that this scheme is largely complete and 10 of the 18 units have tenants allocated to them.

A second application has been submitted for the provision of an additional two units of

accommodation and a communal facility on the site. A decision on funding for this proposal will be made following the completion of the first scheme, the submission of final account, a post-project review and confirmation from Monaghan County Council that all units provided under the first scheme are fully tenanted.

Emergency Accommodation Provision

588. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the status of all aspects of his planning, including modular housing, to alleviate the number of families in emergency accommodation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42881/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): A range of measures are being taken to secure a ring-fenced supply of accommodation to house homeless households and mobilise the necessary supports in order to deliver on the Government's target of ending involuntary long-term homelessness by the end of 2016. These measures have been identified in the Government's Implementation Plan on the State's Response to Homelessness (May 2014). Progress in implementing these measures is reported through the Cabinet Committee on Social Policy and Public Service Reform. The plan and progress reports are available on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.environ.ie/en/DevelopmentHousing/Housing/SpecialNeeds/HomelessPeople/>.

With regard to modular housing, the Government has approved the delivery of 500 units of modular housing for homeless families across Dublin. It is intended to have the first 150 units delivered as quickly as possible in the Dublin City Council administrative area, with the City Council acting as the contracting authority. The Council is aiming to secure the delivery of an initial fast-tracked 22 of these units before Christmas, with delivery of the remaining units commencing in late Q1 2016. A further 350 units will then be provided across the four local authorities in the Dublin region through a national procurement framework overseen by the Office for Government Procurement.

This programme of modular housing provision is being implemented to mitigate the issues associated with an increasing volume of homeless families accommodated in inappropriate commercial hotel arrangements. The units will provide emergency accommodation in the first instance, offering a greater level of stability while move-on options to long-term independent living are identified and secured. Furthermore, such arrangements will facilitate more co-ordinated needs assessment and support planning for access to all required services, including welfare, health and housing services.

Question No. 589 answered with Question No. 564.

Question No. 590 answered with Question No. 561.

Departmental Funding

591. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the funding available for the refurbishment of buildings recently purchased by a person who intends to use these buildings for commercial use; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43024/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): There are no funds at my disposal to support the refurbishment of buildings to be used for commercial purposes.

Construction Industry Register Ireland

592. **Deputy Michael McNamara** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if it is required for competent builders, contractors, specialist sub-contractors and tradespersons who undertake to carry out construction works to be registered with the Construction Industry Register Ireland, in order to comply with the Building Control (Amendment) Regulations 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43032/15]

593. **Deputy Michael McNamara** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the grant assistance available to small firms of competent builders, contractors, specialist sub-contractors and tradespersons who are registered with the Construction Industry Register Ireland to defray the cost of undertaking annual continuous professional development which is a requirement for registration with the Construction Industry Register Ireland. [43033/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): I propose to take Questions Nos. 592 and 593 together.

The Building Control Regulations 1997 to 2015 require the owner of a proposed building to sign a statutory form assigning a competent builder to undertake the works. The regulations do not require that the builder so assigned be registered with Construction Industry Register Ireland (CIRI). CIRI is a voluntary register of builders, contractors and specialist trade persons established by the Construction Industry Federation and I understand that approximately 800 construction entities are currently included on the register which is available online at www.ciri.ie.

Under the Construction 2020 strategy, the Government has signalled its commitment to placing the register on a statutory footing. This is seen as an essential consumer protection measure giving consumers who engage a registered builder the assurance that they are dealing with a competent and compliant operator. Legislative proposals in this regard are currently being prepared by my Department with a view to their being presented to Government for consideration in the near future.

I have no role or function in relation to the grant assistance of construction firms in relation to ensuring that they or their employees are properly trained. I would encourage those small firms of competent builders, contractors, specialist sub-contractors and tradespersons who are registered with the Construction Industry Register Ireland to raise any concerns they have in relation to the cost of undertaking annual continuous professional development (CPD) with CIRI who will be in a position to advise on an appropriate approach which is suitable to the needs of their firm.

Departmental Legal Cases Data

594. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of legal cases currently ongoing against his Department including State agencies under his aegis; the number of cases that took place during the years 2011 to 2014, inclusive; the cost of those that were contested and what damages were involved; the costs and

damages of those that were settled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43265/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Each year my Department is required to prepare and submit to the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General an Appropriation Account of funds expended from the Department's Vote in the year concerned. Following audit, the Account is published on the Comptroller's website and includes details of legal costs incurred by my Department, set out by way of a note to the Account. The Department is involved in a number of pending legal proceedings which may generate liabilities, depending on the outcome of the litigation. Any actual amount or the timing of potential liabilities is uncertain but details of costs involved will be published in the relevant Appropriation Account. Data in respect of legal costs incurred in the requisite years are set out in the following table. The table does not include costs associated with the Planning Tribunal. Payments in respect of legal costs incurred by agencies or bodies under the aegis of my Department are a matter for the agency or body concerned.

Legal Costs - Vote 25 DECLG - €000s

| 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 |
|------|-------|-------|------|
| 405 | 7,257 | 7,812 | 310 |

Departmental Staff Data

595. **Deputy Regina Doherty** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of employees under his remit who are classified under a contract of indefinite duration; the number of these who are receiving incremental salary payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43279/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): There is one staff member with a contract of indefinite duration in my Department since September 2012 and that person is on an incremental scale. The information collected by my Department in relation to local authorities does not show the number of instances of contracts of indefinite duration at a particular point in time

The information requested in respect of State Agencies is not collected by my Department.

