

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 4, inclusive, answered orally.

Questions Nos. 5 to 24, inclusive, resubmitted.

Question No. 25 answered with Question No. 4.

Questions Nos. 26 to 48, inclusive, resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 49 to 58, inclusive, answered orally.

Public Procurement Regulations

59. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if there is sufficiently robust oversight in relation to State procurement and contracts to ensure that all those contracted to do works or to provide services to the State are fully compliant in areas such as tax, social protection, health and safety; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1943/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): It is the responsibility of each contracting authority to ensure that contracts are awarded to compliant businesses through the standard procedures contained in the procurement process. Thereafter the conditions of contract and the legislation governing the referenced areas ensure compliance, with oversight undertaken by the contracting authority concerned and the appropriate statutory bodies as necessary.

Contracting authorities set down the minimum standards for those applying for public contracts in the pre-qualification stage of a tender competition. Compliance with tax and social welfare requirements is dealt with under the criterion covering the personal situation of the applicant. Specifically in relation to works, the duties imposed on clients by the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Construction) Regulations 2013 are dealt with as part of the pre-qualification and award stage of the procurement process. Competency is dealt with in the pre-qualification stage by assessing the applicant's qualifications and experience whereas the question of adequate resources falls under both the pre-qualification and award stages of a procurement process.

Self-declarations may be permitted at the early stage of the pre-qualification process to reduce the administrative burden on both businesses and public bodies. However, successful tenderers or successful candidates in the case of a restricted procedure are required to provide the pre-determined evidence in support of those declarations, a failure to provide the required evidence will result in a rejection of their tender on the basis of non-compliance.

Tax compliance is further enforced through the requirement for a current tax clearance certificate to be produced prior to the award of the contract and for any payments thereunder.

The Public Works Contract also makes provision for deductions from payments in accordance with the legislation governing taxation in that sector. Health and Safety legislation is underlined and enforced throughout the Public Works Contract by enshrining legal requirements as conditions of contract so that serious health and safety breaches may be relied upon as breach of contract leading to termination.

These are in addition to the remedies contained in law which are enforced by the appropriate statutory bodies who possess the necessary powers to investigate and to bring proceedings.

Public Sector Staff Remuneration

60. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the public sector posts, including posts in commercial State companies and posts as Government advisers, that he has approved a breach of a pay-cap for. [1949/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): In June 2011, the Government introduced a general pay ceiling of €200,000 for future appointments to higher positions across the public service and a general pay ceiling of €250,000 for future appointments to CEO posts within Commercial State Companies. No sanctions have been issued for new appointments in excess of these pay ceilings.

When considering how to best implement a reduction in pay to CEOs in a fair and balanced manner, I decided that instead of just applying a €250,000 cap, which is a crude instrument that only affects pay rates above that figure, I would reduce the salary ranges that apply to CEO salaries which has the effect of both reducing the salary for all CEOs in an proportionate manner while maintaining the “weightings” between each Company.

The appointment of Special Advisers requires the approval of Government in accordance with section 11 of the Public Service Management Act 1997. Special Advisers have been employed by Ministers of successive Governments and perform an essential function in providing expert advice, expertise and insights on the key strategic issues facing Ministers.

The current Guidelines provide that Special Advisers are to be placed on the Principal Officer (standard) scale, which currently runs from €75,647 at the minimum to €87,258 at the maximum. They provide that appointments are to be on the first point on the scale except where I approve a higher starting salary. Therefore, in cases where a Special Adviser’s basic pay prior to the appointment was greater than the minimum of the Principal Officer (standard scale), it is open to Ministers to seek sanction from me to appoint the person to a higher starting salary.

I would like to point out that that separate arrangements may apply to the staffing requirements of the Offices of the Taoiseach and the Tánaiste.

Infrastructure and Capital Investment Programme

61. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will fund strategic infrastructural projects through the concept of Government development bonds; if such a proposal will remove the charge from the Government’s balance sheet, with particular reference to areas likely to require urgent and strategic investment, such as the public authority housing programme, a nationally co-ordinated arterial drainage and flood relief

programme or other areas of infrastructural deficiency needing urgent attention; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1921/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The key issue faced by the Government in seeking to respond to the housing crisis or the recent flooding, etc., is not related to the availability of funding, but rather to the fiscal space available to the Government under the fiscal rules of the Stability and Growth which restrict the Government's ability to increase expenditure, including on capital projects. Any funding that would be raised through the issuing by Government of a new Development Bond, as suggested in the question, would be on-balance sheet in General Government terms. As a result, any such funding would have no impact on the fiscal space available to the Government and would not provide any additional capacity for further Exchequer expenditure without equivalent spending cuts in other areas or tax increases, in order to continue to comply with the fiscal rules.

The Deputy will recognise that maintaining fiscal sustainability and economic stability under the Government's fiscal framework will ensure that Ireland retains the hard-won restored confidence of international financial markets to meet its ongoing funding needs. This is central to the continuance of Ireland's economic recovery, securing further reductions in unemployment, achieving further gains in living standards and ensuring the continued development of our public services.

Flood Relief Schemes

62. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans for flood relief measures in 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1920/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): The Government has allocated €80.746 m in 2016 for the Office of Public Works (OPW) overall Flood Risk Management Programme of which €52.561m is for the continued implementation of the OPW's comprehensive programme of capital flood relief works. There are currently five major schemes at construction in Bray, Co Wicklow, River Dodder, Dublin, South Campshires, Dublin, Ennis Lower, Ennis and Phases 2, 3 and 4 in Waterford City. There are a further 26 schemes at design and planning stage and, of these, it is anticipated that construction works on schemes in Claregalway, Co Galway, Bandon and Skibbereen, Co Cork, Templemore, Co Tipperary and Foynes, Co Limerick will be commenced this year.

Other schemes in the capital works programme will be advanced through the planning or Confirmation (Ministerial approval) processes and every effort will be made to progress some of these schemes to construction in 2016 also.

The OPW will also continue in 2016 to administer its Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme which allows local authorities to submit applications for funding to OPW for localised projects costing under €0.5m and which meet required criteria including a minimum cost benefit standard.

In addition to its capital allocation another €15.3m in non-capital funding has been allocated to the OPW in 2016 for its ongoing arterial drainage maintenance works programme under which over 2,000km of river channels and watercourse which OPW is responsible for will be cleaned and maintained.

The OPW's flood relief funding allocation will also allow it to continue in 2016 with its essential hydrometric data gathering and analysis work and other important research and studies in hydrology, coastal and other flood related matters.

The funding available in 2016 will allow the OPW continue to plan for the future flood risk management needs of the country through its comprehensive Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) Programme. Under that Programme the OPW will publish by mid 2016 draft Flood Risk Management Plans for areas across the country that are at significant risk of flooding from rivers and tides. Most of the areas that flooded during the recent severe rainfall events will be covered under the CFRAM Plans. XX Following public consultation, the CFRAM Plans will be finalised by end 2016. The Plans will include a prioritised list of measures, both structural and non-structural, to address flood risk in an environmentally sustainable and cost effective manner which OPW will seek to implement over a 10 year timeframe.

Flood Relief Schemes Funding

63. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of the funding available for flood relief relating to the recent flooding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1831/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): The Government last year announced details of a €430 million 6 year programme of capital investment on flood risk management and mitigation measures as part of the Government's overall Capital Investment Plan 2016 – 2021. The flood protection capital programme 2016 – 2021 will build on the very significant investment that has already been undertaken in flood relief works throughout the country over the last 20 years.

This funding will allow the Office of Public Works (OPW) to continue with the implementation of its current comprehensive programme of flood relief Capital Works which includes projects at various stages of design, planning and construction. Within the €430 million funding envelope, the OPW's allocation for capital flood relief works in 2016 is €52.561m. Separate to this capital allocation another €15.3m in non-capital funding has been allocated to the OPW in 2016 for its ongoing arterial drainage maintenance works programme. There are currently five major flood defence schemes at construction with a further 26 at design and planning.

The funding will also enable the OPW continue its Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme which allows local authorities to submit applications for funding to OPW for localised projects costing under €0.5m and which meet required criteria including minimum cost benefit standards. Over 500 projects have been approved by OPW since the scheme came into operation in 2009 with funding of approximately €29m being provided.

The OPW's flood relief funding allocation will also allow it to continue with its essential hydrometric data gathering and analysis work and other important research and studies in hydrology, coastal and other flood related matters.

The significant funding made available by the Government in its Capital Plan 2016 – 2021 will also allow the OPW continue to plan for the future flood risk management needs of the country through its comprehensive Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) Programme. Under that Programme the OPW will publish by mid 2016 draft Flood Risk Management Plans for areas across the country that are at significant risk of flooding from rivers and tides. Most of the areas that flooded during the recent severe rainfall events will be covered under the CFRAM Plans. Following public consultation, the CFRAM Plans will be finalised by end 2016. The Plans will include a prioritised list of measures, both structural and non-structural, to address flood risk in an environmentally sustainable and cost effective manner which OPW will seek to implement over a 10 year timeframe.

Departmental Expenditure

64. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the legal expenditure ceilings for each of the years 2016 to 2019; the percentage increase these represent from the baseline of 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1918/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): In accordance with the Ministers and Secretaries (Amendment) Act 2013, Expenditure Report 2016 published by my Department on Budget day outlines Ministerial Expenditure Ceilings for the three year period from 2016 to 2018.

The ceilings for 2016 have subsequently been revised by Government in line with the allocations for 2016 set out in the Revised Estimates Volume (“REV”) 2016 published by my Department on 17 December 2015.

The overall Government Expenditure Ceiling of €55.3 billion for 2016, set out in the REV, represents an increase of 1.2% over the 2015 gross voted expenditure estimated outturn of €54.67 billion reported with the end December Exchequer returns.

This rate of expenditure growth belies much of the commentary by the media and others on the conduct of expenditure policy. The control of public expenditure - while meeting priority social needs - strongly reflects a prudent and responsible approach to expenditure policy consistent with the fiscal framework.

The ceilings of €56.17 billion for 2017 and €57.04 billion for 2018 represent increases versus this 2015 outturn of 2.7% and 4.3% respectively.

The ceilings for these two later years take into account demographic pressures arising in the Departments of Health, Social Protection and Education and Skills. Also taken into consideration in these ceilings is the roll-out of the Rural Development Programme, a forecast reduction in the number of people on the Live Register, the carry-over impact of certain Budget 2016 measures including costs relating to the Lansdowne Road Agreement and the revised capital envelope set out in the Capital Plan.

Actual expenditure beyond 2016 will ultimately be a matter for Government decision-making, in light of the fiscal space determined in line with the Stability and Growth Pact obligations at the time and its allocation between tax and expenditure measures as determined by Government.

Flood Relief Schemes Funding

65. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the progress on introducing the €430 million fund for flood defence works, given the recent flooding and the damage to coastal communities and the higher frequency of more severe Atlantic storms over the past number of years. [1914/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): The provision of €430 million funding for flood risk management has already been made by the Government and was announced in the *Infrastructure and Capital Investment Plan 2016 – 2021* published in September 2015.

This funding is being made available to the Office of Public Works (OPW) through the annual Estimates process and allows for a graduated increase in the annual capital allocation

to the OPW for flood relief measures from its existing base of €45m to €100m by 2021. The €430 million allocation will enable the OPW to continue with the implementation of its existing programme of flood relief capital works and to commence implementation on a prioritised basis from 2017 onwards of the structural flood defence measures that will be included in the flood risk management plans being prepared under the Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) Programme including any viable measures identified to address flooding in the coastal locations included in the Programme. These plans are due to be finalised by the end of 2016.

The CFRAM Programme is the core strategy for addressing flood risk in areas at potentially significant risk from flooding. The Programme is focusing on 300 Areas for Further Assessment (AFAs) including 90 coastal areas, mainly in urban locations nationwide, identified as being at potentially significant risk of flooding. It is the principal vehicle for implementing the EU Floods Directive and national flood policy.

Work on the development of preliminary options to address flood risk is now underway in the CFRAM Programme. Following finalisation of the mapping and the identification of flood risk management options, the final output from this important project will be integrated Flood Risk Management Plans containing specific measures to address in a comprehensive and sustainable way the significant flood risks identified. The Plans will include a prioritised list of measures, both structural and non-structural, to address flood risk in an environmentally sustainable and cost effective manner. Further information on the Programme is available on www.cfram.ie.

Pending the completion of the CFRAM Plans, the OPW is continuing with the implementation of its existing comprehensive programme of flood relief Capital Works which includes projects at various stages of design, planning and construction. There are currently five major schemes at construction in Bray, Co Wicklow, River Dodder, Dublin, South Campshires, Dublin, Ennis Lower, Ennis and Phases 2, 3 and 4 in Waterford City. There are a further 26 at design and planning of which it is anticipated that construction works on schemes in Claregalway, Bandon and Skibbereen, Templemore and Foynes will be commenced this year.

The OPW will also continue its Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme which allows local authorities to submit applications for funding to the OPW for projects costing under €0.5m and which meet required criteria. The Scheme has already provided funding for over 500 projects since its implementation in 2009 with expenditure of approximately €29m.

Flood Prevention Measures

66. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the steps he will take to ensure that the local knowledge of residents regarding patterns of flooding in their areas is taken into account as part of the medium-term and long-term efforts to deal with the flooding problem; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1941/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): The OPW's Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) Programme, which is implementing the 2007 EU Floods Directive requirements, is completing detailed assessment of 300 areas at potentially significant risk from flooding. The Programme, which is being undertaken by engineering consultants on behalf of the OPW, working in partnership with the Local Authorities, involves the production of predictive flood mapping for each location, the development of preliminary flood risk management options and the produc-

tion of flood risk management plans.

Public consultation, which provides opportunities for interested persons to convey local flooding knowledge and the preferred solution, is a key element of the CFRAM Programme. To date this has involved:

- a public consultation to inform the designation of the 300 areas, that include 90 coastal areas; and
- meeting in person with each of these 300 communities to explain the assessed and predictive flood risks and their impact for their areas and importantly to get their local knowledge and insight. Separately a national consultation on flood risk maps finished on 23 December 2015;
- public consultation in person on options for each community is underway and will be complete in the coming weeks.

The publication of draft Flood Risk Management Plans, scheduled for summer 2016, will be followed by further programmes of consultation before the Plans are finalised. Members of the public may also contact the individual CFRAM Study engineering consultants by phone, post or email. Further details are available via www.cfram.ie.

When the OPW commences a major flood relief scheme there are opportunities, through local public information days, for the public to make observations on any emerging proposals. After the outline design of the preferred scheme is completed, a statutory four-week public exhibition is held followed by a month for submissions by interested parties.

Public Procurement Contracts

67. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform with regard to the Office of Public Procurement, if the current holder of a contract who is excluded from the new tender because of the quality of a sample has a right to appeal the decision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1944/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Public Procurement is governed by EU and National rules. The aim of these rules is to promote an open, competitive and non-discriminatory public procurement regime which delivers best value for money. It would be a breach of the EU rules for a public body to favour or discriminate in favour of a particular candidate on grounds such as existing relationship with the contracting authority that is carrying out a tender process and there are legal remedies which may be used against any public body infringing these rules.

Public procurement procedures require applicants to meet certain standards when applying for public contracts. The criteria upon which contracting authorities may select suppliers to submit tenders in a public procurement procedure are set out in Regulation 58 of SI 329 of 2006 European Communities (Award of Public Contracts) Regulations and Article 48 and Recitals (39) of 2004/18/EC which is the EU Directive on the co-ordination of procedures for the award of public contracts. In short a contracting authority should set out, non-discriminatory criteria for use when selecting competitors. Samples may be requested as part of this process. It is up to the potential supplier to prove that they have satisfied those criteria.

In order to assist contracting authorities the Office of Government Procurement has developed standard template documents for procurement processes and the award of contracts. These have been designed to enable contracting authorities carry out procurement processes in

a consistent manner. These templates set out the procedures for requesting samples and also the documentation that should accompany them. It is up to the supplier to meet the standards requested. It would be reasonable for a contracting authority to seek the standards that meet their needs and these can of course change over the years.

In relation to the issue of appeal, the Deputy will appreciate that it would be inappropriate for me to comment on a specific tender. Establishing the levels of qualification criteria and award criteria that are relevant and appropriate to a particular contract is the responsibility of the contracting authority concerned. This is because the contracting authority is in the best position to gauge what is appropriate relative to the needs of that specific contract. In this regard, I would therefore suggest that the supplier seek feedback from the contracting authority.

State Bodies Data

68. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of State agencies that have been rationalised, merged or abolished since 2011, the savings of public moneys achieved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1915/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): I refer the Deputy to the Report on the Implementation of the Agency Rationalisation Programme which is published on my Department's web site. The Report provides information on what has been achieved in reducing the number of state bodies as set out in the 2011 Public Service Reform Plan, including savings.

The Report published in December 2014, based on information provided by Government Departments, showed that measures involving more than 90 percent of the bodies to be rationalised and merged were completed. The Report finds as a result of these measures, there were 170 fewer State Bodies at the end of 2014 than in 2011, with a further 11 due to go. The current position, as of January 2016, is that there are 176 fewer bodies, with a further 5 outstanding.

The Report also shows that recurring annual savings of over €15 million were accruing to Central Government, with a further €2.8m in once-off revenue arising from the disposal of property. Further annual savings of the order of €9m will be achieved by 2018, as the full year efficiency savings from some of the measures are realised. It is also important to note that these figures refer to direct Exchequer savings. The Report showed that net savings worth some €40 million will accrue annually to the Local Authority sector on foot of the reform and rationalisation measures in Local Authority structures, which also forms part of the overall rationalisation programme.

The remaining measures to be implemented are highlighted in italics in Appendix 2 of the Report - several of which have since being completed including the merger of the Irish Sports Council and the National Sports Campus Development Authority into Sport Ireland and the substantial reform of the four IR bodies into a single Workplace Relations Commission.

Implementation of those measures outstanding are well advanced and, where possible, arrangements have been put in place on an administrative basis prior to enabling legislation being enacted - as in the case of the merger of the OSI, Valuation Office and Property Registration Authority into the single new body dealing with property and land administration, known as Táilte Éireann.

Departmental Expenditure

69. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his timescale for winding down the financial emergency measures in the public interest legislation; the cost involved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1917/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): From the period 2009 to 2013 the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (FEMPI) Acts introduced pay reduction measures. These measures, together with the Public Service Pension Reduction implemented in January 2011, are estimated to have resulted in over €2.2bn in direct reductions in public service remuneration and pensions.

It is not possible, within the fiscal space currently available to Government and the requirement to manage public expenditure in accordance with the EU's Stability and Growth Pact, to reverse €2.2bn in FEMPI measures in one year. To do so would contravene EU Fiscal rules and reverse the hard won progress made in rescuing the economy from the financial collapse which it so recently faced.

The Government has now, through the negotiation and agreement of a financially prudent public service agreement on pay and related issues, provided for a gradual unwinding of the FEMPI measures as they apply to public servants. The terms of this agreement, the Lansdowne Road Agreement, are being implemented under the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2015 with effect from 1 January 2016 at a full year cost of €844m to 2018. Provision has also been made for an amelioration of the PSPR for public service pensioners at an additional full year cost of €90m in 2018. This approach has also enabled additional resources to be assigned for the ongoing recruitment of additional front line public service staff such as Gardaí, Teachers and Health professionals to support the delivery of our vital public services.

Under section 12 of the FEMPI Act 2013, I am required to review the necessity of FEMPI legislation annually and cause a written report of my findings to be laid before each House of the Oireachtas. In that context, economic progress and fiscal consolidation in the years ahead will determine the scope and timing of the possible further scale-back or elimination of the financial emergency measures.

Pension Provisions

70. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the progress in establishing an interdepartmental group to examine the issue of those who are forced to retire at 65 years of age, but who are not eligible for a State pension until they reach 66 years of age, as he indicated in correspondence dated 24 November 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1252/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The issue of retirement age will become a more significant issue as the age of eligibility for the State Pension increases in the coming years, to 67 in 2021 and to 68 in 2028. We need a policy framework to support longer working lives. We face challenging demographic related expenditure challenges in the coming years: the numbers aged 65 and over are set to increase from 570,000 in 2013 to 855,000 by 2026 and the annual cost of the State Pension is increasing by over €200m every year.

Since my correspondence with the Deputy in November my officials have consulted with each of the relevant Departments with a view to establishing an Interdepartmental Group to examine the implications arising from retirement ages for public and private sector workers. A Memorandum seeking approval to establish the Group has been submitted to Government. It is

proposed that this Group will be chaired by a senior official from my Department and will include representatives from the Departments of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, Justice, Education, Health and Social Protection. The Group will engage with key stakeholders with a view to reporting back to Government later this year with recommendations on a policy framework to support longer working lives. My intention is that the Group will convene in the coming weeks.

Public Service Reform Plan Measures

71. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of the implementation of the Government's reform agenda; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1832/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Public Service Reform is a key element of the Government's overall strategy for recovery. Led by my Department, the reforms delivered over the past five years have enabled us to maintain and improve public services in the face of the necessary reduction in staff numbers and budgets, while meeting increased demand for many services. Importantly, the efficiencies gained have also allowed us to re-invest in frontline service delivery.

Following strong progress on the implementation of the Government's first Public Service Reform Plan (2011), our second Reform Plan was published in January 2014 and sets out the priorities for reform from 2014 to 2016. While maintaining an emphasis on efficiency, this Plan puts a particular focus on improved service delivery and achieving better outcomes for service users.

We are implementing a broad range of reforms, with over 230 specific actions set out in the Plan. This includes, for example, some 400 digital services and improved engagement with service users; implementation of shared services and alternative models of service delivery; more efficient public procurement and property management; and increased accountability and transparency.

Good progress is being made on the implementation of the plan, as outlined in the Annual Progress Report I published in March last year. A copy of the report was sent to all Members of the Oireachtas and it is also available at www.reformplan.per.gov.ie. It is intended to publish the second Annual Progress Report on Public Service Reform in the coming months.

The Deputy will also be aware that the Taoiseach and I published the Civil Service Renewal Plan in October 2014 which is a three year plan to lead and implement major changes across the Civil Service. A progress report on achievements in the 'first 200 days' was published in July and is also available on my Department's website. Since then, work has continued on the remaining actions in the Plan and a further Progress Report detailing the progress made during the second phase of implementation will be published in early summer.

Overall, I am satisfied that we have made very strong progress on Public Service Reform to date. The level of reform that we have delivered could not have happened without the efforts and commitment of our public servants and I commend them for their contribution to date.

Public Services Provision

72. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the dramatic reduction in the number of public servants since 2008 has impacted adversely on

the provision of public services and if a major recruitment drive is needed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1942/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Following a period of retrenchment, staffing levels in the Public Service are increasing, and have been since December 2013. Latest data show that public service staff numbers increased by just under 5,000 in the first nine months of 2015, on foot of the 2015 Budget decisions, which also included a removal of the Moratorium on Public Service Recruitment. It is also worth noting that even throughout the time of the Moratorium, the Government continued to provide for targeted recruitment into key frontline areas in Education and Health, in particular. In addition, as part of the Budget for 2016, I announced a further additional 2,260 teachers, up to 600 new Gardaí, plus more staff in the Health Sector and for Tusla, the Child and Family Agency.

As regards the current level of staffing across the Public Service compared to the peak at end 2008, the changes since then need to be understood and assessed in their proper context.

- In the 5-year period leading up to the end of 2008, public service numbers increased by almost 15%, tracking increases in annual public expenditure levels that have come to define that era. As we know now, this was unsustainable, and it hardly represents a sensible benchmark for public services for the future.

- There was also an unprecedented economic and fiscal crisis which threatened the sustainability of the public finances. This required difficult decisions to reduce public service pay rates and public service numbers, among many other difficult decisions. These were delivered in cooperation with the staff unions, under a series of critically important industrial relations agreements and in tandem with specific sectoral reform measures.

- Finally, there has been a wide ranging reform agenda, which I launched in 2011, and it has delivered efficiencies and enhanced the effectiveness of public services. At the heart of the Reform Agenda is a commitment to drive change and continuous improvements to outdated practices and service delivery models in order to protect and enhance key public services. The introduction of shared services, automation of processes across many areas, and changes to work practices means that more is being done with less.

It is within this context of a more secure and reformed foundation that I have been willing, and will continue to commit resources across key sectors, which the Government can be more assured will impact directly on improved service levels for people.

Living Wage

73. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his views on recent media comments by the Minister for State at the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, Deputy Gerald Nash TD, regarding the cost to the Exchequer if the State becomes a living wage employer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2086/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The most recent aggregate data (based on pay bands) available to the Department indicates that some 93% of all public service staff are on salary points in excess of €25,000 per annum. The suggested wage at €11.50 per hour based on the Civil Service 37 hour standard net working week equates to an annual salary of € 22,203.

Data based on Civil Service staff only indicate that only some 4% of staff (FTE) in the Civil Service are on salary points less than €22,203, with the majority of those on points in the range

€20,000 to €22,000. The estimated cost within the civil service, which is some 12% of the overall public service, would be €1.6m. Detailed costings in other sectors of the public service would require collation and estimation on an individual sector level, based on detailed data on the position of staff on each salary scale across the public service and details of the standard working hours per week for each individual grade. This detailed data is only available to individual public service employers.

Any of those currently on an annual salary of less than €22,203 in the public service may be receiving remuneration in excess of the suggested living wage through additional premium payments in respect of shift or atypical working hours or may benefit from salary scales that progress to the suggested living wage through incremental progression. The increase of 2.5% on annualised salaries up to €24,000 under the Lansdowne Agreement payable from 1 January 2016 may also impact upon the potential additional cost accruing to the Exchequer from the introduction of a Living Wage.

Live Register Data

74. **Deputy Pat Rabbitte** asked the Taoiseach the number of persons on the live register in Tallaght in Dublin 24 in each of the years from 2010 and currently; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2220/16]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The most recent Live Register figures available are for December 2015.

The following table shows the number of persons on the Live Register in the Tallaght local office in December of each year from 2010 to 2015.

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

All Persons on the Live Register in Tallaght in December of each year 2010 - 2015.

December	All Persons
2010	10,178
2011	11,206
2012	11,375
2013	10,861
2014	9,608
2015	8,717

Source: CSO Live Register

Live Register Data

75. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Taoiseach the number of young persons under 25 years of age who are signing on the live register in the Intreo centres at Swords, Coolock, Finglas, Kilbarrack, Ballyfermot and Ballymun in County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45598/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Live Register series gives a monthly breakdown of the number of people claiming Jobseeker's Ben-

efit, Jobseeker's Allowance and other registrants as registered with the Department of Social Protection.

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

The following table shows the number of persons under 25 years of age classified by sex on the Live Register in the local offices requested.

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

Persons under 25 years of age on the Live Register in December 2015 in requested Local Offices.

Local Office	Male	Female	All Persons
Ballyfermot	247	160	407
Ballymun	276	164	440
Coolock	345	187	532
Finglas	462	272	734
Kilbarrack	260	125	385
Swords	207	124	331

Source: CSO Live Register

Ministerial Staff

76. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Taoiseach the number of political staff working in his Department; the role of each; and the salary in each case. [45773/15]

The Taoiseach: A total of seventeen political staff are employed by my Department. The table below sets out the role of each individual staff member and the salary in each case.

Title	Salary
Chief of Staff	€156,380
Special Adviser to the Taoiseach	€156,380
Special Adviser to the Taoiseach	€84,706
Special Adviser to the Taoiseach	€84,706
Special Adviser to Chief Whip	€84,706
Government Press Secretary	€115,431
Assistant Government Press Secretary	€87,258
Deputy Government Press Secretary/Head of GIS	€93,297
Personal Assistant to the Taoiseach	€74,973
Personal Assistant to the Taoiseach	€68,293
Personal Assistant to the Taoiseach	€68,293
Personal Assistant to the Taoiseach	€64,257
Personal Assistant to the Taoiseach	€51,581
Personal Assistant to the Chief Whip	€46,016
Personal Secretary to the Taoiseach	€45,251
Personal Secretary to the Taoiseach	€45,251
Personal Secretary to the Chief Whip	€47,755

Legislative Programme

77. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Taoiseach the total number of Bills that have been published by his Department since 9 March 2011; the number and Titles of those Bills that included a regulatory impact assessment in advance of publication; the regulatory impact assessments published; the total number of promised Bills for publication; if he will provide the Bills that will include a regulatory impact assessment; the regulatory impact assessments that will be published before publication of the Bill; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45800/15]

80. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Taoiseach if he will provide a list of those Acts currently in force for which he has lead responsibility that have parts or sections yet to be formally commenced in tabular form; the details or purpose of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46079/15]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 77 and 80 together.

