

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 9, inclusive, answered orally.

Rail Network

10. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will install a tunnel or bridge at the Pelletstown and Ashtown rail crossing to deal with the major traffic problems it is creating. [45001/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA). I understand it is proposed to close all level crossings on the Maynooth line including the crossing at Ashtown.

I understand that preliminary engineering analysis of the infrastructural works that would be required to facilitate these level crossing closures has been carried out. This analysis includes options for bridges over or under the railway, together with road diversions and road closures which may be required.

There is a limited amount of Exchequer funding available for enhancement of railway infrastructure at the current time and, given the competing demands for scarce resources, it has not been possible to provide funding specifically for the closure of the crossing at Ashtown. The current layout of road design is likely to be in place for the foreseeable future. The immediate priority for investment in the rail network is for ongoing maintenance and renewal of existing assets, in order to achieve 'steady state' condition of the network, and the Government has allocated over €140 million this year for this purpose. It is envisaged that funding will become available for the closure of level crossings during the lifetime of the Capital Plan 2016-2021.

Driver Licences

11. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to the reply to Parliamentary Question No. 597 of 20 January 2015 on the proposed use of new card-style driver licences, wherein he stated that the Road Safety Authority was examining the matter with a view to determining additional information that could be included on the chip that would assist and enhance in the enforcement of road traffic legislation, to indicate the status of this examination and if information on the number of penalty points accrued, disqualifications, etc., will be stored; the progress made in linking driver licences to the registration of

vehicles; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44884/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Since January 2013, in accordance with EU requirements, Irish learner permits and driving licences have been issued in plastic credit-card sized format instead of the older paper format.

EU Directive 2006/126/EC provided for a number of security features as part of the card design. The card containing a microchip was an optional feature and the Irish driving licence contains a microchip. A decision has not yet been made about the nature of information, if any, to be stored on the driving licence microchip. Consideration as to the details to be recorded on the microchip, including any potential recording of information on penalty points or disqualifications that would assist and enhance in the enforcement of road traffic legislation, needs further detailed examination. This work is ongoing within the Road Safety Authority and the Authority has advised that it expects to make a recommendation to my Department on this matter in Spring 2016.

Regarding the linking of driver licences to the registration of vehicles, the Minister for Justice and Equality and I approved in principle in September 2015, subject to the development of a detailed business case, a Master Licence Record Project based on the National Vehicle and Driver File. At its meeting on 8 December 2015, Government noted the progress being made regarding assigning penalty points to drivers for relevant road traffic offences including the Master Licence Record Project. This is a substantial ICT project costing an estimated €4 million over a three-year period, which will entail linking the vehicle and driving licence database of the National Vehicle Driver File. Following approval of the project and the completion of the business case, work will proceed regarding implementation of this project.

Tourism Promotion

12. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will encourage further future growth and development in the tourism sector, particularly to ensure the maximum utilisation of its employment potential; if he will utilise air and sea travel in this context; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44988/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring): Tourism continues to contribute significantly to Ireland's economic recovery. CSO figures for the first ten months of 2015 show that there were over 7.4 million overseas visits to Ireland, an increase of 12.8% on the same period of 2014. With regard to revenue, the most recent CSO Quarterly Tourism and Travel publication shows that spending in Ireland by overseas visitors (excluding carrier receipts) in the first nine months of 2015 amounted to over €3.3 billion, an increase of 17.5% compared to the same period in 2014. The indications are that 2015 will break all previous records in terms of our overseas tourism performance.

Tourism Ireland's targets for 2016 are to grow overseas visit numbers by a further 4%, and grow the associated revenue by 5%. The longer-term tourism goals, as outlined in the Government's Tourism Policy Statement are that by 2025: revenue from overseas visitors will increase to €5 billion, net of inflation; we would have 10 million visits to Ireland annually; and employment in the tourism sector would reach 250,000 compared to 205,000 at present.

In July, I established a Tourism Leadership Group to put in place a Tourism Action Plan that will set out the measures required in the period up to 2018 so that the overall objectives in the Tourism Policy Statement can be achieved. This Action Plan will be published early in the new year.

In terms of access, as an island destination, direct, convenient and competitive access ser-

vices are critical to achieving tourism growth. The zero rate travel tax has seen a very positive response from the airlines with many new routes and increased services coming on stream. I would also acknowledge the important connectivity role played by sea carriers, particularly in relation to holiday visitors from Great Britain and Mainland Europe. I should also mention that I recently announced a €1 million funding allocation to support co-operative marketing activity to regional access points which is designed to encourage new access and maximise the potential of existing air and ferry services to the regions.

Road Projects

13. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport while being mindful of the importance of a rigorous planning framework, if he is concerned at the impact the placing of onerous planning obligations on local authorities and Transport Infrastructure Ireland is having on Government investment in transport projects such as the N59 Oughterard to Maam Cross road in County Galway upgrade, including, for example, the requirement to produce method statements for every stage of a project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44959/15]

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 Transport Infrastructure Ireland (formerly known as the NRA) under the Roads Act 1993, as amended, in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Under section 50 of the Roads Act 1993, either a road authority or Transport Infrastructure Ireland must prepare a statement of the likely effects on the environment of certain road developments, which would include the N59 Oughterard to Maam Cross project. This in turn reflects EU legislation.

Under section 51 of the Roads Act 1993, the road authority concerned or Transport Infrastructure Ireland must apply to An Bord Pleanála for approval of such road developments and must submit the environmental impact statements prepared in respect of the developments to An Bord Pleanála. Any such road developments must not be carried out unless An Bord Pleanála has by order approved them or approved them with modifications. An Bord Pleanála may also refuse to approve such developments.

An Bord Pleanála is responsible for giving planning approval for such road developments and I have no function in the matter.

Accordingly, the implementation of the N59 Oughterard to Maam Cross project is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland and Galway County Council. Galway County Council is working closely with National Parks and Wildlife Service (part of the Heritage Division of the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht) on the development of the N59 Oughterard to Maam Cross Scheme. This involves the agreement of numerous Method Statements for each stage of the scheme, in accordance with the planning approval for the scheme. The development and agreement of the method statements is a time consuming process which is reflective of the environmental risks associated with developing new infrastructure through this uniquely sensitive area.

Road Projects Status

14. **Deputy Anthony Lawlor** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the funding allocated for the planned N7 widening, Sallins bypass and Osberstown interchange road projects in Naas in County Kildare will be available to ensure the projects are progressed

simultaneously; if progressing these works as one project will be more cost-efficient; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40406/15]

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 Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII, formerly known as the National Roads Authority) 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. As regards regional and local roads, responsibility for implementation of improvement projects rests with the relevant local authority which is Kildare County Council in this instance.

The transport element of the Capital Plan provides that work will commence on several roads projects which are targeted at removing critical bottlenecks or upgrading inadequate sections of road, including the M7 widening and the Sallins Bypass. Kildare County Council is responsible for the construction of the Osberstown Interchange.

As the three projects mentioned by the Deputy need to be implemented in a co-ordinated way, I expect TII to liaise with Kildare County Council in relation to an implementation programme. At present TII is assessing how best to progress national projects included in the 7 year transport element of the Capital Plan taking into account annual budget allocations. The timeframe for progressing individual projects will be decided once that process is completed.

Road Safety

15. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will address concerns regarding increasing levels of traffic congestion in Dublin, especially the knock-on congestion caused by blockages on the M50 motorway; if he is developing a strategic plan to deal with the traffic problems on the M50; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44996/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I refer the Deputy to my reply to Priority Question No. 1 today, which I answered earlier.

Military Aircraft Landings

16. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he is satisfied with his role in upholding the Air Navigation (Carriage of Munitions of War, Weapons and Dangerous Goods) Order 1973 in respect of the use of Shannon Airport by civil aircraft used by foreign militaries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44887/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The primary purpose of the Air Navigation (Carriage of Munitions of War, Weapons and Dangerous Goods) Order 1973, as amended, is ensuring the safety of aircraft and those on board.

My Department carries out appropriate consultations with other Departments and agencies in relation to applications for permits under the Order. The applications are then processed, taking account of these consultations. I am satisfied that this role is carried out correctly.

National Mitigation Plan

17. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the consulta-

tions he has had with the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, other Departments and relevant stakeholders subsequent to the publication of the preparation of low-carbon roadmap for transport, regarding his role in the national low-carbon transition and mitigation plan; the content of these discussions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44882/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, it is proposed to address GHG emissions through a National Mitigation Plan, which will incorporate input from the key sectors of electricity generation, built environment, agriculture and transport. My Department is currently examining a suite of measures aimed at delivering cost effective emissions reduction in the transport sector.

As part of this process, my officials are involved in ongoing engagement with other sectors through representation on a Steering Group chaired by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government. Subsequent to the publication of the consultation paper “Preparation of Low-Carbon Roadmap for Transport”, my Department has been actively engaging with broad ranging stakeholder groups and, earlier this year, held an open information exchange on the process in the Department.

Responsibility for emissions reduction is a collective one and, when all sectoral inputs have been co-ordinated, the draft Plan will be available for extensive public consultation before being submitted for approval to Government.

Road Projects Status

18. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the N56 Mountcharles to Inver Road upgrade in County Donegal will be progressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44992/15]

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.

As you are aware, the transport element of the Capital Plan provides that work will commence on several roads projects (including Mountcharles to Inver) which are targeted at removing critical bottlenecks or upgrading inadequate sections of road. In this context, TII is assessing how best to progress projects included in the 7 year transport element of the Capital Plan taking into account annual budget allocations. The timeframe for progressing individual projects will be decided once that process is completed.

National Mitigation Plan

19. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if Ireland will meet its transport renewables targets under the European Union’s sharing effort for greenhouse gas reductions; and if he will address concerns that he has no strategic plan in place for reaching our 20% renewables target by 2020. [44997/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Firstly, as the Deputy will know, responsibility for coordinating Ireland’s position on climate policy rests with

the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government.

Under the 2009 EU Effort-Sharing Decision (406/2009/EC), the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government advises that Ireland is on course to comply with annual emissions reduction targets for the compliance period of 2013 to 2016. However, in respect of the remaining years to 2020, a significant compliance challenge has been highlighted by the EPA.

There is an acute awareness of this challenge across sectors, not least by transport. As the Deputy will be aware, the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Bill has almost completed its journey through the Houses. This legislation will create a statutory obligation to develop a National Mitigation Plan for Ireland, which will seek to put in place the necessary mitigation measures for meeting the long-term policy objectives of a low carbon economy by 2050. The first iteration of the Plan will place particular focus on identifying those measures needed to address the challenges arising from the second half of the compliance period, that is from 2017 to 2020.

In relation to renewables, a mandatory minimum target of 10% is in place for the contribution of renewable energy in transport by 2020. Good progress is being made towards achieving this target and, in 2014, a 5.2% level of renewables penetration was achieved in transport. The Biofuel Obligation Scheme will most likely be the primary mechanism for reaching the 2020 target with some renewables expected to come from the electrification of the car fleet. Policy related to renewable energy rests with the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources.

Public Transport Fares

20. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the effort he has made to make public transport services more affordable given regular increases in fares over the past five years, even for those using prepaid and Leap card options. [45005/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I refer the Deputy to my reply to Question No. 6 today, which I answered earlier.

Greenways Funding

21. **Deputy Helen McEntee** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of a proposed project (details supplied), including its potential to unlock significant tourism sector employment opportunities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44876/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am reiterating the information I supplied the Deputy with in response to the same question on 11 November last.

Under the National Cycle Network funding programme 2014-2016 Meath County Council submitted a proposal to my Department for the development of the Boyne Valley to Lakelands County Greenway. While it was recognised that the proposal had considerable merit it was not possible to provide funding at that time given that the number of applications received far exceeded the resources available.

I met with a delegation from Meath County Council earlier this year to discuss progress on this project since the application was submitted in 2013. I was glad to learn that in the meantime the project team had progressed the detailed design and preparation of contract documents for the project while continuing to explore potential funding sources.

The cost of delivering the entire greenway is estimated to be in the region of €2.4 million. I understand from my meeting with the Council delegation that the project can be delivered in 2 phases. Phase 1 could run for a distance of 8 km from the town park in Navan to Wilkinstown which would represent a valuable amenity in itself. Phase 2 will run from Wilkinstown to Kingscourt. Cavan County Council are also keen to commence this section of the greenway and the planning and design elements are at an advanced stage.

Given that all Department funding for the purpose of delivering greenways is now fully committed up until 2016, I would urge the Council to continue to progress this project in so far as their own resources allow.

Public Transport Provision

22. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport what the expected modal shift in passenger numbers away from private modes of transport is for each public transport project envisaged under the capital investment plan, with particular regard to the Dublin metro project; how these figures compare with the Central Statistics Office's projected population growth to 2030 and the expected increase in traffic volumes as economic activity increases; if this ratio has been factored into the transport sector's emissions mitigation plans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44994/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Government's decision to include the new Metro North project in its Capital Plan Building on Recovery 2016-2021 was based on the conclusions and recommendations of the Fingal/North Dublin Transport Study, which was undertaken by Aecom on behalf of the National Transport Authority (NTA). The North Dublin Study examined 25 different solutions to address the public transport needs of this corridor, including Dublin Airport and Swords, and recommended the new Metro North project as the most appropriate public transport solution to address the transport needs of this corridor.

The report of that Study, which is published on NTA's website identifies the likely passenger demand and passenger usage of the new Metro North project. It reports that the introduction of the new Metro North project will increase passengers on the overall light rail system in Dublin by 65%, with a related decrease in bus boardings of 8%. The overall impact of the new Metro North scheme is a 1.54% increase in public transport passengers in the am peak travel period.

Over the wider Greater Dublin Area, the NTA has recently published a draft transport Strategy for the region, which sets out a set of transport proposals and policies for delivery over the period 2016 to 2035. I expect to receive the draft Strategy from the NTA shortly for my determination. Subject to my approval, I understand the various elements of the draft Strategy are expected to facilitate a reduction in car commuting from a current figure of approximately 62% to 45%.

With regard to emissions, as the Deputy will be aware, it is proposed to address greenhouse gas emissions through a National Mitigation Plan, which will incorporate input from the key sectors of electricity generation, built environment, agriculture and transport. Further to early stakeholder engagement in 2014 and an information exchange with stakeholders in May 2015, my Department is currently examining a suite of measures aimed at delivering cost effective emissions reduction in the transport sector.

These measures will have a particular focus on policy development, smarter travel and modal shift, supports for alternative fuels and certain fiscal and taxation incentives aimed at

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

Climate Change Policy

23. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the climate change adaptation plan for transport will be published, given that his Department's Statement of Strategy 2015-2017 stated it would be published in March 2015. [44881/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Bill creates a statutory obligation for a number of sectors, including transport, to develop sectoral adaptation plans. When enacted, this legislation will provide for the making of these plans within three months of the publication of a new National Adaptation Framework.

In advance of this legislation, my Department, in consultation with key transport agencies and service providers, has been making good progress on developing a plan for transport.

The plan will effectively consider our knowledge base, our vulnerabilities and adaptive capacity to climate change and provide a list of options for the transport sector spanning the short, medium and long terms. In order to advance this work, a stakeholder team was established last year, which consists of representatives from public transport companies, port companies, airport authorities and Transport Infrastructure Ireland. In addition to my own Department, the team also has representatives from South Dublin County Council and the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government.

Officials from my Department are also engaging with other sectors and local authorities through representation on a Steering Group chaired by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government. Such collaboration seeks to secure a cohesive approach to a multi-layered adaptive strategy for Ireland.

Adaptation planning is crucial for transport as a key player in the Irish economy. It makes sense to future-proof the system so that we can continue to accrue the many benefits of transport to the economy and Irish society in general.

My Department is currently working closely with the Environmental Protection Agency to bring a draft to public consultation in the first quarter of 2016 with a view to publication later in the year.

Rail Services

24. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he welcomes plans to increase the Dublin Area Rapid Transit, DART, service frequency in early 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44886/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am delighted that commuters in the New Year will be able to benefit from enhanced service frequency on the DART network. As the Deputy will recall, a few weeks ago I was able to announce total Public Service Obligation funding of €236.6m for 2016, an increase of 12% or €28 million on 2015. While it is the NTA's responsibility to allocate the funding appropriately under its PSO contracts, some of the funding to be received by Iarnród Éireann next year will support these DART service enhancements.

I believe that the new service frequency levels will allow Iarnród Éireann to continue to build on the success they have had in recent years in growing passenger numbers.

I am particularly pleased about the manner in which Iarnród Éireann engages with its customers during the public consultation process which now informs the development of schedule changes. Of course any schedule changes are subject to the approval of the National Transport Authority in its statutory role of improving public transport services generally within available resources.

I understand a similar exercise will take place in the coming months in respect of rail services into Heuston Station.

I look forward to the commencement of these improved DART services in the New Year which I am sure will be welcomed by the commuting public.

Traffic Management

25. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the action he has taken to reduce traffic congestion in Dublin city centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44885/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the provision of public transport infrastructure and securing the provision of public transport services in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA), which in combination enable it to tackle congestion within available resources.

The current capital investment works being undertaken by the NTA is set out in its Integrated Implementation Plan 2013-2018. Some of the key projects in that Plan, and which are currently being delivered, include Luas Cross City, the Phoenix park Tunnel, the City Centre Re-signalling project and bus fleet investment to enhance the quality of public transport services.

Additionally, the NTA's Sustainable Transport Measures Grants Programme supports a wide range of projects in the GDA that support the development and implementation of sustainable transport modes such as cycling, walking and public transport. Local authorities are responsible for implementation of the projects in accordance with relevant statutory processes. In 2015 expenditure under the Programme will amount to c. €27 million.

The Dublin City Centre Transport Study which is being undertaken jointly by the NTA and Dublin City Council (DCC) sets out various proposals to accommodate the increase in commuters travelling into the city centre each morning by 2023, while facilitating the operation of Luas Cross City and enhancing the overall environment of the city centre for visitors, shoppers, residents and workers. The Study covers all modes of transport – walking, cycling, public transport, car – and it also considers how opportunities to improve the appearance of the city could be provided by reconfiguration of street space on certain streets.

Following its publication, there was a significant public consultation process on the Study over the course of the summer which generated very substantial interest from stakeholders. I am advised by the NTA that along with DCC it is now engaging on an individual basis with some of the key stakeholders concerned before NTA and DCC report to DCC's Strategic Transport Policy Committee.

I welcome the comprehensive and positive engagement that is taking place on this important issue and I am assured that all key stakeholders are being given the opportunity to have their views and concerns known and understood.

Finally, I should add that integration measures continue to be progressed such as real time passenger information, the Leap card, the National Journey Planner and WiFi that are designed to encourage public transport use and reduce reliance on the private car.

Tourism Promotion

26. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the impact the Ireland's Ancient East initiative will have on east and south Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44989/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): While my Department provides the capital funding for investment in tourism propositions such as Ireland's Ancient East, it is not directly involved in developing or managing these, as this is an operational matter for the Board and Management of Fáilte Ireland.

I have therefore referred the Deputy's question to Fáilte Ireland for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Military Aircraft Landings

27. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of soldiers of the United States of America who have passed through Shannon Airport; the number of permits he has issued for civilian aircraft to land in Shannon Airport or overfly Irish airspace while carrying munitions in 2015 to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44888/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Shannon Airport has informed my Department that the number of United States troops that have passed through Shannon Airport to date in 2015 is 60,589.

The yearly figures for munitions permits up to 11 December 2015 are 285 munitions permits for civil aircraft landing at Shannon and 478 munitions permits for civil aircraft overflying Irish airspace.

Ports Development

28. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of works being carried out in the port of Foynes in County Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44990/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I can advise the Deputy that the infill project at Foynes is practically completed and handover by the contractor is expected in the next few weeks. The works consisted of infilling 1,400 sq metres behind Berth 6 and part of Berth 5, removing the original access viaduct, building a sheet piled combi wall and revetment wall, diverting six fuel pipelines and the installation of new services such as lighting.

A hard top has yet to be laid on the infilled area but this will not go ahead until the middle of 2016 to allow for the settlement of the infilled area. This project, which cost €12m, has been delivered on time and within budget.

Sports Funding

29. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will address concerns whether there is systematic inequality of Government funding for female sports on participation programmes as opposed to male programmes; and the active policy

measures he is taking to increase female youth participation in sport and more equal funding support for sports for both genders. [44998/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I refer the Deputy to my reply to Priority Question No. 4 today, which I answered earlier.

Tourism Promotion

30. **Deputy Anthony Lawlor** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the level of communication between Fáilte Ireland and local communities regarding points of interest on the Ireland's Ancient East route, which will ensure businesses in these areas can maximise and capitalise on the tourism benefits arising from the initiative; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44981/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): While my Department provides the capital funding for investment in tourism projects such as Ireland's Ancient East, it is not directly involved in developing or managing these. The development of Ireland's Ancient East and engagement with local communities in relation to that development is an operational matter for Fáilte Ireland. Accordingly I have referred the question to the agency for direct reply. Please contact my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Driver Test Centres

31. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his policy on funding driving test centres; if the Office of Public Works is the lead agency in securing accommodation; if there is a process through which the views of staff in such centres are taken into account and the need to provide a high standard of service to the public is considered; if the need to provide a comprehensive service in all areas shapes the policy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40600/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The operation of driver test centres, including their funding, is a matter for the Road Safety Authority (RSA). The Authority is now largely "self-funding" from fees charged for the public services it provides.

The Authority engages the Office of Public Works (OPW) as its accommodation provider for securing driving test centre accommodation, as required. It is my understanding that the Authority is currently developing a 5 year Corporate Strategy which will include strategic plans to improve test centre accommodation to meet the needs of the Driver Testing Service, for the benefit of customers and to ensure it continues to meet its duty of care to employees under Health & Safety legislation. Once this plan is finalised, the RSA has advised that it will engage with the OPW in executing it and in agreeing the funding policy where such funding cannot be granted solely from the OPW. This strategic plan will take into account geographical spread, existing accommodation, and driving test demand levels.

I have been advised that there are many forums in place in the Driver Testing Service where the views of staff regarding accommodation issues can be discussed, including operational, industrial relations, and health and safety forums. The RSA has indicated that the views of staff, customers and stakeholders formed the basis for the development of the Corporate Strategy itself.