Hydraulic Fracturing

596. **Deputy Michael Colreavy** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if the chief medical officer will carry out a health impact assessment into hydraulic fracturing. [42657/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Joe McHugh): The requirement for a Health Impact Assessment into hydraulic fracturing, or otherwise, would only arise if an application to carry out a development proposing the use of this technology were being considered. As I have advised previously, the research programme, which has been commissioned by the Environmental Protection Agency into the potential impacts from unconventional gas exploration and extraction (UGEE) on the environment and human health, is ongoing.

No application to engage in UGEE has been received in my Department, nor would any such application, if submitted, be considered until the research programme has concluded and there has been time to consider its findings.

Renewable Energy Generation Targets

597. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the penalties Ireland will face if we do not meet our target of 10% of transport energy coming from renewable sources by 2020, under the European Union renewable energy supply directive. [42320/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): The 2009 EU Renewable Energy Directive set Member States individual targets for renewable energy in order to attain an overall renewable energy share of 20% by 2020 across the entire European Union. In this regard, Ireland was assigned a legally binding target of meeting 16% of our overall energy requirements from renewable sources by 2020. In addition, Member States must ensure that at least 10% of the energy used in the transport sector is from renewable sources by 2020. The 10% transport target contributes to the overall 16% target, with the additional required contributions coming from renewable electricity (40%) and renewable heat (12%).

While the cost of any shortfall in Ireland's target of 16% has yet to be established, the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) has estimated that the cost to Ireland may be in the range of €100 million to €150 million for each percentage point Ireland falls short of the overall 16% renewable energy target. In arriving at these figures, SEAI used the Irish onshore wind tariff support cost (lower bound) and the UK offshore wind tariff support cost (upper bound) as the cost per megawatt hour (MWh) of purchasing renewable energy credits to meet 2020 targets. Further work commissioned by SEAI suggests the cost to Ireland may be in the range of €70 million to €140 million per percentage point shortfall (equivalent to €50 to €100 per MWh). These estimates are based on the projected marginal cost of the renewable energy being brought to market by the selling Member State, with the cost per MWh based solely on the premium component of the tariff support and the type of technology used, ranging, as with SEAI estimates, from onshore wind (lower bound) to offshore wind (upper bound).

Broadband Service Provision

598. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he has plans to invest in improvements to the fixed line broadband network in east County Galway, specifically in the Raheen and Catherlustrane areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42393/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): The telecommunications market in Ireland has been fully liberalised since 1999. Decisions by commercial operators to invest in particular technologies, including fixed line network technologies are taken purely on commercial grounds, having regard to the cost of service provision and the anticipated revenue returns from any such investment. Neither my Department nor the Commission for Communications Regulation, the independent market regulator, have statutory authority to oblige any particular network provider to invest in the provision of upgraded broadband services.

The State can only intervene to ensure access to broadband services in cases of clear market failure. In this regard the National Broadband Plan aims to ensure that every citizen and business, regardless of location, has access to a high quality, high speed broadband service. This will be achieved through a combination of commercial investments and a State led intervention in areas where commercial services will not be provided.

The commercial telecommunications sector is currently investing approximately €2.5 billion in network upgrades and enhanced services. These very significant investments represent a step-change in the quality of broadband services available.

Last November I published a national high speed coverage map for 2016. This map is available at www.broadband.gov.ie. The areas marked BLUE represent those areas that will have access to commercial high speed broadband services.

The AMBER areas show the target areas for the State intervention and includes the area of Raheen, Caherlistrine, Co. Galway. All premises within the AMBER areas will be included in the State's intervention.

The map allows all members of the public, be they business or residential, to see whether their premises or home will have access to commercial high speed broadband services by the end of 2016 or whether they will be included in the Government's proposed intervention.

It is anticipated that speeds of at least 30Mbps will be also delivered through the Government's intervention and the network will be designed to cater for future increased demand from consumers and business.

Consumers can also consult the websites of the various commercial operators to ascertain details of current and planned future deployment plans.

I can confirm that next generation broadband services have been rolled out to over 45,000 premises to date in County Galway with over 26,200 more expected to be served by commercial investment. Approximately 62,500 remaining premises in County Galway will be covered by further commercial investment or be the target for the proposed State intervention under the NBP. The breakdown of premises covered, per townland, is available on the High Speed Broadband Map.

Over 40 responses were received following the publication of the NBP proposed Intervention Strategy in July last. Non-confidential versions of these submissions are being published and can be accessed at www.Broadband.gov.ie.

Meanwhile, my Department continues to review the technical and financial detail relating to potential new commercial investment proposals. I expect to proceed to formal procurement before the end of the year.

The Government is determined to ensure that the network is 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.

In this context, the NBP proposes that through the combination of commercial investment and State intervention, 85% of addresses in Ireland will have access to high speed services by 2018 with an ambition of 100% coverage by end of 2020.

Prospecting Licences

599. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources further to Parliamentary Question No. 202 of 12 November 2015 and given his statement regarding oral agreements in relation to petroleum prospecting licences, if the companies involved have ever been informed in writing that no such licences were required. [42486/15]

600. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources further to Parliamentary Question No. 202 of 12 November 2015 and in view of his acknowledgement of agreements being done orally with companies (details supplied) regarding petroleum prospecting licences, and the link with the Environmental Protection Agency research project, if any oral or tacit agreements have also been carried out in relation to the unconventional gas exploration and extraction research project currently under way. [42487/15]

601. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources further to Parliamentary Question No. 202 of 12 November 2015 and given his statement on oral agreements in relation to petroleum prospecting licences when these deals were made; who made them; and if the companies involved have formally accepted them. [42488/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Joe McHugh): I propose to take Questions Nos. 599 to 601, inclusive, together.