One Bill was published by my Department since 9 March 2011. It was the Thirty-second Amendment of the Constitution (Abolition of Seanad Éireann) Bill 2013, which was published in June 2013 further to a commitment in the Programme for Government. A regulatory impact analysis (RIA) is normally required for primary legislation but exceptions to this rule are set out in the relevant guidelines.

As the Bill concerned involved amending the Constitution for the purpose of abolishing the Seanad rather than significantly impacting on the regulatory environment, a RIA was not completed, in keeping with precedents for Bills of this nature.

One Bill is promised for publication by my Department, the National Economic and Social Council Bill. Work is underway on it in my Department at the moment. The Bill and any regulatory impact assessment will be published in due course.

My Department has no Acts currently in force for which I have lead responsibility that have parts or sections yet to be formally commenced.

Appointments to State Boards

78. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Taoiseach the number of appointments to State boards since March 2011 under the aegis of his Department; the number of appointments that have been advertised on his Department's website; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46074/15]

79. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Taoiseach the number of chairpersons appointed to State boards under the aegis of his Department since March 2011 that have appeared before the relevant joint Oireachtas committee; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46075/15]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 78 and 79 together.

I make appointments to the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) and the National Statistics Board (NSB).

Since coming into office on 9 March 2011, I have made 18 appointments to the NESC in accordance with the National Economic and Social Development Office Act 2006 and S.I. No. 603 of 2010, National Economic and Social Council (Alteration of Composition) Order 2010.

- The legislation requires that the majority of members are appointed specifically on the basis of nominations from business and employer interests, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions,

farming and agricultural interests, the community and voluntary sector and the environmental sector.

- The legislation also provides for the appointment of six public servants in an ex-officio capacity; one representing the Taoiseach, one representing the Minister for Finance and the remainder representing relevant Departments to ensure NESC's work is integrated with Government policy-making.

- I also appointed eight independent members to the NESC in 2011, in most cases from the academic sector. These appointments were made following careful consideration of the necessary skills, knowledge and expertise relevant to the functions of the Council as required by the legislation.

These positions were not advertised on the Department's website. In line with the Guidelines on Appointments to State Boards and where appropriate and consistent with the legislation, future appointments will be advertised on Stateboards.ie.

I appointed the Secretary General of my Department as Chairman of the NESC on 1 August 2011 in an ex-officio capacity.

Section 18 of the Statistics Act 1993 provides for the composition of and appointments to the National Statistics Board (NSB). It provides that the NSB shall consist of eight members comprising the following seven persons who shall be appointed by the Taoiseach:

- five persons of proven ability and experience in relevant fields - two of whom shall be nominated by the Taoiseach and three of whom shall be nominated by such organisation or organisations as the Taoiseach considers to be representative of the users of official statistics and providers of information under this Act

- Assistant Secretary or equivalent or higher grade in the Department of the Taoiseach

- Assistant Secretary or equivalent or higher grade in the Department of Finance

- together with the Director General, ex officio.

The Chairperson is appointed by the Taoiseach from among the members of the Board.

My functions in relation to the NSB were delegated to the Government Chief Whip, Minister of State Paul Kehoe T.D., on the 22 March 2011. There have been nine appointments to the NSB since March 2011.

In 2012 an Assistant Secretary from my Department was appointed to the board to fill a vacancy in line with Section 18 of the Act.

The term of membership of the previous board expired in 2013. The Chair and Civil Servants on the Board were reappointed for a new term of three years. The Chair of the NSB has not appeared before an Oireachtas Committee and has not been asked to do so. Expressions of interest were invited for the four remaining positions on the NSB. These positions were advertised on the websites of the Department of the Taoiseach and the National Statistics Board. In March 2014 Minister of State Kehoe appointed four persons from among the expressions of interest received.

Also in 2014, an Assistant Secretary from the Department of Finance was appointed to replace an Assistant Secretary from that Department on the NSB.

Question No. 80 answered with Question No. 77.

Living Wage

81. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Taoiseach the cost of implementing a living wage of €11.50 for all employees directly employed or in agencies funded by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46398/15]

91. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Taoiseach the discussions his Department has had with suppliers or service contractors to his Department or to agencies of his Department to ensure that employees of such suppliers and contractors are paid the living wage of €11.50 per hour; the cost of implementing this wage for these employees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1364/16]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 81 and 91 together.

My Department has not had any discussions with suppliers or service contractors to the Department about the impact of a Living Wage. Levels of remuneration for employees of my Department and the National Economic and Social Development Office (NESDO) are based on pay scales set centrally by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

Departmental Expenditure

82. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Taoiseach the total amount of money spent on the Office of the Attorney General; the total number of staff; the total number of staff in the office of the parliamentary draftsman per annum from 2011 to 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46121/15]

The Taoiseach: In the years 2011 to 2015 the Office of the Attorney General (AGO) spent the following:

Year	Amount Spent
2011	€ 11.146 million
2012	€ 11.233 million
2013	€ 11.430 million
2014	€ 11.034 million
2015	€ 11.143 million (provisional outturn).

These figures exclude expenditure relating to the Law Reform Commission which is funded by a grant through the AGO Vote.

The total number of staff (including contract staff) at the end of each year was as follows:

Year	Number of Staff
2011	126.4 (including 9 contract staff)
2012	135.3 (including 7 contract staff)
2013	128.6 (including 7 contract staff)
2014	127.7 (including 8 contract staff)
2015	134.4 (including 6 contract staff)

The total number of permanent drafting (Parliamentary Counsel) staff at the end of each year was as follows:

Year	Permanent Staff
2011	26.8
2012	29.4
2013	29.4
2014	29.6
2015	30.6

The total number of consultant Parliamentary Counsel at the end of each year was as follows (these figures are not included in the totals given above. Also, the figures for consultants represent the WTE at the end of the year: not all consultants were working fulltime for the Office):

Year	Consultant Parliamentary Counsel
2011	-2.5
2012	-1.5
2013	-1.5
2014	-0.25
2015	- 1.25.

The drafting staff were supported by general civil service staff who also supported the legal advisory specialists (Advisory Counsel).

Throughout each year the Office of the Attorney General monitors its resources, including staff numbers, to ensure that it is able to discharge a heavy workload and meet the demands of its clients.

Employment Data

83. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Taoiseach the number of additional persons at work in the Cork-Kerry region since 2011 and 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45888/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) is the official source of estimates of employment in the State. The most recent figures available are for Q3 2015.

Estimates of employment are produced by NUTS 3 Regions.

The NUTS 3 South -West region includes Cork City, Cork County and Kerry.

Table 1a below shows the number of persons aged 15 years and over in employment in the South-West NUTS 3 region in Q3 of each year from 2011 to 2015.

Table 1b shows the annual change in the numbers of persons aged 15 years and over in employment in the South-West NUTS 3 region in Q3 of each year from 2012 to 2015.

Table 1c shows the four year and three year change in the numbers of persons aged 15 years and over in employment in the South-West NUTS 3 region over the period.

Table 1a Persons aged 15 years and over in employment (ILO) in the South-West region, Q3 2011- Q3 2015

‘000

	Q3 11	Q3 12	Q3 13	Q3 14	Q3 15
In employ- ment	270.1	274.9	287.1	277.2	286.5

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

Source: Quarterly National Household Survey, Central Statistics Office.’;

Reference period: Q3=Jul-Sep.

Table 1b Persons aged 15 years and over in employment (ILO) in the South-West region, Q3 2012- Q3 2015 - Annual change

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	Q3 12	Q3 13	Q3 14	Q3 15
In employment	4.9	12.1	-9.8	9.3

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

Source: Quarterly National Household Survey, Central Statistics Office.’;

Reference period: Q3=Jul-Sep.

Table 1c Persons aged 15 years and over in employment (ILO) in South-West NUTS 3 region, Q3 2012- Q3 2015 - Period change

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	Four year change Q3 2011-Q3 2015	Three year change Q3 2012-Q3 2015
In employment	16.4	11.6

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

Source: Quarterly National Household Survey, Central Statistics Office.’;

Reference period: Q3=Jul-Sep.

Law Reform Commission Funding

84. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Taoiseach the annual budget for the Law Reform Commission in each year since 2011. [46173/15]

The Taoiseach: The annual budget for the Law Reform Commission in each year since 2011 was:

Year	€
2011	€2.191 million
2012	€2.342 million
2013	€2.103 million
2014	€2.091 million
2015	€2.149 million

Irish Water Funding

85. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Taoiseach when EUROSTAT will next make a determination as to whether Irish Water meets the criteria as an off-balance-sheet entity; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45981/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Sector classification decisions for the purpose of the National Accounts are made in accordance with the rules of the European System of Accounts 2010 (ESA 2010). A decision on the classification of Irish Water was published by Eurostat in July 2015 based on their appraisal of the Irish Water business plan, as presented to them, in the context of these rules. The classification of Irish Water for future years will be dealt with as part of the review of the register of public sector and general government bodies undertaken annually by CSO. Under the normal rules for the classification of publicly controlled bodies, any reconsideration of the market/non-market nature of these bodies is based on observed data over a number of years (generally 3 years).

One factor in the Eurostat decision on Irish Water was their view of the uncertainty of the business case projections. Therefore it may be possible to begin a review of the classification decision as actual results become available, and CSO will be following up on this with Eurostat in 2016. In line with the normal rules for sector classification it would be possible to consider classifying Irish Water as a market entity only when sales are observed to exceed 50% of costs on a consistent basis.

Census of Population Data

86. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Taoiseach the number of children here who are under three years of age; and the estimated number of children that are between the ages of 1 year and six months and three years. [46124/15]

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

The Central Statistics Office publishes annual population estimates in August with a mid-April reference period. Data is compiled at single year of age only. The latest results were published on August 26th 2015 and estimate that in mid-April 2015 there were **210,112** persons aged 2 years and under and **218,370** persons aged 1 to 3 years usually resident in the State.

The following table shows the estimated population by single year of age for those aged 0 to 3 years. It also shows estimated totals for persons aged 2 years and under and persons aged 1 to 3 years.

Estimated population classified by age, April 2015¹

Single year of age	Total persons
Under 1 year	68,078
1 year	69,423
2 years	72,611
3 years	76,336
Age group	
2 years and under	210,112
1 to 3 years	218,370

¹2015 estimates are preliminary and are subject to revision following publication of Census 2016.

Source: Central Statistics Office.’;

Departmental Expenditure

87. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach the number of annual subscriptions to external membership bodies and groups his Department has, including the cost and details. [46777/15]

The Taoiseach: The number of annual subscriptions to external membership bodies and groups held by my Department are detailed in the following table.

Number of subscriptions	External membership body	Total cost per body (€) for 2015
2	Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development Membership (CIPD)	430
1	Institute of International and European Affairs	7,000
1	Irish Centre for European Law	395
1	Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland	200
1	Irish Computer Society	115
1	Chartered Institute of Internal Auditors	245

Departmental Expenditure

88. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach the number of annual subscriptions to newspapers or magazines his Department has, including the cost and details. [46778/15]

The Taoiseach: My Department has eleven annual subscriptions to newspapers/magazines at a total cost of €8,312.86. Details of the Department’s annual subscriptions are as follows:

Newspaper/Magazine/Online Subscription	Annual Cost
Journal of the Statistical & Social Inquiry Society of Ireland	€200.00
European Voice	€199.75
Data Protection Ireland Journal	€355.00

Newspaper/Magazine/Online Subscription	Annual Cost
Economist (print and online service)	€1,882.60
Eurointelligence (online service)	€875.00
Industrial Relations News	€64.80
Finance Dublin	€648.55
Politico	€398.00
Irish Times (online service)	€1,608.84
The Times	€2,080.32
Total	€8,312.86

Departmental Advertising Expenditure

89. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach the annual cost to his Department of advertisements placed on its behalf in newspapers, magazines, television and radio and social media. [46779/15]

The Taoiseach: The total expenditure by my Department on advertisements in 2015 amounted to €57,906.

Live Register Data

90. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Taoiseach further to Parliamentary Question No. 76 of 15 December 2015, the estimated number of unemployed persons who are not on the live register; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46814/15]

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

The Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) is the official source of estimates of unemployment in the State and the seasonally adjusted number of persons (aged 15-74) unemployed as of the third quarter of 2015 was 197,100. While the QNHS provides quarterly benchmark estimates of unemployment, the CSO also publishes monthly unemployment estimates. The latest seasonally adjusted monthly unemployment figures for December 2015 indicate that the number of unemployed persons aged 15-74 years in that month was estimated to have been 190,600.

The primary classification used for the QNHS results is the ILO (International Labour Office) labour force classification. The classification for unemployed persons includes those persons aged 15-74 years who, in the week before the survey, were without work and available for work within the next two weeks, and had taken specific steps, in the preceding four weeks, to find work. The QNHS does not capture a respondent's status as measured by the Live Register.

The Live Register is compiled from returns made for each local office to the Central Statistics Office by the Department of Social Protection. It comprises persons under 65 years of age in the following classes:

All Claimants for Jobseeker's Benefit (JB) excluding systematic short-time workers.

Applicants for Jobseeker's Allowance (JA) excluding smallholders/farm assists and other self-employed persons.

Other registrants including applicants for credited Social Welfare contributions but exclud-

ing those directly involved in an industrial dispute.

It should be noted that the Live Register is not designed to measure unemployment as per the ILO unemployment classification used by the QNHS.

It includes part-time workers (those who work up to three days a week), seasonal and casual workers entitled to Jobseeker's Benefit or Allowance.

Question No. 91 answered with Question No. 81.

Appointments to State Boards

92. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Taoiseach the names of the persons he has nominated to serve in positions carrying remuneration, other than out-of-pocket expenses, on commissions, industrial, assurance, semi-State or other similar concerns; the amounts received annually in respect of each appointment; the name of the concern to which each appointment was made during the years 2011 to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1851/16]

The Taoiseach: I make appointments to the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) and the National Statistics Board (NSB).

No remuneration is paid, other than out of pocket expenses, to persons nominated to serve in positions on the NESC.

Section 18 of the Statistics Act 1993 provides for the composition of and appointments to the National Statistics Board (NSB). It provides that the NSB shall consist of eight members comprising the following seven persons who shall be appointed by the Taoiseach:

- five persons of proven ability and experience in relevant fields - two of whom shall be nominated by the Taoiseach and three of whom shall be nominated by such organisation or organisations as the Taoiseach considers to be representative of the users of official statistics and providers of information under this Act

- Assistant Secretary or equivalent or higher grade in the Department of the Taoiseach
- Assistant Secretary or equivalent or higher grade in the Department of Finance together with the Director General, ex officio.

The Chairperson is appointed by the Taoiseach from among the members of the Board.

My functions in relation to the NSB were delegated to the Government Chief Whip, Minister of State Paul Kehoe T.D., on the 22 March 2011. Minister Kehoe has made nine appointments to the NSB since March 2011.

Current membership of the NSB	Date of Appointment by Minister Kehoe	Stipend Received				
		2011 (Mar to Dec)	2012	2013	2014	2015
Dr. Patricia O'Hara, Chairperson	October 2013			€2,245	€8,978	€8,978
Ms Rowena Dwyer	March 2014	N/A	N/A	N/A	€4,854	€5,985
Mr. Tom Geraghty	March 2014	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Dr. Helen Johnston	March 2014	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Current membership of the NSB	Date of Appointment by Minister Kehoe	Stipend Received				
		2011 (Mar to Dec)	2012	2013	2014	2015
Mr. Gerard O'Neill	March 2014	N/A	N/A	N/A	€4,854	€5,985
Mr. John Callinan, Assistant Secretary, Department of the Taoiseach	September 2012 October 2013 (Re-appointed)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Mr. John McCarthy, Assistant Secretary, Department of Finance	March 2014	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Mr. Michael McGrath, Assistant Secretary, Department of Finance	October 2013	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Mr. Pádraig Dalton, Director General, CSO	Ex-officio member	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Dáil Reform

93. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Taoiseach recognising progress to date, if he will consider further reforms of Dáil Éireann such as the expansion of Leader's Questions to allow backbench Deputies an opportunity to raise issues of interest; if he will increase the number of Topical Issues to six per day to help meet demand; if he will expand Minister's questions to two hours to facilitate more Deputies' questions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1929/16]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The process of parliamentary reform is an ongoing one. The Programme for Government outlined an ambitious agenda for Dáil Reform to be introduced in a phased process over the lifetime of the Government. On foot of this, since 2011 the Government has brought forward several packages of measures to reform the operation of the Dáil so as to improve its working and enhance the legislative role of members.

In addition, the Government recently indicated its acceptance of a number of recommendations for Constitutional change and for changes in Standing Orders as made by the Convention on the Constitution in its Seventh Report, on Dáil Reform.

The reforms the Government have already introduced in the Dáil since 2011 include the following.

Increased Number of Sitting Days

The number of Dáil sitting days has been significantly increased by reducing the length of Dáil breaks at Christmas, Easter, public holidays and the summer and introducing regular Friday sitting days.

In the 45 months for which the previous Government was in office, the Dáil sat for 349 days – an average of 93 days a year. In the present Government's period in office, the 57 months to end 2015, the Dáil has sat for 588 days – an average of over 123 days a year.

Dáil and Oireachtas Reform Package 2011

The first phase of Dáil Reform, introduced in the summer of 2011, included:

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

Oireachtas Committee Reforms 2012

In the summer of 2012 the Oireachtas Committee system was streamlined to provide an additional focus on areas of priority such as Jobs and Agriculture.

Dáil and Oireachtas Reform Package 2013

In September 2013 the Government announced a further phase of Dáil Reform:

1. Opening up the law-making process through a Pre-Legislative Stage. A Pre-Legislative Stage at an Oireachtas Committee is now a general requirement for non-emergency legislation. A Minister who does not bring a Bill to Committee for Pre-Legislative Stage is required to explain that decision to the Dáil. The Pre-Legislative Stage allows for an unprecedented and extensive engagement by the public in the process of law-making. The relevant Committee can consult with experts and civic society groups; crucially, this takes place before the legislation is drafted. Where there has been a Pre-Legislative Stage, the Chair or Vice Chair of the Committee has an opportunity to outline the Committee's work to the members of the Dáil during the Second Stage debate after the Minister and main opposition spokespeople have spoken on the Bill.
 2. Each year the Taoiseach and Tánaiste will address the Dáil setting out the Government's annual priorities.
 3. The role of Oireachtas Committees in the Budget process has been expanded.
 4. The number of Legislative Programmes has been reduced to two per year.
 5. The time available for legislative debate in the Dáil has been increased, by increasing the total number of sitting days, extending the length of sitting days and starting at 9.30 am on Wednesdays and Thursdays.
 6. The proposer of a Private Member's Bill has five minutes at First Stage to outline the purpose of the Bill to the Dáil.
 7. The number of Friday sittings has been expanded and the Dáil now sits every second Friday to debate Private Members' Bills and Committee Reports selected using a lottery system.
- The number of Bills introduced by Deputies has grown from 14 published in 2010 to 53

published in 2014.

- The new Friday sittings also allow Committees, for the first time, to seek directly to have their own reports debated in the Dáil.

- The system of Topical Issues now requires the Minister or a Minister of State from the relevant Department to reply, or the Deputy who raised the issue can have it deferred until a Minister from that Department is available.

- Ministerial Questions have been reformed:

- The time allocated to Oral Parliamentary Questions to Ministers has been standardised to 75 minutes.

- An ordinary Oral Question will be answered only if the Deputy tabling the Question is in the Chamber when it is reached.

- Each Deputy has 30 seconds to outline the question.

In addition to these reforms, and as mentioned earlier, the Government has indicated its acceptance of a number of recommendations for Constitutional change and changes in Standing Orders made by the Convention on the Constitution in its Seventh Report, on Dáil Reform.

The Government Chief Whip outlined the Government's position on these in the Dáil on Thursday 14 January, as follows.

The Government accepts that there is a case for a referendum to enhance the Office of Ceann Comhairle by giving it constitutional standing, and also for including a reference to Oireachtas Committees in the Constitution.

The Government also accepts three of the Convention's recommendations for changes to Dáil Standing Orders and will shortly ask the Dáil to amend Standing Orders accordingly. The three changes are:

- election of the Ceann Comhairle by secret ballot, intended to enhance the independence of the office of Ceann Comhairle and strengthen the link between the holder of that Office and the members of the Dáil.

- introduction of a system whereby the Taoiseach will appear before the Working Group of Committee Chairs twice a year.

- proportionate allocation of Committee chairs using the d'Hondt system.

In addition, a number of Convention recommendations will be referred to the Dáil Reform Sub-Committee for further consideration, including that the members of Committees should have access to the support of a panel of external members and former TDs; and how the introduction of family friendly hours for the Dáil, and a Committee Week, would work in practice.

As regards the measures proposed by the Deputy, both the Government Chief Whip and the Dáil Reform Sub-Committee of Dáil CPP are willing to consider any proposals made to them by any member of the House. The Deputy's proposals - the expansion of Leader's Questions to allow backbench Deputies an opportunity to raise issues of interest; an increase in the number of Topical Issues to six per day; and expansion of Minister's Questions to two hours to facilitate more Deputies' questions - have merit and could be considered for any future package of Dáil reforms.

Freedom of Information Fees

94. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Taoiseach the amount his Department has received in fees from freedom of information requests in 2014 and in 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45767/15]

The Taoiseach: The fees from Freedom of Information requests received by my Department in 2014 and 2015 were €2,194 and €594 respectively.

In considering these figures it should be noted that the Freedom of Information Act 2014, which came into force on 14 October 2014, introduced a number of changes to the charging system for freedom of information requests, including abolition of the application fee, reduction in the internal review fee and changes to search and retrieval fees.

Departmental Staff Promotions

95. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Taoiseach under the Civil Service reform programme, the number of clerical officers who have been promoted to higher executive officer and the number of executive officers who have been promoted to assistant principal officer in his Department through internal competitions after the significant change in eligibility rules; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2583/16]

The Taoiseach: My Department has implemented the provisions of the circular letter issued by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform on 14 January 2014 regarding Cross-Stream Promotion Arrangements.

No Clerical Officers were promoted directly to Higher Executive Officer and no Executive Officers were promoted directly to Assistant Principal Officer through internal competition in my Department since the introduction of these arrangements.

Widow's Pension Applications

96. **Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection why a person is not receiving the increase in the widow's pension as per budget 2016; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1843/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): In Budget 2016, there was limited scope for rate increases, and it was decided that the additional funds would, largely, concentrate on the elderly, who are less likely to be in a position to take up employment than those of working age. The Budget increased the maximum rates for all social welfare recipients aged 66 and over by €3 per week. This increase applied to State Pensions, but also to Widow aged 66 and over, Carer's Allowance recipients aged 66 and over and Incapacity Supplement recipients aged 66 and over. In this context, the rate of payment for widows of working age was not changed.

A widow aged between 60 and 65 years, whose late spouse/civil partner received the Household Benefits package from this Department, may qualify for that package if they otherwise satisfy all other conditions and receive a relevant qualifying payment.

Where the surviving spouse/surviving civil partner was the person in receipt of the allowance(s) they can retain the Household Benefits package provided that the conditions for

receipt of the allowance remains satisfied. Where a widow/widower/surviving civil partner is also in receipt of half rate Disability Benefit this will not prevent him/her from qualifying for the Household Benefits Package.

I was pleased to announce in Budget 2016 that the rate of the Fuel Allowance scheme was increased from €20 to €22.50, which will be of benefit to many disadvantaged widows of all ages, and householders on long-term welfare, and will assist with meeting the costs of their heating needs during the winter season. To receive Fuel Allowance, Widows pension recipients must also satisfy the other conditions for that payment, i.e., be unable to provide for their heating needs from the resources of their household, live alone or only with one of a list of exempted persons, and satisfy a means test. All recipients of non-contributory payments are accepted as satisfying the means-test.

Disability Allowance Applications

97. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the status of an application by a person (details supplied) in County Limerick under the disability allowance scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1833/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned submitted an application for disability allowance on 17 April 2015.

The application, based upon the evidence submitted, was refused on medical grounds and the person in question was notified in writing of this decision on 30 June 2015 and of her rights of review and appeal. On receipt of further medical evidence, a deciding officer reviewed the claim and upheld the original decision. An appeal of this decision was received and the decision of the Appeals Officer (AO) was to disallow the appeal. However, the Department understands that the AO is currently reviewing this decision.

The department received a further application for DA from the person in question on 19 November 2015 and this application is currently being processed. The person in question will be notified directly when a decision has been made on her entitlement.

Carer's Allowance Applications

98. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection when a decision on the allocation of a carer's allowance to a person (details supplied) in County Louth will be made. [1834/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I confirm that the department received an application for carer's allowance from the person concerned on 24 September 2015. The application is currently being processed and once completed, the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

Illness Benefit Payments

99. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the status of payment to a person (details supplied) in County Limerick under the illness benefit scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1836/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned was in receipt of illness benefit from 30 Sept 2015 to 28 Nov 2015 and they submitted a final cert confirming they were fit to resume work on 30 Nov 2015. The person concerned submitted a fresh claim for illness benefit from 30 Nov 2015 and this claim was received in my department on 4 Dec 2015. In the meantime the person concerned was in receipt of supplementary welfare allowance and as such it is necessary to adjust this payment in advance of payment of illness benefit. This has now been done. The person concerned has been transferred to monthly certs and the next cert is due on 8 Feb 2016.

Question No. 100 withdrawn.

Invalidity Pension Eligibility

101. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection why a person (details supplied) in County Mayo was not considered for an invalidity pension after their disability benefit payment ceased; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1925/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Invalidity pension (IP) is a payment for people who are permanently incapable of work because of illness or incapacity and who satisfy the pay-related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions. To qualify for IP claimants must, inter-alia, have at least 260 (5 years) paid PRSI contributions since entering social insurance and 48 contributions paid or credited in the last complete contribution year before the date of their claim. Only PRSI classes A, E or H contributions are reckonable for IP purposes.

To date there is no record in the department of receipt of a claim for IP from the person in question.

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

Carer's Allowance Applications

102. **Deputy Noel Harrington** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the status of an application under the carer's allowance scheme by persons (details supplied) in County Cork in November 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1933/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I confirm that the department received an application for carer's allowance from the person concerned on 3 December 2015. Once processed, the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

Disability Allowance Applications

103. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the status of an application by a person (details supplied) in County Clare under the disability allowance scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1976/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person in ques-

tion is in receipt of disability allowance (DA).

Following a recent routine review of entitlement, the department is satisfied that the conditions for the scheme continue to be met by the person in question. Payment of DA continued to the person in question while the review was underway.

Social Welfare Code

104. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will change the qualifying criteria for training support grants to enable those availing of education under the National Framework of Qualifications level 7 to receive payment at that level, rather than currently as at level 6; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1981/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): The Training Support Grant (TSG) is designed to fund quick access to short-term training where this cannot be provided by a state provider within a reasonable time or where an intervention is identified that can support individual jobseekers to access work opportunities.

This scheme is not designed to provide general or more structured training for jobseekers. Access to the scheme is via the Department's case officers who are tasked with identifying support interventions for jobseekers, particularly where a job opportunity has been identified or where an intervention will enable an application for work to be made.

The scheme is activation focused and the jobseeker is required to provide reasonable evidence or grounds of need (for example in the form of a potential job offer) or a requirement to maintain or achieve accreditation, for example, certain certification such as required to work in particular sectors such as construction, catering or the caring sectors. Courses above Level 6 on the QQI do not fall within the ambit of this scheme. Courses above Level 6 are supported under the Department's Back to Education Programme.

Disability Allowance Payments

105. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection when payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Limerick who has recently won an appeal under the disability allowance scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1982/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned has been awarded disability allowance with effect from 24 June 2015, following a successful appeal. The first payment will be made by her chosen payment method on 10 February 2016. In the interim, she has been in receipt of supplementary welfare allowance.