Public Transport Provision

32. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will prioritise projects listed in the capital programme which he recently announced, with particular reference to road and rail projects and the need to identify the most pressing and urgent cases to alleviate traffic congestion and safety issues on the various road and rail routes involved; when the projects will go to tender; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44987/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Under the Government's new Capital Plan *Building on Recovery Infrastructure & Capital Investment 2016-2021*, the public transport programme included in the 7 year transport element of the Plan will reach €3.6 bn. This will allow for €2.6 bn investment to be prioritised for essential 'steady state' maintenance and asset renewal of the public transport system including:

- An on-going maintenance programme to ensure the safety and efficiency of the rail network;
- Bus fleet replacement and capacity enhancement;
- Upgrading of Bus Corridors; and
- The completion of the Luas Cross City project in Dublin.

Funds are also being committed for a range of measures which will help to alleviate traffic congestion and promote modal shift in the short term, including the opening of the Phoenix Park Tunnel in 2016 to bring some scheduled passenger services on the Kildare Line to Connolly Station; improvements to the DART service with increased frequencies and capacity; building additional cycle lanes and improving existing lanes and continuing with the smart technological upgrades which enhance public transport and encourage more people to use the public transport network.

A further €1 bn will be invested to address growing congestion resulting from economic recovery and population growth. Works will include the completion of the City Centre Resignalling Programme for the rail network and the construction of a new Central Traffic Control Centre for commuter and intercity rail. This additional funding will also enable major transport projects, including new Metro North and DART Expansion Programme, to proceed.

With regard to roads projects, the transport element of the Capital Plan provides that work will commence on several roads projects which are targeted at removing critical bottlenecks or upgrading inadequate sections of road. In this context, Transport Infrastructure Ireland (in relation to national roads) and my Department (in relation to regional and local roads) is assessing how best to progress projects over the 7 years of the plan taking into account annual budget allocations. The progression of projects which have not yet received planning approval will of course be conditional on achieving the necessary approvals. The timeframe for progressing individual projects will be decided once TII's assessment process is completed.

Road Projects Status

33. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the A5 project and his recent engagement with his Northern Ireland counterparts in this regard; the funding he has committed for it and the funding committed by the Northern Ireland Government; the status of the funding allocated under the St. Andrews Agreement and

if it is still available; when the project will be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44956/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As I indicated to the Deputy in my reply to Question No. 586 of 24 November, reference 41655/15, “A Fresh Start – the Stormont Agreement and Implementation Plan” was concluded on 17th November and it states that the Irish Government remains supportive of the commitment to co-fund the construction of the A5 and notes that the planning issues related to the project are currently being addressed by the Northern Ireland authorities.

Under the Agreement the Government reaffirms its commitment to provide funding of £50 million for the A5 project and has committed to provide an additional £25 million to ensure that Phase 1 of the project (Newbuildings to north of Strabane) can commence as soon as the necessary planning issues have been resolved by the Northern Ireland authorities. It is envisaged that construction of Phase 1 of the A5 will start in 2017 with a view to completion in 2019. In keeping with the revised project timeline, the Government funding will be provided in three tranches of £25 million in the years 2017, 2018 and 2019 respectively. I have no function in relation to funding commitments of the Northern Ireland Executive.

Road Projects Status

34. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the N14 and N13 roads in conjunction with the A5 road; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44991/15]

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 the NRA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Invalidity Pension Applications

35. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection when a decision on an invalidity pension claim will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45493/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Invalidity pension (IP) is a payment for people who are permanently incapable of work because of illness or incapacity and who satisfy the pay related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions.

The department received a claim for IP for the person concerned on 19 October 2015. The person concerned was refused IP on the grounds that the medical conditions for the scheme were not satisfied. He was notified on the 14 December 2015 of this decision, the reasons for it and of his right of review and appeal.

Carer's Allowance Applications

36. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection when a decision on a review under the carer's allowance scheme will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45495/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I confirm that the department received an application for Carer's Allowance (CA) from the person concerned on 23 June 2015.

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.

The evidence submitted in support of this application was examined and the deciding officer decided that this evidence did not indicate that this level of care was required.

The person concerned was notified on 27 October 2015 of this decision, the reason for it and of his right of review and appeal.

On 27 November 2015 further evidence was received. Once a review of all the evidence is completed, the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

Disability Allowance Applications

37. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will expedite an application under the disability allowance scheme by a person (details supplied) in County Kerry as all relevant information has been submitted; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45498/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I confirm the department received an application for disability allowance (DA) on 11 September 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.

In the meantime, the person may apply for means-tested supplementary welfare allowance from his local community welfare service.

Social Welfare Appeals Status

38. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the status of an appeal to the Social Welfare Appeals Office by a person (details supplied) in County Mayo; if it will be expedited due to the financial hardship the person is suffering; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45515/15]

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 27th October 2015. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the rel-

evant 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.

State Pension (Contributory) Eligibility

39. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will extend the homemaker credit scheme to persons who left the workforce to provide full-time care before April 1994; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45517/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The State pension contributory is a very valuable benefit and is the bedrock of the Irish pension system. Therefore, it is important to ensure that those qualifying have made a sustained contribution to the Social Insurance Fund over their working lives. To ensure that the individual can maximise their entitlement to a State pension, all contributions paid or credited over their working life from when they first enter insurable employment until pension age are taken into account when assessing their entitlement and the level of that entitlement. Since 1961, when contributory pensions were introduced, the average contributions test has been used in calculating pension entitlement. Once over 16 years of age, the date a person enters into insurable employment is the date used for averaging purposes.

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

The Government has no plans to backdate this scheme prior to 1994 as the costs would be significant. In addition, under the current rules, the costs of the scheme are expected to increase in the coming years due to the increase in female employment rates since 1994.

For those with insufficient contributions to meet the requirements for a State pension (contributory), the State pension system provides alternative methods of support. If their spouse has a contributory pension, they may qualify for an Increase for a Qualified Adult amounting up to 90% of a full rate pension, which by default is paid directly to them. Alternatively, they may qualify for a means-tested State Pension (non-contributory), amounting to 95% of the maximum contributory pension rate.

Work is underway to replace the 'yearly average' system with a 'total contributions approach'. Under this approach, the number of contributions recorded over a working life will be more closely reflected in the rate of pension payment received. It is expected that the total contributions approach to pension qualification will replace the current average contributions test for State pension (contributory) for new pensioners from 2020, although that date is subject to change, as this is a very significant reform with considerable legal, administrative, and technical challenges to be overcome in its implementation. The position of women who were homemakers will be considered very carefully in developing this reform.

State Pension (Contributory) Eligibility

40. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will examine the anomalous situation whereby persons who left the workforce after a short period to provide full-time care to a child prior to 1994, but subsequently paid over ten years of contributions after returning to work, are not entitled to the full contributory pension as they might have been had they started work at 55 years of age; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45518/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The State pension contributory is a very valuable benefit and is the bedrock of the Irish pension system. Therefore, it is important to ensure that those qualifying have made a sustained contribution to the Social Insurance Fund over their working lives. To ensure that the individual can maximise their entitlement to a State pension, all contributions paid or credited over their working life from when they first enter insurable employment until pension age are taken into account when assessing their entitlement and the level of that entitlement. Since 1961, when contributory pensions were introduced, the average contributions test has been used in calculating pension entitlement. Once over 16 years of age, the date a person enters into insurable employment is the date used for averaging purposes.

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

For those with insufficient contributions to meet the requirements for a State pension (contributory), the State pension system provides alternative methods of support. If their spouse has a contributory pension, they may qualify for an Increase for a Qualified Adult amounting up to 90% of a full rate pension, which by default is paid directly to them. Alternatively, they may qualify for a means-tested State Pension (non-contributory), amounting to 95% of the maximum contributory pension rate.

Work is underway to replace the 'yearly average' system with a 'total contributions approach'. Under this approach, the number of contributions recorded over a working life will be more closely reflected in the rate of pension payment received. It is expected that the total contributions approach to pension qualification will replace the current average contributions test for State pension (contributory) for new pensioners from 2020, although that date is subject to change, as this is a very significant reform with considerable legal, administrative, and technical challenges to be overcome in its implementation. The position of women who were homemakers will be considered very carefully in developing this reform.

Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility

41. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the categories of social protection recipients who will not receive a Christmas bonus due to their length of time in receipt of a payment; why each of these categories is excluded; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45519/15]

51. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she is aware of any person who was awarded the Christmas bonus who had not been in receipt of

a qualifying payment for 390 days or more; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45566/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 41 and 51 together.

On Budget Day, I was pleased to announce a 75% Christmas Bonus to over 1.2 million long-term social welfare recipients, such as pensioners, people with disabilities, carers and long-term jobseekers at a cost of €198 million.

The Bonus was introduced in 1980, and long-term jobseekers became eligible for the payment in 1985. Short-term jobseekers have never been eligible for the bonus, and this arrangement continues to apply this year.

In the case of most eligible schemes, all recipients of the payment receive the bonus and there is no duration requirement e.g. the State Pension, Widow's Pension, Disability Allowance, Invalidity Pension, Carer's Allowance, etc.

Recipients of Jobseeker's Allowance (JA) must have been in receipt of the payment for a minimum of 15 months (390 days) in order to be eligible for the bonus. Long-term jobseekers are eligible for the bonus in recognition of their being wholly or mostly financially dependent on their welfare payment for income.

Participants on JobBridge, who were in receipt of JA immediately prior to participation on the scheme, must have been in receipt of JA for 15 months prior to starting on JobBridge, or have 15 months duration in total combined on JA and JobBridge, in order to be eligible for the bonus. This arrangement also applies for participants on Back to Education Allowance. It should be noted that participants on these schemes who were previously in receipt of other eligible payments, such as Disability Allowance or One-Parent Family Payment, are automatically eligible for the bonus. The 15 months duration requirement applies only to those participants who were previously in receipt of JA immediately before starting on the scheme.

Two other payments also have the 15 months duration requirement – Supplementary Welfare Allowance and Direct Provision Allowance. The Christmas bonus (when paid in the past) was administered for SWA recipients by the Community Welfare Service (CWS) of the HSE. The CWS transferred into this Department in late 2011. Prior to the abolition of the Bonus in 2009, there was variation in the administration of the bonus across HSE areas. When the bonus was re-introduced last year, entitlement was standardised for SWA recipients in line with Jobseeker's Allowance. It should be noted that persons on Basic SWA (with a duration of less than 15 months) who are awaiting a decision on a long term scheme (to which the Bonus applies) will receive the Bonus if entitlement to the relevant scheme is backdated to cover the week in which the Bonus would have been payable for 2015.

The calculation of the 390 days is contingent on how claims are linked. If there is a break of up to 52 weeks in a person's JA claim – for instance, if a person in receipt of JA found employment that lasted for 10 months, or went on an Education and Training Board course, and subsequently claimed JA again – the time spent on JA immediately prior to the job/course would be combined with the time on the current claim in order to assess eligibility for the bonus. In this regard, a JA recipient's current claim may be less than 390 days and he or she can still qualify for the bonus, if the claim can be linked to a previous eligible claim.

National Internship Scheme Data

42. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the number of persons participating in JobBridge schemes, by county, in each of the years 2011 to date, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45525/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): JobBridge was introduced in July 2011 in response to the unprecedented collapse in the economy - particularly the sharp increase in unemployment. The primary aim of the scheme is to give unemployed people the opportunity to secure work experience and prove their competence to prospective employers.

To date, JobBridge has attracted the voluntary participation of over 44,000 interns and encouraged over 18,000 Host Organisations to offer them a wide range of work experience opportunities. There are currently over 4,800 people on internships.

The following tables provide a detailed breakdown on a county basis for the years 2011 to 2015.

Table 1. JobBridge internships started in 2011 by County

County	Internships
Carlow	60
Cavan	38
Clare	81
Cork	396
Donegal	105
Dublin	1397
Galway	217
Kerry	87
Kildare	111
Kilkenny	42
Laois	37
Leitrim	16
Limerick	177
Longford	32
Louth	93
Mayo	73
Meath	66
Monaghan	58
Offaly	35
Roscommon	24
Sligo	85
Tipperary	120
Waterford	125
Westmeath	98
Wexford	102
Wicklow	98
Total	3773

Table 2. JobBridge internships started in 2012 by County

County	Internships
Carlow	118
Cavan	122
Clare	204
Cork	883
Donegal	352
Dublin	3149
Galway	652
Kerry	291
Kildare	336
Kilkenny	171
Laois	151
Leitrim	44
Limerick	483
Longford	73
Louth	220
Mayo	218
Meath	228
Monaghan	155
Offaly	120
Roscommon	69
Sligo	173
Tipperary	308
Waterford	341
Westmeath	218
Wexford	280
Wicklow	215
Total	9574

Table 3. JobBridge internships started in 2013 by County

County	Internships
Carlow	145
Cavan	181
Clare	251
Cork	1063
Donegal	371
Dublin	3745
Galway	721
Kerry	340
Kildare	393
Kilkenny	147
Laois	157
Leitrim	57

County	Internships
Limerick	615
Longford	76
Louth	292
Mayo	328
Meath	263
Monaghan	209
Offaly	152
Roscommon	91
Sligo	208
Tipperary	358
Waterford	357
Westmeath	271
Wexford	333
Wicklow	204
Total	11328

Table 4. JobBridge internships started in 2014 by County

County	Internships
Carlow	141
Cavan	179
Clare	244
Cork	1022
Donegal	368
Dublin	1870
Galway	769
Kerry	361
Kildare	422
Kilkenny	174
Laois	183
Leitrim	85
Limerick	650
Longford	85
Louth	342
Mayo	356
Meath	339
Monaghan	194
Offaly	185
Roscommon	119
Sligo	231
Tipperary	394
Waterford	355
Westmeath	313
Wexford	330
Wicklow	251

Total	11683
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Table 5. JobBridge internships started in 2015 by County

County	Internships
Carlow	137
Cavan	113
Clare	156
Cork	695
Donegal	266
Dublin	2430
Galway	496
Kerry	324
Kildare	338
Kilkenny	128
Laois	125
Leitrim	74
Limerick	492
Longford	67
Louth	275
Mayo	246
Meath	210
Monaghan	164
Offaly	121
Roscommon	87
Sligo	156
Tipperary	266
Waterford	288
Westmeath	241
Wexford	260
Wicklow	175
Total	8330

Community Employment Schemes Data

43. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the number of persons participating in community employment schemes, by county, in each of the years 2011 to date in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45526/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the following table.

County/Area	2011	2012	2013	2014	Nov-15
Carlow	335	320	399	401	396
Cavan	225	216	284	339	337
Clare	596	573	605	600	607

County/Area	2011	2012	2013	2014	Nov-15
Cork	2,177	2,122	2,198	2,190	2080
Donegal	1,157	1,124	1,169	1,185	1153
Dublin	6410	5658	5997	6117	5659
Galway	1,507	1,467	1,538	1,549	1493
Kerry	966	973	1014	1,017	1013
Kildare	664	615	817	886	897
Kilkenny	445	389	443	429	460
Laois	307	296	282	308	312
Leitrim	170	182	172	154	148
Limerick	1305	1160	1196	1226	1340
Longford	304	291	305	332	351
Louth	817	776	845	857	842
Mayo	794	767	796	791	759
Meath	472	411	488	517	527
Monaghan	341	340	358	421	419
Offaly	372	357	372	385	421
Roscommon	349	356	320	349	349
Sligo	433	399	442	497	472
Tipperary	1022	905	992	994	933
Waterford	708	716	766	875	880
Westmeath	551	544	590	605	635
Wexford	851	859	933	953	1018
Wicklow	726	629	622	668	619
TOTAL	24,004	22,445	23,943	24,645	24,120

Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility

44. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if refugees residing in a hotel (details supplied) are receiving full social protection payments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45532/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): Families arriving in Ireland under the Resettlement arrangements are afforded full refugee status upon their arrival in Ireland. These families are eligible for social welfare payments on the same basis as Irish citizens and are entitled to apply for relevant social welfare weekly payments such as basic supplementary welfare allowance, jobseekers allowance, one parent family payment and child benefit appropriate to the circumstances of the individual or family. The types of social welfare payments or rates of payments paid to these individuals is a matter between the individuals themselves and the Department. In general, refugees while resident in the Emergency Reception and Orientation Centre (EROC) receive accommodation, food and other basic services provided by the State. Social Welfare legislation allows for the assessment of the non-cash benefits provided to the residents and the Department assesses the value of these non-cash benefits when determining appropriate rates of social welfare payments. This generally results in a reduction of the weekly amount payable taking into account that basic requirements such as food, accommodation and other services are provided. Refugee families are also entitled to receive child benefit and the back to school clothing and footwear allowance depending on their family circumstances. The Department can make exceptional needs

payments (ENPs) to help meet essential, once-off and unforeseen expenditure such as seeking accommodation, which a person could not reasonably be expected to meet out of their weekly income. Programme Refugees and others with refugee status can apply for ENPs to meet needs as they arise, for example for essential items such as clothing or other personal items, travel costs and also rent deposits to support the transition into rented accommodation. Once the period of orientation in the reception centre is over and the families move to accommodation in the community, the means assessment is reviewed and entitlement to the relevant social welfare payment is recalculated to reflect the changed situation. This would generally result in an increase in payment in line with the scheme rules taking into account the individual circumstances of the individual or family. The amount paid to the individual families in the hotel referred to by the Deputy is a matter between the individuals and the Department.

Questions Nos. 45 to 47, inclusive, withdrawn.

Social Insurance

48. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the reason persons in receipt of maintenance payments are treated differently in the taxation of these payments, in that they pay more pay-related social insurance than those with the same income where that income is not from maintenance payments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45553/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Class S PRSI at the rate of 4% may be payable on reckonable income received by an individual, provided their annual income from all sources exceeds €5,000. Reckonable income for the purposes of charging class S PRSI includes a broad range of income, including income from a profession or trade as well as rental and investment income and maintenance payments received by an individual (who is not jointly assessed for income tax purposes with the maintenance payor).

Once the €5,000 insurability threshold is exceeded, class S PRSI is charged on all reckonable income, without regard to the source of that income. For PRSI purposes, there is therefore no difference in the treatment of maintenance payments from other sources of reckonable income.

The payment of PRSI class S provides entitlement to long-term social insurance benefits including the State pension (contributory) and the widow's, widower's or surviving civil partner's contributory pension.

Tax Credits

49. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection for the analysis supporting the assumption that the new €550 earned income tax credit will reduce the differential between the self-employed vis-à-vis the employed with the same income; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45556/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The impact of the new €550 earned income tax credit for the self-employed is a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Finance.

Question No. 50 withdrawn.

Question No. 51 answered with Question No. 41.

Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility

52. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she is aware of any discretionary payments being made by local community welfare officers to persons who did not qualify for the Christmas bonus; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45567/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): On Budget Day, I was pleased to announce a 75% Christmas Bonus, which has been paid to long-term social welfare beneficiaries, such as pensioners, people with disabilities, and carers. Long-term recipients of jobseeker's allowance (JA) or supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) are eligible for the bonus if they have been in receipt of their payment for 15 months, in recognition of their being wholly or mostly dependent on their social welfare payment for income. Periods of time spent on another qualifying scheme immediately prior to the award of a SWA claim may also be used to establish eligibility, for example which would include time spent on JA. In these cases, an officer will examine eligibility for the bonus and make payment to the individual where the criteria are met. Individuals in this situation who did not receive an automated payment of the Christmas Bonus should attend or contact their local office to establish their eligibility.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications

53. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the status of an application for domiciliary care allowance by a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45576/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned was notified on the 15th December 2015 that her application for domiciliary care allowance was successful and that the allowance has been awarded from the 1st October 2015. The first payment of the allowance, along with arrears due, will issue on 19th January 2016.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications

54. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the status of an application for domiciliary care allowance by a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45583/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): An application for domiciliary care allowance (DCA) was received from the person concerned on the 27th October 2015. This application has been forwarded to one of the Department's Medical Assessors for their medical opinion. Following receipt of this opinion, a decision will be made by a Deciding Officer and notified to the person concerned. It can currently take 12 weeks to process an application for DCA.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications

55. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the status of an application for domiciliary care allowance by a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45585/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): An application for domiciliary care allowance was received from the person concerned on the 26 August 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 13 November 2015 outlining the decision of the deciding officer to refuse the application.

A review of this decision was requested on 23 November 2015 and additional information on this child's condition/care needs has been supplied. The application together with the new information supplied has been forwarded to a medical assessor for their professional opinion. Once this opinion is received the application will be re-examined by a deciding officer and a revised decision will be made if warranted. The person concerned will be notified of the outcome of this review as soon as it is completed. Such reviews can take up to 12 weeks to complete at present.

Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility

56. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if and when payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Kildare who has not received payment for two weeks; what is the appropriate payment to this person, who was previously a casual worker but who has not worked in a number of months and has an application for the back to work enterprise allowance pending; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45586/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): According to the records of the Department the person concerned advised that he is a casual worker and is classified as such. As a casual worker he was requested to produce documentation relating to his employment in late October 2015, he was advised his payment would be affected if this documentation was not returned. The requested documentation was not returned and his claim was suspended pending the receipt of same. The Department has now been advised by the person concerned that his casual employment has ceased and he is requested to submit documentation to confirm this position. I understand that the person concerned has made an application for supplementary welfare allowance and has received a BASI payment.

According to the records of the Department there is no application for Back to Work Enterprise Allowance for the person concerned.

State Pension (Contributory) Eligibility

57. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will amend legislation on the State pension (contributory) so that the calculation of average contributions only takes into account the number of years actually worked, rather than the number of years since the person started working, given that the current system unfairly penalises women who took breaks in their employment in order to raise children; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45590/15]

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

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

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

For those with insufficient contributions to meet the requirements for a State pension (contributory), the State pension system provides alternative methods of support. If their spouse has a contributory pension, they may qualify for an Increase for a Qualified Adult amounting up to 90% of a full rate pension, which by default is paid directly to them. Alternatively, they may qualify for a means-tested State Pension (non-contributory), amounting to 95% of the maximum contributory pension rate.

The most recently published Actuarial Review of the Social Insurance Fund confirms that the Fund provides better value to female rather than male contributors. It further confirms that those with lower earnings and those with shorter contribution histories, mostly women, have and will continue to obtain the best value for money from the Fund due to the distributive nature of the Fund.