Pursuant to Section 9 of the Petroleum and Other Minerals Development Act 1960, it is a matter for the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources to determine whether or not to grant a Petroleum Prospecting Licence when an application for such a licence is made. As set out in my response to Question No. 202 on 12 November, the then Minister did not agree to a recommendation to grant such a licence in the instances referred to by the Deputy. Under the legislation the decision is one for the Minister and the agreement of an applicant is not required.

Hydraulic Fracturing Policy

602. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his plans to keep Ireland free of hydraulic fracturing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42763/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Joe McHugh): A multi-agency trans-boundary programme of research on the potential impacts on the environment and human health from UGEE projects is under way and is being administered by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and co-funded by the EPA, my Department and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, with oversight from a broad based Steering Committee. As has been outlined on a number of occasions, no decision will be made on any proposal for the use of hydraulic fracturing, as part of an Unconventional Gas Exploration & Extraction (UGEE) project, until there has been time to consider the outcome of this major research programme.

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

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

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

I can once again confirm that no decision will be made on any proposal for the use of hydraulic fracturing, as part of any UGEE programme, until there has been time to consider the outcome of this Joint Research Programme.

Prospecting Licences

603. **Deputy Noel Harrington** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources when the exploration prospecting licences 3435, 2899, 2900 were issued; the length of these licences; if an option exists for these licences to be renewed; if so, the timeframe; if provision is made for a further renewal after this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42868/15]

604. **Deputy Noel Harrington** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he is satisfied that a mining company (details supplied) in County Cork has met all the terms and conditions of the licences issued to it; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42869/15]

605. **Deputy Noel Harrington** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he or his Department has been informed of changes in the details of ownership or operation of the holder of certain exploration licences (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42870/15]

606. **Deputy Noel Harrington** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he is aware of the work of the Allihies Parish Co-Operative Society Limited in developing a tourist facility around the old mountain mine entrance and works in Allihies in County Cork; his plans to consider excluding this area from any further licences or renewal of exploratory licences to enable this facility to be developed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42871/15]

607. **Deputy Noel Harrington** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the information and scientific analysis available for public examination for exploratory work in the area surrounding the old mountain mine in Allihies in County Cork for mineral and metal reserves over the past 75 years; when the results of current exploratory work will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42872/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Joe McHugh): I propose to take Questions Nos. 603 to 607, inclusive, together.

The prospecting licences (PL) for areas 3435, 2899 and 2900 were granted to Westcork Copper Mining Co. Ltd (the licensee) for a period of six years from 25 February 2010 until 24 February 2016.

PLs are reviewed by my Department every two years to ensure that the licensee has complied with all licence conditions (i.e. the licensee has carried out an acceptable work and expenditure programme and reported satisfactorily on same). The licences in question were last reviewed in April 2014 and determined to be in good standing. The next licence review is scheduled to be completed in early 2016. All Prospecting Licences contain a conditional guarantee of renewal for licensees who satisfactorily observe the terms and conditions of their existing PLs. The licensee may apply to renew their licences in February 2016 for a further six years (to 24 February 2022). Should such an application be made, it will be evaluated by my officials. PLs that are twelve years old may thereafter be renewed every two years subject to further evaluation by my officials.

To date, the licensee has not advised my Department of any changes in details of ownership or operation.

My Department makes all exploration work reports which are at least six years old available for public release. Reports can be released earlier than six years, should licensees surrender their prospecting licences. In relation to PL Areas 3435, 2899 and 2900, provisional results of the licensee's exploration are due to be made publicly available in late February 2018. Historical work reports relating to the Allihies area are available from the Exploration Report search facility on my Department's website at <http://gis.dcenr.gov.ie/imf/sites/ExplorationCompanyReports/textinputscreen.html>.

In addition historical information on the former mining operations at Allihies can be accessed on my Department's website at <https://secure.dcenr.gov.ie/goldmine/index.html>.

My Department is aware of the work of the Allihies Parish Co-Operative Society Limited in developing a tourist facility around the old Mountain Mine entrance and works in Allihies, County Cork. A tourist mine project can be both beneficial to the local economy and in enhancing the perception of the mining industry in general, so long as it is undertaken with due regard to human health and safety and environmental protection.

However, as Minister of State with responsibility for natural resources, it is my primary statutory obligation to facilitate and regulate the discovery and development of new mineral deposits and as such there are currently no plans to exclude this area from prospecting.

It should be noted that all Prospecting Licences issued are restricted to exploration and do not grant any right to extraction or mining. Any plans to carry out mining will require a separate mining lease from my Department as well as Planning Permission from the Local Authority and an Integrated Pollution Control licence from the EPA.

Energy Resources

608. Deputy Thomas P. Broughan asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the steps he is taking to ensure the security of Irish oil and gas supplies and the key role being played by Whitegate oil refinery in the maintenance of energy security; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43038/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): Approximately 96% of gas consumed in Ireland is imported, with approximately 45% of our electricity being generated using gas. EirGrid, together with ESB Networks and Gas Networks Ireland, have respective emergency plans in place to deal with any unexpected short-term disruption to gas supplies. The security of Ireland's gas supplies will be significantly strengthened by the coming onstream of the Corrib Gas field which will reduce our dependency on imported gas in the short to medium term.

Ireland has no domestic oil production and all oil consumed is imported, either in the form of crude oil that is refined at Whitegate or in the form of product. The National Oil Reserves Agency (NORA) manages Ireland's strategic oil reserves. NORA ensures that Ireland meets its EU and International Energy Agency (IEA) obligations to maintain 90 days' oil stocks for use in the event of an oil supply disruption.