Arrears of payment due will issue as soon as possible once any necessary adjustment is calculated and applied in respect of any overlapping payments or in respect of outstanding overpayments (if applicable).

Community Employment Schemes Places

106. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if a person (details supplied) in Dublin 8 will be granted a further one year extension of a com-

munity employment scheme placement. [1985/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Community Employment Programme is a labour market intervention designed to assist the long term unemployed return to the work force. The term for participants on Community Employment has been set at 6 cumulative years (312 weeks) for persons of 55 years of age up to State Pension age by the Department.

The person concerned has been a participant on the Canal Communities Training Programme (CE) scheme for 4.75 years, an extension request has been received from her employer so that her participation may be extended up to State Pension age. This extension request has now been granted.

Invalidity Pension Data

107. **Deputy Kieran O'Donnell** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the number of applicants in receipt of invalidity pension in Limerick city and county; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1986/16]

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 contribution conditions.

As of December 31, 2015 there were 3,242 recipients of IP residing in the County of Limerick, including Limerick city.

A separate figure for the number of IP recipients in Limerick city is not maintained.

Social Welfare Offices

108. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the full-year cost of making all Intreo offices and services accessible to persons with disabilities by the end of 2016; the cost of providing disability training to all staff who are not already trained in disability awareness; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1989/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Office of Public Works is charged with ensuring that all Intreo Centres comply with building regulations and disability legislation. With regard to access, and in particular access for persons with disabilities, over the past 4 years the OPW refurbished and remodelled 60 Social Welfare Local Offices into Intreo Centres and/or acquired new premises in some locations. In most locations, the buildings would have already complied with the relevant aspect of the Building Regulations. All costs associated with providing disability access to buildings would have been absorbed in the overall costs of refurbishment of Intreo Centres.

The Department offers a suite of disability awareness training to its staff including Disability Awareness, Mental Health Awareness and Deaf Awareness. E-learning courses from the National Disability Authority (NDA) and the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) are available free to all staff via links on the Department's staff development intranet site. All new staff in DSP are made aware of disability issues during induction.

Under the One DSP Learning initiative, introduced in 2015, a module covering Employment Supports for People with a Disability is available to Case Officers. This module covers

all the grants and supports available for both jobseekers and employers with regard to people with a disability. This will continue to be available for Case Officers in 2016. In addition, a focused training day for 70 Case Officers will take place in February in conjunction with the National Disability Authority (NDA). Topics will include a general overview of disability; introduction to disability awareness; an overview of the NDA website and on-line training tool and disability-specific information using a case study.

It is estimated that the cost of providing disability awareness training to all staff in the Department would be approximately €150,000.

Disability Allowance

109. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the full year cost in 2016 of increasing the disability allowance by €6, €7, €7.50 and €8 per week; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1990/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Disability Allowance is a means-tested social assistance paid to persons who are substantially restricted in undertaking suitable employment arising from a medical condition (subject to satisfying the relevant medical criteria). The estimated cost in 2016 of increasing the weekly rate of Disability Allowance by €6.00, €7.00, €7.50 and €8.00 is detailed in the following table.

Increase in the weekly rate	Estimated Cost in 2016 (full year)
€6.00	€39.5 million
€7.00	€46.1 million
€7.50	€49.4 million
€8.00	€52.6 million

There is an analogous social insurance payment, Invalidity Pension, which is paid to persons who are permanently incapable of work (subject to satisfying the relevant medical criteria). A €1 increase in the weekly rate of Invalidity Pension would cost €3.2 million in a full year.

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

Community Employment Schemes Data

110. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection how many community employment schemes and how many places on these schemes are available in counties Galway and Mayo; the average cost of providing one place on a CE scheme for a person over 55 years of age; the equivalent cost of providing social protection for that same person; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1995/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): There are 71 Community Employment (CE) Schemes with 1,479 places in Galway, and 37 CE schemes with 849 places in Mayo as at 14 January 2015.

The average annual cost of a CE place for one year, including income support and all other costs such as training fees, material costs and Supervision is approximately €15,000.

The average annual payment value for jobseeker's allowance (JA) for 2015 is just over €10,200.

CE has a standard minimum rate of payment of €210.50 per week while jobseeker's allowance has a means assessment and the rate received will depend on the relevant means assessed against the payment.

As there are different rules applying to CE and JA payments, it is not possible to provide an exact equivalent cost without having a specific case to compare.

Citizen Information Services

111. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection to supply details, in tabular form, of the funding allocated to and the actual expenditure by the sign language interpreting service from 2012 to 2015, inclusive; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2030/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Citizens Information Board (CIB) is the statutory body responsible for supporting the provision of information, advice (including money and budgeting advice) and advocacy services to all citizens on a wide range of public and social services.

The Sign Language Interpreting Service (SLIS), which is funded by CIB, is the national agency for the provision of sign language interpreting services in Ireland and seeks to ensure that quality interpretation services are available to deaf people in Ireland, so that they can access public and social services.

The budget allocation and actual expenditure in each of the past four years is set out below.

Sign Language Interpreting Service	2012	2013	2014	2015
Grant allocation	€285,000	€284,658	€275,000	€275,000
Expenditure	€264,975	€323,064	€292,193	€284,498

Jobseeker's Allowance Applications

112. **Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection why a person (details supplied) in County Dublin was refused a jobseeker's allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2039/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned submitted an application for jobseeker's allowance with effect from 14 October 2015. In addition to a number of other qualifying conditions, a person must satisfy the condition of being habitually resident in the state. The application was disallowed on the basis that the person concerned was not deemed to be habitually resident in the state. It is open to the person concerned to seek a review of this decision or to appeal the decision to the independent social welfare appeals office.

Invalidity Pension Applications

113. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the status of an application by a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if she will make a statement

on the matter. [2054/16]

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.

A claim for IP was received from the person concerned on the 10 December 2015. In order to assist with the assessment of the person's medical suitability for IP, two forms for completion issued to the person concerned on the 12 January 2016. On receipt of the completed forms, the IP claim will be processed as quickly as possible and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

The Department advises the person concerned to ensure that full and complete details of his/her medical condition(s), treatments, investigations, specialist reports etc are furnished at the outset to ensure a good quality decision on his claim and to avoid unnecessary delay.

Water Conservation Grant Data

114. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the number of applicants who received payment of the water conservation grant in 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2068/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Department of Social Protection is administering the Water Conservation Grant on behalf of the Department of Environment, Community, and Local Government. A total of 887,127 householders have been paid the 2015 Water Conservation Grant to date. These payments amount to €88,712,700. A small number of residual applications from householders who meet the 2015 eligibility criteria continue to be processed.

Question No. 115 withdrawn.

Redundancy Payments Waiting Times

116. **Deputy Ciara M. Conway** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the status of the Waterford Crystal settlement process; the progress in issuing lump sum payments in cases where the number of years worked was in dispute; the reason for the delay in settling such cases; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2152/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The mediated agreement for former Waterford Crystal workers, which covers 1,774 scheme members, provides for the payment of:

(a) a tax-free once-off lump sum of €1,200 for every year of Scheme Service, not exceeding 40 years, plus

(b) payment of monies in respect of pensionable service which is payable from the normal retirement date of the scheme members (on a fortnightly basis).

To date 1,589 lump sum payments, (including payments to spouses of those with pensions adjustment orders) have been authorised totalling €42.4 million. Work is ongoing in the Department to process any outstanding payments of lump sums for those who have accepted the terms of the agreement.

During the Mediation on the Waterford Crystal Pension Factory and Staff Schemes it was agreed by the parties that a dispute resolution procedure would be set up whereby disputes in relation to individual cases would be referred to a dispute resolution process under the auspices of the Workplace Relations Commission. The dispute resolution procedure is solely and exclusively for individual disputes concerning personal employment information particular to the individual used for the calculation of lump sums and monies in respect of pensionable service as set out in the letter of offer and/or deed of release including scheme service dates and calculations.

It is my understanding that the Dispute Resolution Officer is actively engaged in examining all cases which have been submitted to him and these will be acted on by the Department once that process is completed.

The finalisation of all aspects of the mediated agreement is a matter of priority, both for me and for the Department. I can assure the Deputy that every effort is being made to progress payments as quickly as possible.

Social Insurance

117. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the procedure to be followed to reactivate the employment record of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2156/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): In order to have her Spanish social insurance record transferred from Spain to Ireland, the person concerned should call to her local office with details of her social services number in Spain, the addresses of any residences where she lived in Spain and the details of each employment, including the name and address of each employer and the commencement and termination of employment dates of each employment while in Spain. This information is necessary in order to for the Department to request essential information from the Spanish Authorities to support their claim.

It is open to the person concerned to submit an application for jobseeker's allowance which is a means tested payment and not dependant on her social insurance record.

Fuel Allowance Applications

118. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection when an application by a person (details supplied) in County Clare will be processed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2170/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Fuel allowance, under the National fuel scheme, may be payable to certain households in receipt of long term Social Welfare payments who are unable to provide for their heating needs. The allowance is subject to a means test and is paid only to those who live alone or with certain exempted people. Full details of the qualifying criteria for the scheme are available on the Department's website www.welfare.ie.

An application for fuel allowance was received from the person concerned on 27 November 2015. The weekly household means were assessed as being in excess of the allowable weekly income limit for fuel allowance. The application for fuel allowance was disallowed and the person concerned was notified of the decision and the reasons for it on 14 January 2016.

Rent Supplement Scheme Applications

119. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the procedure to follow to transfer a rent supplement payment as quickly as possible to a new address in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2191/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): A new application for rent supplement must be made when a client of Rent Supplement moves to a new address. An application has been issued to the client. They should submit this updated Rent Supplement Application to the Mid Leinster Rents Unit so that their entitlement to Rent Supplement at this new address can be assessed.

Direct Provision Data

120. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the full-year cost in 2016, based on the projected number of persons accessing direct provision, of increasing the weekly adult rate from €19.10 to €23.00, €24.00, €25.00, €27.00, €28.00, €30.00, €32.00, €34.00, €36.00, and €38.74; and of increasing the weekly child rate from €9.60 to €12.00, €14.00, €15.00, €16.00, €18.00, €20.00, €22, €24.00, €26.00, €28.00 and €29.80; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2192/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): The direct provision allowance is a non-statutory payment administered by the Department of Social Protection on behalf of the Department of Justice and Equality to persons in the Direct Provision system. The Government has provided €3.6 million for direct provision allowance in 2016.

The Government has recently approved an increase in the weekly direct provision allowance payment in respect of children from €9.60 to €15.60 from January 2016. The full-year cost in 2016 of this increase is approximately €345,000.

There are approximately 3,000 adults and 1,100 children residing in the system of direct provision in respect of whom the direct provision allowance is being paid. The full-year cost in 2016, based on the current numbers, of increasing the weekly adult rate from €19.10 to €23.00, €24.00, €25.00, €27.00, €28.00, €30.00, €32.00, €34.00, €36.00, and €38.74; and of increasing the weekly child rate from to €12.00, €14.00, €15.00, €16.00, €18.00, €20.00, €22.00, €24.00, €26.00, €28.00 and €29.80; is provided in the attached tabular statement. The numbers of persons seeking asylum in Ireland is increasing which would increase the costs as set out.

The Report of the Working Group on the Protection Process recommended an increase in the rate of the direct provision allowance payment for both adults and children which will be considered by the Cabinet Committee on Social Policy and Public Service Reform in due course.

Adult Rate and full-year cost of rate increase.

Adult Rate €19.10	Additional full year cost to increase adult rate from €19.10 to amount
Increase to €23.00	€608,400
Increase to €24.00	€764,400
Increase to €25.00	€920,400

Adult Rate €19.10	Additional full year cost to increase adult rate from €19.10 to amount
Increase to €27.00	€1,232,400
Increase to €28.00	€1,388,400
Increase to €30.00	€1,700,400
Increase to €32.00	€2,012,400
Increase to €34.00	€2,324,400
Increase to €36.00	€2,636,400
Increase to €38.74	€3,063,840

Child Rate and full-year cost of rate increase.

Child Rates	Additional full year cost to increase child rate from €9.60 to amount	Additional full year cost to increase child rate from €15.60 to amount
Increase to €12.00	€137,280	n/a
Increase to €14.00	€251,680	n/a
Increase to €15.00	€308,880	n/a
Increase to €16.00	€366,080	€22,880
Increase to €18.00	€480,480	€137,280
Increase to €20.00	€594,880	€251,680
Increase to €22.00	€709,280	€366,080
Increase to €24.00	€823,680	€480,480
Increase to €26.00	€938,080	€594,880
Increase to €28.00	€1,052,480	€709,280
Increase to €29.80	€1,155,440	€812,240

Invalidity Pension Appeals

121. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if an application by a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny under the invalidity pension scheme will be expedited; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2198/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The department received a claim for invalidity pension (IP) from the person concerned on 20 July 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 21 September 2015 of this decision, the reasons for it and of his right of review and appeal. The person concerned requested a review and appeal of this decision and submitted further medical evidence on 21 October 2015 in support of his request. Following a review of all the information available it has been decided that there is no change to the original decision. The person concerned was notified on 14 January 2016 of the outcome of the review.

As the person concerned has appealed the decision to the independent Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO), a submission is being prepared by the department and will be forwarded to the SWAO for determination.

The SWAO will be in touch with the person in question in due course in relation to the progress of their appeal.

Jobseeker's Benefit

122. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will review the policy of linking claims under the jobseeker's benefit scheme, given the difficulties it is causing seasonal workers who make repeat claims each year; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2225/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The jobseeker's benefit scheme provides income support for people who lose work and who have the required number of social insurance contributions. The 2016 Estimates for the Department provide for expenditure on jobseeker's benefit of €369 million.

Initially when a person makes an application for jobseeker's benefit, 3 waiting days apply and payment is from the 4th day of the claim where there is no accrued holiday entitlement. In the administration of the jobseeker's benefit scheme the concept of continuity in a claim and the notion of "linked claims" is a key component of how the jobseeker's benefit scheme operates in practice. Where a person makes a repeat jobseeker's claim within 26 weeks from the end of a previous claim, both claims may be linked and no waiting days apply. This applies to all jobseeker's benefit claimants, including seasonal workers. Where a person makes a claim for jobseeker's benefit more than 26 weeks from their previous jobseeker's claim 3 waiting days are served and payment commences on the fourth day.

To better facilitate Department of Social Protection customers, I have introduced a system where all new or repeat customers can make an appointment, at a time that suits them, with their local Intreo office to discuss or submit their application form.

As part of my Department's modernisation programme and the public service reform plan, the Department has moved into the delivery of online services. This means that, for the first time, customers will be able to make an application for a jobseeker's benefit payment online from 29 January 2016, using the MyWelfare.ie portal. MyWelfare.ie is designed to enable clients to access personalised Department of Social Protection services by registering for, and creating a personal account. The portal has been operational since July 2015 and currently allows customers to book PPSN and Public Service Card appointments.

For jobseeker's benefit, the on-line application form on MyWelfare.ie has been developed in a way to ensure that the staff who will be processing claims will receive all of the information that they require in a usable format so as to be able to make an informed decision in a timely manner without further recourse to the customer.

It should also be noted that if a person signs off from jobseeker's benefit to take up work for up to 12 weeks, there is a fast track system in place to ensure they are able to make this transition in an easy and efficient manner. This fast track system allows the individual to quickly sign back on their jobseeker's scheme and then continue to receive benefits after the work or course finishes.

Social Welfare Application Forms

123. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if application processes for all schemes will continue to have paper-based options for those who do not have access to broadband and who do not wish to apply online; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2243/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Department of Social Protection is committed to providing a professional, efficient and courteous service to all customers, providing and delivering the highest quality of service in accordance with the guiding principles of Quality Customer Service, as adopted across the public service and endorsed by Government.

The Department delivers services and support on a daily basis to its customers across a range of contact channels including telephone, SMS text messaging, websites, online services, walk-in services, and paper. This provides an integrated service, giving customers more choice in how they access the services they require and the Department will continue to provide services and information to customers through their preferred channel, where possible.

The application processes for all schemes will continue to have paper-based options available for those who are unable or do not wish to apply on-line. Customers can access application forms from their local Intreo centre or nearest Citizens Information Centres and can get assistance in completing their forms, if required.

Departmental Properties

124. **Deputy Seán Conlan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection for a list of all buildings surveyed and evaluated by the Office of Public Works, which it has furnished or not to her, regarding the provision of a new building in which to house the Department of Social Protection offices currently situated on Main Street in Ballybay, County Monaghan; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2265/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Office of Public Works (OPW) is the exclusive procurer of office accommodation for the Civil Service and the sole authority for allocating space to the Civil Service. While we are aware that the OPW looked at a number of properties, we are not aware of the extent of survey and evaluation. Following visits to a number of properties, the OPW narrowed their list down to two properties that would meet the accommodation brief previously submitted by my Department. These properties were:

1. Ballybay Enterprise Park, Ballybay, County Monaghan.
2. Teach O'Cleircin, Monaghan Town, County Monaghan.

Departmental Properties

125. **Deputy Seán Conlan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the instructions she gave to the Office of Public Works on providing office space in which to house the Department of Social Protection offices currently located in Ballybay, County Monaghan; what was taken into consideration when reaching the decision to give such instructions; if she was lobbied or requested by any public representative or third party to have these offices removed from Ballybay and placed in Monaghan town; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2266/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Office of Public Works were presented with a brief of requirements from Department of Social Protection that would meet the immediate Department's accommodation needs in the Monaghan area. These needs included a building that would accommodate the following:

- 32 number of staff
- Public and back office accommodation requirements (2-4 PSC Booths & 1 Interview Room, reception and a waiting area).
- Storage and communications rooms
- Staff toilets and rest room
- Canteen facilities, post/store room, etc.

The key considerations for the Department included, the need to ensure that all outstanding Health and Safety issues with the current/proposed building would be adequately addressed; the need to ensure that the existing/new building could serve the public (for taking Public Services Cards) and accommodate the additional staff that were being assigned to the unit. The provision of a Public Services Card Centre for the public in County Monaghan was an urgent business need of this Department. The OPW, our procurer of property, had other issues to be addressed, including resolving issues relating to the existing/new building, complying with the new Building Control Regulations 1997-2015, and the associated costs of any remedial or fit-out works.

The Department has not been lobbied or requested by any public representative or third party, to have these offices removed from Ballybay and placed in Monaghan town.

Questions Nos. 126 to 128, inclusive, withdrawn.

Jobseeker's Allowance Payments

129. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if arrears have issued to a person (details supplied) in County Kildare under the jobseeker's allowance scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2273/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned was paid arrears of jobseeker's allowance amounting to €938.40 on 17 December 2015, covering the period 2nd December 2015 to 22 December 2015. No further arrears are due in this case.

Fuel Allowance Payments

130. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the status of eligibility under the fuel allowance scheme of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2274/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned submitted an application for an increase under the fuel allowance scheme on 2 July 2014. The increase was awarded from that date and the increase remains in payment during the current fuel season.

Disability Allowance Applications

131. **Deputy Pat Rabbitte** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she is

aware that the participants who enter the 12-month residential programme for men with addiction problems, and who are homeless, in Tallaght in Dublin 24 are mostly in receipt of a jobseeker's allowance, which is terminated after 14 weeks when they are entitled to a supplementary welfare allowance, and that they are then ineligible to go on to community employment schemes, SOLAS training courses, education courses and Tús programmes, in respect of which continuous entitlement to a jobseeker's allowance is required; if she will authorise the local office to extend the entitlement to a jobseeker's allowance for six months to facilitate participants returning to work and education; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2279/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): A person in receipt of a jobseeker's payment who is participating in a rehabilitation programme for an addiction, on a residential basis in a HSE approved treatment centre, may be permitted to retain their jobseeker's payment for up to 14 weeks. These programmes support the customer in building their capacity to return to employment in the future.

Customers are advised, at the outset, that these arrangements are intended to cater for a short term stay only e.g. up to 14 weeks to facilitate them in their treatment.

Should a person remain in a residential treatment programme beyond 14 weeks they are advised to apply for a payment more suited to their circumstances, for example, Supplementary Welfare Allowance.

All schemes, employment programmes, training and education courses have particular qualifying conditions and a customer's eligibility for them is examined on an individual basis.

Disability Allowance Applications

132. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will expedite an application by a person (details supplied) in County Kerry under the disability allowance scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2284/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The application for disability allowance (DA), based upon the evidence submitted, was refused on medical grounds and the person in question was notified in writing of this decision on 14 January 2016. The person was also notified of his right to a review of this decision or to appeal it to the independent Social Welfare Appeals Office.

Disability Allowance Eligibility

133. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the precise basis upon which a case of a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath under the disability allowance scheme has been reviewed and the circumstances thereof; if she will give cognisance to the considerable outlay and expenditure incurred by this; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2292/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Disability allowance (DA) is a means tested scheme. Any income, with some specified exceptions, belonging to the person and/or his or her spouse/partner/co-habitant is assessable as means for DA purposes. Full details of the means assessment rules for DA can be found on www.welfare.ie.

Following a routine review of entitlement, it was established that the financial circumstances of the person in question had changed, which resulted in a reduced entitlement. There is no

discretion allowed to deciding officers in the assessment of means as the relevant rules and regulations are laid down in social welfare legislation.

Departmental Expenditure

134. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the amount Seetec Employment and Skills Ireland has been paid for its work under the JobPath scheme; how many persons it has assisted; her views on whether this represents value for money; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2315/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): JobPath is a new approach to employment activation to support long-term unemployed people and those most at risk of becoming long-term unemployed to secure and sustain paid employment. Two companies, Turas Nua and Seetec, have been contracted by the Department to deliver JobPath services. At the end of 2015 some 3,000 jobseekers had been referred to Seetec. It is not intended to publish the individual payments to the JobPath companies as these are commercially sensitive and to do so would place the State at a disadvantage both in terms of the contracts now in place and any future procurement that may be undertaken. JobPath is a payment by results model and all initial costs are borne by the companies. JobPath is so structured that the companies will not be able to fully recover their costs until they place sufficient numbers of jobseekers into sustainable jobs. The companies have a year to work with each jobseeker in order to secure employment. Participants on JobPath receive intensive individual support to help them address barriers to employment and to find jobs. Each person is assigned a personal advisor who assesses their skills, experience, challenges and work goals and agrees a personal progression plan that includes a schedule of activities, actions and job focused targets. Participants are provided with a range of development supports and may also be referred for further education and training opportunities. If placed into a job the companies will continue to provide in-work support to the client for at least three months and up to twelve months while the client remains in employment.

Departmental Contracts

135. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the organisations she uses for outsourcing departmental work, including the processing of applications, the value of the contracts in place and the tasks they carry out; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2316/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The details requested are currently being compiled and a response will issue directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Community Employment Schemes Operation

136. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her proposals to deal with community employment schemes where their insurance per participant has increased six-fold in some instances; and if she is aware of this and the measures she will take to assist schemes and to ensure their sustainability. [2318/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): This Department has become aware in recent times of increases in insurance premiums for CE

schemes. The main reasons cited for this is an increase in claims frequency over recent years by such schemes. The Department has been in consultation with the main insurers and brokers about the proposed increase and to seek to limit the incidence of future claims.

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

The Department is not in a position at present to allocate additional monies to the materials budget in 2016. While materials budgets are allocated on an annual basis, if there is a scheme experiencing particular difficulties, the sponsor should contact their local Intreo office in relation to this matter.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Appeals

137. **Deputy John Browne** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the status of an appeal of a decision refusing domiciliary care allowance to a person (details supplied) in Dublin 5; and if she will reconsider this decision and grant the allowance in the circumstances. [2325/16]

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 7 December 2015. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought. When these papers have been received from the Department, the case in question will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral appeal hearing.

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

State Pension (Contributory) Eligibility

138. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if a person (details supplied) in County Kerry will be provided with credited contributions for the period the person was in receipt of a carer's allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2327/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned applied for state pension (contributory) in February 2014. Their claim was disallowed as they did not satisfy the requirement to have a minimum of 520 paid full-rate Irish insurance contributions. Even if additional credited contributions were considered to be due for a period spent caring, the minimum paid contributions condition would remain unsatisfied.

The person's entitlement to a state pension (contributory) under EU Regulations is also being examined. The United Kingdom's Department for Work and Pensions has advised that it is awaiting confirmation of the person's UK insurance record from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, taking into account documentary evidence submitted regarding additional contributions for the 1967-68 UK contribution year. On receipt by my Department of the revised UK

social insurance record for the person concerned, their pension entitlement under EU Regulations will be reviewed and the person concerned will be notified of the outcome without delay.

Carer's Allowance Applications

139. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection to expedite an application that was submitted by a person (details supplied) in County Cork in October 2015 under the carer's allowance scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2332/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Carer's allowance (CA) is in payment to the person concerned since 14 August 2014 in respect of one care recipient.

The department received an application for CA for a 2nd care recipient from the person concerned on 12 October 2015. CA was awarded to the person concerned on 15 January 2016 and the first payment will issue to their nominated bank account on 21 January 2016 November 2015. Arrears of allowance due from 15 October 2015 to 20 January 2016 have also issued.

The person concerned has been notified of the outcome.

Carer's Allowance Eligibility

140. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath is entitled to the full rate of a carer's allowance, given the person's recent application; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2334/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned is in receipt of carer's allowance (CA) at a reduced rate of payment from 17 April 2003.

The person concerned has requested a review and submitted additional evidence in support of this review. The review is currently being processed and once completed, the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

Question No. 141 withdrawn.

Departmental Staff Promotions

142. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection under the Civil Service reform programme, the number of clerical officers who have been promoted to higher executive officer and the number of executive officers who have been promoted to assistant principal officer in her Department through internal competitions after the significant change in eligibility rules; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2582/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The last internal competitions which were run for promotion to the Higher Executive Officer and Assistant Principal Officer grades within the Department of Social Protection had a closing date of September 2013. This pre-dated the changes in eligibility rules referred to, which were introduced in January 2014.

Insurance Costs

143. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Finance if he will liaise with the Irish Insurance Federation to ascertain why returning emigrants with clean driving licences and a history of driving abroad in countries such as Australia, the United States of America and Canada are being charged exorbitant amounts for their premia; if he will prioritise dealing with this injustice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1670/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As Minister for Finance, I am responsible for the development of the legal framework governing financial regulation. Neither I, nor the Central Bank of Ireland, may interfere in the provision or pricing of insurance products. The EU framework for insurance expressly prohibits Member States from adopting rules which require insurance companies to obtain prior approval of the pricing, or terms and conditions of an insurance product.

The provision of insurance cover and the price at which it is offered, including the granting of no claims discounts, 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. These are considered by insurance companies on a case by case basis. Variations in the costs and risks of providing motor insurance cover can vary between different countries.

Insurance Ireland, which represents the insurance industry in Ireland, has informed me that motor insurers use a combination of rating factors in making their individual decisions on whether to offer cover and what terms to apply. Factors include those such as the age of the driver, the type of car, the claims record, driving experience, the number of drivers, how the car is used, etc.

Insurance Ireland has also informed me that, in general terms, where there has been no motor insurance in an individual's name and there is a gap of cover of two years or more since their last insurance, a no claims discount is deemed invalid. However, it further states that if the individual can produce confirmation that they have been continually insured and are claim-free in their own name while they were abroad this would be taken into consideration.

Insurance Ireland operates a free Insurance Information Service for those who have queries, complaints or difficulties in relation to obtaining insurance. In the event that a person is unable to obtain a quotation for motor insurance or feels that the premium proposed or the terms are so excessive that it amounts to a refusal to give them motor insurance, they should contact Insurance Ireland, 5 Harbourmaster Place, IFSC, Dublin 1, Telephone +353 1 6761820, quoting the Declined Cases Agreement.

Vehicle Registration

144. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Finance the costs of extending the vehicle registration tax rebate for electric vehicles until 2017 and until 2020. [2124/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Section 62 of the Finance Act 2014 provided for an extension of the reliefs from Vehicle Registration Tax (VRT) available for electric vehicles, hybrid electric vehicles and plug-in hybrid electric vehicles till 31 December 2016. The cost of the VRT rebate for electric vehicles in 2015 was €2 million. As the cost of extending the rebate until 2017 and 2020 will rely on a number of factors such as levels registrations of electric vehicles and the Open Market Selling Price (OMSP) of those vehicles during that period, it is not possible to accurately calculate the cost requested.