Work is underway to replace the 'yearly average' system with a 'total contributions approach'. Under this approach, the number of contributions recorded over a working life will be more closely reflected in the rate of pension payment received. It is expected that the total contributions approach to pension qualification will replace the current average contributions test for State pension (contributory) for new pensioners from 2020, although that date is subject to change, as this is a very significant reform with considerable legal, administrative, and technical challenges to be overcome in its implementation. The position of women who were homemakers will be considered very carefully in developing this reform.

Carer's Allowance Applications

58. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the status of the case of a person (details supplied) in County Louth who applied for carer's allowance on behalf of a spouse in August 2015 but has not yet received a response; when a decision will be made; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45592/15]

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 who has a disability such that they require that level of care and who satisfy a means test.

I can confirm that an application for CA was received on 18 August 2015. A request for information issued to the person concerned on 8 December 2015.

Once the requested information is supplied, a decision will be made without delay and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

Jobseeker's Allowance

59. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the terms of reference and timeframe for the proposed review of the rate of jobseeker's allowance for young persons under 25 years of age, which she recently announced; if the review will allow for input and submissions from organisations working on this issue; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45597/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Reduced rates for younger jobseeker's allowance recipients were first introduced in 2009, extended in Budget 2014 and now apply to jobseeker's allowance recipients under 26 years of age. These measures are targeted activation measures, aimed at protecting young people from welfare dependency by incentivising them to avail of education and training opportunities. If a jobseeker in receipt of the reduced jobseeker's allowance rate participates on an education or training programme they will receive a higher weekly payment of €160.

The Labour Market Council is a group comprising of independent industry leaders and labour market policy experts from organisations including the OECD, SIPTU and the Irish National Organisation for the Unemployed. The Council has responsibility for driving the implementation of the Pathways to Work strategy and for advising on labour market policy. That is why I have asked the Council to examine the reduced rates of jobseeker's allowance for those under 26 years of age.

I have asked my officials to draft the terms of reference and broad structure of the Council's review and this work is currently ongoing.

Youth Guarantee

60. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the number of education, training and work experience places delivered under the Youth Guarantee in 2015 to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45599/15]

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

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

Overall, the Youth Guarantee provided nearly 25,000 places for young people in 2014. This figure excludes some 24,000 places provided for young people through PLC courses and apprenticeships. (These PLC and apprenticeship places, together with the wide range of vocational third-level courses provided for the young, although not reserved for unemployed jobseekers, nevertheless contribute to the spirit of the guarantee.)

The following table details the expected full year intake for 2015 as well the actual number

of starters up to the most recent date for which data are available. (Apprenticeship and PLC places are, again, excluded).

Youth Guarantee Progress - 2015 Starters

Programme	Expected full-year Intake	2015 information to date	Note
Youthreach		688	Expected full year intake combines Youthreach and Community Training Centres. Youthreach places as of end May 2015
Community Training Centres	3,300	1480	As of end November 2015
JobBridge	5,000	2,120	As of mid December 2015
Tus	1,000	1,070	As of end September 2015
JobsPlus (including JobPlus Youth)	1,500	721	As of end October 2015
Momentum	2,000	1,053	As of mid December 2015
BTEA (excl Momentum)	3,300	N/A	
BTWEA	200	151	As of end September 2015
VTOS	500	N/A	Enrolment begins in September
Former FAS/SO-LAS*	9500	6,409	Based on Specific Skills Training, Traineeship, Bridging & Local Training Initiative starters end November 2015.
County Enterprise Board Youth Entrepreneurship Training and Mentoring supports.	700	N/A	This programme has been superseded by Ireland's Best Young Entrepreneur 2014/5 competition
Micro Finance Ireland micro-loans for young people.	150	N/A	Age-specific breakdowns not yet available.
International Work Experience and Training	250	8	As of mid December 2015
Gateway	450	272	As of end September 2015
Community Employment	500	686	As of mid December 2015
Total	28,350	14,650	Excluding where figures are not available

Tax Credits

61. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Finance if the difference in taxation of maintenance payments received is in contravention of Article 40.1 of Bunreacht na hÉireann, which states that all citizens are equal, with the rider that the State may have due regard to differences of capacity, physical and moral, and social function; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45558/15]

64. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Finance the reason persons in receipt of maintenance payments are treated differently in regard to the taxation of those payments, in that they pay more income tax than those with the same income where that income is not from maintenance payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45553/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 61 and 64 together.

I am assuming that the Deputy is referring to the tax liability that arises on an individual who receives maintenance payments and is taxable on that income compared to the tax liability that arises on an individual whose income, under the Tax Acts, includes earned income.

In determining the amount of income tax payable on an individual's income, the individual may be entitled to either the Employee (PAYE) Tax Credit or the Earned Income Tax Credit, where it is shown that the individual's income, or an element of it, consists of earned income.

Earned income is defined, in broad terms, either as income arising from an individual's trade or profession, where the individual is self-employed, or as PAYE income where the individual is an employee.

Income received by an individual in respect of maintenance payments does not fall within the definition of earned income and as such, there is no entitlement to either the Employee (PAYE) Tax Credit or the Earned Income Tax Credit.

The treatment of maintenance payments and the income tax liability on that income is directly comparable with the tax arising on other taxpayers whose total income does not include earned income.

I would also point out that the tax treatment of a separated couple with one income earner is equivalent to the tax treatment of a married couple with one income-earner, insofar as only the income-earning spouse would be entitled to claim a PAYE or Earned Income Credit, as appropriate.

The constitutionality of the various provisions of the tax code are ultimately a matter for the courts to decide, where issues are put before them. However, the Deputy should be aware that due regard is given to the provisions of the Constitution when constructing the tax code.

Tax Collection

62. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Finance if the Revenue Commissioners can demand back income tax with interest, having previously made the mistake every year for a number of years of informing a citizen that the citizen had no liability for income tax; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45560/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): It would seem that the Deputy has a specific case in mind as regards the circumstances outlined in his Question. I am advised by Revenue that without more detailed information on the particular case, it is not possible to fully

consider the assertions made by the Deputy and therefore to enable me to provide a more comprehensive reply. If the Deputy wishes to provide more specific information, I will arrange that my officials pass this information on to Revenue and the matter can be followed up in greater detail.

The Deputy will be aware that in general the principle of self-assessment applies to taxes administered by Revenue. The primary responsibility for calculating and paying the correct amounts of tax rests with the taxpayer. Revenue does of course offer a significant range of supports to the taxpayer to calculate and pay the right amount.

Any tax return or declaration made by a taxpayer may be subject to a Revenue compliance intervention to ensure the completeness and accuracy of return or declaration. Where, in that context, a return or declaration is found to be incorrect, giving rise to an under declaration of tax due, Revenue will seek any additional tax, interest and possibly penalties.

Credit Availability

63. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which he remains satisfied regarding the availability of working capital throughout the hotel and catering sectors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45643/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy is aware, the Government recognises that small businesses, including those in the hotel and catering sector, play a central role in the sustainable recovery of the Irish economy. To facilitate this, Government policy since 2011 has been focused on ensuring that all viable SMEs have access to an appropriate supply of credit from a diverse range of bank and non-bank sources. Officials from my Department regularly meet representatives from the SFA, ISME and Chambers Ireland, whose membership encompasses the hotel sector, to discuss issues around access to finance.

The Central Statistics Office release “Overseas Travel August - October 2015” (<http://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/ot/overseastravelaugust-october2015/>) shows that in the period January to October 2015, there were over 7.4 million visits to Ireland. Overall trips to Ireland were up 12.8% in the first ten months of 2015 compared to the same period in 2014. For the three-month period from August-October 2015, overseas trips to Ireland increased by 14%.

Tourism delivers income and jobs in every town and city in the country. The reduction in VAT to 9% in the tourism sector and the abolition of the air travel tax improved Ireland’s competitiveness. The 9% VAT rate is a major benefit to the tourism sector and is much sought after by other sectors in the economy. I announced changes to the Employment and Investment Incentive scheme last year subject to compliance with European State Aid provisions. With specific regard to the hospitality sector, I extended the inclusion of hotels, guest houses and self-catering accommodation in the scheme by a further 3 years. The benefit of these policies can be seen in tourist numbers, new businesses, the survival of established businesses and, most of all, in employment.

Turning to the banking sector, AIB and Bank of Ireland are concentrating on growing their balance sheets. In this context, both banks recognise the need to increase business lending and have put on record their commitment to the SME sector.

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

Some of the main policies introduced by this Government to encourage access to credit for small and medium businesses include:

- The Supporting SMEs Online Tool, a cross-government initiative, was launched in May 2014. On answering 8 simple questions, the small business will receive a list of available Government supports. The Supporting SMEs Online Tool is available at www.supportingsmes.ie

- The Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland has been established as a means of ensuring that SMEs are provided with sufficient finance for growth. The Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) is an initiative designed to increase the availability of funding to SMEs at a lower cost and on more flexible terms than have recently been available on the Irish Market in recent times. The SBCI does not lend directly to SMEs. It uses a network of lending partners known as 'on lenders' to make its funds available to SMEs. Bank of Ireland, AIB, Finance Ireland and Merrion Fleet Management are all current on lending partners of the SBCI. The SBCI has reached a significant milestone as €110 million has now been drawn down by 3,200 SMEs. More information on the SBCI can be found on www.sbc.gov.ie.

- The Credit Guarantee Scheme encourages additional lending to small businesses by offering a partial Government guarantee to banks against losses on qualifying loans to eligible SMEs. My colleague, the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, has recently brought legislation to the Oireachtas which will enable the development of a more flexible Credit Guarantee Scheme with longer duration and more products and providers included.

- The Microenterprise Loan Fund, administered by Microfinance Ireland, provides support in the form of loans for up to €25,000, available to start-up, newly established, or growing micro enterprises employing less than 10 people, with viable business propositions. Microfinance Ireland works in partnership with the Local Enterprise Offices nationally to administer this fund www.microfinanceireland.ie

- The Credit Review Office helps SME or Farm borrowers who have had an application for credit of up to €3 million declined or reduced by the main banks, and who feel that they have a viable business proposition. They also examine cases where borrowers feel that the terms and conditions of their existing loan, or a new loan offer, are unfairly onerous or have been unreasonably changed to their detriment. This is a strictly confidential process between the business, the Credit Review Office and the bank. The Credit Reviewer John Trethowan and his team have overturned 55% of the refusals that have been appealed to the Office. Further details are available at www.creditreview.ie

My Department and the Credit Review Office, working with the other relevant Departments and Agencies, will continue to monitor the availability of both bank and non-bank credit on both a macro and sectoral basis in order to ensure that sufficient access to finance is available to facilitate participants in the SME sector to reach their full potential in terms of growth and employment generation. In this context, the Action Plan for Jobs 2015 includes a dedicated chapter and associated integrated set of actions to support the financing for growth in the SME sector.

Question No. 64 answered with Question No. 61.

Customs and Excise Controls

65. **Deputy Anne Ferris** asked the Minister for Finance the status of customs officials conducting spot-checks on the contents of aeroplanes landing at Irish airports for refuelling purposes to ensure they are not carrying goods or munitions that make the landing contrary to

Irish law; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45482/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The responsibilities of customs officials at ports and airports are concerned with goods and persons entering or leaving the State. Aircraft which land solely for the purpose of refuelling are not involved in importing or exporting goods to or from Ireland, and so are not subject to customs controls. Thus there is no customs requirement for a declaration regarding passengers, crew or goods on board, nor is there a basis for a customs inspection.

If crew members seek to enter the State or import goods into the State they are, of course, subject to customs clearance.

Insurance Industry Regulation

66. **Deputy Joe Costello** asked the Minister for Finance his views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding flood insurance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45520/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am aware of the difficulties that the absence of flood insurance cover can cause to householders and businesses. However, the provision of insurance cover and the price at which it is offered is a commercial matter for insurance companies and is based on an assessment of the risks they are willing to accept and adequate provisioning to meet those risks. In my role as Minister for Finance, I have responsibility for the development of the legal framework governing financial regulation. Neither I, nor the Central Bank of Ireland, can interfere in the provision or pricing of insurance products or have the power to direct insurance companies to provide flood cover to specific individuals.

The Government's strategy on insurance and flooding is focussed on ways to address the increased availability of flood insurance. This involves:

- a) prioritising spending on flood relief measures;
- b) development and implementation of plans by the Office of Public Works (OPW) to implement flood relief schemes; and
- c) the transfer of data in relation to completed flood defence schemes to the insurance industry by the OPW.

Progress is continuing on the implementation of this strategy.

Officials in my Department have consulted with the OPW regarding completed flood relief works in the Dublin area and I am informed that the River Tolka Dublin City Flood Relief Scheme provides protection against tidal and fluvial flooding to the East Wall area. Details of the protected areas, as provided to Insurance Ireland, are available at http://maps.opw.ie/defended_areas/map/

Individuals who are experiencing difficulty in obtaining flood insurance and who believe that they are being treated unfairly, may contact Insurance Ireland which operates a free Insurance Information Service for those who have queries, complaints or difficulties in relation to insurance. This service can be contacted at (01) 676 1914 or by email at info@insuranceireland.eu

67. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide details of the projects in which the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund has invested in tabular form. [45588/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF) has provided the following table which provides preliminary and unaudited data as at 30 September 2015. The summary data are published on a quarterly basis on ISIF's website and a detailed listing of investments is published annually in the NTMA's Annual Report.

30/09/2015	Total ISIF Commitment (€m)	3 Party Committed capital in Ireland (€m)	Total Project Size in Ireland (€m)	Multiple of Total Project Size in Ireland to Total ISIF Commitment
Water	300	600	900	3.0x
Infrastructure	250	155	405	1.6x
Energy	44	456	500	11.4x
SMEs	325	417	742	2.3x
Food & Agriculture	30	187	217	7.2x
Real Estate Based Businesses	400	370	770	1.9x
Venture	403	525	642	1.6x
Direct Private Equity	56	291	347	6.2x
Committed to Date	1,808	3,002	4,523	2.5x

In addition, the ISIF announced 2 further commitments during November 2015:

1. The ISIF and institutional clients of US-based Quadrant Real Estate Advisors LLC have committed up to €100 million for financing high-quality office development and construction projects in Ireland. Under the investment mandate agreed with the ISIF, Quadrant will manage the provision of "senior stretch" loans, ideally suited to Grade A office development projects in strong markets which have planning permission but which may not yet have letting or sale agreements in place. The ISIF will invest up to €50 million alongside up to €50 million of capital from Quadrant's wider institutional client base.

2. Swrve, a global leader in mobile marketing engagement, announced in early November that it closed a \$30 million funding and acquisition round led by the ISIF and US-based Evolution Media Partners. The company further announced that the round will enable it to create 45 jobs at its Dublin base.

Tax Data

68. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of tax that was returned from relevant contracts tax 1 by gross figure, by net figure after rebates and offsets for 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45626/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Relevant Contracts Tax (RCT) system is a tax deduction at source system that is applied by a principal contractor on payments due to a subcontractor under a relevant contract. All payments are reported to Revenue, and in a minority of cases (based on risk criteria), a percentage of the payment due is withheld and paid over to Revenue, to be offset against the subcontractor's liability for income tax, VAT and

other taxes.

The tax that is collected under the electronic RCT system in any year is first and foremost offset against any unpaid tax liabilities the subcontractor may have. Thereafter, it is available for offset against tax as it falls due. Only where the tax deducted under the RCT system exceeds the subcontractor's tax liability for the year is the 'excess' tax deducted repaid by Revenue.

I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the gross Relevant Contracts Tax (RCT) collected in 2014 was €200.8 million. €122.4 million was offset against tax liabilities for 2014 or earlier years and €47.4 million was repaid. €31 million remains available for offset against subcontractors' tax liabilities (or for repayment where tax liability is exceeded) and will remain so for a period of four years.

Tax Code

69. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance if he will explain the apparent discrepancy in his letter of 17 July 2015 regarding bogus self-employment, where he stated the number of payers of relevant contracts tax 1 in the construction sector was approximately 34,000 and yet, more recently in a parliamentary response on the same issue, he stated that the number was 75,386; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45627/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Persons to whom the RCT system applies are either principal contractors or subcontractors the RCT system does not apply in respect of employees. The concept of 'RCT1 taxpayer' as referenced by the Deputy does not exist.

The figure of 34,000 referred to in the Question relates to the approximately 34,000 subcontractors active in the RCT system. The figure of 75,386 referred to in the Question relates to the number of individuals employed in construction related businesses.

As to wider issues relating to employment matters, during the recent Finance Bill Committee Stage debates, I announced that a public consultation will be held shortly on a range of issues relating to employment practices and trends.

Public Sector Staff Redeployment

70. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will open up the transfer list for employees within the public service, the numbers who are interested in such transfers, with particular reference to the education and training boards; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45507/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): As the Deputy will be aware there are currently no formal arrangements for the transfer of staff between the different sectors of the public service. While, for example, expressions of interest did allow for some movement between sectors such moves were, in the main, designed to address specific skills shortages.

About 12,000 civil and public servants have moved under various mobility schemes.

In the civil service, for which I am directly responsible, the Central Transfer Scheme (CTS) for Clerical Officers was negotiated with the Staff Side Unions in 1978. It provides for cross-Departmental transfer arrangements and is a mechanism for filling clerical vacancies in provincial locations.

Each department with provincial offices maintains a list, in order of the application date, of clerical staff who are seeking a transfer. The scheme is central in the sense that a department must accept applications from officers of other Civil Service departments. Information on the number of applicants is not maintained centrally.

The Central Transfer Scheme for the Civil Service is not available to staff in the wider Public Service.

Under Action 15 of the Civil Service Renewal Plan, my Department in conjunction with the Civil Service Management Board is examining ways to improve mobility.

I am not aware of the current mobility arrangements in the Education and Training Board area, however Education and Training Boards come within the remit of the Minister for Education and Skills in the first instance.

Flood Prevention Measures

71. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the cost to the Office of Public Works of flood prevention measures in east Meath to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45511/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): The Office of Public Works (OPW), along with the local authorities in Co Meath, Fingal and Dublin City carried out the River Tolka Flood Relief Scheme from 2003 to 2011. The works in the Meath area were completed between 2003 and 2007 at a cost of €6.8m.

The Mornington Flood Relief Scheme was completed in 2013 at a cost of €3.93m, and during 2015 the OPW carried out direct labour maintenance of this scheme along with areas of Northlands Estate at an approximate cost of €66,000.

The OPW also carries out an annual programme of maintenance on the river and drainage channels in Co. Meath for which under the Arterial Drainage Acts it has maintenance responsibility. However, it is not possible to provide a cost figure for this as a breakdown of the overall maintenance expenditure figure on a county basis is not available.

In addition to major schemes, the OPW provides funding to local authorities under the Minor Works Scheme and since the scheme commenced in 2009 the OPW has expended €0.3m under the programme for Co Meath.

On 11th February, 2014 the Government allocated specific funding for repair of coastal defence infrastructure that was damaged in the Winter 2013/14 storms, of which €75,000 was allocated to County Meath. Meath County Council submitted to the OPW a programme of proposed works in relation to its allocation that included projects in the Laytown - Bettystown area. All funds have now been disbursed to Meath County Council in relation to this scheme.

Flood Relief Schemes Status

72. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the reason for the undue delay in the proposed flood relief scheme for Templemore in County Tipperary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45559/15]

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

mon Harris): Following the formal public exhibition of the proposed flood relief scheme for Templemore which took place in March/April of 2015, work on finalising the detailed design of the scheme has been ongoing. This has involved necessary consultations with relevant stakeholders. The Office of Public Works is working to progress the scheme as quickly as possible and hopes to submit the scheme to the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform for approval shortly. Allowing for the required independent review by the Minister of the scheme's Environmental Impact Statement the OPW would anticipate works commencing in late 2016.

Commercial Rates Exemptions

73. **Deputy Áine Collins** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will request the Valuation Office to reassess the rateable valuation on the Green Glens equestrian arena in Millstreet, County Cork, given that this is a horse breeding facility which is an exempt development and only hosts equine events three to four times in the year. [45573/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): I, as Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform am not empowered by any provision in the Valuation Acts 2001 to 2015 to request the Commissioner of Valuation to re-assess the valuation of any property for rating purposes. The Commissioner is independent in the exercise of his duties under the Valuation Acts and the making of valuations for rating purposes is his sole prerogative as provided by those Acts.

However, I am advised that any ratepayer dissatisfied with the rateability of a property, the valuation assessed on a particular property or the method of calculation can, on payment of the prescribed fee of €250, apply to the Commissioner who in accordance with the provisions of section 28 of the Valuation Act 2001 will appoint a Revision Manager to investigate the rateability or the valuation of a particular property. If dissatisfied with the outcome of the investigation, the applicant has a right of appeal to the Valuation Tribunal, an independent body set up for that purpose. There is also a further right of appeal to the High Court and ultimately to the Supreme Court on a point of law.

The basic premise under the Act is that all buildings and lands used or developed for any purpose including constructions affixed thereto are rateable unless expressly exempted under Schedule 4. Agricultural land and farm buildings are expressly exempted under Schedule 4. For the purposes of the Acts, farm buildings are buildings, part of buildings, or other structures, occupied together with agricultural land and used solely in connection with the carrying on of agricultural activities on that land.

Generally speaking equestrian arenas are commercial enterprises and typically include such facilities as stables for horses, a covered riding arena and ancillary buildings to support the enterprise and, as such, do not come under the specific exemptions contained in Schedule 4.

Flood Prevention Measures

74. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the proposals the Office of Public Works has to carry out essential drainage work in County Cavan; if he is aware of the serious problems caused for households and businesses in parts of County Cavan, particularly in the Crossdoney, Killeshandra and Farnham areas, due to recent severe flooding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45618/15]

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

mon Harris): The specific areas mentioned by the Deputy are within the Drainage District of Cavan County Council. Drainage Districts are areas where drainage schemes to improve land for agricultural purposes were constructed prior to the Arterial Drainage Act, 1945. The statutory duty of maintenance for these schemes lies with the Local Authorities concerned.