Ireland has one refinery in Whitegate, Cork that was privatised as a result of its sale by the State in 2001. The owners of the refinery, Phillips 66, advised my Department in October that they were putting the Whitegate refinery up for sale. A refinery sale would be a commercial

matter between Phillips 66 and a potential purchaser. As this process is under way Whitegate will continue to be operated on a business as usual basis.

The Government views the continued operation of the Whitegate refinery on a commercial basis as highly desirable from an energy security and economic perspective. Security of supply remains a fundamental tenet of our energy policy. I am in contact with my ministerial colleagues to discuss the importance of continued operations at the facility.

Departmental Legal Cases Data

609. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the number of legal cases currently ongoing against his Department including State agencies under his aegis; the number of cases that took place during the years 2011 to 2014, inclusive; the cost of those that were contested and what damages were involved; the costs and damages of those that were settled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43262/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): The information requested by the Deputy in relation to my Department is being compiled and will be forwarded as soon as possible. The information sought by the Deputy regarding the agencies under the aegis of my Department is an operational matter for each agency. I will request that they reply directly to the Deputy with the information requested.

Departmental Staff Data

610. **Deputy Regina Doherty** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the number of employees under his remit who are classified under a contract of indefinite duration; the number of these who are receiving incremental salary payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43276/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): My Department does not have any employees on Contracts of Indefinite Duration.

Fáilte Ireland Expenditure

611. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport Fáilte Ireland's spend on the marketing campaign for the Wild Atlantic Way. [42298/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The promotion and marketing of the Wild Atlantic Way is an operational matter for both Tourism Ireland (overseas market) and Fáilte Ireland (domestic market). Accordingly, I have referred the Deputy's question to both agencies for direct reply.

Please contact my private office if you do not receive a response from either agency within ten working days.

The Gathering Expenditure

612. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the spend on the recent marketing campaign for the The Gathering. [42299/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Gathering was an initiative carried out in 2013. A designated budget of €12 million was provided for the project by my Department; €5 million in 2012 and a further €7 million in 2013. The core funding was supplemented by a range of cash and non-cash supports leveraged by The Gathering from key partners. The provision of a substantial range of supports by the Dublin Airport Authority and a €1 million Gathering event fund provided by IPB Insurance Ltd were chief among the partner supports secured.

Independent research undertaken on behalf of Fáilte Ireland indicated that, in 2013, between 250,000 and 275,000 overseas visitors to Ireland travelled specifically because of The Gathering. This growth in visitor numbers, directly attributable to The Gathering, was estimated to be worth approximately €170 million in revenue in 2013.

Any decisions in relation to subsequent marketing activity related to The Gathering would be operational matters for the Tourism agencies, Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland. Accordingly, I have referred the Deputy's Question to the agencies in question for further details. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Airport Development Projects

613. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he is committed to the current application by the Ireland West Airport Knock for 90% Exchequer funding for the expansion plans associated with the operation of the airport, and to further business proposals to facilitate the ongoing development of the airport and the region; and if these expenditure measures are included in the capital expenditure programme. [42302/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Regional Airports Programme 2015-2019 was approved by the EU Commission in August last and is available on my Department's website. This Programme was approved under the 2014 EU Guidelines on State aid to airports and airlines.

The Programme provides for Exchequer support to cover safety and security related projects/activities at the four regional airports in Waterford, Kerry, Donegal and Knock (IWAK) under four separate Schemes - Capital Expenditure Grant Scheme (CAPEX), the Core Airport Management Operational Expenditure Subvention Scheme (OPEX), Public Policy Remit Capital Expenditure Grant Scheme (PPR-C) and Public Policy Remit Core Airport Management Operational Expenditure Subvention Scheme (PPR-O)).

My Department is currently assessing the necessary supporting documentation provided by the airport in compliance with the various Schemes, including its Business Plan for 2015-2019.

Under the CAPEX Scheme, the maximum aid contribution allowed under the EU Guidelines for these types of investment is 75% and this is reflected in the latest business plan received from IWAK.

I am aware that IWAK believe that they will require up to 90% grant aid in order to implement the larger safety and security related projects. There is provision under the EU Guidelines that, in exceptional cases, a separate submission may be made to the EU Commission for consideration to exceed that 75% maximum laid down in the Guidelines. Such submissions will be considered on a case-by-case basis by the Commission. IWAK are fully aware of these provisions.

This issue will be dealt with as we progress the implementation of the Programme in 2016.

Over the life of the new Programme, almost €18m has been allocated for capital expenditure, and in excess of €28m over the seven years of the Capital Plan. Funding availability in any particular year will be subject to the outcome of the normal Exchequer budgetary process and all airports are aware of this.

Rail Network

614. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has established the timeframe for the completion of the western rail corridor and its associated cost. [42303/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Over the lifetime of the new Capital Plan “*Building on Recovery: Infrastructure & Capital Investment 2016 - 2021*”, the priority for heavy rail infrastructure is to provide the necessary funding for maintenance and renewal programmes to bring the level of funding on the network up to the required *steady state* level.

In an environment where funding remains constrained, it has not been possible to make exchequer funding available to reopen closed rail lines in the West, or anywhere else on the network. This does not however preclude a third party from providing finance for the development of a railway line or freight services.

The new Capital Plan includes a commitment that, in advance of the Mid-Term Review of the Plan, the Government will commission a feasibility study to examine options for expanding freight transport on the railways. The potential for investment in rail freight in the west can be considered in that context.