Flood Risk Insurance Cover

145. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Minister for Finance his views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding flood insurance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1862/16]

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.

Government policy in relation to flooding is focused on the development of a sustainable, planned and risk-based approach to dealing with flooding problems, with a view to addressing the increased availability of flood insurance. To achieve this aim, there is a focus on prioritising spending on flood relief measures, development and implementation of plans by the Office of Public Works (OPW) to implement flood relief schemes. This strategy is complemented by a Memorandum of Understanding between the OPW and Insurance Ireland which provides for the transfer by the OPW of data in relation to completed flood defence schemes to the insurance industry, which should provide a basis for the increased provision of flood insurance in areas where works have been completed.

The OPW has advised me that Durrus in Co. Cork is an Area of Further Assessment (AFA) under the Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management project, and has therefore been the subject of detailed assessment and modelling, leading to the production of draft flood maps. These draft maps were the subject of local Public Consultation Days throughout the country and a statutory public consultation process which concluded on 23rd December 2015. It has clearly been stated that the draft flood maps were published for consultation purposes only and use of the maps for any other purposes is not permitted. Specifically, Insurance Ireland has been informed that these maps cannot be relied upon to inform insurance premiums, policies or excesses. All comments/responses received during the public consultation process will be considered before the flood maps are finalised. The OPW has further advised me that for Sruth Mhuileann, the draft maps indicate that part of this development is an area of low flood probability, i.e. a 0.1% Annual Exceedance Probability (AEP) or a 1,000 year return period, while the remainder of the development is not a flood risk. The preferred design standard that flood risk options are to address is typically the 1% AEP or 100 year return period, and flood risk management options are not designed to manage more extreme flood risks than this.

The current flooding crisis has raised issues in relation to insurance and flooding. The Taoiseach and some other of my colleagues in Government met the insurance industry on Tuesday 12th January 2016 to discuss the industry's role in providing flood insurance and to obtain the industry's views on flood insurance issues such as those outlined in the correspondence supplied by the Deputy. The Taoiseach has asked the insurance industry to revert back within two weeks following further consideration of their approach to the provision of insurance in areas where demountable defences are in place, along with details on the availability of insurance in areas with flood defences.

In addition, my officials are undertaking detailed research on alternative options with the potential to ensure greater availability of flood insurance. This will be in the form of a comparative analysis of the different approaches to flood insurance in other countries.

Disability Allowance Applications

146. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if the National Asset Management Agency will allow individual potential home buyers an opportunity to purchase units it is selling rather than disposing of them to investors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1883/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Deputy will be aware that NAMA does not own residential property and therefore it not itself in a position to sell such property. Rather NAMA has acquired loans and its role is that of a lender with claims over security for its loans, like a bank, rather than a property owner or lessor. The sale of properties securing NAMA's loans is managed directly by the property owners or, where the property is the subject of enforcement, by the appointed receiver/administrator.

NAMA debtors and receivers, who do control residential property, offer such property for open market sale and, in the majority of cases, potential homebuyers may bid for individual residential units. These are advertised in the normal way in newspapers and estate agent websites throughout the country. A selling agent, who advertises a property on behalf of a debtor, would not generally refer to specific properties as being affiliated to the secured lender. This is no different in the sale of property securing NAMA's loans than it would be for the sale of properties securing a bank's loans.

The NAMA website (www.nama.ie) includes a list of residential properties to which receivers have been appointed and which are either for sale or are likely to be offered for sale through receivers in the near future. The NAMA website does not include properties being sold by NAMA debtors or their agents, as to do so would identify such debtors as NAMA debtors. NAMA is legally precluded from identifying its debtors under the NAMA Act 2009. As explained, these properties are openly marketed by the debtor or appointed receiver, rather than NAMA, and are open to bids from individual buyers in the majority of cases.

In certain cases, NAMA debtors and receivers have offered residential units for sale as part of multi-unit sales transactions where this was the most efficient means of managing and completing transactions. However, in such cases, the units concerned are usually occupied by tenants under letting agreements and the option of sale by individual unit may not necessarily be available. A tenant's statutory rights are unaffected by any such sale. As the Deputy will be aware, the decision on sales strategy is made based on the maximisation of value in all instances.

Financial Services Regulation

147. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to deal with spiralling arrears in mortgages held by non-bank financial institutions; if he will make these institutions subject to targets for restructuring solutions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1884/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by the Central Bank of Ireland ('the Central Bank') that non-bank financial institutions are not a regulatory category. However, Retail Credit Firms are authorised to provide credit, in the form of cash loans, directly to individuals (these firms are not licensed to accept deposits). Some firms authorised in this category are mortgage lenders. A register of all Retail Credit Firms is available on the Central Bank website at the following link: <http://registers.centralbank.ie/DownloadsPage.aspx>. The Deputy will be aware that all consumer and relevant SME loans sold by regulated finan-

cial institutions are now covered by the Consumer Protection (Regulation of Credit Servicing Firms) Act 2015. Therefore borrowers are now restored to the protections they previously had, such as the Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears (CCMA), the Consumer Protection Code and the Code of Conduct for Business Lending to Small and Medium Enterprises. Borrowers who previously had access to the Financial Services Ombudsman also have this right restored by this legislation.

The Mortgage Arrears Resolution Targets (MART) were introduced by the Central Bank in March 2013, as a prudential policy measure, to set progressively more demanding quantitative targets for specified Credit Institutions to process mortgage arrears cases and achieve sustainable outcomes. Retail credit firms, which are not authorised to accept deposits, are not subject to the prudential standards set out in the MART. However, the same consumer protection framework applies to retail credit firms as to other regulated lenders, including the Consumer Protection Code and the Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears (CCMA). Any decision about extending the application of MART targets would be a matter for the Central Bank, but as the Deputy is already aware, the Central Bank announced last April that following a thorough assessment of its supervisory approach to mortgage arrears, it has determined that relying on common quarterly solution targets across all banks is no longer appropriate.

The Deputy will also be aware that the CCMA sets out requirements for all mortgage lenders, including Retail Credit Firms, dealing with borrowers in arrears or pre-arrears on a mortgage loan which is secured by their primary residence. It provides a strong consumer protection framework to ensure that borrowers struggling to keep up mortgage repayments are treated in a fair and transparent manner by their lender and that long term resolution is sought by lenders with each of their borrowers. The Central Bank monitors Retail Credit Firms' treatment of borrowers under the CCMA and engages with them in relation to the Mortgage Arrears Resolution Process (MARP), as provided for in the CCMA.

You will be aware that on 23 June 2015 the Central Bank published the results of a themed inspection of lenders' compliance with its statutory CCMA, which found that, overall, lenders have implemented frameworks as required by the CCMA. These results are available at <http://www.centralbank.ie/press-area/press-releases/Documents/230615%20Letter%20to%20Industry.pdf>. I am informed by the Central Bank that Retail Credit firms were included in the scope of this themed inspection of the CCMA. The Central Bank has confirmed that it is currently reviewing responses received from all lenders that were subject to the CCMA themed inspection. It continues to engage with these lenders as part of its on-going supervisory engagement to ensure compliance with the Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears (CCMA).

Mortgage Arrears Proposals

148. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance to instruct banks to make greater use of split mortgages and other long-term solutions in preference to arrears capitalisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1885/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Deputy will be aware that the Central Bank of Ireland (Central Bank) publishes the Residential Mortgage Arrears and Repossession Statistics series on a quarterly basis which provides a comprehensive overview of the entire Irish mortgage market including information on arrears broken down by inter alia restructure arrangements broken down by type; and the performance of restructured mortgage accounts. Data is provided by all entities that hold loans secured on properties located in the Republic of Ireland including inter alia bank and non-bank entities. The most recent series (Q3 2015 data) was published by the Central Bank on 11 December 2015 and can be accessed at <http://www>.

centralbank.ie/polstats/stats/mortgagearrears/Documents/2015q3_ie_mortgage_arrears_statistics.pdf. A total stock of 120,806 PDH mortgage accounts were categorised as restructured at end Q3 2015, reflecting an increase of 1.9% when compared with the previous quarter. Split mortgages and arrears capitalisations accounted for 20% and 28% of the total PDH restructures respectively, and showed significant increases over the quarter.

The Deputy will also be aware that I have no direct function in the relationship between the customer and banks. Notwithstanding the fact that the State is a shareholder in certain financial institutions, I must ensure that these banks are run on a commercial and independent basis to ensure the value of the banks as an asset to the State.

Decisions taken by the banks are a matter for the board and management of the relevant institution. The relationship framework agreements define the arm's-length nature of the relationship between the State and the banks in which the State has an investment. All banks operating in the State are therefore entitled to pursue all options open to them within the significant constraints imposed by the regulator, the Central Bank and the law as it applies. In this context, I would remind the Deputy of the strong consumer protection framework provided by the CCMA, in particular provision 39 - Resolution, which requires each lender to explore all of the options for alternative repayment arrangements (ARAs) which it offers, when determining which ARA options are viable for each particular case.

Illicit Trade in Fuel and Tobacco Products

149. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the efforts the Revenue Commissioners and Customs officials are making to clamp down on smuggling of tobacco and fuel; the cost to the State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1886/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Revenue Commissioners advise me that it is inherently difficult to estimate the extent of any illegal activity with confidence and that it is not possible, therefore, to put a figure on the cost to the Exchequer of fuel fraud. The extent of the illicit trade in cigarettes is estimated, however, through annual surveys of smokers that are carried out for Revenue and the National Tobacco Control Office of the Health Service Executive by Ipsos MRBI. Assuming that the illegal cigarettes consumed displaced the equivalent full tax paid quantity of cigarettes, the results of the 2014 survey indicate that the loss to the Exchequer in excise duty and VAT attributable to the illegal trade was of the order of €214 million.

I am advised also that combatting the illegal tobacco and fuel trades is, and will continue to be, a high priority for Revenue.

Revenue's actions against the illegal tobacco trade include a range of measures to identify and target those who are involved in the supply or sale of illicit products, with a view to seizing those products and prosecuting the persons involved. This multifaceted strategy also includes ongoing analysis of the nature and extent of the problem, development and sharing of intelligence on a national, EU and international basis, use of analytics, deployment of detection technologies and optimising the deployment of resources.

Revenue has also implemented a comprehensive strategy to tackle the illegal fuel trade, based on the introduction of stringent supply chain controls, the implementation from April 2015 of a new fuel marker here and in the UK, and rigorous enforcement action.

In addition, Revenue cooperates extensively with An Garda Síochána in acting against these illicit trades, and the relevant authorities in the State also work closely with their counterparts in Northern Ireland, through cross-border enforcement groups, to target the organised crime

groups that are responsible for a large proportion of these forms of criminality. I believe that this work to tackle cross-jurisdictional organised crime will be supported and reinforced by the establishment, in the framework of “A Fresh Start: The Stormont Agreement and Implementation Plan”, of the Joint Agency Task Force, which includes the Revenue Commissioners.

Revenue’s programmes of action against these criminal activities have achieved notable successes. During 2015, some 68 million illicit cigarettes and 2,364 kilograms of illicit tobacco were seized, and there were 40 and 75 convictions, respectively, for tobacco smuggling and the sale of illicit tobacco products. In addition, 15 filling stations were closed down and 215,000 litres of fuel were seized during the year, bringing total closures and seizures since 2011 to 149 stations and more than 3 million litres. 31 fuel laundries, where prescribed markers were illegally removed from fuel, were also detected and shut down during that time. The industry view is that the measures implemented have been successful in curtailing fuel fraud. This view is supported by a significant increase in tax revenues from road diesel over recent years. An analysis of long-term consumption trends for road diesel and marked diesel in Ireland undertaken by Revenue also pointed to a significant change in the pattern of consumption following implementation of the anti-fraud measures.

For my part, I have acted to ensure that the Revenue Commissioners have the statutory powers necessary for undertaking this important work.

In the case of tobacco, measures in the Finance Act 2012 clarified the legal basis for Revenue officers to open and examine the contents of postal and courier packets that are reasonably believed to contain untaxed tobacco products. In the Finance Act 2013, I introduced new offence and forfeiture measures relating to the illicit production of tobacco, including offences of keeping materials and equipment for the purpose of illegal tobacco production, and provision for forfeiture of any equipment, materials, or unmanufactured tobacco used for illicit production. The Finance (No. 2) Act 2013 strengthened the obligation of a person suspected of dealing in unstamped tobacco products to provide information to a Revenue officer or a Garda and to present any tobacco products concerned for examination. The measure also allows any bag or other receptacle that is reasonably believed to contain tobacco products that are concerned in an offence to be searched.

In relation to fuel, action was taken to ensure the necessary legislative underpinning for a range of key initiatives, including the strengthening of the licensing regime for auto fuel traders, the introduction of a new licensing regime for marked fuel traders, the putting in place of new requirements for recording and reporting of fuel transactions, and the introduction of the new fuel marker. Revenue’s ability to combat fuel fraud was strengthened also by the introduction, in the Finance (No. 2) Act 2013, of a provision making a supplier who is reckless in supplying fuel for a purpose connected with excise fraud liable for duty at the standard rate of tax. In the Finance Act 2014, Revenue’s entitlement to refuse or revoke a mineral oil trader’s licence was augmented to cover situations including where a trader does not maintain adequate stock management systems and records, or provides false or misleading information.

I am satisfied that, as a result of these initiatives, the current legislative framework provides an effective basis for action by Revenue against fuel and tobacco offences, and I am assured by the Revenue Commissioners that action against such activities will continue to be a central element of their work.

Ireland Strategic Investment Fund Investments

150. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he is satisfied with the

pace at which the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund is investing the cash it has available and the economic impact of these projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1887/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF), managed by the National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA), has advised that it has committed €2.2 billion to investments in Ireland as at 31 December 2015. The Fund, which was established to invest on a commercial basis to support economic activity and employment in Ireland, committed €759 million to Irish projects in 2015 which are in addition to previous commitments of approximately €1.4 billion by its predecessor the National Pensions Reserve Fund (NPRF) made prior to 2015. The level of 2015 commitments is in line with the 2015 deployment target of €500 million to €1 billion. When combined with third-party capital, ISIF backed companies, projects and funds have attracted total investment commitments to date amounting to €5.2 billion.

Further information on the ISIF deployment objectives and targets is available at <http://www.ntma.ie/business-areas/ireland-strategic-investment-fund/>

The ISIF has also published its first semi-annual update of the economic impact of its investments, covering the six month period to 30 June 2015 (detail of commitments made as at 31 December 2015 will be published shortly):

- Over 12,000 jobs are supported directly and indirectly by the Fund's investments (In line with industry standards, an indirect employment multiplier is applied to direct jobs. The NTMA calculation of employment multipliers is based on Central Statistics Office methodology and has been verified by the CSO).

- The Fund's Irish investments are split approximately 50/50 between Dublin and the rest of Ireland.

- 85 Irish companies backed by the Fund generated turnover of €645 million in the first half of 2015.

- 35% of their turnover comes from exports.

- €218 million was earned in wages/salaries in the first half of 2015 by employees of these companies.

- Gross Value Added (GVA) from the Fund's investments was €276 million (GVA is a standard method to measure economic impact).

The full Economic Impact Report is available online at: <http://www.ntma.ie/business-areas/ireland-strategic-investment-fund/>

The Investment Strategy of the Fund published in July 2015 notes that deployment is subject to availability of suitable opportunities that meet the Fund's double bottom line mandate of commercial return and economic impact, that the nature of the opportunity set is uncertain and that investment by the Fund should not crowd out private investment. The Investment Strategy targets commitment of the full fund to investments in Ireland by end 2019.

I am satisfied with the pace of deployment and the economic impact achieved by the Fund to date and look forward to the future impact and benefits of the fund as its resources continue to be deployed in line with its investment plan.

Tax Reliefs Application

151. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the impact of tax relief changes introduced in budget 2014 on private medical insurance premiums; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1888/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Since 16 October 2013, tax relief for medical insurance premiums has been restricted to the first €1,000 per adult and the first €500 per child insured. Any portion of premium paid in excess of these ceilings no longer qualifies for tax relief. Prior to this, income tax relief for medical insurance premiums was provided at source, at the standard rate of income tax, on the entire premium amount regardless of cost. Therefore, the State was paying 20% of the cost of all private medical insurance premiums.

The cost of Income Tax relief in respect of medical insurance increased significantly in the years leading up to the introduction of the caps in Budget 2014, estimated at €404 million in 2011 and €448 million in 2012. Despite the increasing cost of the relief, the numbers insured were estimated to have reduced by approximately 150,000 over the same period, while at the same time the level of medical cover decreased on some policies. Against this background the increase in costs was unsustainable. If the relief had remained unchanged and the trend was to continue, it was estimated that the cost of the relief would have increased to approximately €1 billion per annum by 2020.

Relief through the tax system effectively means that some taxpayers who could never afford private health insurance, or who had to give up their policies due to personal circumstances, provide financial support to those individuals who can afford such insurance. In my view, taking into account the increasing costs and reducing coverage outlined above, it was unfair and unsustainable to allow unrestricted tax relief on private medical insurance premiums, particularly at a time when the general population has contributed so much to repairing the public finances. The ceilings ensure a level of continuing support via the tax system for those who purchase medical insurance policies, while reducing Exchequer exposure to more expensive policies.

It should also be noted that the 2009 Commission on Taxation recommended the retention of medical insurance relief, but that it should be limited. The introduction in Budget 2014 of an upper ceiling on the amount of medical insurance premiums that qualify for tax relief achieved this recommendation.

The potential yield to the Exchequer in 2014 of restricting tax relief on private medical insurance policies to the first €1,000 of a premium is tentatively estimated to be in the order of €151 million. This yield takes into account the difference between the actual cost of the relief in 2014 and the potential cost of an unrestricted relief, taking into account the increased numbers of policy holders following the introduction of lifetime community rating in 2014.

When the cap was introduced in Budget 2014, it was estimated that the yield to the Exchequer would be approximately €94 million in the first year and €127 million in a full year. The reduction in overall Exchequer cost from the last full year in which unrestricted relief was available (€448 million in 2012) was €94 million in 2014 and €123 million in 2015, based on the current estimates for Exchequer costs in those years of €354 million and €325 million respectively. On this basis, I am satisfied that the projected Exchequer yield in Budget 2014 was accurate, and that the current caps are functioning appropriately and as intended.

Mortgage Lending

152. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he has or intends to formally request the Central Bank of Ireland to review any aspect of its mortgage rules; and if he

will make a statement on the matter. [1889/16]

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

As the Deputy is aware, the Central Bank is independent in the formulation and implementation of these macro prudential measures. In that context, the Central Bank committed itself to monitoring the implemented measures and I have been informed by the Central Bank that it will publish studies assessing the operation of the rules and of what it is seeing in the market in the second half of 2016. While no further detail on the format of this work is available at this time, the Governor nevertheless did indicate that if the Central Bank sees strong reasons to vary the rules then it would be open minded about making an adjustment if the analysis suggests that a change, in either direction, is appropriate. However, this will be a matter for the Central Bank to consider in due course.

Fiscal Policy

153. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the fiscal space that will be available in each of the next five years following the publication of the Exchequer returns for 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1890/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The projected fiscal space figures published in Table A8 on page C.50 of the Budget 2016 book are consistent with compliance with our obligations under the expenditure benchmark. Fiscal space is calculated in line with the trend potential growth rate of GDP less a convergence margin that applies as Ireland is not yet at its medium term budgetary objective under the balanced budget rule. It should be noted that changes in revenue levels are not relevant to the calculation of fiscal space unless it arises from a discretionary policy decision. Additional revenue arising from discretionary measures increases the overall fiscal space while the converse in relation to revenue reductions also applies.

The medium term fiscal space projections set out in Budget 2016 are not final as they are based on projections for the GDP deflators, reference rates, convergence margins and general government expenditure outturns for each of the relevant years. The actual GDP deflators, reference rates and convergence margins values used to assess compliance with the rules each year will be set by the European Commission using their estimates compiled in their Spring and Autumn forecasts. The general government expenditure values used to evaluate adherence to the rules will be the final Central Statistics Office (CSO) estimates from the National Income and Expenditure (NIE) and Government Finance Statistics (GFS).

Although 2015 tax revenue was ahead of expectations due to overall economic growth and buoyancy, it will not impact on the fiscal space available for 2016 and subsequent years. 2015 Exchequer spending, which is the largest component of general government expenditure, was in line with Budget day projections and will have little impact on the availability of fiscal space.

The first official estimates for general government expenditure for 2015 will be compiled by the CSO for the end March 2016 Excessive Deficit Procedure (EDP) transmission to EURO-STAT. Following on from this and the next iteration of the European Commission's forecasts

in February, revised projections of fiscal space for the next five years will be published by my Department in the Stability Programme Update 2016.

State Banking Sector

154. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to return Allied Irish Banks to the private sector; the issues that need to be addressed in the Irish banking sector generally before this happens; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1891/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I have made it clear that the decision to sell any part of our shareholding in AIB will be one for the next Government.

The State's stake in AIB is a valuable asset. As the deputy will know, in December of 2015, AIB successfully completed the reorganisation of the bank's capital, including the return of almost €1.7 billion to the exchequer from the redemption of Preference Shares. This was possible because the bank have made significant progress on a number of fronts, such as returning to profitability, reducing non-performing loans and increasing lending into the Irish economy. In this context, I think it prudent to explore the options available to us, with a view to ultimately recouping the significant investments that the State made in AIB during the financial crisis.

There is still work to be done in assessing how we might structure our gradual exit from the bank and particularly when we should start this process. My Department have recently appointed an Independent Financial Advisor, Rothschild, to provide advice in this regard. The appointment will help provide the next government with all the information and optionality they need to make an informed decision about our investment.

The Irish banking sector has made substantial progress in improving profitability, reducing impaired loans, and increasing lending particularly to SMEs. Where legacy issues remain in the sector - such as the elevated, though declining, number of mortgages in arrears - it is the remit of the Central Bank to monitor these and intervene where required. All progress toward a more stable and active banking sector will have positive implications for the value of the State's shareholdings in the banks.

IBRC Liquidation

155. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance when an updated projection of the final outcome of the Irish Bank Resolution Corporation liquidation will be available; if the State expects to pay all unsecured creditors including junior bondholders; when cash will be returned to the State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1892/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Special Liquidators intend to provide an update on the winding up of Irish Bank Resolution Corporation Limited (in Special Liquidation) by way of their third progress update report in the first quarter of 2016.

I am advised by the Special Liquidators that they currently have a cash balance in excess of €2.1 billion on hand which will be available for distribution to creditors.

The ultimate level of dividend paid, if any, to each creditor cannot be known until such time as all loan assets are sold, the total level of adjudicated creditors is finalised and the other contingent creditor claims which may crystallise, including those from litigation, are known.

I am advised by the Special Liquidators that they continue to adjudicate on claims by each

creditor class. As the Deputy is aware the payment of proceeds from the liquidation, the costs and expenses of the liquidation, preferred creditors and senior unsecured creditors will all rank in priority to the holders of subordinated debt. Each class of creditor will be paid according to their legal priority as set out in the Companies Acts.

The priority for the distribution of assets under the Companies Act's is generally:

1. Costs and expenses of the ongoing liquidation (these claims are certain to be paid in full);
2. Preferential creditors, including certain taxes and employee and pension claims arising prior to the date of liquidation (these claims are certain to be paid in full);
3. Amounts owing to NAMA under the Facility Deed acquired from the Central Bank which were secured by a floating charge over the bank's assets (these claims have been fully repaid and the floating charge has been released);
4. Unsecured creditors, including:
 - Debts owing to the Minister/NTMA under ELG
 - Debts owing to the Deposit Guarantee Scheme
 - Unguaranteed debt/depositors
 - Unknown, including:
 - * Local authority development bonds
 - * Suppliers / other "normal" unsecured creditors
 - * Employees that are not preferential creditors
 - * Contingent creditors and other potential costs principally relating to litigation, etc.
5. Subordinated creditors
6. Members of the company - the Minister currently holds 100% of all shares and preference shares in the company.

Tax Exemptions

156. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Finance the status of an application by a person (details supplied) in Dublin 11 for an exemption from vehicle registration tax; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1901/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by Revenue that an application for an exemption from Vehicle Registration Tax (VRT) was made by the person concerned in November 2014. The letter of acknowledgement issued by Revenue following receipt of the application contained details of a Revenue contact phone number, postal address, email address and a named Revenue official.

Revenue made numerous unsuccessful attempts to contact the person concerned, at the contact address and telephone number provided in the application, as regards additional information required to facilitate consideration of the application. In the circumstances, the application was eventually refused by Revenue in May 2015. I understand from Revenue that efforts to

deliver a registered letter advising of the refusal were also unsuccessful.

Defence Forces Remuneration

157. **Deputy Michael McNamara** asked the Minister for Finance if he will outline the status of the PDFORRA claim to the Revenue Commissioners for a flat rate expenses allowance under section 114 of the Tax Consolidation Act 1997; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1930/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The legislation governing the deductibility of expenses incurred in employment, as set out in section 114 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997, provides that, for an expense to qualify as a deduction against income from an office or employment, the expense must be wholly, exclusively and necessarily incurred in the performance of the duties of the office or employment.

For ease of administration, where a large number of employees incur similar qualifying expenses which are not reimbursed by their employer, the Revenue Commissioners have over the years provided a facility whereby a flat rate expense allowance may be claimed. Such a flat rate is agreed between the Revenue Commissioners and persons representing the relevant group of employees, typically a trade union or similar body. In agreeing a flat rate expense, an entitlement to a deduction must first be established by reference to the nature and amount of the expense incurred. It must also be established that any such expense is not reimbursed by the relevant employer(s), either directly or by way of an allowance or other means. As part of this process, it is necessary to clarify the extent to which expenses are similarly incurred by all relevant employees.

I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that they are currently in discussions with PD-FORRA regarding a claim for a flat rate expense allowance for certain members of the Defence Forces. The discussions involve an examination of the categories of duty carried on by the relevant members, the types of expenses wholly, necessarily and exclusively incurred in such duties and the nature and purpose of any allowances currently paid in respect of those duties.

Tax Yield

158. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he has revised his budget 2016 day forecast of €6,614 million for corporation tax receipts in 2016, given the outturn for 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1991/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): My Department issues official taxation forecasts twice a year, firstly as part of the annual Budget, which is published in October each year and then updated, if necessary, in the Stability Programme Update (SPU) in April of the following year. Therefore, the next official forecast for 2016 in respect of corporation tax will be contained in the 2016 SPU. As part of the SPU process my Department will continue to examine, with the assistance of the Office of the Revenue Commissioners, the very strong corporation tax performance in 2015. Any revision of the 2016 forecast will take this analysis and any further developments, including the outturn for the first quarter of 2016, into account.

Pension Provisions

159. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Finance if the guaranteed income of

€12,700 associated with drawing down a private pension early is remaining at the current rate or if it will be increasing back to over €18,000; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2037/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): In Finance Act 2013, I rescinded the Finance Act 2011 changes to the specified or guaranteed pension income requirement for Approved Retirement Fund access which had increased that income requirement from €12,700 to a variable limit based on 1.5 times the State Pension (Contributory) which amounted to €18,000 per annum. At the same time, I also rescinded the Finance Act 2011 change which had increased the maximum “set aside” amount required to be invested in an Approved Minimum Retirement Fund (AMRF) from €63,500 of the remaining pension fund (after taking the permissible tax-free lump sum) to a variable amount equal to 10 times the annual State Pension (Contributory) rounded to the nearest €100 which amounted to €119,800 or the remainder of the pension fund if less than this increased amount. Investment in an AMRF is a requirement for individuals with Defined Contribution pension arrangements who do not meet the specified income requirement and choose not to purchase an annuity.

I re-introduced the original specified income requirement (€12,700) and maximum AMRF set-aside amount (€63,500) on the grounds, among other reasons, that without an appropriate transition period, the 2011 Finance Act changes would detrimentally affect the plans of many individuals preparing for retirement over the medium term. The intention at the time of Finance Act 2013 was that the 2011 changes would be re-introduced in 2016.