The Office of Public Works (OPW) carries out its own programme of Arterial Drainage Maintenance to a total of 11,500km of river channel and approximately 730km of embankments around the country. These are arterial drainage schemes completed by the OPW under the Arterial Drainage Acts 1945 and 1995, whose purpose was primarily to improve the drainage of agricultural lands to enhance production. The Glyde & the Dee, the Inny and the Boyne Scheme include river channels within County Cavan. In accordance with its statutory requirements, the OPW maintains these completed schemes in proper repair and in an effective condition to the standard of the original scheme. The annual maintenance programme typically involves some clearance of vegetation and removal of silt build-up on an average five-yearly cycle.

The Government's core strategy for addressing those areas at most significant risk and impact from flooding is the Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) Programme. Ballyconnell and Cavan Town are the two Areas for Further Assessment (AFAs) being assessed in County Cavan under the CFRAM Programme. These were deemed to be areas of potentially significant risk and impact from flooding under the Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment (PFRA) which was completed in 2011. The County Cavan AFAs are being assessed under the North Western – Neagh Bann (NW-NB) CFRAM study. Further information is available on the study website: <http://www.neaghbanncfрамstudy.ie/>

A national public consultation on the draft flood maps is ongoing and will run until 23 December 2015. Details are available on the consultation website http://maps.opw.ie/flood_draft-map_consult/

Local flooding issues are a matter, in the first instance, for each Local Authority to investigate and address, and County Councils may carry out flood mitigation works using their own resources. The OPW operates the Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme for projects estimated to cost less than €500,000. The purpose of this scheme is to provide funding to Local Authorities to undertake minor flood mitigation works or studies to address localised flooding and coastal protection problems within their administrative areas. Further details are published on the OPW website www.opw.ie.

Departmental Strategies

75. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation following the publication of Innovation 2020, when the first meeting of the implementation body will take place; the number of meetings planned in 2016; the mechanism in place to review progress and ensure targets in the strategy are being met on an annual basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45522/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The first meeting of the Innovation 2020 Implementation Group is to take place in early 2016. The Group will meet in three formations with smart agenda setting:

- A primary formation will drive and track implementation of the strategy at an overall level.
- The second formation will mirror the Research Prioritisation Action Group and will have a role in driving and reporting on implementation of various strands of the strategy at a more granular level – this group will identify what needs to be done by which funder/agency/depart-

ment to deliver on higher level actions in this strategy.

- The third formation will deal with EU issues, incorporating both the role of the Horizon 2020 High Level Group, and broader EU research issues, such as opportunities arising from the European Fund for Strategic Investment.

An implementation plan is being drafted in which the number of meetings of the Group to take place in 2016 will be determined.

A number of high-level national indicators with associated targets to 2020 have been selected to measure success in implementing the strategy. The Innovation 2020 Implementation Group will report annually to the Cabinet Committee on progress in achieving high-level targets and delivering on actions. Monitoring and reporting on key actions will also be delivered through the annual Action Plan for Jobs process.

Departmental Bodies Establishment

76. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation following the publication of Innovation 2020, when scientists engaged in basic research will be able to apply for funding; the provisional deadline for applications in 2016; the spend allocated for basic research in 2016 and for each year thereafter; the scientific disciplines which will be accommodated for grant funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45523/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Innovation 2020 contains a commitment to supporting the full continuum of research from frontier (basic) research to the creation and development of research-informed innovative products, processes and services. Funding for research is awarded according to the criteria, of which excellence is key, set out in the various funding programmes operated by research funders irrespective of whether the research is basic or applied. The most recent survey of R&D performed in the higher education sector (HERD survey published July 2015) shows that basic research accounted for 51% or €320m of that expenditure in 2012/13.

Under Innovation 2020, a competitive fund to support qualified researchers to undertake project-based frontier research is being developed. Funding will be awarded on the basis of the excellence of the research proposals and assessed through a rigorous and international peer-review process. The parameters for this programme will be determined by the Irish Research Council in 2016.

Animal Welfare

77. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the changes he has made to regulations on the export of puppies and dogs; if the extended time frame required for inoculating the animals will have a very damaging impact on the industry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45484/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The most recent changes relating to the export of dogs were introduced as a result of new EU Regulations on intra-community trade in dogs which came into effect on 29 December 2014. Under these regulations, dogs must be at least 12 weeks old in order to be vaccinated against rabies and a waiting period of 21 days post (primary) vaccination is necessary for rabies immunity to take effect. Accordingly dogs may not be under 15 weeks of age at time of export.

The Regulations allow Member States the option of allowing the importation into their territories of dogs, which are less than 12 weeks old and have not received an anti-rabies vaccination or are between 12 and 16 weeks old and have received an anti-rabies vaccination, but 21 days have not elapsed since the completion of the vaccination. The following member states - Austria, Bulgaria Czech Rep., Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Croatia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovenia and Slovakia - and Switzerland have notified the Commission that they are prepared to accept young pups. The remaining Member States including the United Kingdom do not accept young dogs. Almost all of the 250 dogs that are on average exported from Ireland each week are destined for the United Kingdom.

The Deputy may be aware that immunity from rabies is one of a number of requirements for export of dogs. Other requirements are that dogs must:

- come from holdings or businesses which are registered by the competent authority and are not subject to any ban on animal health grounds (including rabies), and which undertake to have these animals regularly examined, to notify possible disease and to comply with the requirements ensuring the welfare of the animals held;

- be identified by means of a microchip (a transponder readable by a device compatible with ISO standard 11785);

- undergo (within 48 hours prior to the time of dispatch) a clinical examination carried out by an authorised veterinarian, who must verify that the animals show no signs of diseases and are fit to be transported for the intended journey;

- be individually accompanied by a passport completed and issued by an authorised veterinarian;

- be accompanied to the place of destination by a health certificate (model in Part 1 of Annex E to Directive 92/65/EEC as last amended by Commission Decision 2013/518/EU), issued by an official veterinarian of the Member State of dispatch.

The new EU regulations, which are in place almost 12 months, are designed to facilitate the movement of pets throughout the EU. I am satisfied that they will not have a negative impact on the export of dogs.

Single Payment Scheme Payments

78. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a decision will issue to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45489/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The 2014 Single Farm Payment/Disadvantaged Areas' scheme application of the person named was initially selected for a Remote Sensing inspection. A subsequent field visit, to verify the position on the ground, identified discrepancies between the area declared and the area determined resulting in an over-declaration in area of greater than 50%. This resulted in no payment being due under the 2014 Single Payment Scheme and the application of an administrative fine to be offset against any future EU payments.

As payment had already issued in respect of 2014, based on the results of the initial Remote Sensing inspection, my Department was required to recoup the amount of the payment issued from payments due under the REPS and the Beef Data Schemes.

The administrative fine for 2015 was calculated and deducted prior to payments issuing under the 2015 Direct Payments Schemes. The person named has no debts outstanding with my Department.

The person named sought a review of this decision. This review process included a re-inspection of the lands being claimed. The outcome of this review was to uphold the original decision. The person named was notified of this outcome on 20 July 2015. The person named submitted an appeal to the independent Agriculture Appeals Office, the outcome of which was to disallow that appeal. The person named was notified of this decision by the Agriculture Appeals Office on 8 December 2015. The person named was also notified that if they believed they had not been treated fairly by that Office it is open to them to raise the matter with the Office of the Ombudsman, 18 Lower Leeson St., Dublin 2.

Single Payment Scheme Payments

79. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will make substantial payments on account, of up to 50%, under the single payment scheme and the disadvantaged areas scheme in cases where administrative checks are expected to be protracted and where no refunds are due to his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45494/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): This year, my Department received over 135,000 applications from farmers under the Direct Aid Schemes, which are funded or partially funded by the EU. The Schemes involved include the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) and the Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) Scheme. Under EU Regulations, all applications must be subjected to robust administrative checks prior to payment. The main element of the administrative check is an area assessment. This is achieved by using the detailed database of individual land parcels. This is known as the Land Parcel Identification System (LPIS) which currently records, electronically, some 1 million individual land parcels and which is required to be kept fully updated.

The Department's systems in this critical area must meet demanding EU and national audit requirements. Only valid applications under the BPS and ANC that fully comply with the requirements of the EU legislation are paid. Consequently, all applications under the Schemes are subject to administrative checks. Cases that do not pass the validation process go into error and cannot be paid pending a resolution of the error concerned. These errors include over-claims, dual claims and incomplete application forms. In addition, applicants under the ANC scheme must fulfil stocking density and retention requirements. My Department enters into correspondence, mainly through the issuing of query letters to farmers, in order to resolve these error cases.

My Department has received approximately 123,000 applications under the BPS from applicants who currently hold entitlements and 102,000 applications from those eligible under the ANC scheme. In relation to the 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. The balancing payments commenced issuing as scheduled on 1 December.

Despite the extension of the closing date for the receipt of applications by two weeks, with a consequent reduction of the processing time available, Ireland was among the earliest to pay

the BPS/Greening in the European Union. To date, in excess of 119,000 farmers have received payments totalling €1.054 billion - this represents 97% of the applicants. There is no rationale for partial payments, using scarce IT and processing resources, when the Department is targeting a payment figure of 99% by Christmas. In relation to the ANC Scheme, I can confirm that payments commenced, on schedule, on 23 September. To date, in excess of 89,600 farmers have received payments totalling €191 million. Certain of the outstanding farmers will not be paid until next year when they achieve the stocking requirements of the scheme. It is not possible to pay until these farmers are compliant with the terms and conditions of the scheme.

As outstanding BPS, Greening and ANC cases are fully processed and are cleared of any outstanding error, they will be processed for payment. My Department is prioritising the processing of all such outstanding cases with regular payment runs continuing over the coming weeks for all fully processed cases.

Single Payment Scheme Appeals

80. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of an appeal of an application under the 2014 single payment scheme and the disadvantaged areas scheme by a person (details supplied) in County Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45499/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under the Single Payment/Disadvantaged Areas Scheme was received from the person named on the 14 May 2014. Following a partially successful appeal to the Agriculture Appeal Office, the person named was paid his 2014 Single Payment on 18 September 2015.

Payment is now due under the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme in respect of 11.06 hectares. Payment will issue directly to the nominated bank account of the person named at the earliest possible date.

Basic Payment Scheme Payments

81. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason for the delay in a payment under the basic payment scheme 2015 to a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45505/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The 2015 Basic Payment Scheme applications of both of the persons named were submitted to the Department on 29 May 2015. The application of the first person named has been processed and payment will issue to their nominated bank account on completion of the further processing of their separate Private Contract Clause application. The application of the second person named has been processed with advance payment issuing on 19 October 2015 to their nominated bank account.

The persons named also submitted a 2015 Private Contract Clause application to my Department which sought the transfer of land and corresponding entitlements by lease. My Department issued a letter to the second named person on 16 November seeking clarification regarding leased or rented land. No reply to this letter has been received by my Department to date. When a reply has been received setting out the clarification sought, my Department can further process this application.

GLAS Applications

82. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of an application under the green low-carbon agri-environment scheme by a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45514/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named is approved in GLAS with a contract commencement date of 1 October 2015 and based on the actions selected will qualify for a part year payment for the period 1 October to 31 December.

Competition and Consumer Protection Commission

83. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he envisages any problem with a company (details supplied) gaining control of the meat industry and controlling the price paid to farmers due to its recent takeover of a 50% shareholding in another company, which also gives the company greater control of the rendering industry and puts more pressure on the price being paid to farmers, which is very low at the moment. [45551/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The State, through the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission, has an existing and well established infrastructure for oversight of competition matters and for dealing with allegations of anti-competitive practices or abuse of a dominant position.

I understand that acquisitions or mergers of organisations with turnover exceeding certain statutory thresholds are required to be notified to that body, which conducts an assessment to determine whether there will be any “substantial lessening of competition”. The acquisition referred to by the deputy will be subject to the relevant statutory requirements under competition law.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Appeals

84. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when he will make a decision on an appeal by a person (details supplied) in County Galway under the agri-environment options scheme 2; the reason for the delay given that the appeal was lodged in March 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45555/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named commenced their AEOS 2 contract on 1 September 2011. Issues arose in respect of a parcel of Wild Bird Cover (WBC) which, in order to be eligible for payment under the scheme, must have an area greater than 0.5 hectares. The area of WBC was recorded as 0.47 hectares following digitisation in 2013 and a subsequent field visit confirmed that the area on the ground was indeed less than 0.5 hectares and therefore ineligible for payment. The person named was informed of the ineligible parcel and consequent reduction in payment and a 10% penalty on 14 April 2014.

Maps were then submitted to the Single Payment Unit by the applicant’s planner, increasing the area without reference to the original inspection result. On foot of increased area shown, the planner appealed the payment reduction and penalty to the AEOS section. This was a complex case and involved various areas in the Department.

My officials have now completed examination of the file and a letter issued to the person named on 15 December confirming the original decision. The person named has been offered the opportunity to appeal to the Agriculture Appeals Office if they are not satisfied with the decision.

Basic Payment Scheme Payments

85. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a payment will be processed and made for persons (details supplied) in County Offaly; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45562/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The persons named submitted a 2015 Transfer of Allocation Right and Reference Value application to my Department to transfer the allocation and value through Change of Legal Entity. This application has been fully processed and payment under the Basic Payment Scheme will issue as soon as possible.

Single Payment Scheme Payments

86. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 247 of 1 December 2015, when a single payment will be issued to a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45563/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person name has been allocated 43.41 new entitlements under the 2015 Basic Payment Scheme at a value of €1,300 including Greening payment. The value of entitlements of approximately €14,500 which was associated with this herd number under the 2013 and 2014 Scheme year could not be allocated to the person named as they were not owned by him in 2014.

My Department issued a letter to the owner of the entitlements and to the person named on the 10 April 2014 informing them that the value of the entitlements would be lost unless particular actions were taken. As no action was taken, the value of these entitlements could not be carried forward into the new Basic Payment Scheme. My Department will make direct contact with the person named to see if there are any options open to him in relation to the lost entitlements.

Full payment has issued to the person named in relation to the new entitlements allocated. He has also received €4,344 on foot of a Private Contract Clause application and €3,200 in relation to his Young Farmer Scheme application.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

87. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment will be issued under the basic payment scheme and the areas of natural constraint scheme to farmers (details supplied) in County Mayo; the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45568/15]

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 30 April 2015. Processing of applications under both schemes is complete and payment has issued directly to the nominated bank account of the person named.

Basic Payment Scheme Payments

88. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Galway will be paid under the basic payment scheme and if he has rectified issues surrounding a dual claim. [45580/15]

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 14 May 2015. The processing of this application was recently finalised and payment has issued to the nominated bank account of the person named.

Severe Weather Events

89. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide funding for persons (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45589/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am acutely aware of the difficulties farmers in flooded areas are experiencing in recent weeks.

My Department has put special arrangements in place to deal with animal welfare issues that might arise as a result of flooding and to deal with the flooding of slurry tanks that has occurred in a limited number of circumstances.

Where there is a potential animal welfare issue on farms, farmers are urged to contact the Department Animal Welfare Helpline. This helpline is aimed at providing assistance to farmers, and is dealing with farmers on a one-to-one basis where there is a risk of animal welfare. Farmers who are experiencing particular difficulty arising from the flooding should contact the helpline at Call Save 0761 064408 or Phone 01 6072379.

Alongside my Department's Animal Welfare Helpline, I have asked Teagasc to provide dedicated on-farm practical advice and assistance to farmers in flooded areas and ensure farming operations are supported. Contact should be made using the helpline number 0761 113555.

I have also prioritised payments to farmers at this time. At this point, the vast majority of farmers have been paid over €1.2 billion in EU payments under the Basic Payment Scheme and the Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme (formerly Disadvantaged Areas Scheme) this year. Given that a completely new payment regime has been introduced, this is a significant achievement and I am committed to issuing remaining payments as individual issues are resolved around applications. Payments under other schemes such as REPS/AEOS have been made along with GLAS and Beef Data and Genomics Scheme payments which are being prioritised.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Payments

90. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a payment to a person (details supplied) under the areas of natural constraint scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45595/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under the 2015 Areas of Natural Constraints Scheme was received from the person named on 22 April 2015. Processing of the application has recently been finalised and payment will issue shortly directly to the nominated bank account of the person named.

EU Funding

91. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and when financial instruments for on-farm capital investments will be in place. [45596/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am considering whether to include Financial Instruments (FIs) in Ireland's Rural Development Programme. The funding for any such FIs would have to draw on Ireland's existing RDP allocation of European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development funding as well as National Exchequer funding.

So far 7 Programmes from 5 Member States have implemented a FI for the current programme period. In order to include a FI as a measure in a RDP an Ex ante assessment is required by EU regulation. This assessment can take between 3 months to a year to complete.

Once this is done, an agreement must be reached between my Department and any other potential stakeholders/financial institutions on a clear investment strategy that is developed from the gaps, if any, identified in the ex ante assessment. Following this, a new measure description would have to be drafted and inserted into the RDP by way of an amendment. FIs can only be introduced to the RDP this way and currently only one amendment is allowed per year; this could mean that the FI assessment would not be completed in time for Ireland's next amendment in 2016. The European Commission have, however, proposed a change to the Regulation in order to allow Member States to lodge a separate amendment to the RDP in respect of Financial Instruments and this will be decided on in the near future. While this would allow greater flexibility in terms of inserting an FI measure into the RDP, the timeframe from assessment to Commission approval means that the whole process could still take a year or more.

In the interim my Department has been exploring new and more competitive sources of funding for Irish Agriculture and will continue to do so in the context of evolving market requirements. For example, the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland, which includes the European Investment Bank as one of its funding partners, launched a new 'Agriculture Investment Loans' product earlier this year. This credit is available at favourable terms for investments by agricultural SMEs involved in primary agricultural production, the processing of agricultural products or the marketing of agricultural products. The features of these products compared with those currently on the market are lower interest rates, loan amounts up to €5 million and increased repayment flexibility. Of the almost €45 million in loans approved and drawn down by SMEs between March and end-June from the SBCI, a third has been accessed by the agricultural sector, including farmers.

Basic Payment Scheme Appeals

92. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of an appeal under the basic payment scheme by a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45617/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named submitted an application for the 2015 Basic Payment Scheme on 28 May 2015. Having examined the application it was established that the person named did not qualify for Scottish Derogation as there was no verifiable evidence of production under the beef, dairy, arable or sheep sectors in 2013 which is a requirement to qualify under the scheme. The person named was notified of this decision and lodged an appeal. A letter issued from my Department on 14 December 2015 requesting additional information in support of this appeal. Upon receipt of the requested information a decision will be made regarding eligibility under Scottish Derogation and the person named will be notified accordingly.

Basic Payment Scheme Payments

93. **Deputy Paul J. Connaughton** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Galway under the basic payment scheme; the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45652/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named submitted an application under the ‘new entrant to farming’ category of the 2015 National Reserve. Payments under the 2015 National Reserve commenced during the week beginning 14 December. The application submitted by the person named has been fully processed and payment is due to issue in the coming days.

Defence Forces Personnel Data

94. **Deputy Seán Ó Feargháil** asked the Minister for Defence the number of personnel in the Permanent Defence Force on the most recent date available and the estimated full-year cost of increasing this number to the 9,500 agreed level. [45651/15]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): On the 31 of October, 2015 (the latest date for which figures are available), the strength (whole-time equivalent) of the Permanent Defence Force was 9,155. Budget 2016 includes a provision of some €416 million for Permanent Defence Force Pay and this amount will allow for the payment of the full establishment of 9,500 personnel, in line with the commitment in the White Paper on Defence.

The Government is committed to maintaining the stabilised strength of the Permanent Defence Force at or near 9,500 personnel; comprising of 7,519 Army, 887 Air Corps and 1,094 Naval Service. Targeted recruitment has taken place so as to maintain the level of personnel in, and to ensure the operational capacity of, the Defence Forces. With the support of the Chief of Staff and within the resources available, I intend to retain the capacity of the Defence Forces to operate effectively across all roles and to undertake, both at home and overseas, the tasks that are laid down by Government.

Paternity Leave Scheme

95. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her views on a matter (details supplied) regarding paternity leave; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45503/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy Aodhán Ó Ríordáin): As announced in the October Budget, a provision for two weeks paternity leave

with a related paternity benefit to be paid through the social welfare system will be introduced from September 2016. As the Deputy will appreciate, substantial changes to legislation as well as new administrative systems in the Department of Social Protection are needed before the benefit and leave arrangements can be implemented. The proposed commencement date of September 2016 is therefore necessary to ensure that all these necessary requirements are in place before paternity leave and payment of paternity benefit can commence.

This is a very important reform of our family leave arrangements, but it does need time to implement. Whatever commencement date is selected, it will inevitably only cater for cases that arise after that date.

Northern Ireland

96. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the re-introduction of the paramilitary monitoring commission and the establishment of a cross-Border agency to deal with organised crime, as outlined in the Fresh Start agreement; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45609/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Fresh Start Agreement was established between the Northern Ireland Executive and the Irish and British Governments in November 2015. The Agreement addresses a range of measures relating to the devolved institutions in Northern Ireland.

The new agreement also includes Justice related provisions for a new Joint Agency Task Force, led by police and revenue services, to bring together the relevant law enforcement agencies and better coordinate strategic and operational actions against cross border organised crime. The new Task Force will consist of a senior level strategic oversight group that will oversee the work of an operations coordination group to coordinate front line joint, inter-agency operations and direct relevant resources in that context.

Preparations for the new Task Force are at an advanced stage.

In addition, the Fresh Start Agreement contains cross border commitments on the establishment of a new monitoring and verification body as part of the initiative to end paramilitarism. The Northern Ireland Executive will appoint a three person panel by the end of December 2015. The Panel will be charged with the task of bringing a report to the Executive with recommendations for a strategy to disband paramilitary groups. This report must be presented to the Executive before the end of May 2016 and the Executive is to present a strategy by end-June 2016.

In order to monitor the implementation of the strategy for ending paramilitarism, a four member independent monitoring and verification body, to include persons of international standing, will be established by the UK and Irish Governments. The UK Government and the Irish Government will nominate one member each and the Executive shall nominate two members. This monitoring and verification body will be required to be established and operational in 2016.

We are currently in discussions with the UK Government to advance the formation of the monitoring and verification body.