Road Projects Expenditure

615. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has established the cost of upgrading the N4 road between Cloonamahon and Castlebaldwin in County Sligo to enhance the Sligo to Dublin link; and if this cost has been included in the capital expenditure programme. [42304/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual national road projects is a matter for the Transport Infrastructure Ireland (formerly known as the NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the relevant local authority. Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects is a matter in the first instance for TII in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act.

The transport element of the Capital Plan “*Building on Recovery*” makes provision for several roads projects to commence which are targeted at removing critical bottlenecks or upgrading inadequate sections of road including the N4 Collooney to Castlebaldwin upgrade scheme.

In this context, TII will be drawing up an implementation programme in relation to the projects included in the 7 year Capital Plan taking into account annual budget allocations. The detailed budget for the scheme will be determined as part of that process prior to the competitive tender process for the scheme.

Air Safety

616. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will report to Dáil Éireann on the public safety regulations he is implementing regarding the growing usage and popularity of drone aircraft and the impact of drones on the local environment and ecosystems; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42467/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Irish Aviation Authority has statutory responsibility under the Irish Aviation Authority Act 1993 for the regulation of aviation safety standards for civil aviation in Ireland. This includes remotely piloted aircraft systems (RPAS) or as they are more commonly known, Drones. The Irish Aviation Authority, which is responsible for the safety of airspace operators in Ireland, published its policy for regulation of the safe use of RPAS in Ireland in April 2012. There is already in place a regulatory process for licensing and training by the IAA in the area of RPAS. I have also been informed by the IAA of its intention to introduce new regulations for the safe operation of drones very shortly.

It is accepted both internationally and at an EU level that the deployment of RPAS pose new challenges, including those related to public safety, and that the increase in the use of RPAS by hobbyists and enthusiasts requires consideration of regulatory controls in this arena. Such wider public policy issues are in the process of being addressed both at an International and EU level. My Department is committed under the National Aviation Policy 2015 to continue to contribute to the EU rule making and regulatory process concerning RPAS.

Departmental Legal Costs

617. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 628 of 17 November 2015, the amount spent by the National Sports Campus Development Authority, now Sport Ireland, in respect of legal advice relating to freedom of information requests since 2012; and if he is satisfied that this was an appropriate use of taxpayers' money. [42536/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I have referred the Deputy's question to Sport Ireland for direct response in relation to expenditure by the Authority or by Sport Ireland on legal advice relating to FOI requests since 2012. I would ask the Deputy to inform my office if a reply is not received within 10 days.

I am satisfied that expenditure on legal advice was an appropriate use of taxpayers' money, where the Authority or Sport Ireland considered that such legal advice was required.

Public Transport Review

618. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when he proposes to conduct a review of all public transport services in counties Sligo, Leitrim and Roscommon. [42695/15]

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

Rural Transport Programme

619. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to allow the nomination of elected members of local authorities to sit on the boards of the Local Link companies within their region. [42697/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Ann Phelan): Responsibility for the management of the Rural Transport Programme (RTP) was assigned to the National Transport Authority (NTA) with effect from April 2012. This includes responsibility for the restructuring of the RTP which has involved the establishment of 17 Transport Co-ordination Units under the Local Link brand.

I have referred your question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

Transport Management Certificate of Professional Competence

620. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of persons who sat the transport management certificate of professional competence examination for each of the three examinations held during 2015, and the number who passed, by centre. [42698/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The requested information is set out in the table below and has been provided by the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport.

2015 Transport Management CPC Examinations - Candidate Numbers and Passing Rates

| | | |
|-----------------------------|-----|--------|
| January 2015 | Sat | Passed |
| Galway | 24 | 23 |
| Mullingar | 8 | 8 |
| Dublin/Green Isle | 73 | 64 |
| Athlone | 7 | 7 |
| Maynooth | 9 | 6 |
| Limerick | 25 | 15 |
| Cork | 19 | 15 |
| Tallaght/(Momentum Program) | 20 | 14 |
| Letterkenny | 9 | 8 |
| | | |
| June 2015 | Sat | Passed |
| Galway | 18 | 15 |
| Mullingar | 11 | 9 |
| Enniscorthy | 4 | 4 |
| Dublin/Green Isle | 70 | 57 |
| Limerick | 16 | 15 |
| LIT/Limerick | 10 | 6 |
| Cork | 16 | 14 |

| | | |
|-----------------------------|-----|--------|
| January 2015 | Sat | Passed |
| Tallaght/(Momentum Program) | 15 | 9 |
| Letterkenny | 33 | 17 |
| Curragh Army Camp | 15 | 12 |
| | | |
| September 2015 | Sat | Passed |
| Galway | 12 | 7 |
| Dundalk (Momentum Program) | 15 | 9 |
| Dublin/Green Isle | 62 | 42 |
| Limerick | 13 | 10 |
| Letterkenny | 9 | 4 |
| Curragh Army Camp | 7 | 6 |

Transport Management Certificate of Professional Competence

621. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans for reform of the transport management certificate of professional competence. [42699/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): A review of the administration and organisation of the Transport Management CPC is under way in my Department. In the interim, I have introduced revised criteria in relation to the authorisation of training providers for the Transport Management CPC. These revised criteria are in effect since 1 November 2015 and bring about an opening of the market for prospective training providers who demonstrate compliance with the criteria. The revised criteria are published on my Department's website.

Parliamentary Questions

622. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to a previous parliamentary question (details supplied), if he will address a matter regarding the National Sports Campus Development Authority and Sport Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42742/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): This is a matter for Sport Ireland and I have referred the Deputy's question to Sport Ireland for direct response. I would ask the Deputy to inform my office if a reply is not received within 10 days.