In the context of the preparations for Finance Bill 2015 I chose not to re-introduce the 2011 changes and have no specific plans to do so at any particular point in the future.

Insurance Industry

160. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Finance the status of the payment of claims by Setanta Insurance; the level of payments that are expected to be made; the approximate timeframe for this matter to be dealt with; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2098/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The liquidation of an insurance company is a legally complex process. Setanta is a Maltese incorporated company and, therefore, the Setanta liquidation is being carried out under Maltese law.

Progress in the liquidation of Setanta Insurance has been awaiting the outcome of legal proceedings in the case of the Law Society of Ireland versus the Motor Insurers’ Bureau of Ireland (MIBI). On 4 September 2015, the High Court held that the MIBI is liable in respect of claims against the policy holders of Setanta. This decision is currently being appealed by the MIBI and the appeal hearing took place last week (on 12, 13 and 14 January 2016). As this case is *sub judice*, there are certain matters which I am not in a position to comment on at this time. Thus, I am responding to the Deputy’s question as best as I can within these constraints.

The Liquidator for Setanta has informed me that:

- The number of open claims was 1,696 as at 30 November 2015.
- The claims reserves position stands at between €87.7 million and €95.2 million.
- The Liquidator is continuing to accept new claims up until May 2016, two years after the insurance policies issued by Setanta were cancelled.

- Final settlements can only be paid out after all of the company's liabilities are quantified, including claims.

- The Liquidator reports that it is proving difficult to settle claims in advance of the outcome of the MIBI appeal.

I expect to be in a better position to inform the House after the legal proceedings are concluded and the implications of the outcome of those proceedings have been assessed.

European Central Bank

161. **Deputy Joe Costello** asked the Minister for Finance if he has examined the benefits and drawbacks of the European Central Bank increasing its inflation target from 2%; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2109/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) assigns responsibility for monetary policy to the European System of Central Banks (the ECB and national central banks). Article 127 of the TFEU provides that the “primary objective of the European System of Central Banks (ESCB) shall be to maintain price stability”. This article goes on to say that “without prejudice to the objective of price stability, the ESCB shall support the general economic policies in the Union”. While the TFEU does not give a precise definition of what is meant by price stability the ECB's Governing Council has defined price stability as a year-on-year increase in the Harmonised Index of Consumer Prices (HICP) for the euro area of below (but close to) 2%.

The TFEU provides, at Article 130, for the independence of the ECB, the ESCB and national central banks in carrying out the tasks and duties conferred on them by the Treaties and in particular that the “Union institutions, bodies, offices or agencies and the governments of the Member States undertake to respect this principle and not to seek to influence the members of the decision-making bodies of the European Central Bank or of the national central banks in the performance of their tasks”.

In this context, I should point out that inflation in the euro area has been below levels consistent with price stability for some time. The “flash” estimate shows the euro area annual rate is expected to be 0.2 per cent in December 2015 and inflation has been close to zero over 2015. The ECB's priority is to return inflation to levels consistent with price stability. In January 2015, the ECB decided to take additional monetary policy measures as it considered the prevailing degree of monetary accommodation to be insufficient to adequately address heightened risks of too prolonged a period of low inflation.

In that regard, under the ECB's Expanded Asset Purchase Programme (“Quantitative Easing”), the eurosystem (comprising the ECB and the national central banks of the euro area) has been purchasing €60 billion of public and private assets per month and plan to do so until at least March 2017, or until there is an improvement in inflation to levels consistent with price stability.

Universal Social Charge Exemptions

162. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated cost of abolishing the universal social charge on incomes below €80,000; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2151/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the estimated first and full year cost of increasing the USC (Universal Social Charge) exemption threshold from €13,000 to €80,000 is in the order of €1,584 million and €2,148 million respectively. This costing assumes that the current USC rates and bands as set out in Budget 2016 remain in place for those earning in excess of €80,000 per annum.

These figures are estimates from the Revenue tax forecasting model using latest actual data for the year 2013, adjusted as necessary for income, self-employment and employment trends in the interim. They are estimated by reference to 2016 incomes and are provisional and may be revised.

Debt Collection

163. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the Revenue Commissioners ceasing to engage with a taxpayer on an amount owed after referring the collection of the debt to an external solicitor or sheriff; if it is appropriate for the Revenue Commissioners not to engage in further negotiations, even though there may be matters to be negotiated after the referral of the case to a third party; if it is further appropriate that the Revenue Commissioners can devolve responsibilities in relation to the collection of taxes in this manner; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2280/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by Revenue that its clear preference is to always engage directly with taxpayers and businesses that are experiencing temporary cash-flow difficulties rather than deploying debt collection/enforcement sanctions.

However, any such engagement is predicated on open and honest discussion by the taxpayer/business, including a willingness to identify and agree a mutually satisfactory payment arrangement. The arrangement will always include an interest element, which is a statutory charge that Revenue has no discretion on, and will require a clear commitment from the taxpayer/business to pay future taxes as they fall due.

Revenue has also assured me that cases are only referred to the Sheriff or to an external solicitor as a last alternative where discussions with the taxpayer/business have failed to resolve the issue. Once a tax debt is referred to the Sheriff or external solicitor, Revenue generally ceases to negotiate directly with the taxpayer/business.

Revenue does of course continue to negotiate directly with the taxpayer/business on all issues other than the specific debt that was referred to the Sheriff or external solicitor. Revenue may also, in exceptional circumstances, agree to re-engage with the taxpayer/business in relation to the referred debt where relevant and previously unknown issues subsequently arise. However any such re-engagement will require the taxpayer/business to firstly pay any fees or expenses already incurred by the enforcement agent.

If there are particular issues that have arisen in a case since it was referred for debt collection/enforcement, then the Deputy should advise the taxpayer/business to make immediate contact with Revenue. If there are no emerging issues, the Deputy should advise the taxpayer/business to engage with the Sheriff or external solicitor who have discretion to agree a mutually suitable payment arrangement.

Revenue has taken a very proactive approach to taxpayers/businesses experiencing difficulty in paying their taxes. I strongly advise any taxpayers/ businesses in difficulty to engage early with Revenue and not to ignore demands for payment. Enforcement is a last resort and the system would cease to work effectively if following referral the taxpayer/business could re-

open negotiations directly with Revenue.

Departmental Offices

164. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Finance if his Department was refurbished recently; the work done; and the cost. [2298/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): This issue has already been discussed in this House at Estimates time last year.

My Department and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform share the office space in the South Block of Government Buildings.

In 2014 the Office of Public Works (OPW) conducted an investigation of the Building and concluded that a full electrical rewiring and upgrade of the fire systems was necessary as a matter of urgency. In particular some electrical equipment was found to be in a very dangerous state.

OPW commenced a tender process in July 2015 and the project has started and will continue until Autumn 2016. The project includes the replacement of old electrical fittings with energy saving appliances and a complete electrical rewiring, which in turn necessitates plastering, repainting and redecorating. Fire prevention systems are being upgraded to current standards.

The project provides the opportunity for some restoration works for the South Block part of the historic Government Buildings complex. Some non-structural partitions are also being removed to optimise office space utilisation. Given the historic nature of the Building, conservation architects from OPW are overseeing the project and OPW is sharing the total cost of the project with the two departments in 2015 and 2016. The total cost of the project is approximately €4 million.

If the current programme of works were not carried out, then both Departments may have needed to vacate the building on health and safety grounds and seek office space elsewhere in the vicinity at additional cost.

Property Tax Exemptions

165. **Deputy Gabrielle McFadden** asked the Minister for Finance if he will temporarily exempt homes from property tax on the basis that they should be re-valued at zero until such time as they regain their value after flood defences are put in place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2349/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Section 13 of the Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 (as amended) sets out how residential properties are to be valued for Local Property Tax (LPT) purposes.

The current valuation date of 1 May 2013 is now valid until 31 October 2019 on foot of a recent legislative amendment (Finance (Local Property Tax) (Amendment) Act 2015). The declared valuation is not affected by any repairs or improvements made to a property or by any general increase or decrease in property prices that might occur over the course of the valuation period.

The date that determines if a property owner is liable for LPT for any given year is known

as the 'liability date'. The 'liability date' is set by the LPT Act as 1 November in the preceding year and the owner on this date is liable to pay LPT for the following year. For example, the 'liability date' for the year 2016 is 1 November 2015. If a property becomes uninhabitable after that date the liability for 2016 remains due.

The LPT Act does not provide for revised or reduced valuations on foot of occurrences such as the recent flooding. However, initial analysis by Revenue indicates that the majority of properties situated on affected 'flood plains' are already valued in the lowest Valuation Band and the question of a reduction in value does not therefore arise.

Revenue recently announced that it is making the LPT Deferral and Partial Deferral relief available to property owners, in respect of the 2016 liability, whose principal private residence was flooded during the recent bad weather. The relief is available to the people affected, regardless of whether they qualify under the normal Deferral/Partial Deferral criteria as set down in Part 12 of the LPT Act, providing they are in receipt of assistance through the Department of Social Protection Humanitarian Relief Fund.

For clarity, Part 12 of the LPT Act provides for Deferral, and Partial Deferral (50%) schemes that can apply to liable property owners under certain conditions including, 'Income Level', 'Hardship', 'Personal Insolvency' and also to 'Personal Representative of a Deceased Person'. The deferred tax remains as a charge on the property and must be paid before a sale or transfer can be completed. Interest is charged on the deferred amount at a rate of 4% per annum and the duration of the relief normally coincides with the valuation period (1 May 2013 to 31 October 2019).

It may however arise that certain properties have suffered damage and have become uninhabitable and will not be repaired by 1 November 2016 and will be unfit for occupation by the property owner. Such properties, once they are not occupied at 1 November 2016, will not be liable for LPT for 2017.

Property owners who wish to avail of the deferral option or require clarification in regard to their particular circumstances should contact the LPT Helpline at 1890 200 255 to make the necessary arrangements. Revenue has assured me that any queries or requests for deferral will be prioritised and responses will be issued without delay.

The Deputy will be aware that the Government has provided a number of supports to persons affected by flooding including the Humanitarian Assistance Scheme administered by the Department of Social Protection (DSP).

Departmental Staff Promotions

166. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Finance under the Civil Service reform programme, the number of clerical officers who have been promoted to higher executive officer and the number of executive officers who have been promoted to assistant principal officer in his Department through internal competitions after the significant change in eligibility rules; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2576/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I wish to inform the Deputy that since the implementation of the Cross Stream Promotion arrangements a number of staff at Clerical Officer and Executive Officer level in my Department have participated in various competitions which were advertised internally. However, to date, none have been successful.

All competitions run by my Department adhere to the Commission for Public Service Ap-

pointments Code of Practice.

Flood Relief Schemes Funding

167. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when he will make a decision on a funding allocation on the basis of Clare County Council's submission of a feasibility study which examined the flooding issues and proposed a flood defence scheme for Seafeld and Clohaninchy in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1837/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): The Office of Public Works (OPW) is reviewing the feasibility study report prepared by the engineering consultants engaged by Clare County Council to examine the flooding issues at the location mentioned. The OPW will be responding to the Council as soon as possible once it has completed a full review of the feasibility study report.

Office of Public Works Properties

168. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of a property (details supplied) under the ownership of the Office of Public Works in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1880/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): I am advised by the Commissioners of Public Works that they are in the process of disposing of the State's interest in the former Garda station at Lauragh, Co. Kerry at present.

Flood Relief Schemes

169. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the funding available to assist businesses in flood-prone areas of Cork city (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2215/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): The Lower Lee (Cork City) Flood Relief Scheme is at design stage with the outline design expected to be completed in the next few months. At the same time, an Environmental Impact Statement will be completed. It is expected that this will allow the holding of a formal public exhibition in mid 2016 following which work on the detailed design will be progressed with the aim of enabling the OPW to submit the Scheme for Ministerial Confirmation under the Arterial Drainage Acts as early as possible in 2017.

In relation to management of the flood risk for Cork, the Office of Public Works (OPW) is currently undertaking the Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) Programme throughout the country. The Programme involves an assessment of 300 locations nationwide including 90 coastal locations, the mapping of potentially significant flood risk areas and the production of flood risk management options and plans. These draft Flood Risk Management Plans are due to be published in mid-2016 for public consultation.

In the context of the CFRAM Programme, the Government announced two pilot Individual Property Protection (IPP) projects on 5 January 2015. These are community based pilots to inform the mechanism to deliver IPP, as part of a community based approach or scheme and

also the potential costs and benefits attached to IPP for areas where a flood defence scheme is not likely to be completed for some time.

These pilots are:

- a feasibility study in Thomastown and Graiguenamanagh, where Kilkenny County Council has procured consultants to carry out the study that are due to be appointed in January 2016. The consultants will survey each property to establish potential and appropriate IPP options for the community. The development of all possible feasible flood defence options for these towns is an ongoing part of the CFRAM process, and

- Mayo County Council is considering the potential viability of a scheme for the installation of flood gates for some properties, identified by the community in Crossmolina, as an interim measure to help mitigate any further flood damage pending the completion of the defence scheme for the town.

The pilots will, in time, inform any extension of IPP to other areas.

Public Service Reform Plan Update

170. **Deputy Michael McNamara** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when internal vacancies in the Civil Service will be centrally advertised, as proposed in the reform plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46361/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): I understand that the Deputy is interested in Action 15 of the Civil Service Renewal Plan which aims to improve mobility arrangements in the civil and public service.

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

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.

In the civil service 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.

Flood Prevention Measures

171. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when the application process for the pilot scheme for individual home protection measures in Crossmolina in County Mayo will be open; how will it operate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1865/16]

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

mon Harris): The Government announced two pilot Individual Property Protection (IPP) projects on 5 January 2015. These are community based pilots to inform the mechanism to deliver IPP, as part of a community based approach or scheme and also the potential costs and benefits attached to IPP for areas where a flood defence scheme is not likely to be completed for some time.

Mayo County Council is considering the potential viability of a scheme for the installation of flood gates for some properties, identified by the community in Crossmolina, as an interim measure to help mitigate any further flood damage pending the completion of the defence scheme for the town. The flood defence scheme is due to commence in 2017.

Flood Relief Schemes

172. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his response to the ongoing flooding, particularly in County Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2002/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): The unprecedented rainfall in December led to extensive flooding across the country including in Co. Wexford.

A flood relief scheme is being progressed by Wexford County Council for Enniscorthy. The River Slaney (Enniscorthy) Flood Relief Scheme was publicly exhibited in 2009 but due to significant local opposition did not proceed to Confirmation stage at that point. Taking on board comments received during the exhibition, amendments were made to the outline design. Consultants were recently appointed by the Council to complete the detailed design both for the flood defences and the new bridge. It is hoped to have the designs completed mid-2016 and pending any objections following further public consultation, the scheme will be submitted to the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform for confirmation. It is hoped to be in a position to appoint contractors early in 2017.

The Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) Programme is currently being undertaken by the OPW in partnership with local authorities and other stakeholders, in line with national flood policy and the EU Directive (2007/EC/60). The South Eastern CFRAM Study is one of six regional studies that are assessing flood risk in 300 Areas for Further Assessment (AFAs) deemed to be at potentially significant risk and impact from flooding. Good progress is being made on the Study which is assessing the areas of Blackwater, Bunclody, Courtown, Gorey, Kilmore, New Ross & Environs and Wexford including the North & South Slob.

Enniscorthy is an Area for Further Assessment (AFA) under the South Eastern CFRAM study. The flood relief scheme for this location will cover the River Slaney within the town centre. An area called Cherry Orchard is within Enniscorthy AFA and is located on the Urrin, a tributary of the Slaney. The South Eastern CFRAM Study has developed mapping and will pursue options to address flood risk, for the Cherry Orchard location, separate to the Flood Relief Scheme.

Flood Maps for these AFAs will be finalised shortly and are being informed by a local Public Consultation held in March 2015 and a Statutory Public Consultation that closed in December 2015.

Work on the identification of appropriate and feasible flood risk management options is underway. A local Public Consultation on the options for Wexford and the North and South Slob

was held on 15 December and local consultations for other Co. Wexford AFAs are being scheduled for the coming weeks. Further information is available on www.southeastcfamstudy.ie.

Following the identification of feasible flood risk management options, Flood Risk Management Plans will be prepared and published for public consultation during summer 2016. The Plans will set out specific measures to address the significant flood risk factors in a proactive and comprehensive way. The Government recently announced €430m for capital flood relief works as part of the overall Capital Investment Plan 2016-2021. This increased level of funding will allow for the prioritised investment for the Flood Risk Management Plans over the coming years.

Identifying and addressing localised flooding is a matter for Wexford County Council in the first instance. It is open to the Council to undertake any local flood mitigation works using its own resources or to submit an application for funding, if necessary, under the Office of Public Works (OPW) Minor Flood Mitigation Works & Coastal Protection Scheme. Any application received will be assessed under the scheme's eligibility criteria available on the OPW website, www.opw.ie.

The OPW carries out its own programme of Arterial Drainage Maintenance in the county. These maintenance works relate to arterial drainage schemes (Ballyteigue/Kilmore and Owenvarragh) completed by the OPW under the Arterial Drainage Acts 1945 and 1995, whose purpose was primarily to improve the drainage of agricultural lands. Wexford County Council is responsible for the ongoing maintenance of certain watercourses within Drainage Districts in the county for arterial drainage works completed prior to 1945.

Flood Relief Schemes

173. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will introduce a grant scheme for flood relief and prevention measures for households and businesses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2003/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): The Office of Public Works (OPW) is currently undertaking the Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) Programme throughout the country. The Programme involves an assessment of 300 locations nationwide including 90 coastal locations, the mapping of potentially significant flood risk areas and the production of flood risk management options and plans. These draft Flood Risk Management Plans are due to be published in mid-2016 for public consultation.

In the context of the CFRAM Programme, the Government announced two pilot Individual Property Protection (IPP) projects on 5 January 2015. These are community based pilots to inform the mechanism to deliver IPP, as part of a community based approach or scheme and also the potential costs and benefits attached to IPP for areas where a flood defence scheme is not likely to be completed for some time.

These pilots are:

- a feasibility study in Thomastown and Graiguenamanagh, where Kilkenny County Council has procured consultants to carry out the study that are due to be appointed in January 2016. The consultants will survey each property to establish potential and appropriate IPP options for the community. The development of all possible feasible flood defence options for these towns is an ongoing part of the CFRAM process, and

- Mayo County Council is considering the potential viability of a scheme for the installation of flood gates for some properties, identified by the community in Crossmolina, as an interim measure to help mitigate any further flood damage pending the completion of the defence scheme for the town.

The Interdepartmental Flood Policy Co-ordination Group is considering the potential costs and benefits associated with any targeted individual property protection scheme that could benefit those isolated properties, as distinct from the community based approach being piloted.

Evaluation of these pilots and the work by the Interdepartmental Co-ordination Group will, in time, inform Government of the merits of any possible targeted grant scheme for flood relief and prevention measures for households and businesses.

Public Expenditure Policy

174. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he is satisfied with the level of investment in public services here, given our standing in relation to the rest of the European Union; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2004/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Comparison of investment in public services relative to the rest of the European Union needs to take into account the profound impact the economic crisis had on the public finances. The fiscal adjustment implemented in order that Ireland could successfully exit the troika programme and return sustainability to our public finances required significant expenditure reductions and tax increases. Gross voted expenditure was reduced from its peak of just over €63 billion in 2009 to €54 billion in 2014.

Budget 2015 marked a turning point in our fiscal and economic recovery, with expenditure reductions no longer being required to meet our fiscal targets. The Government was in a position to make some targeted increases in selected areas. Further, with the economy performing strongly and Exchequer tax receipts over €3 billion ahead of profile in 2015, additional funding was made available through Supplementary Estimates of €1.4 billion to support key services and social supports. This brought gross current expenditure in the key areas of Health, Social Protection and Education to over 81% of all gross current expenditure for 2015, reflecting the Government's priority to protect key public services and social supports.

As the Deputy is aware, the size of the State essentially refers to the resources it has available to it and the services it provides within those resources. My Department included some trend analysis on the size of the State over time in the 2014 Expenditure Report which is available on the Department's website.

Data between 1983 and 2014 show that in real terms the State's expenditure tripled in size but as a proportion of the overall size of the economy, spend varied around a long term average of 30% of GDP. This reflects changes in both the size of the economy and expenditure.

In making comparisons with the rest of the European Union, the Deputy will also be aware that the basis for the comparison can have a significant impact. Expenditure compared against GDP, GNP or a hybrid of the two may give different results. Adjusting for the demographic profile of the population can also impact on the comparisons.

Including the additional amounts provided by way of Supplementary Estimate, General Government Expenditure, excluding debt interest, is forecast for 2015 at just under 32% of GDP and 37½% of GNP. As a proportion of the overall economy, Government spending is

roughly the same size it was in 2001 and is broadly in line with the trend over time.

Ireland is on track to exit the Excessive Deficit Procedure with a general government deficit close to 1½% of GDP for 2015. Budget 2016 was therefore framed under the rules that apply under the preventive arm of the Stability and Growth Pact. The Revised Estimates for Public Services (“REV”) 2016 set out further sustainable increases in public expenditure. The increases provided in the REV demonstrate the Government’s commitment to investment in public services and assisting those most in need while ensuring that the public finances are managed on a sustainable basis.

Specifically in relation to capital investment, the Capital Plan announced an exchequer capital spend of €27 billion over six years. If we add investment from the wider semi-state sector, and off-balance sheet mechanisms such as PPPs, total state investment amounts to €42 billion over the period.

The €27 billion Exchequer component of the Capital Plan, supplemented by the new €500 million phase of the PPP programme, is primarily targeted at addressing priority needs in transport, education, housing and health care. Investments will be made in public transport, including commencement of a metro project in Dublin, new and upgraded schools, Primary and continuing care health facilities, and social housing. Investments will also be made to mitigate risks from flooding. There will also be continued investment to support job creation.

Departmental Projects

175. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the projects and initiatives he has funded in County Wexford in the past year, including the announcement date of each funding package; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2006/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): In response to the Deputy’s question I announced the Government’s Capital Plan on 29 September 2015 which outlined exchequer capital spending of €27 billion over the next six years. As the Deputy will be aware a range of projects and initiatives in County Wexford have been funded by the Government through the relevant line departments.

Departmental Staff Promotions

176. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform under the Civil Service reform programme, the number of clerical officers who have been promoted to higher executive officer and the number of executive officers who have been promoted to assistant principal officer across different Departments through internal competitions after the significant change in eligibility rules; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2055/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): I can confirm that five Clerical Officers were promoted to Higher Executive Officer in my Department, from a confined competition, since the eligibility criteria changed. There have not been any Executive Officers promoted to Assistant Principal Officer from confined competitions.

All promotion competitions in my Department are carried out in accordance with the Commission for Public Service Appointments Code of Practice. The Code sets out the core principles applicable to recruitment and selection and appointments are merit based.

Flood Relief Schemes Applications

177. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the Office of Public Works has received an application from Mayo County Council for flood defence works for an area (details supplied) in County Mayo; when the application will be processed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2148/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): An application for funding under the OPW Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme for a project at Bachelor's Walk, Ballina, Co. Mayo was received within the last two weeks and is currently being assessed.

Heritage Sites

178. **Deputy Seán Kenny** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of persons who visited each Office of Public Works heritage site in each of the years 2014 and 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2175/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): A total of approx 4.45m people visited OPW-managed heritage sites in 2014. The breakdown is as follows.

The figures for 2015 are still in the process of being compiled and will be available shortly. Provisional estimates indicate however that the total visitors have again increased over the 2014 total.

It should be noted that these figures relate to those sites where the OPW Heritage Services provide Guide facilities and where visitor numbers are fully recorded. There are significantly more visitors to heritage sites in OPW care which are not attended by staff and where there is no facility to record footfall. Overall therefore, it is clear that there are many more people attending at heritage sites throughout the country than the formally recorded figures would indicate.

2014 Visitor Numbers	
Site Name	Total
Altamont	58,023
Arás	5,197
Ardfert Cathedral	6,867
Athenry Castle	13,532
Aughnanure Castle	32,289
Ballyhack Castle	2,471
Barrys court Castle	8,860
Battle of the Boyne/ Oldbridge Estate	71,137
Blasket Centre	44,074
Boyle Abbey	6,927
Bru na Boinne	48,996
Newgrange	139,173
Knowth	58,883
Cahir Castle	66,747
Carrowmore	31,097

2014 Visitor Numbers	
Site Name	Total
Casino Marino	18,790
Castletown House & Parklands	285,410
Céide Fields	28,484
Charles Fort	74,446
Clonmacnoise	149,472
Corlea Trackway Visitor Centre	3,988
Derrynane House	24,874
Desmond Castle	10,507
Desmond Hall	11,362
Donegal Castle	40,626
Dublin Castle	217,758
Dún Aonghasa	121,001
Dungarvan Castle	11,639
Dunmore Cave	40,830
Emo Court	12,082
Ennis Friary	15,967
Farmleigh Estate	402,773
Ferns Castle	6,875
Gallarus Castle	43,650
Garinish Island	55,088
Glebe House and Gallery	24,085
Glendalough Visitor Centre	79,810
Hill of Tara	11,892
J F Kennedy Arboretum	92,236
Jerpoint Abbey	23,370
Kilkenny Castle	259,250
Kilmacurragh Gardens	50,517
Kilmainham Gaol	328,886
Listowel	6,196
Loughcrew	11,079
Main Guard	5,774
Maynooth Castle	25,268
Mellifont Abbey	5,783
National Botanic Gardens	541,946
Newmills Corn and Flax Mills	3,476
Ormond Castle	9,116
Parke's Castle	15,423
Pearse Museum	34,011
Pearse's Cottage	7,206
Phoenix Park Visitor Centre	135,790
Portumna Castle	15,211
Rathfarnham Castle	Closed for works
Reginald's Tower	31,029

2014 Visitor Numbers	
Site Name	Total
Rock of Cashel	272,503
Roscrea Heritage	29,987
Ross Castle	83,225
Scattery Island	2,491
Skellig Michael	15,315
Sligo Abbey	15,309
St. Audoen's Church	27,502
St. Mary's Church, Gowran	2,002
Swiss Cottage	22,802
Tintern Abbey	13,433
Trim Castle	76,511
TOTAL Visitors to OPW Guided sites 2014	4,448,329
	4.45million

Flood Relief Schemes Status

179. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform to set down the due date for the return of tender packages for the Skibbereen flood relief scheme; when he will confirm the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2214/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): Cork County Council is the Contracting Authority for the Skibbereen Flood Relief Scheme and the Council is progressing the tender process for the project. The due date for the return of tenders for the procurement of a civil works contractor is 5 February, 2016.

The Scheme has been submitted to the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform for Confirmation. The Minister must have the Scheme's Environmental Impact Statement independently reviewed before the Scheme can be confirmed. Approval for the contractor appointment by the OPW as the sponsoring and funding agent must await the formal confirmation of the scheme by the Minister. It is hoped that this process will be completed in the next few months, which would allow construction of the scheme to commence in mid-2016.

It is expected that construction of the Skibbereen scheme will take approximately 24-30 months to complete.

The Government remains fully committed to the provision of the flood relief scheme for the people of Skibbereen. Funding for the scheme is available and the OPW has made provision for the cost of implementing the scheme in its financial profiles over the years 2016-2019.

Flood Prevention Measures

180. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform to outline the measures in place to alleviate the losses to local businesses in County Dublin, in particular, in the Dublin 2 and 4 areas, should these areas experience flooding in the future. [2231/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): The risk of flooding in the specific areas mentioned is being addressed currently

by the Office of Public Works (OPW) and Dublin City Council (DCC) working in partnership. There are currently two major flood relief schemes being undertaken in the specific areas mentioned, the largest being the scheme on the River Dodder where works have been completed on the tidal section and works are ongoing on the section at risk from fluvial flooding. Significant works and investment have been undertaken to date on this scheme with further works continuing into 2017. Another scheme on the South Campshires (Sir John Rogerson's Quay) in the City commenced in 2014 and will be completed later this year. Both these schemes are being undertaken with DCC acting as the Contracting Authority and the OPW acting as the funding agency and undertaking the works using its direct labour force.

Other schemes have been completed in recent years on the River Tolka and on a section of the River Wad. There are also a number of Schemes in the early stages of planning for the City and County which involve a partnership with all the relevant local authorities and these include the Rivers Poddle and Camac in the City and projects for Portmarnock and Skerries on which Fingal County Council will take the lead.