Commissions of Inquiry

97. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she has had any

connect with the Police Ombudsman's office in the North which is carrying out an investigation into the bomb attack at Kay's Tavern; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45472/15]

98. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will implement the recommendations of the Oireachtas final report on the report of the independent commission of inquiry into the bombing of Kay's Tavern on Crowe Street in Dundalk on 19 December 1975; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45473/15]

99. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she accepts the conclusion of the Oireachtas final report on the report of the independent commission of inquiry into the bombing of Kay's Tavern, on Crowe Street in Dundalk on 19 December 1975 that there was widespread collusion between British State forces and Unionist paramilitaries; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45474/15]

100. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she accepts the conclusion of the Oireachtas final report on the report of the independent commission of inquiry into the bombing of Kay's Tavern on Crowe Street in Dundalk on 19 December 1975 that it will lead to a commission of inquiry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45475/15]

101. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will establish a commission of investigation into the bombing of Kay's Tavern on Crowe Street in Dundalk on 19 December 1975. [45476/15]

102. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she accepts the conclusion of the Oireachtas final report on the report of the independent commission of inquiry into the bombing of Kay's Tavern that there was sufficient information available to the Government that British security personnel were working with and as loyalist paramilitaries; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45477/15]

103. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she accepts the conclusion of the Oireachtas final report on the report of the independent commission of inquiry into the bombing of Kay's Tavern that more should have been done by the State to assist victims of the atrocities and that they should not have been left in a position where they legitimately felt they had been forgotten about; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45478/15]

104. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will request An Garda Síochána to meet the families of the victims of the bomb attack at Kay's Tavern and other incidents covered by the reports of the Barron Commission and the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Justice, Equality, Defence and Women's Rights; if An Garda Síochána will brief the families on the current status of its investigations; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45479/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 97 to 104, inclusive, together.

The bombing at Crowe Street in Dundalk on 19 December 1975 was a brutal and indiscriminate attack. Two men, Hugh Watters and Jack Rooney, were killed when a car bomb exploded outside a licensed premises known as Kay's Tavern and many more people were injured by the explosion. As we approach the fortieth anniversary of this bombing our thoughts are with the families of those who were killed and those who were injured. I extend my sincere sympathies to all of the victims of this attack.

I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that an extensive criminal investigation was carried out at the time of this attack - indeed this is set out in detail in the Barron Inquiry Report - and that it has been comprehensively reviewed subsequently. It is a matter of regret that nobody

has been held accountable for this crime. However, the Garda investigation file remains open and any new or additional evidence will be pursued fully.

This bombing was among a number of incidents that were the subject of a comprehensive inquiry conducted by the late Mr Justice Henry Barron and considered subsequently by a sub-committee of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Justice, Equality, Defence and Women's Rights. The Barron Inquiry concluded that the bombing was carried out by loyalist extremists who were most probably associated with the Mid-Ulster UVF. This bombing is one among a number of troubles-related violent incidents, including killings, in respect of which allegations have been made of collusion between security forces and paramilitary groups.

I have requested the Garda Commissioner to provide me with a report on the current situation and on any developments with regard to the bombing and the Garda investigation and I will communicate further with the Deputy when that is to hand.

Military Aircraft Landings

105. **Deputy Anne Ferris** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of An Garda Síochána conducting spot-checks on the contents of planes landing at Irish airports for refuelling purposes to ensure that they are not carrying goods or munitions that make the landing contrary to Irish law; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45480/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Responsibility for the regulation of activity by foreign military aircraft is accorded to the Minister for Foreign Affairs under the Air Navigation (Foreign Military Aircraft) Order 1952.

Arrangements under which permission is granted for foreign military aircraft to land at Irish airports are governed by strict conditions. These include stipulations that the aircraft must be unarmed, carry no arms, ammunition or explosives and must not engage in intelligence gathering, and that the flights in question must not form part of military exercises or operations.

The Garda authorities consider fully in accordance with the law information in respect of any request to search an aircraft. An Garda Síochána remains fully committed to investigate all alleged breaches of criminal law involving the use of aircraft at Irish airports.

Statutory powers of search and entry are bestowed on An Garda Síochána under various legislative provisions and when authorised by a Judge. However, these powers are exercised in circumstances where a member of An Garda Síochána has a reasonable suspicion that an offence has occurred supported by some evidence. The mere assertion of wrongdoing by a member of the general public is clearly insufficient in this regard.

An Garda Síochána has investigated a range of complaints of alleged unlawful activity at Shannon Airport and, where appropriate, files have been submitted to the Director of Public Prosecutions. In all these cases, no further action was found to be warranted, owing to a lack of any evidence of unlawful activity.

I would point out, for the sake of clarity, that An Garda Síochána has no role in relation to the inspection of foreign State or military aircraft which, in accordance with international law, enjoy sovereign immunity.

Citizenship Status

106. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of foreign nationals who have been naturalised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service and the number of naturalised persons registered on the electoral register since their naturalisation. [45490/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the number of persons that have been naturalised from 2005 to date is 113,000 approximately.

Once granted citizenship new citizens acquire the same rights as all other citizens. A leaflet informing new citizens of their right to register and vote in all elections in the State, and how they can register, is included in the information packs issued to all candidates at citizenship ceremonies. However, my Department would not have any information on the number of naturalised persons who registered on the electoral register.

Visa Applications

107. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the required documentation has been received by the visa office for a person (details supplied) in County Kildare who submitted all the required documentation a number of weeks ago and paid the requisite fee; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45528/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that on-line visa applications were made on 28 October 2015. The applications and supporting documentation have not been submitted to any of the Visa Offices or Irish Missions abroad.

The visa applications cannot be processed until the visa fee has been paid and the signed summary sheet and all the supporting documentation have been submitted to one of the Irish Embassies or Consulates in the surrounding area.

If the applicants are resident in Syria, they should submit their applications to the Honorary Consul in Damascus and it will be referred to the Irish Visa Office in Abu Dhabi. If they are unable to submit it there, they can submit their applications to one of the other Irish Embassies or Consulates in the surrounding area or directly to the Irish Visa Office in Abu Dhabi. Further information can be found on the website of the Irish Embassy in Abu Dhabi (www.embassyofireland.ae).

Guidelines on the visa application process including details of the required supporting documentation can be found on the INIS website (www.inis.gov.ie).

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

In addition, applicants may themselves e-mail queries directly to INIS (visamail@justice.ie).

Asylum Seeker Accommodation

108. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will address concerns around the designation of a hotel (details supplied) as an emergency reception and orientation centre; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45536/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Reception & Integration Agency (RIA) of the Department of Justice and Equality is responsible for the provision of accommodation for asylum seekers while their application for protection in the State is being processed. RIA also procures suitable premises on behalf of the Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration (OPMI) for the accommodation of refugees when they first arrive in the State and before they move to their permanent homes in locations throughout the country. In both cases potential centres are assessed from a number of perspectives including access to local amenities, the provision of State services and the suitability of the accommodation for its particular purposes.

On 31st July 2015, RIA advertised for expressions of interest from persons or companies wishing to provide accommodation and related services for persons in the protection process. On foot of this advertisement, the proprietors of the premises in question responded to RIA. These premises meet the particular requirements of the OPMI for the accommodation of families invited to Ireland under the UNHCR Refugee Resettlement Programme. The premises will provide initial accommodation on a rolling basis to groups of Programme Refugees in the immediate period following their arrival in Ireland. Adult refugees undergo an eight week cultural orientation programme prior to their resettlement in locations, agreed between the OPMI and local authorities, throughout the State. As an assistance to their orientation programme, children with refugee status are provided with an education programme. Links to services such as health, transport etc., are also provided for families.

It is established best practice that on arrival in a new country, refugees need time to rest after what has been a traumatic experience, a very long journey and to acclimatise to their new environment. Refugees are supported by OPMI through this processes following their arrival. After the initial period, the language training and orientation programme begins and the refugees attend classes four days a week. Outings to local places of interest will generally be organised at weekends as well as activities for the children. Transport for these outings is of course provided as is regular transport to local urban areas.

Judicial Investigations

109. **Deputy Seamus Kirk** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality to outline her plans to instigate an inquiry into the murder of a person (details supplied) in 1976 and the subsequent Garda Síochána investigation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45575/15]

110. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality to outline her views on the request of the family (details supplied) for an independent inquiry into a death in 1976 and the conduct of the subsequent investigation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45629/15]

115. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality to outline the status of the investigation of the murder of a person (details supplied) in 1976; if An Garda Síochána will carry out further investigations; the level of co-operation by the Police Service of Northern Ireland; if she will ensure that further full and thorough investigations are undertaken without further delay; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45649/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Ques-

tions Nos. 109, 110 and 115 together.

As the Deputies will be aware, I have previously met with family members of the victim to whom the Deputies refer and their legal representative to hear their concerns about aspects of the Garda investigation of the murder of their loved one and their call for an inquiry. This case was one of those inquired into previously by the late Mr Justice Henry Barron and examined subsequently by a sub-committee of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Justice, Equality, Defence and Women's Rights.

I have great sympathy for the family in this case. There can be no doubt that the brutal murder of their loved one caused them untold grief and that there were unacceptable failings in the investigation of the murder. These matters were examined comprehensively by the Barron Inquiry and by the Oireachtas subcommittee.

I am recently in receipt of correspondence from the family's legal representatives with regard to legal proceedings in respect of the matter raised. The matter has been referred to the Chief State Solicitor's Office in accordance with the normal practice. In these circumstances the Deputies will appreciate that it would not be appropriate for me to comment further on the matter.

Garda Stations

111. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality to detail the number of Garda Síochána stations and the number of gardaí in each throughout the Waterford Garda Síochána division on 1 November 2010 and on 1 November 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45644/15]

112. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality to detail the number of Garda Síochána stations and the number of gardaí in each throughout the Kerry Garda Síochána division on 1 November 2010 and on 1 November 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45645/15]

113. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality to detail the number of Garda Síochána stations and the number of gardaí in each throughout the Tipperary Garda Síochána division on 1 November 2010 and on 1 November 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45646/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 111 to 113, inclusive, together.

I have received the information from the Garda Commissioner requested by the Deputy, regarding the number of Garda stations and the number of gardaí in each of the Waterford, Kerry and Tipperary Garda Divisions on 1 November 2010 and on 1 November 2015.

The information requested is being complied and will be sent to the Deputy directly.

Garda Remuneration

114. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the full-year cost of a net increase of 500 in the number of fully qualified members of An Garda Síochána. [45648/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Garda Commis-

sioner is the Accounting Officer for the Garda Vote and in that context I am informed by the Garda authorities that after 32 weeks of training, Garda recruits are attested and move on to the first point of the Garda pay scale €23,171 rising to a maximum of €45,793 per annum after 19 years. They may also qualify for other allowances depending on their assignments.

The annual cost of 500 new Garda recruits in their first year (assuming an attestation date of 1st January) is €12.8m. This figure includes Employer's PRSI but excludes any allowances which the members may qualify for following attestation. The annual cost will obviously increase as the members move up the Garda pay scale each year.

Question No. 115 answered with Question No. 109.

Garda Data

116. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 427 of 6 October 2015 and Parliamentary Question No. 267 of 7 July 2015, when the information will become available; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45650/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Deputy will recall that the information requested in both of the Parliamentary Questions referred to was not readily available at the time, and that I undertook to write to him directly on receipt of the information from the Garda Commissioner.

A post reply for Parliamentary Question Number 267 of 7 July 2015 issued from my office on 23 September 2015 and a post reply for Parliamentary Question Number 427 of 6 October 2015 issued from my office last Friday 11 December 2015.

Health Services

117. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Health when a decision will issue to persons (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45492/15]

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 out to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy. If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, he can contact my Private Office and they will follow the matter up with the HSE.

Hospital Complaints Procedures

118. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry who was a patient in Cork University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45496/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Although our acute hospitals endeavour to provide the best service possible, there will be times when a patient does not consider that their expectations have been met. Where someone is not satisfied with their experience of treatment in our hospitals, they should, in the first instance, use the HSE's formal complaints process, details of which are on the HSE website, at <http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/yourhealthservice/>

feedback/complaints/. Under this process, a complaint is first made to the hospital in which the treatment was provided or the incident occurred. If the person is not satisfied with the hospital's response, a review can be sought from the HSE Director of Advocacy and the Ombudsman, as follows.

HSE Director of Advocacy

Oak House

Millennium Park

Naas

Co Kildare

Tel 1890 424 555.

Office of the Ombudsman

18, Lower Leeson Street

Dublin 2

Tel 1890 223 030.

Email: ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.ie

In relation to the specific case raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond directly. If a reply has not been received from the HSE within 15 working days, please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up with them.

Hospital Appointment Status

119. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Offaly will receive a hospital appointment. [45497/15]

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.

Medical Research and Training Expenditure

120. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health to support the medical research charities group in 2015 and 2016 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45501/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I am committed to maintaining and developing a strong health research strand within and throughout the health service.

Research in health is supported through the Health Research Board (HRB). The HRB is a statutory body under the aegis of the Department of Health and is the lead agency in Ireland supporting and funding health research. The HRB has a current annual budget in the region of €40m.

I am aware of the valuable work of the MRCG and the Deputy may be aware that since 2006, the work of the Medical Research Charities Group (MRCG) has been supported by my Department through annual funding to the Health Research Board (HRB) for the co-funding of research projects with medical research charities. The level of funding is currently at €900,000 per annum. This innovative joint funding scheme allows members of the MRCG to support clearly defined research projects in disease areas and patient populations of specific interest to each individual charity, where they might otherwise not be in a position to finance the full cost of that research. Officials in my Department recently met with representatives of the MRCG and discussed ways in which the Department can support the organisation during 2016.

Developments in the health sector structures such as the appointment of a Chief Academic Officer to the management teams of the Hospital Groups will put research on the agenda of the healthcare system at a high level. That, combined with a commitment by my Department to drive a research, evidence and data analytics agenda are important enablers for driving the research agenda. Indeed, a new Assistant Secretary for Research and Development and Health Analytics, was recently appointed in my Department. This appointment is further evidence of how I view the crucial importance of health research and data to providing the foundations for sound health policies, practices and outcomes.

I am committed to embedding research and evidence at the heart of health policy and practice. My Department is working with the HSE to ensure that this agenda is driven and supported in a co-ordinated way at corporate level by the Executive. As part of this process options will be explored on how best this can be achieved.

In respect of the other areas raised I can inform the Deputy that a revised General Scheme of the Health Information and Patient Safety Bill was approved by Government in November and the Bill is expected to be published in 2016. It is also envisaged that the Heads of the Human Tissue Bill will be progressed in 2016.

The National Rare Disease Plan recommended that an Oversight Implementation Group of relevant stakeholders led by the HSE and including patients' groups, be established to oversee and monitor implementation of the plan's recommendations. This group was established by my Department earlier this year and it has met on a number of occasions. One of the principal recommendations in the Plan was the establishment of a National Clinical Programme for Rare Diseases. This programme will be responsible for, among others: Mapping, developing and implementing care pathways for rare diseases; facilitating timely access to centres of expertise - nationally and internationally; developing treatment guidelines for many rare disorders; and developing care pathways with European Reference Centres for those ultra-rare disorders where there may not be sufficient expertise in Ireland.

Long-Term Illness Scheme

121. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health his views on the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 17 who requires a long-term care plan; and if he will make

a statement on the matter. [45502/15]

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

Medicinal Products Availability

122. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Clare will be facilitated with required products; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45512/15]

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

Hospital Appointments Administration

123. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Offaly will receive a hospital appointment. [45533/15]

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 Appointments Administration

124. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if he will examine a referral by a general practitioner of a person (details supplied) to Kerry General Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45537/15]

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.

Long-Term Illness Scheme Eligibility

125. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if he will include fibromyalgia in the long-term illness scheme and provide increased supports to persons suffering from fibromyalgia, a condition now recognised by the World Health Organization as a distinct disease; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45545/15]

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

Medicinal Products Availability

126. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide funding for the drug Orkambi which is proven to help persons who are suffering from cystic fibrosis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45561/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicinal products under the community drug schemes in accordance with the provisions of the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013. Prior to reimbursing any medicine, the HSE considers a range of statutory criteria, including clinical need, cost-effectiveness and the resources available to the HSE.

The decisions on which medicines are reimbursed by the taxpayer are made on objective, scientific and economic grounds by the HSE on the advice of the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE). They are not political or ministerial decisions. The NCPE conducts the health technology assessment of pharmaceutical products for the HSE, and can make recommendations on reimbursement to assist the HSE in its decision-making process.

Vertex Pharmaceuticals, the manufacturer of Orkambi, submitted a Rapid Review application for the drug to the NCPE on 26 November 2015. The company is expected to submit a full pricing and reimbursement application to the HSE/Primary Care Reimbursement Service in the immediate future.

Once this application is received, it will be considered by the HSE in line with criteria set out in the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013 and using the processes outlined in national pricing framework agreements.

Hospital Appointments Administration

127. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Health to urgently expedite an appointment at Cork University Hospital ophthalmology department for a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45569/15]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Hospital Services

128. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the additional services that will be provided at Beaumont Hospital in Dublin 9 in 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45571/15]

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.

HSE Governance

129. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the number of management grades within the Health Service Executive earning over €120,000 in each of the years 2013 to date [45572/15]

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.

Autism Support Services

130. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the services he provides for children with autism in County Monaghan; the specific supports in place; the assistance and back-up available to children and to their parents; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45578/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The particular issues raised by the Deputy are service matters for the Health Service Executive. Accordingly I have arranged for the question to be referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Of-

fice and they will follow up the matter with them.

Hospital Services

131. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health when he will meet the family of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45587/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I was very sorry to learn that the late individual referred to by the Deputy was left exposed for a period of time on the Whitworth ward in Beaumont Hospital and that his dignity was compromised. It is not the standard of care that anyone aspires to.

You will appreciate that I receive a large volume of requests to meet individual patients or their families to discuss their cases. It is not practical for me to do so in all cases and as you know, I do not have the authority to intervene in individual patient cases anyway. I am concerned about creating the impression or expectation that I can. That is not my role and in some cases it is even unlawful to do so.

You will know from the recent Patient Safety Conference about my plans to extend the remit of the Ombudsman to examine clinical matters where the complainant is not satisfied with the response or the hospital or provider. This will require a change in legislation but I am committed to this proposal. The Ombudsman can already examine non-clinical issues.

In this particular case, I think the most appropriate course of action would be a meeting with the hospital CEO or Chairman to discuss the report in the first instance as any changes will have to be made by the hospital which has its own management and board.

If on foot of that meeting there are still issues that fall into my remit and could be resolved by my personal attention, I shall be happy to reconsider the request on that basis.

I have asked the hospital to provide me with a copy of the report so that I can read it. They may need to ask permission from the next of kin to this.

As the Deputy will be aware, I cannot comment in detail on individual cases. I have no access to individual patient information which is confidential.

Nursing Staff Remuneration

132. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 445 of 8 December 2015, if the wage increases to €9.15 on 1 January 2016, in line with the national minimum wage, will apply to fourth-year student nurses participating in the fourth-year rostered clinical placement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45591/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Pursuant to a “Chairmans Note” to the Lansdowne Road Agreement, the Department of Health and the HSE are to consider the issues of pay for student nurses during the fourth year 36 week placement with the nursing unions. This matter is the subject of direct engagement between my Department, the HSE and the nursing unions at present.

Separately, the current rates of pay for the placement, will be increased from the 1st January 2016, pro rata to the increase in the minimum wage for trainees announced in Budget 2016 and provided for in the National Minimum Wage Order 2015 (S.I. No. 442 of 2015).

Health Services Data

133. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health if the details requested in correspondence (details supplied) will be provided for each of the years 2013 to date in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45601/15]

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.

Medical Card Applications

134. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite an application for a medical card by a person (details supplied) in County Kerry as all relevant information has been submitted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45620/15]

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.

Disability Services Provision

135. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health the plans and pilot projects for outsourcing care for the intellectually disabled which was previously delivered in-house by the Health Service Executive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45625/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services.

As the specific matters raised in the Deputy's question relate to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy. If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, he can contact my Private Office and they will follow the matter up with the HSE.

Human Rights Issues

136. **Deputy Anne Ferris** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will rec-

commend to the Government to invite the European External Action Service to oversee the detention of an Irish citizen (details supplied) and any Egyptian trial that may happen; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45541/15]

137. **Deputy Anne Ferris** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will request the Egyptian authorities to allow Irish family members of a person (details supplied) to accompany Irish Embassy officials on their visits to the Egyptian prison where this Irish citizen is detained as a similar arrangement was facilitated for the family members of an Australian journalist detained under similar long-term circumstances and subsequently returned to Australia; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45542/15]

138. **Deputy Anne Ferris** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will confirm that no trial process for an Irish citizen (details supplied) has actually commenced in Egypt and, in that respect, any action taken by the Irish Government now may not be viewed as an interference in a foreign judicial process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45543/15]

139. **Deputy Anne Ferris** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has examined all options for seeking the extradition of a person (details supplied) to stand trial here, given the extraordinary long period of pre-trial detention already sanctioned by the Egyptian authorities; if he has already formally made a request under rule 140 of the Egyptian presidential code for the deportation of this Irish citizen to stand trial here; if he has issued frequent reminders to the Egyptian Government regarding the urgent need for a response; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45544/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 136 to 139, inclusive, together.

My Department is exploring every avenue to try and secure the release of this citizen and will continue to bring all of our influence to bear on his behalf through the appropriate channels. Ultimately, the decision to release him will be made solely by the Egyptian authorities. 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.

All actions taken in this case are considered in light of the Government's clear objectives. First, to see our citizen released by the Egyptian authorities so that he can return to his family and his studies in Ireland, and second to provide consular support for his welfare while he remains in detention. The considered approach and sustained action that has been taken by my Department to date in this case has been to further these objectives, and most importantly to avoid any action that could be counterproductive or detrimental to his best interests.

I have engaged closely with the European Union's High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the Commission, Ms. Federica Mogherini, in regard to this citizen's detention and our actions are both carefully considered and closely coordinated. The Government's Embassy in Cairo is also in frequent contact with the European External Action Service and other European delegations in Egypt.

My Department retains the flexibility to adapt its approach as and when that may be required, and I will continue to cooperate closely with the relevant stakeholders.

The matter raised in regard to visits was dealt with privately between my Department and this citizen's family at a meeting last week. It would not be appropriate to publicly address mat-

ters relating to the consular assistance provided to a citizen in public.