Tourism Project Funding

623. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding a submission for funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42859/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Arrangements for the provision of tourist information offices are an operational matter for the Board and management of Fáilte Ireland. Accordingly, I have referred the Deputy's question to them for

further information and direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Public Transport Fares

624. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the steps he will take to ensure parity of bus transportation costs to the consumer (details supplied). [42860/15]

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

Road Projects Expenditure

625. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the proposals to provide a substantial increase in the non-national road network grant allocation to Monaghan County Council for 2016; if he is aware of the concerns expressed by councillors at Monaghan County Council and at Carrickmacross and Castleblayney municipal district in relation to the urgent need to upgrade substantial parts of the road network; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42975/15]

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

Ireland has just under 100,000 kilometres of road in its network and the maintenance and improvement of national, regional and local roads places a substantial financial burden on local authorities and on the Exchequer. Because of the national financial position, there have been very large reductions in Exchequer funding available for roads over the past number of years. Funding in 2008 was €2.3 billion while funding this year is around €760 million for the national, regional and local road network. The reality is that funding will continue to be tight for the next number of years.

Local authorities are aware that it is a matter for each Council to determine its priorities and to allocate funding accordingly. Given funding constraints, my objective has to be to allocate funding to local authorities on as equitable basis as possible. The main grant categories are, therefore, based on road lengths in each local authority's area of responsibility.

The RLR allocations for next year have yet to be decided but I expect to announce the details early next year. It is important to reiterate that State grants are intended to supplement local authorities' own resources. In this context, I am emphasising to Councils that the commitment of local authorities to contribute significantly from their own resources, towards the cost of improving and maintaining the regional and local roads, network is essential.

Road Safety Strategy

626. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a national speed limit campaign will take place (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42978/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Road Safety Authority has statutory responsibility for the promotion of public awareness in relation to road safety and the safe use of our roads.

It must be remembered that speed limit signs cannot be interpreted as representing a target, or that it is safe to drive up to the limit displayed. It is the driver's responsibility to exercise judgment and to drive at a safe speed having regard to the prevailing road conditions.

Reiterating this point, one of the recommendations of the 2013 published Speed Limit Review was the need for more awareness and communications on the futility of speeding. I understand that this is something the RSA will address in 2016. In addition, I am informed that this will be supplemented with updated education and training on the issue of speeding in the RSA's road safety programmes being delivered in schools and also in the delivery of Essential Driver Training lessons for learner drivers.

While accepting that irrespective of the location on our road network there needs to be frequent reminders for drivers that speed limits are maximum limits and not targets, I would also highlight that ensuring drivers do not break these limits is the responsibility of An Garda Síochána.

Road Projects Status

627. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the construction of the north ring road in Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43021/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for the Transport Infrastructure Ireland (formerly known as the NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects is a matter in the first instance for TII in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act.

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

Compulsory Purchase Orders

628. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a number of compulsory purchase orders are needed to progress the construction of the north ring road in Cork; the estimated cost of completing these; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43022/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for the Transport Infrastructure Ireland (formerly known as the NRA) under

the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects is a matter in the first instance for TII in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act.

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

Departmental Legal Cases Data

629. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of legal cases currently ongoing against his Department, including State agencies under his aegis; the number of cases that took place during the years 2011 to 2014, inclusive; the cost of those that were contested and what damages were involved; the costs and damages of those that were settled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43272/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The information requested by the Deputy is being collated and will be forwarded to the Deputy within ten working days. If you do not receive the information within the ten working days please contact my private office.

Departmental Staff Data

630. **Deputy Regina Doherty** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of employees under his remit who are classified under a contract of indefinite duration; the number of these who are receiving incremental salary payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43285/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): There are no employees of my Department who are classified as being employed under a Contract of Indefinite Duration.

I have asked the State Agencies under the aegis of my Department to provide the Deputy with the information requested. If you do not receive a reply within 10 working days please advise my private office.

Noxious Weeds

631. **Deputy Eric Byrne** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she is aware of the increasing presence of Japanese knotweed in urban areas, particularly in Dublin; how individual citizens can report and have a remedy to the ever-increasing presence of this noxious weed, much of which is to be seen in the Kilmainham area of Dublin, and in particular on some sites which are to be developed for social housing (details supplied); if she will offer public information on how to collectively eradicate this noxious alien from urban areas; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42477/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I am aware that there is a growing public awareness and concern about the impact of invasive species here, including Japanese Knotweed. In this regard, I wish to advise that my Department is responsible for the Wildlife Acts and the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats)

Regulations 2011 (S.I. No. 477/2011), both of which prohibit the spreading of invasive species.

In general, control of invasive species such as Japanese knotweed is a matter for landowners, and my Department carries out considerable work on control of such species in National Parks and Nature Reserves. For example, work was undertaken over many years to deal with the rhododendron threat in Killarney National Park. My Department does not however have the resources required to extend such work into urban areas or the wider countryside and is not in a position to provide dedicated funds for such work to other bodies.

The National Parks and Wildlife Service of my Department worked with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) to fund and manage the *Invasive Species Ireland Project between 2006 and 2103*. This initiative provides advice and guidance on the management of a range of invasive species, including the Japanese Knotweed.

Best Practice Management Guidelines for Japanese knotweed have been published and can be accessed on the project website at www.invasivespeciesireland.com. These guidelines provide practical advice to persons and organisations, including local authorities, on the removal and disposal of these species.