The details of the flood defence scheme works already completed in the areas in question have been provided to insurance companies as part of the arrangements agreed between the OPW and Insurance Ireland under a Memorandum of Understanding of March 2014. The insurance companies have agreed to take these works into account in the provision of flood insurance cover in the areas benefitting from the works. This should allow businesses in the areas in question to obtain flood insurance cover at affordable rates. Under the Memorandum of Understanding, the details of the flood relief schemes currently under construction and those yet to commence, will, when completed, be provided to the insurance companies also.

The management of flood risk in Dublin city and county is being addressed also in a comprehensive way under the OPW's Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) Programme for the East Region. Good progress is being made on the East CFRAM Project which is a part of the overall national CFRAM Programme which, in turn, is the principal vehicle for implementing the EU Floods Directive and forms the strategic focus of national flood risk management policy. The national Programme is focusing on 300 Areas for Further Assessment (AFAs), including 90 coastal areas, identified as being at potentially significant risk from flooding. The CFRAM Programme, which includes the assessment of a number of river catchment areas within Co. Dublin, involves the production of predictive flood hazard and risk mapping for each location, the development of preliminary flood risk management options and the production of Flood Risk Management Plans containing a prioritised list of measures to address in a comprehensive and sustainable way the significant flood risks identified. The Plans will be used to determine national priorities for State Investment in flood defences, on a systematic and objective basis taking into account social, environmental and economic factors.

Under the CFRAM Programme to date, Flood Risk Management Plans have been produced for the Fingal-East Meath and River Dodder catchment Study areas. The Eastern CFRAM Study is assessing the remaining identified significant flood risk areas in Co. Dublin. Draft mapping is now being finalised following conclusion of the national statutory public consultation on 23 December 2015. Work on the development of preliminary options to address the significant flood risks identified is underway. Following the finalisation of the flood mapping and the identification of flood risk management options, the Eastern CFRAM Flood Risk Management Plans are scheduled to be published for public consultation during summer 2016 and completed at end 2016. Further information on the Programme is available on www.cfram.ie. Considerable work is being undertaken therefore to protect businesses in Dublin city and county from future flooding and associated losses. Should a future flooding event result in the question of financial assistance for businesses affected arising, this will be a matter for consideration by Government at that time.

Departmental Offices

181. **Deputy Seán Conlan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform to set out the steps he took in advertising for an available and suitable building to house the Department of Social Protection offices, which the Government intends on moving from Ballybay, County Monaghan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2260/16]

182. **Deputy Seán Conlan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform to outline the tendering process in obtaining alternative office space for the Department of Social Protection offices which are currently located in Ballybay, County Monaghan; the replies he received; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2261/16]

183. **Deputy Seán Conlan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform to set out the square footage of the building he has chosen in Monaghan town to re-locate the Department of Social Protection offices currently in Ballybay, County Monaghan; the square footage of the existing building in Ballybay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2262/16]

184. **Deputy Seán Conlan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform to set out the annual rent agreed on the building which he has chosen in Monaghan town to re-locate the Department of Social Protection offices, which are currently located in Ballybay; if this rent equates with rents for similar buildings in Monaghan town; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2263/16]

185. **Deputy Seán Conlan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if any public representatives, and in particular public representatives in County Monaghan or County Cavan, asked him, whether in verbal, written or electronic communication, to take into consideration the building that he has chosen to relocate the Department of Social Protection Offices, which are currently located in Ballybay, County Monaghan; the person who first brought this building to his attention; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2264/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 181 to 185, inclusive, together.

The Commissioners have recently signed a lease for part of a building in Monaghan town for the Department of Social Protection following an extensive search of marketed properties. The building was selected having regard to a number of key criteria including location, size, accessibility, condition and rent. The leased buildings in Ballybay amount to 7,062 sq ft while the lease in Monaghan Town is 5,045 sq ft which includes nearly 1,200 sq ft of basement storage space. Having regard to rent, the annual rent for the lease in Monaghan town is €39,500. This is materially less than the current rents, €53,427, in Ballybay, and will result in an ongoing annual saving to the Exchequer. The Commissioners are also of the view that the new rent in Monaghan is at a competitive market level having regard to the quality and location of the building. The Commissioners have confirmed that no representations were received from any elected representatives in relation to the building in Monaghan Town.

Public Sector Pensions

186. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform to set out the status of the examination by the community sector high-level forum on the provision of Exchequer funding to implement a Labour Court recommendation relating to the provision of a pension scheme dating back to 2008 for supervisors and assistant supervisors in community employment schemes; when the final report will be completed; and if he will make a statement

on the matter. [2317/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): As the Deputy will be aware unions representing CE Supervisors and Assistant Supervisors have sought the provision of Exchequer funding to implement a Labour Court recommendation relating to the provision of a pension scheme dating back to 2008. However the position has remained that it is not possible for the State to provide funding for such a scheme to employees of private companies, even if those companies are or were reliant on State funding.

Notwithstanding this the matter has remained under review and I recently held a constructive meeting with SIPTU and IMPACT trade unions in relation to this matter. Having listened to their respective positions I have reconvened the Community Sector High Level Forum, which ceased operation some years ago, in order that this matter is fully examined, having regard to costs and precedent.

The forum commenced its work on 27 November 2015. I would anticipate that it would be in a position to report to the Government on its work this year.

Budget Targets

187. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform to set out the extent to which the principles of public expenditure monitoring and reform remain part of and a requirement of Government policy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2353/16]

188. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if Government expenditure remains on target with budgetary projections; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2354/16]

191. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform to outline the extent to which specific provisions will be required to trigger area warnings in the event of a departure from good practice in respect of spending or departure from reform principles; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2357/16]

192. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform to outline the extent to which he has observed tendencies by Departments or bodies under their aegis to exceed expenditure guidelines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2358/16]

193. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if particular tendencies or issues relating to over-expenditure by Departments have been brought to his attention; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2359/16]

194. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform to outline the extent to which he can incentivise all Departments and public bodies to follow good or best practice in respect of public expenditure and reform; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2360/16]

195. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform to outline the savings directly and through the principle of reform achieved by his Department over the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2361/16]

196. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform to set out the extent to which he has achieved the targets set in respect of public expenditure and

reform five years ago; if future targets will be met in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2362/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 187, 188 and 191 to 196, inclusive, together.

My Department has played a key role in ensuring Ireland met or exceeded its key fiscal targets in each year of the EU/IMF programme of financial support resulting in a successful exit from the programme in December 2013. Furthermore, Ireland is on track to exit the corrective arm of the Stability and Growth Pact (SGP) with a general government deficit of close to 1½% of GDP for 2015.

In 2016, Ireland will become subject to the preventive arm of the SGP. Adherence to the rules of the preventive arm will regulate the growth in public expenditure in line with the medium term potential growth rate of the economy, thereby making sure that the level of spending is sustainable and can continue to be supported by the economy.

Managing the delivery of public services within Budgetary allocations is a key responsibility of each Minister and their Department, and important measures are in place to help ensure that these budgetary targets continue to be met. My Department is in regular communication with all Departments and Offices to ensure that expenditure is being managed within the overall fiscal parameters. The drawdown of funds from the Exchequer is monitored against the published expenditure profiles. There is regular reporting to Government on these matters, and information is published monthly, as part of the Exchequer Statement. With the move to the preventive arm of the SGP in 2016 it is important that Departments manage expenditure within their allocations as set out in Revised Estimated Volume ('REV') 2016.

In relation to fiscal targets for 2015, end-year Exchequer returns indicate that the General Government Deficit will be close to 1½% of GDP, well below the 2.1% forecast at the time of Budget 2016. Overall voted expenditure for the year has come in below the amount approved by the Dáil by way of original estimate and supplementary estimate.

With 2015 tax revenues exceeding forecast by over €3 billion, the Government was in a position to provide additional funding to a number of Departments by way of supplementary estimate. The additional expenditure represents a responsible approach towards ensuring that public services are adequately funded to meet social and economic objectives both in 2015 and in 2016. The allocation of additional resources should also be viewed in the context of the significant fiscal consolidation implemented in order to return sustainability to the public finances.

Public Service Reform was a key element of the Government's response to the crisis and continues to be an essential part of our strategy for recovery. Significant progress has been made since the publication of the Government's first Public Service Reform Plan in 2011 that has helped improve productivity and deliver benefits across a range of specific areas such as greater openness and transparency, digital government, shared services, procurement reform and property management.

A second Public Service Reform Plan (2014-2016) was published in January 2014. While maintaining an emphasis on efficiency and reducing costs, this Plan puts a particular focus on improved service delivery and achieving better outcomes. The actions set out in the Reform Plan address areas such as: greater use of shared services and innovative approaches to service delivery; increased use of technology and improved engagement with service users; more efficient and effective public procurement; increased accountability and transparency in public decision making; enhanced leadership and performance management; and a continued focus on building the required capacity to deliver reform. A comprehensive Progress Report on the

Public Service Reform Plan 2014-2016 was published in March of last year.

Infrastructure and Capital Investment Programme

189. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform to set out the extent to which financial provision can be made for off-balance sheet funding of vital infrastructural projects that may be necessary, such as arterial drainage, flood relief, emergency housing or other vital and unforeseen issues meeting expenditure; if Government bonds may be a resolution in such circumstances; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2355/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The key issue faced by the Government in seeking to deliver infrastructural projects continues to be the fiscal space available to Government under the fiscal rules of the Stability and Growth Pact, which impacts on the Government's ability to increase expenditure, including on capital projects. Any funding that would be raised through the issuing of new Government Bonds, as suggested in the question, would not be off-balance sheet and therefore any such funding raised would have no impact on the fiscal space available to the Government, nor would it provide any additional capacity for further Exchequer expenditure without equivalent spending cuts in other areas or tax increases.

In terms of the ability to deliver additional public infrastructure on an off-balance sheet basis, in General Government terms, the scope to do so under Eurostat rules is constrained. Public Private Partnerships are the only recognised mechanism by which this can be done at present, and the Government has already agreed to a new €500 m third phase of the PPP programme which was announced in the Capital Plan. However, PPPs impose long term financial commitments over a very long period of time (up to 40 years), which increase over time as new PPPs come on stream thus absorbing an increasing amount of the Government's discretionary capital expenditure allocation on an annual basis. Accordingly, the use of PPPs must be carefully planned, and controlled, in a manner that is sustainable in the long term and which the public finances can afford.

The possibility of identifying other options to assist in delivering key public infrastructure on an off-balance sheet basis continues to be explored, in particular in the context of delivering on the commitments in the Government's Social Housing Strategy and the potential to use the €400 m earmarked for this purpose from the proceeds of the sale of Bord Gáis Energy. However, identifying a suitable mechanism that is capable of meeting the Eurostat requirements for classification as off-balance sheet is proving challenging. The Government remains open to the possibility of using such off-balance sheet options, if suitable options can be identified, to supplement direct Exchequer investment and assist with the delivery of critical national infrastructure on a timely basis, provided that this can be done on a sustainable and affordable basis.

The Deputy will recognise that maintaining fiscal sustainability and economic stability under the Government's fiscal framework will ensure that Ireland retains the hard-won restored confidence of international financial markets to meet its ongoing funding needs. This is central to the continuance of Ireland's economic recovery, securing further reductions in unemployment, achieving further gains in living standards and ensuring the continued development of our public services.

Public Sector Reform Implementation

190. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform to

outline the extent to which reform will remain central to Government policy in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2356/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Public Service Reform was a key element of the Government's response to the crisis and continues to be an essential part of our strategy for recovery. The reforms we have implemented over the past five years have enabled us to maintain and improve public services in the face of necessary reductions in staff numbers and budgets, and at a time of increased demand for public services.

Following on from strong progress on the implementation of the Government's first Public Service Reform Plan (2011), our second Reform Plan was published in January 2014 and sets out the priorities for reform for the period 2014 to 2016. While maintaining an emphasis on efficiency and reducing costs, this Plan puts a particular focus on improved service delivery and achieving better outcomes for service users.

We are implementing a broad range of reforms, with over 230 specific actions set out in this Reform Plan. This includes, for example, more digital delivery of services and improved engagement with service users; implementation of shared services and alternative models of service delivery; more efficient and effective public procurement and property management; and increased accountability and transparency in public decision making.

Good progress is being made on the implementation of the Reform Plan, as outlined in the Annual Progress Report on Public Service Reform, which I published in March last year. A copy of the report was sent to all Members of the Oireachtas and it is also available at www.reformplan.per.gov.ie. It is intended to publish the second Annual Progress Report on Public Service Reform in the coming months.

The Deputy will also be aware that the Taoiseach and I published the Civil Service Renewal Plan in October 2014 which sets out a three year action plan and is leading to major changes right across the Civil Service. A Progress Report on achievements in the 'first 200 days' was published last July and is also available on my Department's website. Since then, work has continued on the remaining actions in the Plan and a further Progress Report detailing the progress made during the second phase of implementation will be published in early summer.

Overall, I am satisfied that we have made very strong progress on Public Service Reform. A focus on reform and continuous improvement must be an essential element in the strategy of all Departments and Offices. Therefore, I believe that reform should continue to be a key element of any future strategy.

Questions Nos. 191 to 196, inclusive, answered with Question No. 187.

Zero-hour Contracts

197. **Deputy Eric Byrne** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the status of a matter concerning a person (details supplied) in Dublin 6; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1844/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Gerald Nash): The Deputy is referring to recommendations made by the University of Limerick (UL) in its study on the prevalence of zero hour contracts and low hour contracts among Irish employers. It is important to point out that this is an independent study and the conclusions drawn and the recommendations made in the study are those of UL. Therefore, it was essential that the various stakeholders who contributed to the study and indeed other interested parties

who may not have had an opportunity to engage with UL, were given an opportunity to consider and respond to the findings and recommendations in the UL report. To this end, my Department sought submissions from interested parties by way of a Public Consultation. A large number of submissions were received by 4 January 2016, the closing date for receipt of such submissions. The responses contain a variety of views both for and against the recommendations as made by UL, in relation to the notice periods employees should receive when work is being offered or hours are cancelled. The responses received will require careful consideration by my Department over the coming period. This will inform the policy response to be considered by Government arising from the study.

Equality Issues

198. **Deputy John Browne** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if a person whose human rights were discriminated against but who does not fall within the criteria allowed by the Workplace Relations Commission can pursue the discrimination through another mechanism; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1867/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy will appreciate that in the absence of specific details beyond hypothetical scenarios presented I can only respond by providing general information that I hope will be of assistance. The Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) is an independent, statutory body which was established on 1 October 2015 under the Workplace Relations Act 2015 (No. 16 of 2015). It assumes the roles and functions previously carried out by the National Employment Rights Authority (NERA), Equality Tribunal (ET), Labour Relations Commission (LRC), Rights Commissioners Service (RCS), and the first-instance (Complaints and Referrals) functions of the Employment Appeals Tribunal (EAT). The Employment Equality Acts 1998 to 2015 cover employees in both the public and private sectors as well as applicants for employment and training. The Acts outlaw discrimination in work-related areas such as pay, vocational training, access to employment, work experience and promotion. Cases involving harassment and victimisation at work are also covered by the Acts. The publication of discriminatory advertisements and discrimination by employment agencies, vocational training bodies and certain other bodies, e.g. trades unions and employer associations, is outlawed. An employee or prospective employee may make a claim if he or she is of the view that discrimination on any of the nine prohibited grounds has occurred. The grounds are Gender, Civil status, Family status, Sexual orientation, Religious belief, Age, Disability, Race colour, nationality, ethnic or national origins and Membership of the Traveller community.

Discrimination outside the workplace is covered by the Equal Status Acts. The Acts outlaw discrimination in all services that are generally available to the public whether provided by the state or the private sector. These include facilities for refreshment, entertainment, banking, insurance, grants, credit facilities, transport and travel services. Discrimination in the disposal of premises, provision of accommodation, admission or access to educational courses or establishments is also prohibited subject to some exemptions.

The nine grounds on which discrimination is outlawed are Gender, Civil status, Family status, Sexual orientation, Religious belief, Age, Disability, Race and Membership of the Traveller community. The legislation covers many different goods and services. It includes access to a place, facilities for banking, entertainment, cultural activities or transport, professional or trade services, health services, access to education and accommodation.

Complaints under the Equality legislation can be made to the WRC and they will be heard by an Adjudication Officer who can order redress as set out in the Acts if a finding of discrimi-

nation is made.

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) is an independent statutory body under the aegis of the Department of Justice and Equality which has been established to promote and protect human rights and equality in Ireland. It is Ireland's National Human Rights Institution recognised as such by the United Nations. It is also Ireland's National Equality Body for the purpose of EU Law. I understand that IHREC may grant legal assistance to individuals seeking to vindicate their human rights in the State such as by providing legal advice and legal representation before the Courts. IHREC can be contacted at the following link <http://www.ihrec.ie/contact/>.

Zero-hour Contracts

199. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the status of zero-hour contracts (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1908/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Gerald Nash): The Statement of Government Priorities, July 2014 committed to conduct a study on the prevalence of zero hour contracts among Irish employers and their impact on employees and make policy recommendations to Government on foot of this. The University of Limerick was appointed in February 2015, following a competitive tendering process, to carry out a study into the prevalence of zero hour contracts and low hour contracts in the Irish economy and their impact on employees. The study, published in November, 2015, found that zero hour contracts as defined within current Irish employment rights legislation are not extensively used in Ireland. It found low working hours can arise in different forms in employment contracts, such as regular part-time contracts with fixed hours or a contract with "If and when" hours only or a hybrid of the two. If and when contracts are contracts where workers are not contractually required to make themselves available for work.

The UL report made a range of recommendations relating to contracts, hours of work and notice, minimum hours, how contracted hours should be determined, collective agreements, data gathering and wider contextual issues.

It is important to point out that the UL study was an independent study and the conclusions drawn and the recommendations made in it are those of UL. Therefore, it was essential that the various stakeholders who contributed to the study and indeed other interested parties who may not have had an opportunity to engage with UL, were given an opportunity to consider and respond to the report.

To this end, my Department sought submissions from interested parties by way of a Public Consultation. A large number of submissions were received by 4 January 2016, the closing date for receipt of such submissions. The responses contain a variety of views both for and against the findings and recommendations as made by UL, which will require careful consideration by my Department over the coming period. This will inform the policy response to be considered by Government arising from the study.

Action Plan for Jobs

200. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the activities his Department paid for in promoting the Action Plan for Jobs and the various regional

Action Plans for Jobs in each of the years since the plan was launched in 2012, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1964/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The costs borne directly by the Department associated with the promotion of the annual Action Plan for Jobs since 2012 and the Regional Action Plans launched in 2015 are outlined in a table. Costs are inclusive of value added tax.

Promotion - Action Plan for Jobs	2012	2013	2014	2015
Design work, event staging and venue hire	€3,072.87	€2,361.60	€7,487.62	€7,810.27
Photography at APJ launches & Quarterly updates.	€1,248.47	€868.00	€320.70	€801.10
Totals	€4,321.34	€3,229.60	€8,167.62	€8,611.37

The enterprise agencies, primarily the former Forfás, Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland, also organised and bore the cost of events associated with the development of the annual Action Plans and the Regional Action Plans since 2012. On many occasions the Department and the agencies were also provided with the use of some facilities for free by industry hosts at some of the launches and quarterly updates.

In addition, in response to repeated industry led calls for greater awareness programmes for Government sponsored enterprise supports in 2014 the Department invited tenders for the development and roll-out of a one year awareness campaign to promote the range of Government supports available to small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and entrepreneurs as well as providing APJ updates through a single, dedicated website, www.actionplanforjobs.ie. The development of this single portal for SMEs and entrepreneurs was also accompanied by a national media campaign during 2015 under the Action Plan for Jobs banner. The total cost for web development and the creative video and radio production costs incurred during 2015 for this campaign was €236,358.

Job Losses

201. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the actions he has taken to protect jobs at a company (details supplied) in County Tipperary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2070/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Clearly my first thoughts are with the workers affected by the announcement of job losses at the company. Since C&C purchased MJ Gleeson a number of years ago the company has been engaged in restructuring of certain elements of its business. The decision announced on 12 January is part of a company-wide restructuring particularly of its manufacturing base which the company has undertaken following the loss of contracts for private label water which has led to serious under utilisation of capacity.

I have spoken to senior management at the company in recent days and urged them to reconsider the decision in relation to the facility in Borrisoleigh but unfortunately this did not prove possible.

The Group announced that following a detailed review of its manufacturing and operational

footprint, it intends to consolidate production from sites in Shepton Mallet in England and in Borrisoleigh into its manufacturing site in Clonmel. Under this proposal, production and packaging will be transferred on a phased basis from the facility in Borrisoleigh. Consequently, Clonmel will become the core manufacturing site for Bulmers and Magners cider, Tipperary Water and the company's range of niche premium beers and ciders. In support of the proposal, the Group will invest in excess of €10 million in enhancing packaging and logistics capability in Clonmel, creating 80 additional jobs, and designed to put Irish-based employment on a secure and competitive footing. The company has indicated that Borrisoleigh will remain as a key transport hub and both logistics and warehousing operations will be maintained in the town.

The company has indicated that, where possible, the workers at Borrisoleigh will be offered alternative employment at the expansion in Clonmel. Regrettably, net roles lost in Ireland across the company's operational network are estimated to be 54 jobs. I note the company's statement that it will provide support and training for the workers affected. In addition, all the supports of the State will be made available.

Enterprise Ireland will continue to engage with the company as it undertakes restructuring. The Agency will continue to monitor the situation at the company and will continue to offer any assistance that it can within Enterprise Ireland's remit.

I understand that the company has initiated the consultation process with its employees and their representatives who are impacted by the announcement. The company plans to meet with employee and union representatives over the coming weeks.

Workplace Relations Commission information staff are available to meet staff of the affected enterprise, either individually or collectively, to assist the parties concerned.

The State agencies will continue to work closely with each other, and with local interests, to seek new investment for County Tipperary.

Public Procurement Contracts Social Clauses

202. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the steps he has taken to incorporate social clauses in public procurement criteria that other European countries have implemented to enable small and medium-sized enterprises to tender for a greater share of procurement contracts, given that he is the lead Minister for the Action Plan for Jobs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2193/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Policy responsibility for public procurement, including the issue of social clauses rests with my colleague, Minister Brendan Howlin, Minister for the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER), and is led by the Office of Government Procurement (OGP). The OGP, an office under the remit of DPER, set up a number of working groups to improve SME access to public procurement:

- High Level Working Group on SME Access to Procurement;
- SME Working Group; and
- Social Clauses Project Group.

My Department's officials are closely involved in supporting SME's access to public procurement through their involvement in these groups.

The Social Clauses Project Group was established by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform to pro-actively look at projects with a view to including social clauses on a pilot basis, to ensure those awarded contracts contribute to employment or training opportunities for long term unemployed. This is consistent with the whole of Government approach to job creation through the Action Plan for Jobs.

Work Permit Applications

203. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the status of an application for a work permit by a person (details supplied); if this application will be quickly processed given the expiry date of the visa; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2196/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): A General Employment Permit issued in this instance on 15 January 2016.

Enterprise Support Schemes

204. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation to support a jobs proposal (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2255/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) are now the ‘first-stop-shop’ State support service for micro and small businesses in each local area. The LEOs provide advice and direction, covering all government supports and requirements, to anyone who wishes to start or expand a business. They can also provide funding for projects that meet certain criteria, in certain circumstances, and other non-financial supports. For example, with regard to the financial supports available, it should be noted that the LEOs generally grant assist enterprises in the manufacturing or internationally traded services sector which over time can develop into strong export entities. However, there are other non-financial supports available, such as mentoring and training, and the LEO staff can advise as to which supports would be most appropriate.

In addition, any business can use the LEOs to access finance from Micro Finance Ireland (MFI), which offers loans of up to €25,000 to start-up, newly established or growing microenterprises (employing less than 10 people) with viable business propositions that do not meet the conventional risk criteria applied by the banks. Applications for the Microfinance Fund should be channelled through the local LEO. Further information is available on the LEO website at www.localenterprise.ie.

Businesses can also access the ‘Supporting SMEs’ online search tool that was launched last year. By answering eight questions, a small business will be able to:

- Find out which of the over 80 Government business supports from 27 different Government Departments, Agencies and Initiatives are available to them;
- obtain information on the range of Government supports for accessing credit;
- identify their nearest Local Enterprise Office where they can discuss the outcomes of the guide further;
- download all these filtered results into a document for their further use.

The 'Supporting SMEs' Online Tool is available at: www.actionplanforjobs.ie.

Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership

205. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership in its current form and, in particular, the regulatory co-operation provision, is weighted heavily in favour of corporations at the expense of citizens and; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2338/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The EU-US negotiations have as their objective to strengthen and deepen the trade and investment relations between the two regions covering 40% of global economic output. The trade deal will stand to benefit business, large and small, and consumers. The negotiation in respect of regulatory co-operation will ensure that economic gains do not lower our high standards in the field of labour rights, the environment or consumer's health and safety. This principle is built into the negotiating mandate which guides the Commission in these negotiations. The aim of the negotiations is closer cooperation by making present and future rules more compatible, reducing the cost of unnecessary red tape by making it easier for companies' to comply with both EU and US laws while ensuring food, animal and plant imports are safe. Regulatory cooperation and coherence recognises the realities of globalisation and will make the trading landscape easier and more predictable, which is particularly important to SME's to internationalise and grow exports.

Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership

206. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if, at any of the recent consultations on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, he or any other delegate raised concerns regarding the shifting of some of the more controversial issues in the TTIP to a time after the conclusion of the agreement, as has been flagged by many international democracy watchdogs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2339/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): I understand that the EU Commission aim to conclude all chapters of the EU-US trade agreement in 2016. A comprehensive and ambitious EU-US trade agreement will have tangible benefits for Ireland in terms of jobs, growth and investment and it is my hope that substantial progress on all aspects can be reached this year.

Economic Growth Initiatives

207. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the cost of developing a cross-Border development zone in conjunction with the Northern Ireland Executive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2342/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The concept of a specific Border Development Zone as a means of fostering economic recovery in the cross-border region of the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland was initially proposed by the *Centre for Cross Border Studies* (CCBS) in their Bradley/Best economic study of 2012 and I am aware that the CCBS has undertaken further research on the topic in the intervening period also. I also note that the Deputy's party proposed such a Zone in a policy document last year. The possible development of a Border Development Zone could raise significant issues involving

EU State Aid Rules and other EU provisions and it would also, of course, require detailed negotiations between both administrations on this island. There would also be significant resource issues, which would be challenging. I am not aware that detailed costings have been carried out in relation to the proposal. I expect that these would obviously depend of the exact nature and functions of such a body. As you will be aware, this Government have initiated a significant reduction in the number of Bodies and Agencies, in order to achieve more effective administration and delivery of services, so that a very strong case needs to be made to justify the creation of new bodies. I would again emphasise that any new structures to be put in place would require the full agreement of the Northern Ireland authorities. Both administrations on the island are focussed on developing the existing mechanisms and on making them work better.

Developing new, regionally-based, economic structures could be a significant policy development, and one requiring careful consideration. The need to avoid duplication would be paramount, in the interests of utilising scarce State resources efficiently. It is therefore worth noting that there are already several mechanisms in place to pursue cross border economic development.

I strongly believe that we should continue to build on the structures already in place and on what has been achieved in that region. The work of the Cross Border Body, *InterTradeIreland*, has been foremost in this regard, with a significant range of enterprise development initiatives and programmes in place. My Department jointly funds and provides oversight to this Body, together with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment in Belfast, and it represents a very effective mechanism for tackling business development on an all-island basis. In addition, there is on-going co-operation between *Enterprise Ireland* and its Northern Ireland counterpart agency, *Invest Northern Ireland* on areas of mutual interest.

Over recent years, a range of projects under the Enterprise Development theme of the INTERREG IVA Programme (2009-2015) have made a significant impact on developing small businesses in the region. My Department co-funded this strand of this INTERREG Programme, under which a total of 28 individual projects have been initiated. I now look forward to the roll out of the successor Programme for the period up to 2020, which will support Research and Innovation initiatives.