I can confirm that the citizen's trial has indeed begun, with ten adjournments so far. While the stage of substantive hearings has not yet commenced, the case is considered to be in process, as would also be the case in the Irish judicial system. I have expressed my deep dissatisfaction at the lengthy adjournments to both Foreign Minister Shoukry and Ambassador Gendi, and will continue to intervene on this citizen's behalf at the appropriate times and in the appropriate ways.

As both I and the Taoiseach have reported previously to the House, an application for this citizen's release under the Presidential Decree/Law 140 was made in February of this year by the citizen's Egyptian lawyer. That application was formally supported by the Irish Government by way of diplomatic note and has been followed up on in subsequent meetings with Egyptian officials. The Egyptian authorities are in no doubt as to the Government's desire to see this citizen released at the earliest possible opportunity.

Departmental Staff Remuneration

140. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of staff in his Department earning over €100,000 per year by grade; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45570/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The requested information on staff with a salary of or above €100,000 in my Department is set out in the following table. Twenty one of these staff are serving in senior positions as Heads of Mission in our Embassy and Mission network and a further eight are serving as Heads of Division at HQ.

Grade	Number in grade
Secretary General	1
Second Secretary General	4
Deputy Secretary	3
Assistant Secretary	21
Legal Adviser	1
Principal Development Specialist	4

Departmental Staff Remuneration

141. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the proposals to provide additional funding to non-governmental organisations towards their programmes working to mitigate the risk of gender-based violence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45603/15]

142. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the proposals he has put forward at European Union Foreign Affairs Councils on the need to increase funding to non-governmental organisations to assist their programmes dealing with gender-based violence in many regions, particularly in countries where a significant cohort of the population are victims of conflict-related sexual violence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45604/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 141 and 142 together.

Preventing and responding to gender-based violence is a central priority of Ireland's programme for overseas development, Irish Aid and is at the core of our efforts to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. We work closely with local and international non-governmental organisations to strengthen their capacity to respond to gender-based violence and to support the development and implementation of laws which prevent such violence from occurring. Our work in this area was recognised by the OECD last year which praised Ireland for the "effective agenda setting role it plays on gender equality and women's empowerment" including being "a powerful force behind the stronger donor focus on tackling violence against women".

Through its funding to Irish non-governmental organisations, Irish Aid supports a range of programmes focused on the elimination of gender-based violence. The Department also collaborates very closely with Irish non-governmental organisations through its membership Irish Consortium on Gender-based Violence, a unique grouping of Irish development and humanitarian organizations and the Irish Defence Forces. The Consortium works to build its members' capacity to respond to all forms of gender-based violence in conflict, post-conflict and long-term development contexts and to advocate for the elimination of gender based violence, globally.

This year, Irish Aid has renewed its partnership with the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women. The Trust Fund is a unique multi-lateral grant-making mechanism exclusively devoted to supporting the work of local non-governmental organisations in developing organisations focused on addressing violence against women and girls. Since its establishment in 2006, the Trust Fund has awarded \$103 million to projects in 136 countries. I expect that Irish Aid's support to the Trust Fund will continue next year.

As women and girls are particularly vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence in emergency situations, Irish Aid prioritises their protection in its humanitarian action. Earlier this year, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade launched Ireland's second National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (2015-2018). In addition to identifying concrete commitments which will ensure the protection of women and girls in conflict, the new Plan also places an increased focus on the importance of women's empowerment and participation in decision-making in conflict and post-conflict situations.

At the European level, Ireland has been actively engaged in ensuring commitments by the Foreign Affairs Council to combat gender-based violence, including two sets of Council Conclusions focused on gender and development, in May and October of this year. In October, the Council launched the EU's second Gender Action Plan (2016-2020), placing an emphasis on the importance of preventing and responding to such violence in emergencies, including in EU and Member State development programmes.

EU Issues

143. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the outcome of the most recent discussions he has had with the British Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Mr. Philip Hammond, and with the British Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Ms Theresa Villiers, in relation to the forthcoming referendum on British membership of the European Union; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45605/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): In discussions with all British ministers, I always stress the particular value we attach to the UK's membership of the European Union. That was the case when I last met Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond in London on 23 November. I explained to him why the UK's place in the EU matters as much

as it does to us and outlined our determination to be as helpful as we can be in the negotiations that lay ahead. This meeting was the third formal meeting between us in the last 12 months, with the previous two meetings having taken place in Dublin. We also meet more informally at meetings of EU Foreign Ministers and in other fora.

The British Government understands our approach to their relationship with the European Union. The subject regularly arises not just in my discussions with my UK counterpart but also in exchanges between the Taoiseach and Prime Minister Cameron and between our Minister of State for European Affairs and his British counterpart. Both the Taoiseach and I have also spoken publically in Britain about the potential negative implications for Ireland of a UK withdrawal from the Union to influential audiences such as the British Irish Association, the Confederation of British Industry and Chatham House.

We are working hard as well to ensure that the Northern Ireland dimension to this debate is taken fully into account by the UK government. That is because the Government believes that the EU has been a real force for good for everyone in the North, whether in terms of supporting the peace process or by helping to create jobs and growth. I have made this point in discussions with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Theresa Villiers, with whom I have worked closely since the summer of 2014. Earlier this month I also spoke at a conference at Queen's University Belfast along with the Northern Ireland Minister for Finance and Personnel, Arlene Foster. At that conference, I outlined why the uncertainty of a UK withdrawal from the EU would be bad not just for the North but for Ireland as a whole.

The immediate challenge – including at tomorrow's European Council – is to work with both the UK and our other 26 EU partners to reach an agreement that both addresses UK concerns and is acceptable to every EU Member State. While a deal is unlikely to be reached this week, we hope that the foundations can be put in place so that a solution can be achieved in early 2016.

The question of the UK's future within the European Union will, however, ultimately be decided by the British people. While Ireland has much at stake – and the Government will continue to make its voice heard in the debate – we need to remain respectful of the democratic process underway in our neighbouring country.

Humanitarian Aid

144. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the efforts he and his European Union counterparts have made in relation to the plight of refugees fleeing the Middle East and North Africa; the progress on developing an adequate and comprehensive European Union response programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45608/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The scale of the migration challenge facing the international community is enormous. The conflict in Syria - the biggest driver behind this year's migrant flows - has led to the world's largest humanitarian crisis. But the problem is bigger than Syria. An estimated 60 million displaced people worldwide are on the move, the highest since World War II. They are coming not just from Syria but from such places such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Gaza and a dozen or so countries in sub-Saharan and North Africa.

For most of this year Migration has been at the very top of the EU agenda. There have been no fewer than five special meetings of Justice and Home Affairs ministers devoted to migration while Heads of State and Government have debated the issue in three special councils. I and

my foreign minister colleagues have also addressed the issue many times this year.

In June, the Foreign Affairs Council launched EUNAVFOR Med, the EU's naval operation to disrupt the dangerous activities of people smugglers in the Mediterranean, which have tragically resulted in the loss of many lives. As the Deputy will know, the crews of the L.E. Niamh, Eithne and Samuel Beckett have done sterling work in saving more than 8,500 lives.

In September, the Government decided accept up to 4,000 asylum seekers and refugees as part of the European Commission's comprehensive plan to address the migration crisis.

As part of its efforts to develop a comprehensive strategy to address the refugee crisis, the EU organised two high level conferences earlier this year. On 8 October, a conference focusing on migration flows into the EU through the Eastern Mediterranean and Western Balkans route took place in Luxembourg attended by both JHA and Foreign Ministers. The Conference issued a Declaration endorsing a five-pronged approach to addressing the migration challenge.

On 11/12 November EU Heads of State and Government met their African counterparts at a migration summit in Valletta. They agreed to establish a Trust Fund to address the root causes of migration in Africa. The €1.8 billion Fund is to be augmented by EU member state contributions. Ireland is contributing €3m.

On 29 November, there was a key meeting of EU Heads of Government with Turkey in Brussels at which the EU agreed to provide a financial package worth €3 billion to help Turkey accommodate the more than two million refugees residing in the country. As part of the agreement there is to be a concerted effort by Turkey to stem the flow of irregular migrants through its territory. This agreement – or Joint Plan of Action – presents a real opportunity to stem the flow of such migrants into the EU.

Humanitarian Aid

145. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will provide additional funding for humanitarian aid for Syria and adjoining areas in view of the ongoing conflict, the appalling loss of life and the urgent need to get essential humanitarian aid to persons living in desperate conditions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45615/15]

146. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will raise at the next European Union Foreign Affairs Council the need for the European Union to provide additional funding to Syria and that region given the ongoing conflict, the appalling loss of lives and the urgent need to get humanitarian aid to persons living in desperate conditions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45616/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 145 and 146 together.

The world now faces unprecedented levels of humanitarian crisis, driven by conflict, chronic instability, and economic and environmental shocks. Globally, there are now more than 59 million people displaced, more than at any time since the Second World War.

Ireland is firmly committed to responding to the humanitarian needs of those affected by these crises. Our most significant humanitarian contribution in recent years has been for the people affected by the appalling conflict in Syria, which has created the world's largest humanitarian crisis. More than 250,000 Syrians have been killed, 6.6 million people are displaced within Syria, and over 4.2 million have had to flee the country in search of safety. Some 13.5

million people, well over half of Syria's population, are in need of urgent humanitarian assistance.

Ireland is particularly mindful of the impact of the crisis on Syria's immediate neighbours – Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Iraq – which have been generous hosts to huge numbers of desperate people, putting huge strain on their own resources.

We have been supporting efforts to assist refugees affected by the Syria crisis, providing needs-based humanitarian assistance since 2012.

Ireland's humanitarian aid is implemented by our UN, NGO and Red Cross partners, and has helped to provide food, shelter and medical care to those who need it.

At the Pledging Conference in Kuwait in March 2015, Ireland pledged €12 million in humanitarian assistance for the Syrian crisis this year. Earlier this week, I announced an additional package of €2.95 million in humanitarian assistance to Syria and the region, bringing the total given in 2015 to €13 million.

With the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance within Syria greatly exceeding the number of refugees who have fled their home country, I have ensured that half of this package is focused on their needs.

With more than 2 million children in Syria, and 700,000 across the region not in school, there is a high risk of creating a generation of under-qualified and disaffected youth. To support the No Lost Generation initiative, which supports education, child protection and engagement of adolescents in their communities, €1 million goes to UNICEF.

Additionally, €500,000 goes to UNICEF in Jordan for water and sanitation work in the Azraq refugee camp, improving living conditions for Syrian refugees there, and increasing sustainability in this long drawn out crisis.

By the end of 2015, Ireland will have provided over €42 million to the Syrian people since the beginning of the crisis. I am determined that Ireland will continue to provide appropriate humanitarian assistance to the Syrian people.

The Syria crisis remains high on the European agenda. On 23 September last, an Emergency European Council was held to address the crisis, resulting in further funding being given. Since then, the European Council of 15 October, and the informal European Council of 15 November have discussed the crisis in the context of migration. The Foreign Affairs Councils of 12 October and 16 November both featured Syria prominently on their agendas.

The EU, collectively, is the world's largest humanitarian donor, and has been a leading donor in response to the Syrian crisis. The EU (European Commission and Member States) has provided some €4.4 billion in humanitarian assistance to the Syrian people since the beginning of this crisis. This crisis will remain on the EU's agenda, and will remain a humanitarian priority for the EU, as it is for Ireland.

Research and Development Funding

147. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Education and Skills following the publication of Innovation 2020, the amount of her 2016 departmental budget which she will allocate to basic research under the new frontier research fund; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45521/15]

148. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Education and Skills following the publication of Innovation 2020, the persons who will be allowed to apply under the new frontier research fund; when applications will open and close; the amount of moneys that have been allocated for this fund over the course of the strategy, by year; the maximum grant amount that can be drawn down per year; the type of grants that will be dispersed, including Ph.D and post-doctoral research; the scientific disciplines which will be accommodated for grant funding; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45524/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 147 and 148 together.

Under Innovation 2020 a new competitive fund to support researchers to undertake project-based frontier research, and to develop as Principal Investigators, is to be established by the Irish Research Council. Funding will be awarded on the basis of the excellence of the research proposals, assessed through a rigorous and international peer-review process. It will be open to all disciplines and career stages post PhD over the implementation of the programme. In 2016, the IRC will begin developing the parameters of the programme along with its terms and conditions, with the intention to launching the first call for proposals in the latter half of 2016. Given the timeframe from the call issue to the award of grants, no funding implications arise in 2016. The funding requirements for the IRC, including the new research frontiers programme, will be agreed in the context of the 2017 estimates process.

SOLAS Training and Education Programmes Data

149. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of persons engaged in Solas full-time training jobs in each year since it was established, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45527/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Damien English): SOLAS was established in October 2013. The operation of SOLAS Training Centres was transferred to the Education and Training Boards under two phases in January and July 2014. Since the transfer, training centre staff are now employees of the Education and Training Boards.

The most recent statistics available are for quarter two 2015. These statistics show there were 295.78 whole time equivalents employed as instructors/tutors in training centres. The equivalent figure for 2014 was 280.37.

Teaching Council of Ireland

150. **Deputy Jonathan O’Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills why the Teaching Council of Ireland is proposing to abolish regulation 3 which allows Association Montessori Internationale and Sarojini Naidu Medical College graduates to teach in special schools and classes and in resource and as substitutes in mainstream schools; the percentage of teaching staff in special schools who fall under regulation 3; the educational basis and evidence supporting this decision; and the timeframe in which she expects this decision to be implemented. [45485/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Under the Teaching Council Act, the Teaching Council is the body with statutory authority for the registration of teachers. Teachers are registered under The Teaching Council [Registration] Regulations 2009.

As the statutory professional standards body for teaching in Ireland, the Council is of the view that all teachers should be first and foremost qualified and registered as teachers in their given sector, whether primary or post primary.

The Deputy should note that the Teaching Council has not accredited any programmes from Sarojini Naidu Medical College. The data in relation to the employment of teachers in special needs schools is not available in my Department.

The Teaching Council is currently reviewing the Teaching Council [Registration] Regulations 2009 under the Teaching Council Act as amended in the Teaching Council (Amendment) Act 2015. The draft regulations will be submitted for the consent of the Minister in due course.

Summer Works Scheme Expenditure

151. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will allocate funding to a school (details supplied) in County Donegal under the summer works scheme, when she will announce when schools will be allocated funding under this scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45491/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I wish to advise the Deputy that commensurate with the level of funding available for the Summer Works Scheme, applications, including that from the school referred to by the Deputy, 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. It is my intention to publish a list of successful applicants at the end of February/early March 2016.

School Curriculum

152. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the specific rules she was referring to in the public comments she made when committing to erasing rule 68 regarding the place of religion in the primary school curriculum, where she stated that she was also going to eliminate any other rules that do not speak to the diverse and welcoming nature of our modern school system, or if she made these comments rhetorically; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45500/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The Deputy will be aware that the Report of the Advisory Group to the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector was published in April 2012. The Report recommended a review and updating of the Rules for National Schools and in particular, Rule 68.

As acknowledged in the Report, there is an overall context that many of the Rules are outdated and have been overtaken in whole or in part by legislation and directions in Department circulars.

At this point I have made no specific decision in relation to the Rules other than Rule 68. At the same time I have made it clear that the Rules generally must accord with the diverse and welcoming nature of our modern school system.

Schools Building Projects Status

153. **Deputy Helen McEntee** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a site for a school (details supplied) in County Meath has been confirmed. [45529/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I can confirm for the Deputy that the building project for the school in question will be constructed on the school’s existing site. The project is currently at an early stage of architectural planning and the stage 1 initial sketch design report was recently furnished to my Department for review. Upon completion of this review and subject to no issues arising, the project will be authorised to complete stage 2(a) which is the developed design stage, including the preparation of documentation to lodge for statutory approvals.

Schools Building Projects Status

154. **Deputy Noel Coonan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of stages involved in the construction of a school building from pre-start to finish; the details of what each stage entails; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45540/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The stages of architectural planning referred to by the Deputy arise from my Department’s design team procedures for the procurement of major capital projects. These are necessary to comply with Department of Finance guidelines which require that capital projects be fully designed prior to going to tender. They also ensure proper cost management of capital projects and facilitate compliance with statutory and public procurement requirements. At present, there are five stages involved in the delivery of major school projects which reflects the Capital Works Management Framework developed by the Department of Finance. The stages are as follows: Stage 1 - Preliminary Stage 2 - Design (which is divided into Stage 2a - Developed Sketch Scheme and Stage 2b - Detailed Design) Stage 3 - Tender Action, Evaluation and Award Stage 4 - Construction Stage 5 - Handover of Works and Final Account. An extract from my Department’s Design Team Procedures detailing each project stage is set out below for the Deputy’s information. The fully detailed Design Team Procedures are available on my Department’s website at www.education.ie.

Stage 1 Preliminary Design

The Design Team objectives for Stage 1 Preliminary Design are to:

Review all information provided whether as part of the Project Brief or otherwise and satisfy themselves that the project is viable

Establish and analyse all site factors and constraints which may impact on the location for the proposed works and the design and cost implications of each viable option/location

Where the project is in part or in total the repair/replacement of a building element(s), or a refurbishment project, to fully determine the scope and extent of the works necessary

Exclude impractical and unviable options/locations, collaboratively explore and assess the remaining options/locations available for meeting the project brief, and demonstrate by comparison with the other options, that the recommended option achieves an acceptable balance between the design (architectural, engineering and health & safety), educational, and economic requirements of the project

For details of the Stage 1 requirements refer to DTP2012 - Preliminary Design Stage 1 (available at www.education.ie).

These requirements are summarised as follows:

Immediately on appointment (within 2 weeks of appointment) the Design Team Leader is required to prepare a draft Detailed Project Programme

Concurrently the Design Team should start its site investigations and preparatory design work.

Having prepared a detailed project programme and satisfied himself/herself that the work necessary for a meaningful meeting will be completed in time, the Design Team Leader should agree a date for a Pre-Stage 1 meeting (through the appropriate Department Officer)

The purpose of the Pre-Stage 1 meeting between the relevant Department officials, Client and Design Team is to review and agree the design options and issues as well as to discuss and agree the project programme in order to permit the project to proceed without delays.

At the Pre-stage 1 meeting a preferred option will normally be agreed (See DTP2012 - Preliminary Design Stage 1 for further details).

The preferred option should now be developed taking into account any issues raised

Once the design has been developed as above, the Design Team needs to prepare a Stage 1 (summary) Report as set out in DTP2012 - Preliminary Design Stage 1.

The Design Team should now consult with the Client and agree the final Stage 1 proposals and Stage 1 (summary) Report prior to proceeding to the next stage.

This Summary Report should also be forwarded to the Department together with the Stage Completion Certificates (for fee payment and audit/record purposes only not for “approval”).

The Design Team are not authorised to proceed to Stage 2a unless they are satisfied that the project complies with the brief, is in accordance with the recommendations made at the Pre-Stage 1 meeting and can be constructed safely within the area and cost limits

Stage 2a Developed Design

The Design Team objectives for Stage 2a Developed Design are to:

Develop the design and accurately cost plan the option agreed with the Client to a stage where the project is fully cost planned and can be prepared to lodge for statutory approvals

Details of the Stage 2a requirements are set out in DTP2012 – Developed Design Stage 2a (available at www.education.ie).

These requirements are summarised as follows:

As soon as the Design proposals and Stage 1 Report have been signed off (in writing) by the Client, the Design team should proceed to Stage 2a.

The Developed Sketch Scheme should evolve from these Stage 1 design proposals and must not vary substantively in design, form, layout or area. The Design Team needs to consider all aspects of the developed design in an integrated manner and shall comply with the written brief (and any authorised amendments), the agreed Schedules of Accommodation, the approved cost limits, and Design Guidelines

Having satisfied themselves that the Design Team members can complete the work necessary for a Stage 2a meeting in time, the Design Team (through the Design Team Leader) should

confirm the date and time set for a Stage 2a Stakeholder meeting, or if necessary arrange an alternate date.

The Design Team shall comply with all Stage 2a requirements as set out in DTP2012 – Developed Design Stage 2a and DTP-2012 Cost Control Procedures including pre-planning consultations and the preparation of a Stage 2a (Summary report).

On completion of Stage 2a, and prior to client consultation, the Design Team should be satisfied that the design proposals (agreed at Pre-Stage 1) as developed, can be constructed safely within the area and cost limits agreed.

The purpose of the Stage 2a meeting is to present the design proposals, cost implications and any other relevant issues to the relevant Department officials and client for discussion and comment.

The Client and their Design Team should ensure that sufficient information is available to fully explain the developed design, and should have copies of the relevant information available for distribution at the meeting.

The Design Team will also confirm the date for completion of Stage 2b.

The developed design proposals should now be amended to take into account the comments of the client and Department. The Design Team should then consult with the Client and agree the revised Stage 2a proposals and Report prior to proceeding to the next stage

Stage 2b Detailed Design

The Design Team objectives for Stage 2b Detailed Design are to:

- obtain all statutory approvals,
- prepare a set of fully detailed Tender Documents, and
- prepare an accurate pre-tender cost check/plan

Details of the Stage 2b requirements are set out in DTP2012 – Detailed Design Stage 2b and DTP-2012 Preparation of Tender Documents (available at www.education.ie).

These requirements are summarised as follows:

As soon as the developed design proposals have been completed and signed off (in writing) by the Client, the Design team should proceed to Stage 2b.

Any Brief Changes (e.g. abnormal costs arising from planning conditions) should be agreed prior to completion of the tender documents. [Amendments to the brief, area limits, cost limits or application of the guidance, not confirmed in writing by the Department, are not authorised changes and have no validity.]

Where the Restricted Procedure will be used for the appointment of Contractors, the Design Team and Client should seek such authorisation not less than 60 days before the anticipated completion date for Stage 2b.

On completion of Stage 2b, the Design Team (through the Client) should write to the Department confirming that Stage 2b has been completed in accordance with the brief (including any authorised brief changes) and requesting authorisation to proceed to tender

A copy of the Tender Documents (Volumes properly bound, labelled and paginated) and the

pre-tender cost check/plan should be included (for record purposes only). The Form of Tender, Contract Schedules, Instructions to Tender and Cost Check/Plan must be in hard copy. The Works requirements and Pricing Documents should be in electronic format (i.e. as a CD). All documentation should be under cover letter from the Project Leader and list each enclosure.

The Design Team should consult with the Client explaining to the Client what is included and what is not included in the documents and get written sign-off to the Tender Documents and Cost Plan.