In addition, my Department is currently supporting the development of a Japanese Knotweed protocol for Ireland. A number of agencies, including the National Biodiversity Data Centre (NBDC), Inland Fisheries Ireland and the National Roads Authority are involved in drafting the protocol which it is to be completed next year. I am aware too that a number of local authorities are already carrying out control programmes for problem species including Japanese knotweed.

Turf Cutting Compensation Scheme Payments

632. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht when payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42528/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): An application for compensation under the cessation of turf cutting compensation scheme has been received by my Department from the individual referred to in the Deputy's Question. I am advised that a payment of €1,521 in respect of Year 1 of 15 (2014) has been made to this applicant.

The qualifying criteria for the scheme are that:

- The claimant must have a legal interest in one of the 36 raised bog Natural Heritage Areas – ownership or turbary right;
- The claimant must have been the owner or entitled to exercise turbary rights on the land in question on 25 May 2010;
- The turbary on the site must not be exhausted;
- The claimant must have been cutting turf on the land in question during the relevant five year period; and
- No turf cutting or associated activity is ongoing on the property.

I am advised that an affidavit has been issued to the applicant in relation to the legal interest in the bog plot on which he claims to have been cutting turf. Once the affidavit has been returned,

my Department will be in a position to process the application further.

Fisheries Protection

633. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht why she has not performed an assessment of the impact of the Asian clam infestation in the River Shannon at Lanesborough in County Longford, and its impact on the natural eutrophic lake with the Magnopotamion or Hydrocharition-type vegetation habitat of Lough Ree, given its protection under European Union law; when she will undertake such an assessment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42540/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I refer to the reply to Question No. 44 of 12 November, 2015. The position is unchanged.

Forestry Sector

634. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the action she will take to save the oak woodlands (details supplied) in County Longford; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42567/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department is investigating this matter and I will write to the Deputy when I have received a report.

National Monuments

635. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht why no public consultation took place on the plans to erect a statue to polar explorer Ernest Shackleton in Athy in County Kildare. [42770/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department has no role in relation to this proposal. It may be a matter for the local authority.

National Parks and Wildlife Service Remit

636. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if additional benches will be provided at various locations (details supplied) in Killarney National Park in County Kerry so that persons may rest if they need to, particularly those with mobility issues; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42773/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Deputy will be aware that various types of seating (appropriate to the locations) are available to visitors at a number of locations throughout the Park. The need for additional seating is kept under review and my staff will assess the locations mentioned to determine the feasibility of providing additional seating, subject to health and safety and operational requirements.

National Monuments

637. **Deputy Pat Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she is aware of the representations from the Committee for the Commemoration of Irish Famine Victims to have a memorial stone placed, as appropriate, in the Custom House; her future plans in this regard; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42796/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): As Chair of the National Famine Commemoration Committee, I am responsible for ensuring that appropriate arrangements are in place to commemorate the Great Irish Famine. In carrying out these functions, my main focus is to ensure that the victims of the Irish Famine are respectfully and appropriately remembered and also to raise awareness of current food security issues worldwide. The Great Famine is marked each year at formal commemorations in Ireland and abroad. The 2015 National Famine Commemoration was held in Newry in September and was a great success, enjoying significant cross-community representation. The 2015 International Famine Commemoration ceremony was held at St. John, New Brunswick, Canada in October and was also very successful.

My Department works with other Government departments and with a wide range of stakeholders to ensure that the Great Famine is marked each year by appropriate annual commemorations. My officials are already commencing preparations for next year's national and international commemorative ceremonies, which will take place in Leinster and Philadelphia, USA, respectfully. While our primary focus must remain on the successful delivery of these commemorations, I can confirm that officials from my Department have been in contact with the Office of Public Works to examine the possibility of placing a memorial stone within the grounds of the Custom House in Dublin. This would recognise the staging of the inaugural National Famine Commemoration at that location, in 2008. As these discussions are at an early stage, no final decisions have been made in this matter as of yet.

Scéimeanna Teanga

638. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** den an Aire Ealaíon, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta cén fáth nach bhfuil scéim teanga i bhfeidhm ach ag 115 chomhlacht poiblí as 400. [42819/15]

639. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** den an Aire Ealaíon, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta an í an tAire féin atá freagrach as a chinntiú go bhfuil scéim aontaithe le gach comhlacht poiblí, de réir Acht na dTeangacha Oifigiúla, 2003. [42820/15]

640. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** den an Aire Ealaíon, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta cad atá an tAire chun a dhéanamh chun a chinntiú go bhfuil scéim aontaithe le gach comhlacht poiblí agus cén dáta a bheidh seo déanta. [42821/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh): Tógfaidh mé ceisteanna 638, 639 agus 640 le chéile.

Mar a thug mé le fios don Teachta i mo fhreagra ar Cheisteanna Dála 604 agus 608 ar an 24 Samhain 2015, tá 107 scéim teanga reatha i bhfeidhm agus tá 115 comhlacht poiblí clúdaithe faoi na scéimeanna sin. Clúdaíonn na scéimeanna teanga sin mórchuid na gcomhlachtaí poiblí a mbíonn plé idirghníomhach ag an phobal leo ar bhonn rialta, lena n-áirítear ranna agus oifigí Stáit, údaráis áitiúla, institiúidí oideachais agus comhlachtaí poiblí eile nach iad.

Ní miste a nótáil go bhfuil laghdú suntasach tagtha ar líon na gcomhlachtaí poiblí a mbítear ag plé leo faoi Acht na dTeangacha Oifigiúla mar gheall ar an chuíchóiriú agus an sruthlíniú atá déanta ar chomhlachtaí poiblí an Stáit le roinnt blianta anuas. Tá na hathruithe seo á mbeachtú

i gcomhthéacs Bhille na dTeangacha Oifigiúla (Leasú).