The operation of the North South Ministerial Council, in which I fully participate, both in its Plenary format and also in the Trade and Business Sectoral format with my counterpart from the Northern Ireland Executive, is an ongoing forum which can develop practical North South initiatives.

Departmental Staff Promotions

208. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation under the Civil Service reform programme, the number of clerical officers who have been promoted to higher executive officer and the number of executive officers who have been promoted to assistant principal officer in his Department through internal competitions after the significant change in eligibility rules; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2579/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Rules regarding eligibility for internal promotion within Civil Service Departments were changed as a consequence of a communication from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. As a consequence serving officers have been allowed to compete for promotion to all grades regardless of their current grade. In line with this methodology, since January 2015, of the 17 staff promoted to Higher Executive Officer through internal competition within my Department, 3

were of Clerical Officer grade. In the same period, there were no promotions from Executive Officer to Assistant Principal.

Staff of my Department are encouraged to apply for career advancement opportunities, including internal and open promotion competitions, and may avail themselves of a range of training and further educational opportunities to assist in this development.

Finally, my Department would not have access to statistics in relation to participation in central competitions run by the Public Appointments Services.

Basic Payment Scheme Administration

209. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the online system dealing with farmers' maps (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1838/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department has placed great importance on the online application system since its introduction in 2007. This included the introduction of an electronic mapping facility in 2012 which allowed for more accurate updating of land parcels, fewer penalties for farmers and faster processing of applications.

The introduction of the new Basic Payment Scheme in 2015 necessitated a new online application system for farmers and agricultural agents. My officials devised a farmer friendly system that ensured Irish farmers complied with the new CAP regime, especially the new requirements under Greening.

Following the introduction of the new system which involved complex programming issues a problem arose for 678 applicants who drew maps on an amendment form – these maps were not visible to farmers or their agents. However it's important to stress that at no point were these maps lost. It is also important to note that farmers were not disadvantaged as a result of this issue and the applications were processed as normal.

In advance of the 2016 BPS application period, this issue has been resolved, and the new on-line system is being finalised along with other improvements with the intention of continuing the progress made in the submission of on-line applications. Approximately 70% of BPS applicants now submit their applications on line.

Farm Retirement Scheme

210. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if and when he will reintroduce the farm early retirement scheme; the criteria he will use to assess applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1839/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Early Retirement Scheme was suspended in 2008 due to budgetary constraints. It was reopened briefly in September 2009, with limited additional funding, to accommodate farmers who had applications completed or close to completion at the time of suspension. I have no plans to re-open this scheme or introduce another similar scheme at this time.

Single Payment Scheme Appeals

211. **Deputy Áine Collins** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the non-payments under the single payment scheme and the areas of natural constraint scheme for 2015 and the part-payment for these in 2014 will be resolved for a person (details supplied) in County Cork based on a recent announcement which stated that no penalties would accrue to persons who were unjustly penalised for alleged ineligible lands. [1848/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): In order to comply with EU requirements, the 2014 Single Farm Payment/Disadvantaged Area's Scheme application of the person named was initially selected for a Remote Sensing (Satellite inspection) eligibility inspection. This initial inspection identified discrepancies resulting in an over-declaration in area of between 3% and 20%.

A subsequent field visit, to verify the position on the ground, identified further discrepancies between the area declared and the area determined resulting in an over-declaration in area of greater than 50%. The person named was notified of this decision by letter of 27 April 2015. Based on the terms and conditions of the 2014 Single Payment Scheme this resulted in no payment being due in respect of the scheme and the application of an administrative fine to be offset against any future EU payments. As payment had already issued based on the initial inspection, my Department was required to recoup the over-payment amounts from any future year's payments due.

The person named requested a review of this decision the outcome of which was to up-hold the inspection findings with some minor area adjustments which did not impact on the payment position. The person named was notified of this on 30 June 2015. The person named has appealed this decision to the independent Agricultural Appeals Office and I understand that this matter is currently on-going, with an oral hearing scheduled for later this week. On completion of the appeals process the person named will be notified directly of the outcome.

The outcome of the appeal process will determine the eligible areas for both 2014 and 2015. My Department will immediately review the case of the person named for both years when the appeal process is completed and any payments due will be processed as soon as possible.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Applications

212. **Deputy Michael McNamara** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Clare under the areas of natural constraint scheme; the reason for the delay, given that the person's circumstances have not changed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1849/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under the 2015 Areas of Natural Constraint (ANC) Scheme was received in my Department from the person named on 16 April 2015.

Under the 2015 ANC Scheme, eligible applicants are required to have met a minimum stocking density of 0.15 livestock units for a retention period of seven consecutive months and to maintain an annual average of 0.15 livestock units calculated over the twelve months of the scheme year. Payment under the ANC scheme has not issued in this case as the holding concerned has not satisfied the scheme's minimum stocking density requirements. It is noted that the person named has a restriction on his file due to a National Parks and Wildlife Services plan where livestock can only be held for 3 months on 24.40 hectares of designated lands. However, the remaining 1.91 hectares of land is not designated under National Parks and Wildlife Services plan and is required to meet stocking rules.

A formal decision on this matter issued to the person named on 1 December 2015. He was advised of his right to seek a review of the decision within 90 days to The Agriculture Appeals Office, Kilminchy Court, Portlaoise, Co Laois.

Competition Law

213. **Deputy Michael McNamara** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he has concerns regarding the proposal by a company (details supplied) to acquire a 50% stake in Slaney Foods and, in particular, the fact that it will also acquire its rendering facility, given that there would now effectively be only four category three outlets for handling animal by-products, known as “fifth quarter products”, on which all abattoirs in the State are reliant, and that this would give the company control of over a quarter of the beef processing industry in the State; if he proposes to investigate the proposed acquisition; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1850/16]

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 or the European Commission which conduct 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.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

214. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of payments to a person (details supplied) in County Clare including the agri-environment options scheme and the basic payment scheme for 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1869/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under the 2015 Basic Payment Scheme was received from the person named on 22 April 2015. An advance payment was made under the BPS.

However, a subsequent inspection under the AEOS scheme gave rise to issues regarding land eligibility on a number of the parcels declared on the Basic Payment Scheme application form. An official from my Department will be in direct contact with the person named to clarify the position.

The person named commenced their AEOS 3 contract on 1 May 2013 and has been paid for the 2013 and 2014 scheme years. Under the EU Regulations governing the Scheme and other area-based payment schemes, a comprehensive administrative check, including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System must take place. These checks have now been completed and it is expected that payment will issue shortly.

Agriculture Scheme Eligibility

215. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a person (details supplied) in County Cork is eligible for entitlements from the national reserve as an applicant under the older young farmer section; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1873/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named submitted applications under the ‘young farmer’ category of the 2015 National Reserve and the Young Farmers Scheme to my Department. To qualify as a ‘young farmer’, a person must be setting up an agricultural holding for the first time in his/her name or have set up such a holding during the five years preceding the first submission of the BPS application. According to records held by my Department the person named commenced farming in 2009 which is outside the eligibility period for the measures applied for.

A letter has issued to the person named informing him of the decision in relation to his application and advising him to contact the Department regarding eligibility under the ‘old young farmer’ category of the National Reserve which is available to farmers who commenced farming in 2009.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

216. **Deputy Áine Collins** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine why a person (details supplied) in County Cork has not received a young farmer’s payment which the person was informed was approved before Christmas 2015. [1879/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named submitted applications under the ‘young farmer’ category of the 2015 National Reserve and the Young Farmers Scheme to my Department. To qualify as a ‘young farmer’, a person must be setting up an agricultural holding for the first time in his/her name or have set up such a holding during the five years preceding the first submission of the BPS application. According to records held by my Department the person named commenced farming in 2009 which is outside the eligibility period for the measures applied for.

A letter has issued to the person named informing him of the decision in relation to his application and advising him to contact the Department regarding eligibility under the ‘old young farmer’ category of the National Reserve which is available to farmers who commenced farming in 2009.

Single Payment Scheme Administration

217. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine why there is a delay in transferring entitlements to a person (details supplied); when the transfer will be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1902/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named submitted a 2015 Transfer of Allocation Right and Reference Value application to my Department. All details relating to land parcel details for 2013 and 2015 and Single Payment entitlement values for 2014 had to be reconciled in order to process this application. This application has been fully processed and payment under the Basic Payment Scheme has issued on 19 January 2016.

The person named submitted applications under the ‘young farmer’ category of the 2015

National Reserve and the Young Farmers Scheme. These applications have recently been finalised and payment will issue as soon as possible.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Payments

218. **Deputy John Perry** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a payment due to a person (details supplied) in County Sligo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1907/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named submitted a 2015 Basic Payment/Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme application on 29 May 2015. EU Regulations governing the administration of these schemes require that full and comprehensive administrative checks, including in some cases Remote Sensing (i.e. satellite) inspections, be completed before any payments issue.

The application of the person named was selected for a Remote Sensing eligibility inspection. This inspection has now been completed and the results have been finalised. Payments due under the Basic Payment Scheme issued on 14 January 2016 to the nominated bank account of the person named.

Single Payment Scheme Applications

219. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of payment to a person (details supplied) in County Limerick under the single payment scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1912/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named submitted a 2015 Private Contract Clause application to my Department seeking the transfer of land and entitlements by lease. An issue with regard to a herd number is currently being resolved in my Department to allow for processing of this application and payment under the Basic Payment Scheme. The person named also submitted applications under the Young Farmers Scheme to my Department. Once payment under the Basic Payment Scheme has been made, the application to the Young Farmers Scheme will be processed with a view to payment issuing as soon as possible thereafter.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Applications

220. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a payment will issue to a person (details supplied) under the disadvantaged areas scheme. [1967/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under the 2015 Areas of Natural Constraint (ANC) Scheme was received in my Department from the person named on 27 April 2015.

Under the 2015 ANC Scheme, eligible applicants are required to have met a minimum stocking density of 0.15 livestock units for a retention period of seven consecutive months and to maintain an annual average of 0.15 livestock units calculated over the twelve months of the scheme year. Payment under the ANC scheme has not issued in this case as the holding concerned has not satisfied the scheme's minimum stocking density requirements.

A formal decision on this matter issued to the person named on 18 January 2016. He was advised of his right to seek a review of the decision within 90 days to The Agriculture Appeals Office, Kilminchy Court, Portlaoise, Co Laois.

Basic Payment Scheme Payments

221. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payments will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1973/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named submitted a 2015 Private Contract Clause application to my Department seeking the transfer of land and entitlements by lease. An issue with regard to a herd number is currently being resolved in my Department to allow for processing of this application and payment under the Basic Payment Scheme.

The person named also submitted applications under the 'young farmer' category of the 2015 National Reserve and the Young Farmers Scheme. Officials from my Department have been in direct contact with the Agricultural Consultant working on behalf of the person named with a view to resolving outstanding issues with these applications to have them processed for payment.

The person named commenced their AEOS 2 contract on 1 September 2011 and has been paid for the 2011-2014 scheme years. Under the EU Regulations governing the Scheme and other area-based payment schemes, a comprehensive administrative check, including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System must take place. It is expected that these checks will be completed shortly.

Basic Payment Scheme Payments

222. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 257 dated 24 November 2015, when payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1974/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named submitted a 2015 Transfer of Allocation Right and Reference Value application to my Department. This application has been fully processed and payment under the Basic Payment Scheme has issued on 19 January 2016.

The person named also submitted an application under the Young Farmers Scheme to my Department. This application to the Young Farmers Scheme will be processed with a view to payment issuing as soon as possible.

Single Payment Scheme Eligibility

223. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question Number 487 dated 3 November 2015, the status of a review for a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1975/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An applica-

tion under the 2013 Single Payment Scheme was received from the person named on 28 June 2013. The EU Regulations governing the Single Payment Scheme provided that applications received more than 25 days late are inadmissible. The applicant in this case submitted his 2013 SPS application more than 25 days late and was therefore deemed inadmissible. The applicant submitted his 2014 SPS application on time and payment issue accordingly.

Under EU Regulatory requirements, only farmers who were entitled to receive a direct payment in 2013 (Single Payment, Grassland Sheep Scheme, Burren Life Scheme, Beef Data Scheme) have an automatic allocation right under the Basic Payment Scheme in 2015. If the person named has any extenuating circumstances that resulted in the late submission of the 2013 Single Payment application he should submit a completed Review of Entitlements application form to my Department immediately outlining the extenuating circumstances pertaining to his case. A Review of entitlements application form is available on the Department's website www.agriculture.gov.ie.

Single Payment Scheme Payments

224. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Donegal under the single payment scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1980/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named submitted a 2015 Basic Payment Scheme/Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme application on 28 May 2015. EU Regulations governing the administration of these schemes require that full and comprehensive administrative checks, including in some cases on farm inspections, be completed before any payments issue.

The application of the person named was selected for a Ground Eligibility inspection. This inspection is currently being finalised and payment due under the 2015 Basic Payment Scheme will issue to the nominated bank account of the person named shortly.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

225. **Deputy John Browne** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Wexford will receive payment under the young farmer payment scheme and the national reserve scheme as promised in December 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1984/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named submitted applications under the 'young farmer' category of the 2015 National Reserve and the Young Farmers Scheme to my Department. Eligible applicants to the National Reserve qualify for either an allocation of new entitlements on land for which they hold no entitlements, so called 'naked land', or where an applicant already holds existing entitlements which are below the national average value, these entitlements are increased to the national average value. While the person named meets the eligibility conditions for the National Reserve in all other respects, he holds neither 'naked land' nor low value entitlements on which an allocation from the National Reserve can be made. A letter has issued to the person named informing him of the decision in relation to his application.

The application under the Young Farmers Scheme has been fully processed and payment is due to issue in the coming days.

Questions - Written Answers
Agriculture Scheme Data

226. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine how many persons in Counties Galway and Mayo had reductions in their agriculture grants as a result of previously eligible land being reviewed and removed as a result of its being part of a special area of conservation, by county, in each of the years 2013 to 2015, inclusive; his plans to assist persons in this situation; what percentage of land in Connemara is under an environmental designation which restricts agricultural activity, by designation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1993/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Under the provisions of the Basic Payment Scheme, farmers need to declare an eligible hectare for each payment entitlement held in order to benefit from payment. The hectares declared must be eligible and must have an agricultural activity carried out on them.

The governing EU regulations define an agricultural activity as the production, rearing or growing of agricultural products, including harvesting, milking, breeding animals, and keeping animals for farming purposes and maintaining an agricultural area in a state which makes it suitable for grazing or cultivation. An applicant is free to choose an activity that best suits their farming enterprise and if s/he so wishes can choose to just top the land.

Where an officially approved environmental management plan under the Birds or Habitats Directives requires certain management practices to be conducted on agricultural areas, such management practices will take precedence in determining the level of agricultural activity to be conducted on agricultural areas declared for payment.

Article 32(2)(b)(i) of Regulation (EU) 1307/2013 provides that an eligible hectare is any area which gave a right to payments in 2008 under the single payment scheme and which no longer complies with the definition of ‘eligible hectare’ as a result of the implementation of Directive 92/43/EEC, Directive 2000/60/EC and Directive 2009/147/EC.

In that regard, the 2015 BPS Terms and Conditions set out details with regard to land eligibility and payments. Section 1.7 refers to land eligibility and states that in order to draw down payment in respect of BPS entitlements, applicants must have an “eligible hectare” to accompany each entitlement. An eligible hectare is land that is used for an agricultural activity.

Section 1.7 of the Terms and Conditions further makes reference to The Birds and Habitats Directives and provides that land that no longer complies with the definition of eligible hectare as a result of the implementation of Council Directive 79/409/EEC on the conservation of wild birds or Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora is eligible for payment where the following conditions are met:

- The land must have been claimed under the 2008 Single Payment Scheme;
- The land must have been eligible for payment under the 2008 Single Payment Scheme; and
- Any increase in the ineligible area should be directly linked to the management requirements for the habitat.

Where an applicant is claiming on land that is otherwise considered ineligible, such land will be deemed eligible for payment where the applicant satisfies the requirements as set out above.

In relation to the percentage of land in Connemara with an environmental designation, my Department, in consultation with the National Parks and Wildlife Service, will compile the data requested and forward this directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Herd Numbers

227. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will revert to this Deputy on a matter (details supplied) regarding herd numbers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2008/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The data requested by the Deputy in respect of the number of new herd applications received in 2015 is set out in the Table. There is no maximum waiting period for an application for a herd number. The length of time required to process an individual application is contingent on a number of factors such as the timely response of the applicant in providing the required documentation and proof that the applicant is entitled to use the lands that are the subject of the herd number application. Under normal circumstances, the average waiting period from the time of receipt of the application to the allocation of a herd number is approximately three weeks.

County	Bovine	Equine	Ovine	Poultry	Porcine	Caprine	Cereals	Other	Cervine	Reps	Total
CARLOW DVO	30	39	35	4	7	2	16	1			134
CAVAN DVO	90	54	92	25	4	5	2	1			273
CLARE DVO	86	116	69	15	10	2	1	1			300
CORK NORTH DVO	132	173	34	18	17	6	57				437
CORK SOUTH DVO	132	121	85	47	27	11	29	1			453
DONEGAL DVO	102	100	310	5	13	15	3	2			550
DUBLIN DVO	13	45	14	11	12	2	12	1			110
GALWAY DVO	176	351	201	28	13	9	5	4			787
KERRY DVO	89	155	111	22	11	7	3				398
KILDARE DVO	49	108	55	19	20	4	14		1		270
KILKENNY DVO	44	85	24	13	5	6	16				193
LAOIS DVO	58	48	26	12	7	2	21				174
LEITRIM DVO	67	49	96	5	3	3	0				223
LIMERICK DVO	95	116	29	10	6	7	5				268
LONGFORD DVO	57	43	34	6	2	4	0		1	1	148
LOUTH DVO	28	27	23	6	4	3	19				110
MAYO DVO	132	225	250	49	12	11	2	6			687
MEATH DVO	104	143	88	21	20	5	31	3			415
MONAGHAN DVO	61	31	59	32	0	1	1				185
OFFALY DVO	76	58	50	10	4	4	21	1			224
ROSCOMMON DVO	128	89	132	14	15	5	9		1		393
SLIGO DVO	49	67	102	7	9	6	0	1		1	242
TIPPERARY NORTH DVO	77	67	31	11	7	2	14				209
TIPPERARY SOUTH DVO	86	90	41	8	6	4	19				254
WATERFORD DVO	41	67	30	12	7	3	17	2	1		180
WESTMEATH DVO	74	46	65	19	4	3	10				221
WEXFORD DVO	69	150	78	12	14	9	48	3	1		384
WICKLOW EAST DVO	37	60	55	7	9	3	11				182

County	Bovine	Equine	Ovine	Poultry	Porcine	Caprine	Cereals	Other	Cervine	Reps	Total
WICKLOW WEST DVO	15	21	19	4	1	1	2				63
TOTAL	2197	2744	2238	452	269	145	388	27	5	2	8467

Agriculture Scheme Payments

228. **Deputy Noel Coonan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary under the young farmer scheme, the single payment scheme, the organic farming scheme and the disadvantaged areas scheme; the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2011/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under the 2015 basic payment/Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) Scheme was received from the person named on 29 May 2015. Payment under the ANC scheme issued directly to the nominated bank account of the person named on 14 January 2016. Under the EU Regulations governing the Organic Farming Scheme and other area-based payment schemes, a comprehensive administrative check, including cross-checks with the Basic Payment Scheme must take place. It is expected that these checks will be completed shortly. Payment will issue once the application concerned has passed all administrative checks including cross checks.

The person named submitted a 2015 Transfer of Allocation Right and Reference Value application to my Department seeking the transfer of allocation rights and values by way of gift from the previous owner of the herd number shown to the person named as the new owner of this herd number. The change of name on the herd number occurred after the submission of the Basic Payment Scheme application. This necessitated the submission of a new Basic Payment Scheme application from the person named. The transfer application is now being processed with a view to issuing payment under the Basic Payment Scheme as soon as possible.

The person named also submitted an application under the Young Farmers Scheme to my Department. This application is currently being processed and once finalised the applicant will be notified in writing of the decision with a view to payment shortly thereafter.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

229. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2032/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named submitted a 2015 Transfer of Entitlements Allocation Right and Reference Value application to my Department seeking the transfer of allocation rights and reference values by Change of Registration details from two individuals who previously held the above herd number in joint names, to the person named who now holds the above herd number in his sole name. On 15 October 2015 my Department wrote to both the transferors and transferee under this application requesting further information which is required in order to process the transfer application. No reply has been received to date. My Department will contact the parties again with a view to clarifying the outstanding issues.

The person named also submitted applications under the 'young farmer' category of the National Reserve and the Young Farmers Scheme to my Department. Once payment under the Basic Payment Scheme has been made, the applications to the National Reserve and Young

Farmers Scheme will be processed.

The person named commenced their AEOS 1 contract on 1 November 2010 and has been paid for the 2010-2014 scheme years.

Under the EU Regulations governing the Scheme and other area-based payment schemes, a comprehensive administrative check, including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System must take place. As it is their final scheme year re-checks on payments made for all scheme years must be completed before final payment can be processed. It is expected that these checks will be completed shortly.

Question No. 230 withdrawn.

Basic Payment Scheme

231. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of farmers over 40 years of age (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2035/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Under the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy farmers over forty years of age may apply for an allocation of Basic Payment Scheme entitlements through the New Entrant priority category of the National Reserve and also through the Scottish Derogation. In order to be eligible under the ‘new entrant to farming’ category of the National Reserve, an applicant must:

- Be participating in the Basic Payment Scheme in the year in which s/he applies to the National Reserve;

- Have commenced the present agricultural activity in 2013 or later, and not have had any agricultural activity in his/her own name and at his/her own risk in the five years preceding the start of the present agricultural activity;

- Have successfully completed a recognised course of education in agriculture at FETAC Level 6 or its equivalent, or have commenced such a course in the year of application;

- Have a gross off-farm income that does not exceed €40,000 in either of the most recent tax years.

Successful applicants to the National Reserve will receive an allocation of new entitlements on the basis of one entitlement for one hectare. Applicants who already hold existing entitlement which are below the national average value will receive a top-up whereby the value of those entitlements will be increased to the national average value.

The provision known as the Scottish Derogation allows for the allocation of entitlements to persons who never held Single Payment entitlements but who actively farmed during the 2013 scheme year and can provide verifiable evidence of agricultural production. Such allocation is available to eligible farmers who ‘produced, reared or grew agricultural products’ in 2013 in the beef, dairy, sheep and arable sectors.

There is no upper age limit for qualification for an allocation of entitlements under these two measures/schemes.

Single Payment Scheme Payments

232. **Deputy Áine Collins** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) will receive a payment under the single payment scheme. [2049/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named submitted a 2015 Transfer of Allocation Right and Reference Value application to my Department seeking the transfer of allocation rights and reference values by Change of Registration details. This application has been fully processed and payment under the Basic Payment Scheme issued on 19 January 2016. The person named also submitted an application under the Young Farmers Scheme to my Department. This application has been processed and payment will issue shortly.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

233. **Deputy Noel Coonan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment under the single payment scheme and the disadvantaged areas scheme will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary; the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2051/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under the 2015 Basic Payment/Areas of Natural Constraint Schemes was received from the person named on 7 May 2015. Processing of the Areas of Natural Constraint application has recently been finalised and payment will issue to the nominated bank account of the person named shortly.

My Department also received applications under the 'new entrant' category of the 2015 National Reserve and the Young Farmers Scheme from the person named. These applications have been processed. Payment under the National Reserve has issued on 19 January 2016 and payment under the Young Farmers Scheme will follow shortly.

Forestry Grants

234. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2056/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Following an inspection in 2014 the Forest Service inspector reported that 1.21ha of this plantation was not up to the required standard. A declaration, signed by the applicant in January 2015, stated that all remedial works had been completed and the site was up to standard. A subsequent inspection by the Forest Service inspector found that there had been no significant improvement in the problem areas and that the spruce trees were chlorotic and stunted. The forest owner is advised to consult with her forester as no further payments will be made until the plantation is declared by the Forest Service inspector to be up to standard.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments

235. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will receive a payment under the agri-environment options scheme. [2057/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named commenced their AEOS 1 contract on 1 September 2010 and has been paid for the 2010-2014 scheme years.

Under the EU Regulations governing the Scheme and other area-based payment schemes, a comprehensive administrative check, including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System must take place. As it is their final scheme year re-checks on payments made for all scheme years must be completed before final payment can be processed.

It is expected that these checks will be completed shortly.

Basic Payment Scheme Payments

236. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a payment to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2059/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under Basic Payment/Areas of Natural Constraints Scheme was received from the person named on 11 May, 2015. Processing of the application under both schemes is currently in progress. On completion of this process, the application will be further reviewed with a view to payment issuing directly to the nominated bank account of the person named at the earliest possible date.

Pigmeat Sector

237. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a flat rate payment will be used in the allocation of compensation for pig producers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2061/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am currently giving consideration to the mechanism for distribution of this payment to pig farmers and expect to be making an announcement on the proposed distribution in the very near future.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments

238. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will receive payment under the agri-environment options scheme. [2062/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named commenced their AEOS contract on 1 May 2015 and has received payment in full for the 2013-2015 scheme years.

Payment for the 2015 scheme years issued in two parts, a first instalment of 85% in the amount of €2,576.97 on 15 December 2015 and the remaining 15% in the amount of €454.73 on 17 December 2015.

GLAS Appeals

239. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of an appeal of a farm payment decision by a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2102/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application from the person- named was received by my Department under the first tranche of GLAS. The applicant selected two actions, i.e. Low Input Permanent Pasture (LIPP) and Traditional Orchards.

Following the pre-approval validation checking process, the Low Input Permanent Pasture action was deemed ineligible as there was no record of a grazing enterprise of owned animals on the holding, as required by the scheme specifications. Without this action, the application did not meet the minimum required score of 16.3 and was therefore deemed ineligible for participation in the scheme. The person named was notified of this decision and the option of appeal to GLAS section was given.

The option of an appeal was taken and following a review of the application the original decision was upheld. On the 14 December 2015, a letter issued to the person named notifying him of this decision and of his right to appeal this further to the Agriculture Appeals Office.

GLAS Applications

240. **Deputy Noel Coonan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine why a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary was refused entry to the green low-carbon agri-environment scheme; the options available to the person; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2103/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application from the person-named was received by my Department under the first tranche of GLAS. The applicant selected two actions, i.e. Low Input Permanent Pasture (LIPP) and Traditional Orchards.

Following the pre-approval validation checking process, the Low Input Permanent Pasture action was deemed ineligible as the parcel had not been declared as forage for the previous eight years as required under the GLAS scheme specifications. Without this action, the application did not meet the minimum required score of 16.3 and was therefore deemed ineligible for participation in the scheme. The applicant is free to seek a review of this decision, or to appeal it to the Agriculture Appeals Office. While I understand that he did not apply again under the second tranche of GLAS which closed before Christmas, the option is always there to make a new application under the next tranche of the scheme, and choosing actions that will improve his chances of success.

Organic Farming Scheme Payments

241. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Limerick under the organic farm scheme; the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2108/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named commenced their Organic Farming Scheme contract on 1 June 2012 and has been paid for the 2012-2014 scheme years.

Under the EU Regulations governing the Scheme and other area-based payment schemes, a comprehensive administrative check, including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System must take place. It is expected that these checks will be completed shortly following which the file will be processed for payment.

Íocaíochtaí Deontas

242. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine cén uair a dhéanfar íocaíocht, don bhliain 2015, faoin Scéim Buníocaíochta, faoi Scéim na Limistéar faoi Shrianta Nádúrtha, agus faoin Scéim um Chaomhnú an Chomhshaoil faoin Tuath (REPS), le feirmeoir i gContae na Gaillimhe (sonraí leis seo); cén fáth go bhfuil moill ar an íocaíocht seo agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [2142/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Fuarthas iarratas faoin Scéim Buníocaíochta/Scéim na Limistéar faoi Shrian Nádúrtha ón duine a ainmnítear i mo Roinn an 8 Bealtaine 2015.