The written authorisation of the Department is required prior to commencing Tender Action

On receipt of Departmental authorisation, the Design Team should proceed directly to tender.

Stage 3 Tender Action

Details of the Stage 3 requirements are set out in DTP2012 – Tender Action Stage 3 (available at www.education.ie).

These requirements are summarised as follows:

Once the Design Team has written sign-off from the Client and written authorisation to proceed to tender from the Department, the Design team should proceed immediately to Stage 3.

Where the Restricted Procedure is being used the Design Team will have completed the pre-qualification process and issued de-briefing letters.

Tenders should be evaluated on the basis of the lowest Comparative Cost of Tender. No quality criteria shall apply.

On completion of the examination of the tenders, the Design Team are required to prepare a preliminary report as set out in DTP2012 – Tender Action Stage 3.

The written authorisation of the Department must be obtained before issuing (a) a Letter of Intent and (b) a Letter of Acceptance

Once all the contract preconditions in the letter of intent have been met and the Department has given written authorisation to proceed to Contract, a Letter of Acceptance can be issued. This forms the contract and is the date for the calculation of the Contract Period.

Stage 4 Construction

Details of the Stage 4 requirements are set out in DTP2012 – Construction - Stage 4 and DTP-2012 - Cost Control Procedures (available at www.education.ie).

These requirements are summarised as follows:

All members of the Design Team are collectively responsible for the effective management of the project in order to achieve its completion on time and within budget.

The Design Team Leader (usually the Architect) is the Employer's Representative [ER].

The ER is responsible for all progress reports.

The ER does not have the authority for any breaches to the specified limitations and is responsible for any costs arising there-from. (The ER's authority is set out in the Conditions of Engagement and the Schedule to the building Contract.)

No Client requested change shall be permitted (whether within the ER's authority or not) without prior Department authorisation.

Overall cost control during construction is co-ordinated by the Design Team's Quantity Surveyor in consultation with the other members of the Design Team and in particular the ER

Interim Certificates based on the QS's recommendations (backed by advice from the other Design Team members where appropriate) are issued by the ER to the Contractor, and in turn by the Contractor (Original Certificates only), through the Client, to the Department for payment. There is no provision for the separate identification of amounts due to sub-contractors.

Contractor Claims shall be dealt with promptly in accordance with the Conditions of Contract. The ER should seek a monthly update on claims pending and should deal with any claims reasonably and fairly

Performance assessment on cost control will be carried out jointly on the Design Team.

Stage 5 Handover and Final Account

Details of the Stage 5 requirements are set out in DTP2012 – Final Account - Stage 5 and the DTP-2012 Cost Control Procedures (available at www.education.ie).

These requirements are summarised as follows:

The Design Team individually and collectively are required to effectively manage the Project, and with the co-operation of the Contractor achieve a satisfactory standard of Construction, achieve Substantial Completion of all elements of the Project by the Contract Section/Phase handover dates and overall Contract Completion Date. Substantial Completion Certification must only issue in accordance with the terms of Contract i.e. all elements of work are substantially completed

The Project Supervisor Design Process must arrange for the provision of two copies of the completed Safety File, one copy for the Client and one for the Occupier (i.e. the School principal).

Prior to hand over of the building/or part(s) thereof the Design Team shall explain the Design Concept to the occupiers so that maximum benefit can be gained from the facilities provided. They are also required to explain to the Client how to operate and maintain the building and its engineering services systems at optimum efficiency with particular emphasis on safety and energy conservation.

Under the Public Works Contracts the period for agreeing the Final Account is a maximum of 5 months. This comprises a maximum period of 2 months for the receipt of a Final Statement and a further 3 months to issue the penultimate certificate.

Refer to DTP-2012 Cost Control Procedures for the applicable cost control procedures.

The ER does not have the authority to issue Change Orders after the receipt of the Final Statement

On completion of the Defects Period, the Client, the School Authorities, and the Design Team shall agree and confirm in writing to the Department (through the Client) that the work is complete and all defects have been corrected within this period. The final certificate can now be issued.

On completion of the Defects Period, (having agreed with the Client that all defects have

been rectified), the Design Team are required to submit a Final Project Report to the Client (and through the Client to the Department).

A full set of final construction drawings shall be issued to the Department for record purposes (see DTP2012 – Final Account - Stage 5) with a final construction Schedule of Areas fully reconciled to the Brief

Performance assessment on quality of service (post substantial completion) and cost control will be carried out jointly on the Design Team.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

155. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if additional special needs assistant hours will be allocated to a school (details supplied) in County Kildare, given that an increased number has been added to the list of children with access to a special needs assistant; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45552/15]

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 has 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.

As this question relates to a specific school, I will arrange to have the matter referred to the NCSE for their attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Student Grant Scheme Applications

156. **Deputy John Lyons** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she was aware of a person (details supplied) who was refused a grant from Student Universal Support Ireland on

the grounds of insufficient documentation in regard to independent living when the person was entitled to a back-to-education allowance and satisfied the Department of Social Protection's rules for independent living; why the person was refused, given the person's compliance with all requests for documentation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45574/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): When considering whether a student meets the conditions to be assessed independently of his or her parents, grant awarding authorities are obliged to satisfy themselves beyond doubt that an acceptable degree of proof of independent living in the relevant period has been submitted by the grant applicant.

In exceptional circumstances, where it is not possible to produce such proofs of residence for demonstrable reasons, the awarding body may, at its discretion, agree to accept other documentary evidence that provides an acceptable degree of proof of independent living. For example, while an affidavit, if accompanied by other supporting documentation, may be considered as evidence of independent living, an affidavit in isolation is not considered acceptable as sole proof of residency. Individual circumstances should be discussed by an applicant with the grant awarding authority. If an individual applicant considers that she/he has been unjustly refused a student grant, she/he may appeal, in the first instance, to their awarding body. Where an individual applicant has had an appeal turned down, in writing, by their awarding body, 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 Grant Appeals Board.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

157. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the services she provides for children with autism in County Monaghan, the specific supports in place, the assistance and backup available to children and to their parents; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45577/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): My Department provides for a range of placement options and supports for schools which have enrolled pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in order to ensure that, wherever a child is enrolled, they will have access to an appropriate education.

Children with ASD may be enrolled in a mainstream school and can attend all mainstream classes. In such cases these children will receive additional teaching support through the learning support and/or the resource teacher and, where appropriate, will receive access to Special Needs Assistance and assistive technology if required.

In respect of children with ASD who cannot be accommodated in mainstream education, they may be enrolled in special classes or special schools where more intensive and supportive interventions are provided.

The Deputy will also be aware that the National Council for Special Education, NCSE, is responsible, through its network of local special educational needs organisers, SENOs, for allocating resource teachers and special needs assistants to schools to support students with special educational needs, including autism. It is also the role of the NCSE to make appropriate arrangements to establish special classes in schools in various geographical areas as required. The NCSE have advised that there are 8 special ASD classes in mainstream schools in Co. Monaghan. 3 of these are Early Intervention classes for children with ASD who are not yet school going age and 5 ASD classes are at primary school level. A full list of special classes is

available on the NCSEs website www.ncse.ie. The NCSE provides information for Parents of Children with Special Education Needs through its website and Pamphlet Series which inform parents and guardians of supports and services available for children and young people with ASD and their families. SENOs are also a valuable resource to parents in the following ways:

- Providing support and advice.
- Identifying possible school placements for children.
- Liaising with the school, the HSE and other services.
- Assisting in planning the transition of children to school, between schools and onwards from school. The Middletown Centre for Autism is an initiative jointly funded between my Department and the Department of Education in Northern Ireland. The Centre provides a comprehensive nationwide training service for parents and educational professionals. Parents can view the range of courses which the Centre has available through the website www.middletownautism.com. 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.

Schools Building Projects Status

158. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the long-sought new-build school to replace the current structure of the Holy Family school in Cootehill in County Cavan; if the project is beyond design stage; if the tendering stage has been reached; if the required funding has been approved to allow the project to proceed to construction in 2016; if works will commence in 2016, the alternative accommodation that has been arranged for pupils and teachers during construction; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45584/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The project to provide permanent accommodation for Holy Family School, Cootehill, Cavan is currently at Stage 2(a) (Developed Design stage) of the architectural planning process.

My Department officials recently met with the school authority and their design team to determine what issues, including the decant requirements, remain to be addressed in the design stages and the most effective means of addressing those issues.

As the Deputy is aware on Tuesday 17th November 2015 I announced details of the major school building projects where construction is expected to commence over the next 6 years. I am pleased to inform the Deputy that the major project for this school is included in this plan and is scheduled to commence construction in 2016. Information in respect of all projects on the 6 year plan is available on my Department's website www.education.ie.

Summer Works Scheme Applications

159. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will look favourably on an application under the summer works scheme submitted by a school (details supplied) in County Donegal, given that the playground is a health and safety risk and

given that it does not lend itself to all-inclusive play for all the children; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45594/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I wish to advise the Deputy that commensurate with the level of funding available for the Summer Works Scheme, applications including that from the school referred to by the Deputy 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. It is my intention to publish a list of successful applicants at the end of February/early March 2016.

Schools Building Projects Status

160. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide an appropriate school building for a school (details supplied) in Dublin 4 in time for the commencement of the school year in September 2017; the site where the school will be located; the status of the project; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45611/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I wish to advise the Deputy that a suitable permanent site for the school to which he refers has been identified and the acquisition process is underway.

Given the commercial sensitivities associated with land acquisitions generally I am not in a position to provide further details at this time. I can, however, assure the Deputy that the acquisition of a new site for the school is a priority for my Department and that the patron body, Educate Together, will be informed of the location for the school as soon as it is possible to do so.

Schools Building Projects Status

161. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she has concerns in regard to the planning application for a school (details supplied) in County Kildare, which has DEIS status and which is funded and due to go to build in early 2016, particularly with regard to any undue delays over ambiguity surrounding the requisite wastewater and surface water infrastructure required to facilitate a successful planning application; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45654/15]

162. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills who has responsibility for the financial and provision costs to provide the necessary wastewater and surface water infrastructure to facilitate the construction of a school (details supplied) at the earliest possible date. [45656/15]

163. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she established and resolved the outstanding impediments remaining in place to having a planning application lodged to Kildare County Council for a school (details supplied) in County Kildare which she has sanctioned and approved and which is included in the capital programme to go to construction in early 2016. [45657/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 161 to 163, inclusive, together. The school building project referred to by the Deputy is included on the current 5 year construction programme announced in 2012. It is listed on the programme to proceed to tender and construction in 2015/16.

The project is at an advanced stage of Architectural Planning. Stage 2(B) Detailed Design Stage which includes the applications for Planning permission, Fire Cert and Disability Access Cert and the preparation of Tender Documents. My Department officials and the design team have been working with the Local Authority to determine the full requirements for waste water and surface water infrastructure in advance of submitting the planning application. These infrastructural issues also involve engagement with Irish Water and the National Roads Authority. Further discussions will be required with each agency to address outstanding issues and to determine the most effective solutions possible. In the context of those ongoing discussions, it would be inappropriate to comment at this time on the cost elements of the required infrastructure.

Planning Issues

164. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government to investigate a proposal (details supplied) regarding flooding issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45504/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): I understand that this project comprising a cycleway proposal as well as flood alleviation works to address higher tides and sea levels was originally approved by An Bord Pleanála in 2011 under section 226 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, relating to foreshore developments.

Dublin City Council subsequently made some alterations to the cycleway aspects of their proposals which were progressed under the Part VIII requirements of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended, relating to local authority own developments. Planning approval for the revised proposals was granted by Dublin City Council in May 2013. The procurement of the contract for the undertaking of the works concerned is a matter for Dublin City Council.

Under section 30 of the Act, I am specifically precluded from exercising any power or control in relation to any particular planning case with which a planning authority, including An Bord Pleanála, is or may be concerned.

Private Residential Tenancies Board

165. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government on behalf of a person (details supplied), why some landlords of multi-unit developments are able to take advantage of an exemption from the Private Residential Tenancies Board and why some tenants are excluded from the board's protection; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45486/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): The Residential Tenancies Act 2004, as amended, regulates the tenant-landlord relationship in the private rented residential sector. The Private Residential Tenancies Board (PRTB) was established as an independent statutory body under the Act to operate a national tenancy registration system and to facilitate the resolution of disputes between landlords and tenants.

The Act applies to every dwelling that is the subject of a tenancy, subject to a limited number of exceptions. The dwellings to which the Act does not apply are set out in section 3(2) of

the Act, and include for example

- a dwelling that is used wholly or partly for the purpose of carrying on a business;
- a dwelling within which the landlord also resides;
- a dwelling the subject of a tenancy the term of which is over 35 years.

Where a dwelling is occupied by a person under a tenancy to which the Act does not apply or under an arrangement or agreement which is not a tenancy, such as instances where a bona fide licensing arrangement exists, the PRTB does not have any function in relation to such agreements or arrangements.

In circumstances where it is unclear as to whether a dwelling is the subject of a tenancy to which the Act applies, the PRTB can adjudicate on the question and has done so in the past. Where it finds that a tenancy is unregistered due to the landlord's wrongful claim that the Act does not apply to the dwelling, the PRTB can serve a notice requiring registration and failure to comply is an offence.

Planning Issues

166. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the measures he is taking to prevent corruption of the planning process at local and national level; if he will publish all recent reports on this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45535/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): On 15 December 2015, I published the Independent Planning Review of the performance of planning functions having regard to specific planning issues raised in respect of six planning authorities (Carlow, Cork, Galway and Meath County Councils and Cork and Dublin City Councils) prepared by McCabe Durney Barnes, together with my Department's Response Report to the recommendations. This provides for an expedited schedule to implement all recommendations of the report which I have accepted to be implemented through appropriate legislative, regulatory and policy level changes in 2016. Both reports are available to download on my Department's website at the following weblinks: <http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/DevelopmentandHousing/Planning/FileDownload,43873,en.pdf>. <http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/DevelopmentandHousing/Planning/FileDownload,43874,en.pdf>.

A separate review follows on from the Order made by the High Court on 14 June 2013, quashing that part of my Department's Planning Review Report (2012) relating to Donegal, following a settlement between my Department and the party concerned who had brought judicial review proceedings in respect of that part of the Report. The matter has been disposed of to the satisfaction of both sides. In light of these proceedings, my Department subsequently sought the advice of the Attorney General on how best to proceed in the case of issues raised in relation to planning matters in Donegal. Taking account of advice from the Office of the Attorney General my Department has appointed, on a non-statutory basis, Senior Counsel to prepare a review report in relation to these matters and a report is awaited.

In addition, I have received approval from Government to publish the Planning and Development (Amendment) (No. 2) Bill 2015 which will be available on the Houses of the Oireachtas website shortly. The Bill provides for the establishment of an Office of the Planning Regulator, which will be independent of my Department and whose primary functions will include powers to facilitate enhanced oversight of the planning system by undertaking assessments and evalua-

tions of local development plans, variations of development plans, local area plans and regional spatial and economic strategies to ensure compliance with proper planning and sustainable development particularly regional and national planning policy and guidelines; undertaking research, education and training programmes; and undertaking reviews of the organisation and the systems and procedures used by planning authorities or An Bord Pleanála in the performance of their planning functions under the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, including a review of any potential risks of corruption in the conduct of their functions.

Part 15 of the Local Government Act 2001 provides an ethics framework for both elected members and employees working in local government. The ethics framework imposes a statutory duty on all to maintain proper standards of integrity, conduct and concern for the public interest. There are requirements to submit annual declarations of interest and to also make a declarable interest when pertinent matters arise during the course of the business of the local authority. Elected members are prohibited from speaking or voting at meetings on issues where they have a beneficial interest while employees must refrain from seeking to influence a decision of a local authority in cases where they have a beneficial interest. The Act also prohibits elected members and employees from seeking, accepting or exacting any fee, reward or other favour for anything done by virtue of a person's office or employment. My Department has also issued codes of conduct under Part 15 of the Act for the guidance of elected members and employees in carrying out their functions.

Irish Water Administration

167. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government why his predecessor met a person (details supplied) on 27 February 2012 who was lobbying on behalf of a company; if the purpose of the meeting was to lobby for the company's interest in the Irish Water call centre contract, which was due to go to tender at that time; if he will release any minutes taken at the meeting; if it is appropriate that large corporations which subsequently go on to obtain large State contracts should have access to Ministers in this fashion, without a record of what was discussed being available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45539/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): As Irish Water is a commercial utility and a subsidiary of Ervia (formerly Bord Gáis Éireann), formed and registered under the Companies Act, neither I, as Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, nor my predecessor has had any role in relation to the procurement by Irish Water of external resources or service providers. These are operational matters for the company.

My predecessor as Minister received a request for a meeting with the company concerned and subsequently met with company representatives on 27 February 2012. Department records show that this was an introductory meeting where a profile of the company was provided to the Minister. As such, no minute was taken of the meeting.

The procurement of call centre services, which commenced with the publication of a contract notice in October 2012 and on foot of which a contract was awarded in May 2013, was wholly managed by Ervia/Irish Water, in compliance with public procurement rules.

Local Authority Funding

168. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community

and Local Government the funding provided to local authorities and the formula used in determining it for the provision of public lighting, by local authority, for each of the years 2011 to date; if he will significantly increase funding for this essential public safety need in 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45582/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): My Department does not provide specific funding allocations for public lighting. The provision and maintenance of public lighting is the responsibility of each individual local authority. Local authorities receive income from a variety of sources including grants from Central Government, Local Property Tax proceeds, commercial rates and other locally-raised charges.

It is a matter for each local authority to determine its own spending priorities, including funding towards the provision and maintenance of public lighting, having regard to both locally identified needs and available resources.

Departmental Expenditure

169. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the funding for flood damage remediation works that was sought by each local authority in 2014, in submissions to his Department after the January 2014 flooding, in tabular form; and the amount that was granted to each local authority. [45593/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The Government decided on 11 February 2014 to allocate funding of up to €69.5 million to local authorities in the areas worst affected by the first phase of severe weather between 13 December 2013 and 6 January 2014. The purpose of this was to support communities by restoring amenities, facilities and other public infrastructure which had been damaged.

In relation to funding sought by local authorities from my Department, capital costs totalling €13.1 million were estimated initially for the first phase of severe weather. For the second phase of severe weather, from 27 January to 17 February 2014, local authorities estimated a further €8.5 million in capital costs. To date, a total of €13.738 million has been recouped by local authorities on repair and remediation projects.

In relation to the Deputy's specific query, the amount estimated by each local authority for damage incurred during the winter of 2013/2014 that relates to my Department and the amount recouped by each local authority to date is set out in the following table.

Local Authority	Capital Estimated	Capital Recouped
Clare	6,279,248	1,020,928
Cork County	1,138,900	890,148
Cork City	43,000	20,000
Donegal	678,750	115,171
Galway County	3,011,755	2,156,496
Galway City	612,875	1,134,825
Kerry	1,045,340	1,135,561
Kilkenny	55,000	70,296
Limerick City	430,000	1,026,024
Longford	15,000	15,000
Louth	4,675	-

Local Authority	Capital Estimated	Capital Recouped
Mayo	784,000	784,000
Meath	2,500	2,500
Offaly	15,000	15,000
Sligo	397,700	462,130
Waterford	4,890,000	4,890,000
Wexford	2,222,000	-
Wicklow	61,168	-
Total	21,686,911	13,738,079

Forbairt na nOileán

170. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Comhshaoil, Pobail agus Rialtais Áitiúil i bhfianaise na bhfreagraí a thug sé dom i dtaobh fhorbairt na cé ar Inis Oírr ar an 10ú lá de mhí Dheireadh Fómhair agus ar an 8ú lá de mhí na Nollaig, cén uair a bhfuil sé i gceist aige dul i mbun comhráití leis an Aire, Teachta Heather Humphreys; an ndéanfar é sin as seo go ceann míosa; an bpléifear maoiniú an togra mar cheist le linn na gcomhráití sin; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [45613/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Níl aon athrú ó fhreagra an 8ú lá de mhí na Nollag uaim i dtaobh fhorbairt na Cé ar Inis Oírr faoin gClár Bonneagair agus Infheistíochta Caipitil, 2016-2021.

Renewable Energy Generation Targets

171. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the progress in achieving an overall target of 10% of transport energy coming from renewable resources by 2020, if the target will be reached; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45466/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): The 2009 Renewable Energy Directive sets all Member States a binding target that at least 10% of the energy used in the transport sector must come from renewable sources by 2020. Ireland aims to meet this target mainly through the increased use of sustainable biofuels with electric vehicles also making a small contribution.

The Biofuels Obligation Scheme was introduced in July 2010 as the primary means through which Ireland would meet the transport target and is the principal support for the uptake of biofuels in Ireland. The scheme works by obligating road transport fuel suppliers to bring increasing amounts of biofuel to the transport fuel market. This has seen increased amounts of biofuel used in Ireland since the scheme was introduced and, in 2014, almost 167 million litres of biofuels were placed on the Irish transport fuel market.

In addition, the Electric Vehicle Grant Scheme supports and incentivises, through grants of up to €5,000, the deployment of electric vehicles in Ireland. These grants are in addition to the Vehicle Registration Tax reliefs of up to €5,000 which apply to electric vehicles (EVs). In addition, where technically feasible, customers who qualify for the grant also qualify for a free domestic charge point installed by the ESB. In 2015, 547 new EVs have been supported through the Electric Vehicle Grant Scheme which represents more than half of the total of the 1,082 EVs supported since the programme began in 2011.

In 2014, 5.2% of transport energy requirements were from renewable sources.

Rural Broadband Scheme

172. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the progress made since the rural broadband scheme was introduced and when 3 mobile received the contract; if the promise of 30 Mb speeds for all houses by 2018 is on track, how was the contract framed with 3 mobile to allow it to charge a premium of more than 3,000%; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45513/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): I refer the Deputy to my response to Question No. 597 of 15 December 2015.

The National Broadband Scheme (NBS) expired on 25 August 2014, in line with State aid clearance for the Scheme. Subsequent to its expiry, the specified NBS broadband service is no longer being provided by “3” in its capacity as the NBS service provider.

I have no role in relation to the provision of retail services by “3” in its commercial capacity.