Déantar scéimeanna teanga a dhaingniú le comhlachtaí poiblí ar bhonn céimnithe. Sa chomhthéacs seo, tá plé gníomhach ar siúl ag oifigigh mo Roinne le 129 comhlacht poiblí chun scéimeanna teanga a aontú leo. Tá sé aitheanta go bhfuil dúshlán ag baint leis an phróiseas chun scéimeanna teanga a aontú, go háirithe sa chomhthéacs reatha ina bhfuil brú mór ar acmhainní. Tá bearta dearfacha á dtógáil ag an Rialtas chun tacú leis an phróiseas agus chun feabhas a chur ar sheirbhísí poiblí i nGaeilge. I measc na mbearta sin, áirím na céimeanna atá idir lámha chun cur le líon na n-oifigeach sa Státseirbhís atá inniúil sa Ghaeilge.

Tá na forálacha a bhaineann le scéimeanna a dhaingniú sonraithe in ailt 11-18 d’Acht na dTeangacha Oifigiúla 2003. Maidir le dualgas an Aire Ealaíon, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta i dtaca le scéim a dhaingniú, forálann alt 14(1) den Acht mar a leanas: “Ar chomhlacht poiblí do thíolacadh dréacht-scéime don Aire, féadfaidh an tAire, tar éis dul i gcomhairle le cibé daoine eile lena n-áirítear cibé Aire eile (más ann) den Rialtas a measfaidh an tAire gur chóir dul i gcomhairle leo, agus le toiliú cheann an chomhlachta phoiblí lena mbaineann, an dréacht-scéim a dhaingniú gan leasú nó fara cibé leasuithe is cuí leis nó léi.”

National Raised Bog Management Plan Publication

641. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the funds available for restoration work in raised bogs; the location of the bogs; the programme of work; when the work will commence; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42858/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): In the context of Budget 2016, I announced that funding of €9 million will be available under the Exchequer Capital Investment Framework 2016-2021 for the programme of peatlands restoration. The proposed programme of conservation measures for raised bogs is set out in the draft National Raised Bog SAC Management Plan. The final Plan is scheduled to be published early next year.

In October 2015, the European Commission approved funding under the EU LIFE programme for a €5.4 million project for the restoration of active raised bog on 12 sites in Ireland’s special area of conservation network. €1.35 million will be contributed by my Department to this project.

The project will operate for a period of 5 years and will commence in January 2016. A project team is being recruited to implement this project and will be consulting with local communities in the relevant areas.

Details of the 12 project sites are set out in the following table.

| EU Life Project Site | County |
|----------------------|-----------------|
| Killyconny Bog | Cavan and Meath |
| Clara Bog | Offaly |
| Ferbane Bog | Offaly |
| Mongan Bog | Offaly |
| Moyclare Bog | Offaly |
| Raheenmore Bog | Offaly |
| Sharavogue Bog | Offaly |
| Carrowbehy/Caher Bog | Roscommon |

| EU Life Project Site | County |
|----------------------|-----------|
| Derrinea Bog | Roscommon |
| Garriskil Bog | Westmeath |
| Carrownagappul Bog | Galway |
| Ardagullion Bog | Longford |

Restoration plans which will set out proposals for the restoration of all of Ireland's 53 raised bog special areas of conservation and associated habitats are currently being drafted. These plans will identify technically feasible restoration measures for the various zones of each bog including the high bog, cutover bog and surrounding margins. The implementation of these measures will be with a view to the targets for active raised bog at the particular special area of conservation being met. The draft restoration plans will be developed further in conjunction with local stakeholders and communities.

Typical peatland restoration measures include the blocking of drains in the high bog area, tree and vegetation clearance and installation of peat dams, where necessary.

Through consultation with stakeholders and local communities it will be possible to develop ideas for maximising socio-economic benefits for local communities through peatlands restoration. These could include improving existing or building new facilities (e.g. tracks, board walks, and bog bridges), encouraging the creation of small tourism enterprises, and enhancing the value of a site as an educational resource.

Departmental Legal Cases Data

642. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of legal cases currently ongoing against her Department including State agencies under her aegis; the number of cases that took place during the years 2011 to 2014, inclusive; the cost of those that were contested and what damages were involved; the costs and damages of those that were settled; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43260/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): There are three cases currently before the Irish courts against the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht relating to the functions of my Department. Between 2011 and 2014 a further seven legal actions were completed against me, as the Minister for Arts Heritage and the Gaeltacht, in the courts. Four of these were ended by way of settlement, with legal costs totalling €197,600. The value of settlements or damages arising from these cases totalled €212,500.

Legal costs of €27,500 were incurred in relation to the remaining three cases, while no costs have yet arisen from settlements or damages in those cases.

It should be noted that I was represented by the Chief State Solicitor's Office in all ten cases. The figures given for legal costs relate only to costs for which my Department was liable in relation to other parties involved in the cases concerned.

Bodies operating under the aegis of my Department are separate legal entities in their own right. The issues raised by the Deputy are part of the day-to-day operational responsibilities of the bodies in question and are matters for the bodies concerned.

Departmental Staff Data

643. **Deputy Regina Doherty** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of employees under her remit who are classified under a contract of indefinite duration; the number of these who are receiving incremental salary payments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43274/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I am advised that my Department has one member of staff employed on a Contract of Indefinite Duration and receiving incremental salary payment. I am further advised that 74 staff are employed on Contracts of Indefinite Duration within the bodies under the aegis of my Department, 73 of whom are receiving incremental salary payments.