The provision of electronic communications services, including the imposition of associated retail charges by service providers, occurs within a fully liberalised market. Regulation of service providers to the extent permitted by law is a statutory function of the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg), which is independent in the exercise of its functions.

Mining Industry

173. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if the Mining Board has made a decision on an application by a person (details supplied) in County Galway; if not, when it will issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45516/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): The Minerals Development Act 1979, vested in the Minister the exclusive right of working minerals in the State save for “excepted minerals”. The Mining Board is a Statutory Body established pursuant to Section 33 (1) of the Minerals Development Act 1940 and is independent in the exercise of its functions. Therefore, neither I as Minister nor my Department have any function in matters that come before it.

I understand that due to a family illness, one of the persons with an interest in this matter sought an adjournment of the process which was granted by the Board. In the intervening period the position of the Chairman and one ordinary member of the board have become vacant and the process of filling those vacancies is being progressed. I understand that once these appointments are complete, the Board will be in a position to finalise its consideration of the application.

North-South Interconnector

174. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his views on using an underground alternative on the North-South interconnector which employs high voltage direct current technology; and if he will make a statement on the

matter. [45621/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): As the Deputy will be aware, EirGrid made a formal application for the North-South Transmission Line project to An Bord Pleanála on 9 June 2015. I am constrained, therefore, in what I can say in relation to the project other than the provision of factual information.

The North-South Transmission Line project is part of EirGrid's plans to upgrade the national electricity transmission system. It is a strategically urgent project that will remove restrictions limiting cross-border power flows between Ireland and Northern Ireland and strengthen security of electricity supply throughout the island of Ireland.

Since the project was initiated, there have been numerous studies into the option of using an underground alternative for the project.

In July 2014, a Government-appointed Independent Expert Panel provided its opinion on whether EirGrid had adequately examined this matter. It found that the studies and work undertaken were compatible with the methodologies being employed on the Grid West and Grid Link projects.

On 27 March 2015 EirGrid published a new independently peer reviewed draft Strategy which found that there remains a clear need for the North-South Transmission Line project, and that the existing proposal for a 400kV overhead line remains the most appropriate solution for the project.

Military Aircraft Landings

175. **Deputy Anne Ferris** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of airport security services conducting spot-checks on the contents of planes landing at Irish airports for refuelling purposes to ensure that they are not carrying goods or munitions that make the landing contrary to Irish law; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45481/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Responsibility for the Air Navigation (Carriage of Munitions of War, Weapons and Dangerous Goods) Order 1973, as amended, is divided between my Department and the Irish Aviation Authority. My Department is responsible for issuing exemptions from Article 6 of the Order regarding munitions of war and the IAA is responsible for issuing exemptions from Article 7 regarding dangerous goods.

In response to the Deputy's specific question, the Airport operator does not have a role with regard to compliance of an air carrier with the Irish Statutory provisions in this regard.

Under the Order the carriage of munitions of war on board Irish registered aircraft is prohibited without an exemption from my Department. I have no reason to believe the provisions of the Order are not being complied with by air carriers. My understanding is that there have not been inspections carried out by authorised officers of my Department in relation to the carriage of munitions of war in recent years.

In relation to the carriage of dangerous goods in accordance with Article 7, I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the IAA for direct reply. If you do not receive a response within the next 10 working days please contact my Office.

Marine Safety

176. **Deputy John Paul Phelan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of a request from Kilkenny County Council that a derelict boat be removed from Balinagoth Quay in the Rower in County Kilkenny; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45550/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): My Department is not aware of the particular request referred to by the Deputy.

In general, the relevant legislation under my remit which applies to such cases is the Merchant Shipping (Salvage and Wreck) Act, 1993.

Section 52 (1), (3) and (4) of this Act provide powers to a Local Authority to remove and dispose of a wreck where the Authority believes that the wreck poses a threat to navigation or to the marine environment

The owners of such vessels are responsible for any costs arising from these actions under Section 53.

Road Projects Status

177. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the construction of a new bridge in Cockill in Buncrana in County Donegal, when the project will begin and be completed, the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45557/15]

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

While my Department has approved grant funding for the project, implementation is the responsibility of Donegal County Council subject to approval by my Department at various project stages. In this context I understand that the Council is endeavouring to implement the project as quickly as possible taking into account necessary preparatory work.

Sports Organisations

178. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 622 of 8 December 2015, if he will address matters (details supplied) regarding the National Sports Campus Development Authority and Sport Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45564/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): This is a matter for Sport Ireland. I have referred the Deputy's question to Sport Ireland for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to inform my office if a reply is not received within 10 days.

National Roads Authority Funding

179. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which the proposals as set out in the capital programme, with reference to the M7 and M9 Naas and Newbridge bypass, Sallins bypass, Osberstown interchange, Monread Road roundabout, are prioritised; the anticipated schedule for these works; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45630/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As I outlined to the Deputy in my reply to Question No. 177, reference 39738/15, of 11 November 2015, as Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects (including the N7) is a matter for the Transport Infrastructure Ireland (formerly known as the NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with Kildare County Council. 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. As regards regional and local roads, responsibility for implementation of improvement projects rests with the relevant local authority which is Kildare County Council in this instance.

As you are aware the transport element of the Capital Plan provides that work will commence on several roads projects which are targeted at removing critical bottlenecks or upgrading inadequate sections of road, including the M7 widening and the Sallins Bypass. Kildare County Council is responsible for the construction of the Osberstown Interchange.

In this context, TII is assessing how best to progress national projects included in the 7 year transport element of the Capital Plan taking into account annual budget allocations. The time-frame for progressing individual projects will be decided once that process is completed.

Tourism Policy

180. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans for the development and growth of the tourism sector over the next five years, with particular reference to the development of various tourist trails; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45631/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): My Department's plans for the development of the tourism sector have been published and set out in the policy statement "People Place and Policy - Growing Tourism to 2025" and I am currently chairing the Tourism Leadership Group to develop an action plan to implement the policy. I plan to launch that action plan early in the New Year. In that regard, my Department's role in relation to tourism lies primarily in the area of national policy. It is not involved in the administration of tourism-related funding programmes or in providing support to specific tourism attractions such as trails, which are the responsibility of Fáilte Ireland.

Accordingly, I have referred the Deputy's question to Fáilte Ireland for further information and direct reply. Please contact my private office if you do not receive a reply in ten working days.

Rail Network Expansion

181. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which the commuter rail services will be augmented, arising from his announcement in respect of the capital programme, over the next ten years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45632/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Capital Plan 2016 - 2022 makes provision for the first phase of a multi-phase DART expansion programme, to include the extension of the DART line to Balbriggan and the design and planning phases of the proposed expansion of DART services to Maynooth in the west and Hazel-hatch in the southwest.

A major DART service expansion is also planned for early 2016. The service enhancement in response to continuing passenger growth will include DART service at 10-minute frequency on weekdays; earlier start times for DARTS, extra morning peak services from Dundalk/Drogheda and a revised Dublin/Belfast Enterprise schedule.

Also, the re-opening of the Phoenix Park Tunnel line, together with ongoing resignalling works between Connolly and Grand Canal Dock will allow commuters on the Kildare rail line to have the option of direct services to the south city area served by Tara, Pearse and Grand Canal Dock Rail Stations. The new services on this line will commence in Autumn 2016.

Transport Infrastructure Provision

182. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which he will prioritise road and rail improvements, as identified in the capital programme, to progress over the next ten years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45633/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Under the Government's new Capital Plan *'Building on Recovery Infrastructure & Capital Investment 2016-2021'*, the public transport programme included in the 7 year transport element of the Plan will reach €3.6bn. This will allow for €2.6bn investment to be prioritised for essential 'steady state' maintenance and asset renewal of the public transport system including:

- An on-going maintenance programme to ensure the safety and efficiency of the rail network;
- Bus fleet replacement and capacity enhancement;
- Upgrading of Bus Corridors; and
- The completion of the Luas Cross City project in Dublin;

Funds are also being committed for a range of measures which will help to alleviate traffic congestion and promote modal shift in the short term, including the opening of the Phoenix Park Tunnel in 2016 to bring some scheduled passenger services on the Kildare Line to Connolly Station; improvements to the DART service with increased frequencies and capacity; building additional cycle lanes and improving existing lanes and continuing with the smart technological upgrades which enhance public transport and encourage more people to use the public transport network.

A further €1bn will be invested to address growing congestion resulting from economic recovery and population growth. Works will include the completion of the City Centre Resignalling Programme for the rail network and the construction of a new Central Traffic Control Centre for commuter and intercity rail. This additional funding will also enable major transport projects, including new Metro North and DART Expansion Programme, to proceed.

With regard to roads projects, the transport element of the Capital Plan provides that work will commence on several roads projects which are targeted at removing critical bottlenecks or upgrading inadequate sections of road. In this context, Transport Infrastructure Ireland (in relation to national roads) and my Department (in relation to regional and local roads) is assessing how best to progress projects over the 7 years of the plan taking into account annual budget allocations. The progression of projects which have not yet received planning approval will of course be conditional on achieving the necessary approvals. The timeframe for progressing individual projects will be decided once TII's assessment process is completed.

The Government proposes to undertake a Mid-Term Review of the new Capital Plan, which will take stock of progress and provide the Government with an opportunity to reaffirm priority projects. This Review will also provide the Government with an opportunity to consider the scope for increased levels of investment, should Ireland's economic growth and fiscal progress exceed the present forecasts, and the next Capital Plan (post-2021) will also be formulated in that context.

Tourism Promotion

183. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport how he is enhancing this country's position as an international conference venue with obvious benefit to the tourism sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45634/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The matter raised is an operational matter for the Board and management of Fáilte Ireland in the first instance, working with Tourism Ireland, which promotes the island of Ireland as a visitor destination overseas including through its network of overseas offices.

I have referred the matter to Fáilte Ireland and, in relation to activities in overseas markets, Tourism Ireland, for direct reply to the Deputy. Please contact my private office if replies are not received within ten working days.

Tourism Data

184. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of tourists who have visited this country in each of the past five years to date; the degree to which he has identified the future growth opportunities for all segments of the tourism sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45635/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): While overall responsibility for publication of statistics lies with the Central Statistics Office, according to the CSO, the number of visits to Ireland for each of the past 5 years were as follows:

2010=6,037,100

2011=6,505,200

2012=6,517,200

2013=6,985,900 and

2014=7,604,400.

Latest official data on overseas travel from the CSO shows an increase of 12.8% in over-

seas visits to Ireland for the first ten months of 2015 compared to the same period in 2014.

The Government's Tourism Policy Statement "People, Place and Policy – Growing Tourism to 2025" was launched in March of this year. It acknowledges that generating increased levels of overseas revenue is key for the future of Irish tourism. The main targets contained in the Tourism Policy Statement, to be achieved by 2025, are as follows:

- Overseas tourism revenue to increase to €5 billion net of inflation, compared to €3.5 billion in 2014;
- Overseas visits to Ireland to increase to ten million, compared to 7.6 million in 2014; and
- 250,000 people to be employed in the tourism sector, compared to 205,000 at present.

Earlier this year, I appointed a Tourism Leadership Group, to put in place a Tourism Action Plan that will set out the actions required in the period to 2018 to achieve the overall objectives in "People, Place and Policy – Growing Tourism to 2025" and ensure the strong growth experienced in recent years continues. I intend to publish the Tourism Action Plan in the first quarter of 2016.

Hotel Accommodation

185. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if adequate hotel accommodation is available in all regions; with a view to ensuring the ability of the sector to cater for the growing needs of tourists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45636/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): According to Fáilte Ireland's most recent accommodation occupancy statistics, for January to September 2015, hotel room occupancy in Dublin stood at 77%, whereas hotel occupancy in the rest of Ireland was 67%.

These statistics indicate that the country as a whole has sufficient stock of hotel accommodation to meet the needs of the industry. However, analysis of recent trends in occupancy levels and the impact of increasing demand indicates that we will require additional capacity in some parts of the country - in particular Dublin City Centre. Failure to address such capacity constraints could impact negatively on targets in the "Destination Dublin" strategy and in the Tourism Policy Statement, "People, Place and Policy - Growing Tourism to 2025".

To broaden our understanding of the situation and inform consideration of appropriate responses, Fáilte Ireland recently commissioned an independent assessment of the potential supply of visitor accommodation in Dublin up to 2020 and I am informed that the report is being finalised.

Tourism Promotion

186. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which particular segments of tourism continue to be addressed with a view to ensuring that this country remains an attractive location for the entire tourism strata. [45637/15]

187. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which this country can be marketed abroad to host major sporting events with consequent benefit to the tourism industry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45638/15]

188. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which this country can be marketed abroad as a suitable location for activity recre-

ational tourism; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45639/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 186 to 188, inclusive, together.

Research that has been carried out on behalf of the tourism agencies and tourism industry has found that certain market segments have a higher likelihood to select Ireland as a destination. These are categorised as follows:

- “Culturally Curious”: Travellers in the over 45 age group taking a holiday with their partner, who wish to expand their experience by exploring new landscapes, history and culture.

- “Great Escapers”: These tend to be younger and are specifically interested in rural holidays. Great Escapers are on holiday to take time out, and experience nature at close range.

- “Social Energisers”: Younger visitors who like to holiday in groups or as couples. They may be friends or colleagues looking for an exciting trip to a new and vibrant destination.

Tourism Ireland’s overseas marketing activity is weighted towards these segments in order to provide the best return on marketing investment.

With regard to the marketing of Ireland as a destination for major sporting events or activity recreational tourism, these are operational matters for the tourism agencies Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland and I have no role or function in this regard. Therefore, I have referred the Deputy’s Question to the tourism agencies for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive replies within ten working days.

Regional Airports

189. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which he foresees an enhanced role for the regional airports in the context of business and recreational travel; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45640/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The National Aviation Policy which was published by my Department in August last acknowledges the role played by the regional airports of Donegal, Ireland West Airport Knock, Kerry and Waterford due to a level of international connectivity that they bring to a region for the tourism and business sectors. The Policy confirms that these four airports are being given the opportunity to grow to a viable, self-sustaining, position and in this regard, Exchequer supports under our new Regional Airports Programme 2015-2019 for safety and security related projects and activities at these airports will be continued where appropriate. It is up to the airports being supported to exploit all opportunities in the context of business and recreational travel to expand their level of connectivity to other regions.

Road Network

190. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has examined the need for the development of the extension of the motorway network to the regions, with particular reference to the need to facilitate economic expansion on a regional basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45641/15]

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 rela-

tion to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) formerly the National Roads Authority (NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2007 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

The transport elements of the Capital Plan in the period to 2022 were announced in September and decisions on road projects included in the Capital Plan were framed by the conclusions reached in my Department's Strategic Investment Framework for Land Transport (SFILT). This report highlighted the importance of maintenance and renewal of transport infrastructure together with targeted investments to enhance the existing network through improving connections to seaports, to poorly served regions, to large-scale employment sites, and addressing critical safety issues. Importantly, the Plan includes projects targeted at removing critical bottlenecks subject to planning. In framing the Capital Plan choices had to be made given the overall funding envelope available.

Maintenance and renewal of the road network continues to be the main priority and €4.4 billion of the planned €6 billion road capital budget will be spent on such essential work.

I appreciate that this will not address all demands for road renewal and improvement but it does strike in my view a reasonable balance given the available capital envelope and very importantly over the period of the Plan capital funding for land transport, including roads, will be built up towards the levels needed to support adequate maintenance and development.

Tourism Employment Data

191. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which the number of persons employed in the tourism sector has fluctuated in each of the past eight years to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45642/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Central Statistics Office's official count of direct employment in 'Accommodation and food service activities', a category which includes hotels, restaurants, bars, canteens and catering, was 139,800 in 2014 (7.3% of total employment). This estimate of employment is based on the CSO Household Survey and the jobs identified are defined as 'the respondent's main job' and include both full-time and part-time.

Fáilte Ireland estimate total employment in the tourism sector at approximately 205,000. This estimate includes an additional category of tourism services and attractions which is not covered by the CSO. I have referred the Deputy's question to Fáilte Ireland for any further information on how this estimate has fluctuated in recent years. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Airport Passenger Data

192. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of passengers who travelled through Dublin, Shannon, Cork, Ireland West Airport Knock, Kerry, Donegal, and Waterford airports in each of the past five years in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45647/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The information requested by the Deputy is outlined in the following table.

-	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010
Dublin	21,712,169	20,167,783	19,099,649	18,740,593	18,431,064

-	2014	013	2012	2011	2010
Cork	2,144,476	2,258,005	2,340,115	2,361,947	2,425,131
Shannon	1,639,315	1,400,032	1,395,402	1,656,504	1,755,885
Knock	703,265	665,393	685,781	654,553	589,183
Donegal	35,415	33,768	29,326	40,100	46,915
Kerry	295,251	306,042	286,442	310,905	383,866
Waterford	34,607	28,209	76,554	81,521	104,143

In recognition of the need to have access to statistical information on the aviation sector to assist in informing, developing and monitoring aviation policy, the National Aviation Policy for Ireland, which I published last August, includes an action (Action 8.1) that my Department will publish basic statistical information on our website by end 2015. The statistics for Quarter 3, 2015 will be published on my Department's website, www.dttas.ie next week, and these figures will be updated quarterly thereafter.

EU Directives

193. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the regulations that she has laid down on the cleaning of rivers, if she will review these regulations, given the recent flooding; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45487/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Ireland, like all EU Member States, is bound by the requirements of the EU Habitats and Birds Directives. These Directives ensure the protection of endangered habitats and species, which have been selected for conservation within Special Areas of Conservation or Special Protection Areas. These Directives have been transposed into Irish law, primarily through the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011.

Under these Regulations, my consent, as Minister, may be required in some instances for alteration to the bed or banks of watercourses and waterbodies. However, in most cases, such works require the consent of other authorities, such as the Office of Public Works. In undertaking or consenting to works, the relevant authorities must comply with the legal obligations of the relevant EU Directives, as transposed into Irish law.

In the exercise of their functions, all public authorities have a responsibility to ensure the conservation of protected habitats and species and to ensure Ireland's compliance with its legal obligations.

In order to address the legal complexity, my Department worked closely with the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, the Office of Public Works, local authorities and other agencies of the State that have responsibilities regarding those Directives and Acts to address as expeditiously as possible the steps that needed to be taken to address the damage caused by storms and flooding in late 2013 and 2014. This led to the publication of a "*Guide to Works and Development Consents for Repairing Infrastructure Damaged in Storms or other Emergency Events*". This guide was published in early 2014 by the National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Planning, with input and advice from several Departments, including my own Department.

In the context of the recent floods, my Department has been attending the meetings at the National Emergency Coordination Centre to contribute, as appropriate to the response.

Flood Prevention Measures

194. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the discussions she has had with agencies of her Department and the Office of Public Works in relation to the management of the River Deel, County Mayo, and on to the presence of freshwater mussels therein; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45488/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I understand that the Deputy may be referring to a proposal to develop a flood alleviation scheme on the River Deel. This Scheme is being developed by the Office of Public Works (OPW). The proposed development is located within and adjacent to a European site and various protected habitats and species therein are protected under Irish and European law, including the Freshwater Pearl Mussel.

The planning and environmental team acting on behalf of the OPW contacted my Department in 2014 seeking a consultation on the environmental assessment requirements with regard to this project, including an Environmental Impact Assessment scoping. My Department provided observations and information in relation to the environmental assessment requirements, including in respect of the Natura Impact Statement, which must be prepared in order to facilitate the undertaking of an Appropriate Assessment by the relevant consent authorities in due course. My officials met with the project team earlier this year to assist them further in their preparation in this regard.

In the context of the recent floods, my Department has been attending the meetings at the National Emergency Coordination Centre to contribute, as appropriate to the response.

Clár Forbartha Tuaithe

195. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Ealaíon, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta an raibh an tAire Comhshaoil, Pobail agus Rialtais Áitiúil i dteagmháil léi maidir le forbairt na Cé in Inis Oírr, ó tharla go ndúirt sé liom ar an 6ú lá de mhí Dheireadh Fómhair agus ar an 8ú lá de mhí na Nollag go mbeadh sé ag dul i mbun comhráití léi i dtaobh na ceiste seo; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [45612/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh): Is féidir liom a chur in iúl don Teachta go raibh plé iomlán agus fiúntach agam le grúpaí éagsúla ar Inis Oírr nuair a thug mé cuairt ar an oileán sin ar 10 Nollaig. I measc na nithe a pléadh, bhí forbairt na cé ar an oileán, an tseirbhís aeir, cúrsaí iascaireachta agus saincheisteanna eile a bhaineann le saol na n-oileánach. Tá oifigigh ó mo Roinnse i dteagmháil leis an Roinn Comhshaoil, Pobail agus Rialtais Áitiúil maidir le forbairt na cé ar Inis Oírr. Mar is eol don Teachta, ar ndóigh, is cúram do Chomhairle Contae na Gaillimhe cé Inis Oírr.

Clár Forbartha Tuaithe

196. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Ealaíon, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta Ealaíon, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta cén uair a bhfuil sé i gceist aici go gcasfaidh an tAire Stáit McHugh le hionadaithe ó phobal Inis Meáin, mar atá geallta aige, chun forbairt Ché an Chalaídh Mhóir a phlé leo; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [45614/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh): Mar is eol don Teachta, is cúram do Chomhairle Contae na Gaillimhe Cé an Cha-

laidh Mhóir ar Inis Meáin. É sin ráite, tá mé sásta, ar ndóigh, bualadh le toscaireacht ón oileán maidir leis an gcé ach dáta do chruinniú dá leithéid a aontú leo. Tá sé sin curtha in iúl agam d'ionadaithe Inis Meáin.

Turf Cutting Compensation Scheme Payments

197. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht when payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Cavan in respect of the purchase of bog under the cessation of turf cutting scheme; if this application will be finalised without further delay as it has been ongoing for years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45622/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The individual referred to in the Deputy's Question applied to sell his interest in land within a raised bog special area of conservation, under the voluntary bog purchase scheme administered by my Department.

The applicant has applied to sell both freehold title and a turbary right. My Department, in conjunction with the Chief State Solicitor's Office, has been investigating the position in relation to the turbary right.

The Chief State Solicitor's Office has been in contact with the vendor's solicitor regarding the turbary right and a reply is awaited. My Department will ask that Office to contact the solicitor again and will also advise the applicant of the current position in relation to the sale.