I ndiaidh próiseála a dhéanamh, sainaitníodh ró-éileamh maidir le dáileacht talún amháin a dearbhaíodh. Eisíodh litir don duine a ainmnítear maidir leis an gceist seo agus próiseáladh a iarratas ar an Scéim Buníocaíochta (an SBI) lena íoc. Meastar go n-eiseofar íocaíocht an SBI go gairid don chuntas ainmnithe baine.

Cuireadh san áireamh sa phróiseáil a dhéantar ar an iarratas ar Limistéir faoi Shrian Nádúrtha an ró-éileamh thuas agus tugadh an phróiseáil chun críche le déanaí. Eiseofar an íocaíocht seo do chuntas ainmnithe baine an duine a ainmnítear go gairid.

Chuir an duine a ainmnítear tús lena gconradh faoin Scéim um Roghanna Comhshaoil Talmhaíochta an 1 Samhain 2010 agus íocadh é do bhlianta 2010-2014 na scéime.

Faoi Rialacháin an AE a rialaíonn an Scéim agus scéimeanna eile íocaíochta limistéarbhunaithe, is gá seiceáil chuimsitheach riaracháin a chríochnú, cros-seiceálacha san áireamh leis an gCóras Aitheanta Dáileachtaí Talún. Mar gheall gurb é seo a mbliain deiridh scéime, ní mór athsheiceálacha ar íocaíochtaí a rinneadh do gach bliain scéime a chríochnú sular féidir íocaíocht deiridh a phróiseáil.

Tá na seiceálacha seo tugtha chun críche anois agus meastar go n-eiseofar íocaíocht go luath.

An application under the Basic Payment/Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme from the person named was received in my Department on 8 May 2015. Following processing, an over-claim was identified in respect of one land parcel declared. A letter has issued to the person named regarding this matter and his BPS application has been processed for payment. It is expected that the BPS payment will issue shortly to the nominated bank account.

Processing of the Areas of Natural Constraint application has taken account of the above over-claim and has recently been finalised. This payment will issue to the nominated bank account of the person named shortly.

The person named commenced their AEOS 1 contract on 1 November 2010 and has been paid for the 2010-2014 scheme years. Under the EU Regulations governing the Scheme and other area-based payment schemes, a comprehensive administrative check, including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System must take place. As it is their final scheme year re-checks on payments made for all scheme years must be completed before final payment

can be processed. These checks have now been completed and it is expected that payment will issue shortly.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

243. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when farm payments for a person (details supplied) in County Leitrim will be processed; the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2149/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under the 2015 Basic Payment/Areas of Natural Constraint Schemes was received from the person named on 28 February 2015. Processing of the application under both schemes is complete and payments have issued to the nominated bank account of the person named.

Basic Payment Scheme Payments

244. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Donegal under the basic payment scheme 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2150/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named submitted two 2015 Private Contract Clause applications to my Department seeking the transfer of land and entitlements by lease. The PCC application regarding the transfer of 11.82 entitlements to the person named was processed and Basic Payment Scheme payment on these entitlements issued on 1 December 2015. The remaining PCC regarding the transfer of 14.91 entitlements to the person named is currently being processed with a view to making payment on foot of these entitlements as soon as possible.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

245. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of farm payments to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2169/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named submitted a 2015 Basic Payment/Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme application on 28 May 2015. EU Regulations governing the administration of these schemes require that full and comprehensive administrative checks, including in some cases on farm inspections, be completed before any payments issue. The 2015 Basic Payment Scheme/Areas of Natural Constraint application of the person named was selected for a remote sensing inspection. This inspection resulted in a reduction in the area claimed 19.62 ha to a found area of 14.34 ha. As the amount of entitlements held by the person named is lower than the amount of area claimed, there was no monetary reduction under the Basic Payment Scheme and payments due issued to the nominated bank account on 17 December 2015.

This inspection resulted in findings of an over-declaration in area of greater than 20% in respect of the Areas of Natural Constraint scheme. Based on the terms and conditions of the scheme this resulted in no payment in respect of that scheme. The person named was informed of this outcome on 18 December 2015. The person named has appealed this decision and this request is currently being examined. The person named will be notified of the outcome as soon

as possible.

In the event that the person named is dissatisfied with the outcome of this review, the decision can be appealed to the independent Agriculture Appeals Office, within 3 months.

Question No. 246 withdrawn.

Single Payment Scheme Payments

247. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Clare will receive a payment under the single payment scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2174/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named submitted a 2015 Transfer of Entitlements Allocation Right and Reference Value application to my Department to transfer allocation rights and values to a company. He also submitted an application for Review of Entitlements. These applications are currently being processed and payment under the Basic Payment Scheme will issue as soon as possible.

Beef Exports

248. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the action and measures he is taking to address the unacceptably huge gap between Irish and British cattle prices and to remove obstacles inhibiting the live export trade; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2209/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): In relation to the beef sector, my role as Minister is to create a policy and support environment that allows it to flourish in line with standard market principles. I am guided in this context by the long-term sectoral development strategies as set out in Food Wise 2025 and I am confident that these initiatives, in conjunction with the Rural Development Programme, will lead to continued growth in terms of profitability and efficiency of the sector as whole. As with any Minister for Agriculture in the EU, I can have no role in influencing commodity prices in Ireland. I do note however that 2015 was a relatively positive year for beef prices in Ireland with the yearly average nearly 8% higher compared to 2014.

The primary determinant of prices in any market is the relationship between supply and demand. Price variations in different EU beef markets reflect prevailing conditions in those markets. With regard to the price differential between Irish and UK cattle, a number of factors have been identified to explain why Irish-born cattle command lower prices than their British equivalents. These include a British consumer preference for indigenous product as well as additional transport and processing costs in supplying that market. Last year, Ireland exported approximately 272,000 tonnes of beef, worth in the region of €1.1 billion to the UK. This constituted 54% of the volume and 52% of the value of Irish beef exports and as such, the UK is overwhelmingly Ireland's most important export market.

I attach substantial importance to the live export trade and my Department has been very proactive during my time as Minister in facilitating both the cross-border live trade and shipments of animals overseas. Live exports serve a dual purpose as a means of satisfying market demand for live animals and providing alternative market outlets for cattle farmers in Ireland. It is expected that 2016 will see an increase in the export of live cattle. Improving economic

situations in Italy and Spain are expected to boost demand for Irish cattle and general demand for calves for veal are expected to remain strong.

Last year, live exports to all markets amounted to almost 180,000 head. Geopolitical instability in North Africa, a new veterinary regime in relation to IBR in Belgium and increased domestic prices lead to a reduction in live exports. Exports to Northern Ireland, the Netherlands and France rose, while exports to Belgium, Italy, Spain and Britain declined. Bord Bia has forecast that live exports to Italy and Spain, two traditional live export destinations, should increase in 2016 on foot of economic recovery in those economies and disease outbreaks in certain supplier regions.

There are currently three dedicated and three roll on-roll off vessels approved for the carriage of livestock by sea from Irish ports. Three more vessels are currently at various stages of the process for similar approval.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments

249. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a payment to a person (details supplied) in County Mayo under the agri-environment options scheme; the reason for the delay; and when payment will be made. [2210/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named commenced their AEOS 2 contract on 1 September 2011 and has been paid for the 2011-2014 scheme years.

Under the EU Regulations governing the Scheme and other area-based payment schemes, a comprehensive administrative check, including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System must take place. These checks have now been completed and it is expected that payment will issue shortly.

Single Payment Scheme Payments

250. **Deputy Áine Collins** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a payment to a person (details supplied) in County Cork under the single payment scheme. [2213/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named submitted a 2015 Private Contract Clause application to my Department in respect of the lease of land and entitlements. All details relating to land parcel details for 2013 and 2015 and Single Payment entitlement values for 2014 had to be reconciled in order to process this application. This application has been processed but a land parcel discrepancy has delayed the issue of payment. This issue is being resolved by my Department and payment will issue to the person named as soon as possible.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

251. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a farm payment to persons (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2227/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named has been approved under Tranche 1 of GLAS with a contract start date of 1 January 2016. There is no 2015 GLAS part year payment due to the person named. The application will be processed in respect of payment for the 2016 scheme year in the final quarter of the year.

The first person named has not submitted an application to date under the 2015 Basic Payment Scheme. The second person named submitted an application under the 2015 Basic Payment Scheme which was received in my Department on 23 April 2015. No payment can issue under the Basic Payment Scheme until entitlements have been allocated.

The second person named held nine entitlements under the Single Payment Scheme totalling €81.16. Under the Single Payment Scheme direct payments of less than €100 did not issue to farmers. As a consequence, EU Regulations provide that such farmers cannot be considered as having received a direct payment in 2013 and do not hold an automatic right to participate in the Basic Payment Scheme.

My Department obtained agreement with the EU Commission that persons who were entitled to receive a payment of less than €100 in 2013 may be considered eligible under the Scottish Derogation measure of the Basic Payment Scheme. In order to be eligible under Scottish Derogation they must produce verifiable evidence that on the 15 May 2013 they ‘produced, reared or grew agricultural products through harvesting, milking, breeding animals and keeping animals for farming purposes.’

My Department identified persons who held entitlements under €100 and invited them to submit an application under the Scottish Derogation if they were otherwise eligible. On 5 of August 2015 a letter and a Scottish derogation application form was issued to the second person named with a request to return the application form to my Department within two weeks. To date, no application has been received and the closing date has since passed.

The person named has been approved under Tranche 1 of GLAS with a contract start date of 1 January 2016.

There is no 2015 GLAS part year payment due to the person named. The application will be processed in respect of payment for the 2016 scheme year in the final quarter of the year.

Basic Payment Scheme Eligibility

252. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he has made a decision on the request by a person (details supplied) to have an entitlement on land which he purchased on 2014 reviewed. [2239/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named submitted an application for Review of Entitlements under the 2015 Basic Payment Scheme on the 28 March 2015. The review pertained to the establishment of allocation rights in respect of land and entitlements purchased by the person named under the 2014 Single Payment Scheme year.

To be eligible for the automatic allocation of entitlements under the Basic Payment scheme an applicant must have been eligible to receive a direct payment under the 2013 Single Payment Scheme year. Furthermore where a person sells part of their holding, they may also transfer an ‘allocation right’ in respect of the transferred land to the purchaser where they do not already hold an allocation right of their own.

The seller in this case did not establish an allocation right arising from 2013 scheme year and consequently there is no allocation right available to transfer.

A letter issued to the person named on the 28 of August 2015 informing them that their review was unsuccessful and giving him a right to appeal this decision and to include any further documentary evidence pertaining to his case. No appeal has been received by my Department to date.

Agriculture Scheme Eligibility

253. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he has made a decision on an application by a person (details supplied) in County Kerry for extra entitlements from the national reserve. [2240/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named submitted an application under the 'Old Young Farmer' category of the 2015 National Reserve to my Department. Eligible applicants to the National Reserve qualify for either an allocation of new entitlements on land for which they hold no entitlements, so called 'naked land', or where an applicant already holds existing entitlements which are below the national average value, these entitlements are increased to the national average value. While the person named meets the eligibility conditions for the National Reserve in all other respects, he does not hold either 'naked land' or low value entitlements on which an allocation from the National Reserve can be made.

A letter has issued to the person named informing him of the decision in relation to his application.

Agriculture Scheme Eligibility

254. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he has made a decision on an application by a person (details supplied) in County Kerry for extra entitlements from the national reserve. [2241/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department received applications under the 'young farmer' category of the 2015 National Reserve and the Young Farmers Scheme from the person named. These applications are currently being processed and once finalised the applicant will be notified in writing of the decision with a view to payment shortly thereafter.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

255. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry under the basic payment scheme and areas of natural constraint scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2248/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The 2013 Single Payment Application in respect of the person named was subject to the 2013 LPIS Review. This review identified ineligible features on a number of parcels which resulted in a penalty of greater than 20% for the 2013 Scheme year. The person named was notified of this and

of his right to appeal. The person named unsuccessfully appealed this penalty both to officials in my Department, which included a field visit, and subsequently to the Agriculture Appeals Committee.

The overpayments were subsequently recouped from payments due to the person named including from the 2015 Areas of Natural Constraint and the 2015 Basic Payment Scheme.

Forestry Sector

256. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will put an attractive national afforestation scheme in place for farmers and other persons who have suitable land for planting, which will include a favourable averaging taxation regime, in the context of recent climate events; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2281/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The State has provided attractive grant schemes for landowners for many decades to encourage the planting of new forests and this has continued under the Forestry Programme 2014-2020.

The Afforestation Grant and Premium Scheme 2014-2020 provides very generous grants of up to €5,750 per hectare to cover the full cost of planting, along with annual premiums of up to €635 per hectare per year for 15 years. The rate of grant and premium is dependent on the species of tree planted, with native broadleaf species attracting the highest grant and premium rates. Details are available on the Department's website www.agriculture.gov.ie.

These grant and premium payments are available to all landowners, both farmers and non-farmers.

The Afforestation Scheme supports the planting of 12 different categories of forests, including commercial conifer forests, commercial broadleaf forests and native woodlands. In 2014 two new forest categories were introduced to provide additional options for farmers. The Agro-forestry category aims to encourage farmers to combine livestock grazing with forestry, while the Forestry for Fibre category will allow farmers to plant forestry for the renewable energy or pulpwood markets on a 10-15 year crop rotation.

With regard to taxation, in Budget 2016 the High Income Earners Restriction, which formerly applied to income from forestry, was removed completely for active foresters and farmers. As a result, a taxation averaging regime is not necessary because following Budget 2016 the income earned from clear-felling will now be tax-free.

Competition Law

257. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he is concerned about recent events in the beef and sheep sector, and in particular the reduction in competition and consequent dominance in beef processing as well as rendering due to the sale of a significant share of the Slaney-Irish Country Meats business to ABP Food Group; his plans to make an appropriate submission to the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission on the importance of protecting and guaranteeing competition in processing and rendering for farmers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2291/16]

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 or the EU Commission, which conduct 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.

EU Funding

258. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the new €200 million European Union fund for Ireland to deliver affordable loans for the agri-sector and the rural sector; when this credit facility will be operational; if financial institutions will provide the credit funding or if the Government will provide it directly to farmers; how much will the Government leverage the scheme; what the interest rates will be; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2328/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The European Commission and the European Investment Bank (EIB) have outlined a model guarantee instrument for agriculture, developed within the framework of their Memorandum of Understanding on co-operation in agriculture and rural development within the EU. The model instrument aims to help ease access to finance for farmers and other rural businesses. Member States and regions can adapt and use this model to set up financial instruments funded by their rural development programmes (RDPs) under the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). No such funding has been allocated by the EIB or under Ireland's RDP to date.

I am considering whether to include Financial Instruments (FIs) in Ireland's Rural Development Programme. Financial instruments can take the form of loans, guarantee funds or equity investments and 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. It is also possible to incorporate funding from other sources for such instruments.

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 Evaluation is required by EU regulation. This evaluation can take between 3 months to a year to complete. It includes a range of steps and must assess:

- Market analysis - need to prove that FIs are required due to investment gap; this gap must be quantified;
- Estimation of value added of FI;
- Estimation of public and private resources to be raised;
- Reflection on lessons from other instruments;
- Development of a proposed investment strategy (i.e. choice of instrument) and description of the advantages and disadvantages of different types of financial products;
- Discussion about how results will contribute to RDP objectives; and
- Revision and updating of the ex-ante assessment in the case of changing market conditions.

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 evaluation. Following this, a new measure de-

scription would have to be drafted and inserted into the RDP by way of an amendment.

My Department continues to explore new and more competitive sources of funding for the agri-food sector. For example, the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI), which includes the EIB as one of its funding partners, provides an ‘Agriculture Investment Loans’ product. This credit is available at favourable terms for investments in primary agricultural production, the processing of agricultural products or the marketing of agricultural products. The features of the SBCI products compared with those currently on the market are lower interest rates, loan amounts up to €5m and increased repayment flexibility. Since its launch the SBCI has made €750 million of lower-cost loans available for Irish Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), including farmers. In its last report, the SBCI stated that of the loans approved and drawn down by SMEs, a third had been accessed by the agriculture sector.

Direct Payment Scheme Eligibility

259. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he has discussed farm land under solar farm installations being recognised as an agricultural activity and therefore eligible for European Union direct payments and qualifying for retirement and agricultural reliefs at European Union level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2329/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department, along with other Member States, are currently in discussions with the European Commission on the eligibility, under the Direct Payment Schemes, of agricultural land under solar panels, taking account of the regulatory provisions of Article 32 (3) of Regulation 1307/2013 on agricultural land which is predominately used for non-agricultural activities.

The eligibility of farmland under solar panel installations for various tax measures is primarily determined by national taxation legislation. The Office of the Revenue Commissioners have advised that under certain circumstances, such farmland would be eligible for income tax relief on long-term leasing and for Retirement Relief from Capital Gains Tax. My Department is still awaiting advice on the eligibility for Agricultural Relief from Capital Acquisitions Tax.

Food Labelling

260. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he has taken steps at European Union level to get support for a full review of the impact of United States country of origin labelling legislation at World Trade Organisation level, given the impact this will have on livestock imports to the United States of America; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2330/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The rules on origin labelling for Ireland are determined at EU level and last year I signed into law an SI to give effect to the new European Regulations for country of origin labelling of meat from sheep, pigs, poultry and goats. These mandatory rules require a label to state the Member State where the animal was reared and slaughtered. In addition, my Department is liaising with the Department of Health with a view to extending the legislation to include “loose meats” which are sold or supplied to consumers.

As a member of the EU and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) Ireland is in a position to avail of opportunities for trade that are essential for the development of our open economy.

Membership of these organizations also brings reciprocal trade obligations. My Department is reviewing the WTO ruling, with a view to understanding any potential impact for Irish exports amongst our trade partners within the EU and third country markets.

Basic Payment Scheme Payments

261. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to account for the latest reports stating that only 53% of young farmers have been paid under the basic payment scheme to date; when outstanding payments will be paid; the steps he is taking to expedite payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2331/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Payments under the National Reserve and Young Farmers Scheme commenced in mid-December 2015 and, and given the number of applications and their complexity, these payments will continue over the coming weeks. To date some 60% of eligible applicants under both the National Reserve and Young Farmers Scheme have received payment.

My Department will continue to prioritise the payment of eligible cases under the National Reserve and Young Farmers Scheme to ensure that payment is made as soon as it practicable. Where my Department has contacted an applicant seeking further information or documentation to further process their application, I would encourage these applicants to engage with my Department to ensure that their application can be finalised.

Departmental Staff Promotions

262. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine under the Civil Service reform programme, the number of clerical officers who have been promoted to higher executive officer and the number of executive officers who have been promoted to assistant principal officer in his Department through internal competitions after the significant change in eligibility rules; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2569/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Since the introduction of the recent changes to the eligibility criteria for promotion competitions, one executive officer has been promoted to Assistant Principal Officer in my Department through an internal competitive process. To date, no clerical officers have been promoted directly to the Higher Executive Officer role.

Army Barracks

263. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Defence the cost of fully reopening Columb army barracks in County Westmeath; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1968/16]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): Columb Barracks is no longer required for military purposes accordingly no assessment has been made as to what it would cost to fully reopen the Barracks.

Defence Forces Expenditure

264. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Defence the average operating cost of each Army barracks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1969/16]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): It is not possible to give a detailed breakdown of the average operating cost of each individual barracks due to the extensive effort involved in compiling the information required. However the Defence Forces spent approximately €8.5m in 2015 on utilities such as electricity, gas, heating oil, water and waste disposal across 15 military installations and training areas. Another €7.3m was spent in 2015 on building maintenance.

Air Corps Recruitment

265. **Deputy Seán Kenny** asked the Minister for Defence if he will have a recruitment drive for the Air Corps; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2177/16]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Government is committed to maintaining the stabilised strength of the Permanent Defence Force at 9,500 personnel, comprising of 7,520 Army, 886 Air Corps and 1,094 Naval Service as stated in the 2015 White Paper on Defence. I am advised by the Military Authorities that the strength of the Permanent Defence Force, at 30 November 2015, the latest date for which details are available, was 9103 comprising 7307 Army, 750 Air Corps and 1046 Naval Service.

The manpower requirement of the Defence Forces is monitored on an ongoing basis in accordance with the operational requirements of each of the three services. As there is significant turnover of personnel in the Permanent Defence Force, targeted recruitment has been and is currently taking place so as to maintain the agreed strength levels. A General Service recruitment campaign for the Army was launched on 4 August 2015 and is ongoing. Air Corps General Service Recruits are drawn from the Army General Service Recruit campaign panels as required.

The intake of Cadets into the Permanent Defence Force is normally carried out on an annual basis taking into consideration the operational requirements of the Defence Forces and the resource envelope allocated to Defence. 10 Air Corps Cadets were inducted on 21 September 2015 and remain in service as of 15 January 2016. The Military Authorities advise that a new Air Corps Cadetship campaign will be advertised in either the first or second quarter of 2016.

Direct Entry Competitions are also held as required from which specialist appointments are filled. 24 Apprentice Trainee Technicians were inducted in to the Air Corps in 2015 and remain in service as of 15 January 2016. It is intended to advertise a further competition in the first quarter of 2016.

With the support of the Chief of Staff and within the resources available, it is intended to retain the capacity of the Defence Forces to operate effectively across all roles and to undertake the tasks laid down by Government both at home and overseas.

Army Barracks

266. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Defence when an organisation (details supplied) in County Westmeath will be granted a lease in respect of a portion of property which it occupies at Columb Barracks in Mullingar, County Westmeath, given that this issue is ongoing for almost two years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2336/16]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): Irish United Nations Veterans Associa-

tion (IUNVA) have occupied the former Officers Mess building in the Barracks since late 2014 and have requested a long term lease on the premises. Officials from the Department have met IUNVA representatives on site to discuss the Association's plans for the Barracks and have raised issues regarding those plans. The premises were initially provided to IUNVA on the basis that it would be used as a meeting place for members of the Association. Since then it has come to our attention that IUNVA's long term vision for the premises include the provision of a coffee shop, overnight accommodation for its members and a bar. A lease is currently being considered in that context.

Also the Department of Justice and Equality, who are the lead Department for the refugee accommodation programme, are considering whether any of the buildings falling within the remit of my Department, including Columb Barracks, are suitable for the purposes of temporary accommodation for refugees.

While the Department supports the ongoing use of the Barracks by the local community the current financial and administrative burden resulting from the retention of the Barracks cannot be sustained given that the Barracks is no longer required for military purposes.

In this regard Officials from the Department are scheduled to meet with the CEO of Westmeath County Council in the coming weeks to discuss possible future plans for the Barracks. They would also be happy to discuss, with any interested group, any proposals they may have for the possible purchase and future development of the site for the benefit of the local community.

This is in keeping with the Department's policy to dispose of surplus property no longer required for military purposes.

Departmental Staff Promotions

267. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Defence under the Civil Service reform programme, the number of clerical officers who have been promoted to higher executive officer and the number of executive officers who have been promoted to assistant principal officer in his Department through internal competitions after the significant change in eligibility rules; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2573/16]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Report of the Commission for Public Service Appointments (CPSA), in respect of eligibility rules for promotion of staff in the Civil Service, was adopted on 27 November 2013. Accordingly all Civil Servants with two or more years' service, either continuously or in aggregate, are eligible to apply for all internal promotion competitions from that date. In April 2014 an internal competition for appointment to Higher Executive Officer was held in my Department. One Clerical Officer was promoted to Higher Executive Officer resulting from this competition. A second internal competition for appointment to Higher Executive Officer was held in my Department in December 2015. No appointments have yet been made from this competition.

No Executive Officers have been promoted from that grade to Assistant Principal in my Department in the period since the changes in the eligibility rules for promotion of staff in the Civil Service were adopted.

National Disability Strategy Implementation Plan

268. **Deputy Eric Byrne** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of a matter (details supplied) regarding a campaign; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1842/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy Aodhán Ó Riordáin): I am currently preparing a revised National Disability Inclusion Strategy with a view to having it in place by early 2016. The new Strategy is being prepared on the basis of wide consultation with interested parties in a 3 Phase consultation process. Phases 1 and 2 involving the identification of key themes and building on those through a broad consultation process to produce high-level objectives for the years 2016-2019 have been completed. Phase 3 will commence shortly and focus on agreeing specific actions and time frames in relation to each objective. In summary, my aim is to ensure a rigorous focus on identifying the key themes that impact on the lives of people with disabilities, on identifying agreed objectives within each theme and on developing specific actions to be undertaken to achieve each of the agreed objectives, together with time frames and key performance indicators so that the new Strategy will make a real difference to the lives of people with disabilities.

I welcome the positive engagement of all stake holders in the process so far including their participation in the first round of public meetings and in the National Disability Strategy Implementation Group and look forward to continuing to work with all interested parties in completing and delivering the Strategy.

Furthermore, in autumn 2014, I launched the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for people with Disabilities. The aim of this strategy was to ensure that the barriers faced by those living with a disability in finding employment could be addressed. I appointed Fergus Finlay as the independent chairperson of the strategy's implementation committee to ensure that the Government is provided with regular updates on the Strategy's progression.

Commencement of Legislation

269. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the Child and Family Relations Act 2015 will commence. [2164/16]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I signed the Commencement Order S.I. No. 12 of 2016 on 12 January 2016 which commenced specified provisions of Parts 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 12 and 13 of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 on 18 January 2016. Part 10 has been commenced by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade. The date of commencement of Parts 2 and 3 will be determined by the Minister for Health while the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs will determine the date of commencement of Part 11.

Immigration Controls

270. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality to address the concerns raised by a person (details supplied) regarding the protection and reception services provided for refugees; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2287/16]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Persons coming to Ireland under the Irish Refugee Protection Programme as announced by the Government in September 2015, will be offered full board, accommodation and other supports, for example health and education, and will reside in the newly established Emergency Reception and Orientation Centres (EROCs) for a limited period of time. They will be either persons coming from Greece

or Italy under the EU Relocation measures or programme refugees coming to Ireland from the Lebanon and Jordan under the UNHCR-led resettlement programme. Persons arriving under the Relocation measures will have their applications for asylum processed in an accelerated procedure of approximately 8-12 weeks. Once refugee status has been granted, these persons will be eligible to enter employment and to access other supports on the same basis as nationals. Persons coming to Ireland under the resettlement programme will have programme refugee status on arrival. Persons accepted here under these programmes will also have an entitlement to apply for family reunification, if they wish to do so, thereby further increasing the numbers accepted by Ireland.

In 2015, 176 refugees displaced by the Syrian conflict were admitted to Ireland from Jordan and Lebanon under the UNHCR-led resettlement programme. It is planned that an additional 120 refugees will be admitted from Lebanon in early 2016, with the remaining cases admitted on a gradually increasing phased basis thereafter. The first transfer of persons to Ireland under the EU Relocation measures is expected to take place from Greece in the coming weeks.

Following publication of the Report of the Working Group on Improvements to the Protection Process, including Direct Provision and Supports to Asylum Seekers, the report was referred by Government to the Cabinet Committee on Social Policy and Public Service Reform. One of the key recommendations in the report which goes to the heart of the length of time people spend in Direct Provision is the early enactment of the International Protection Bill and in that regard, the Government has brought forward as a major priority legislation to provide for the introduction of a single applications procedure for international protection. This reform will simplify and streamline the existing arrangements and provide applicants with a final decision on their protection application in a more straightforward and timely fashion. This is aimed at addressing one of the key issues identified in the report, that is, the length of time persons remain in the Direct Provision system. The Deputy will be aware that the International Protection Bill was signed into law by the President on 30 December, 2015. Work has since commenced on the implementation of the single procedure which is expected to be introduced in the coming months. The Act provides for the transfer of responsibility for the processing of protection applications from the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC) to my Department. I will establish an International Protection Office in the Department for this purpose. The Act also provides for the establishment of an independent International Protection Appeals Tribunal (IPAT), which will provide an effective remedy against decisions taken on applications, including a decision to refuse. Existing best practice will be protected and embedded within the new regime. The International Protection Act alone responds to 26 of the recommendations of the Working Group report.

Migrant Integration

271. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of migrants who have moved to a community (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2311/16]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): My Department does not utilise and does not have any plans to utilise the premises referred to as an accommodation centre for migrants.

Spent Convictions Legislation

272. **Deputy Pat Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the Spent Convictions Bill 2011 will be scheduled for Report and Final Stages; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1854/16]

281. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality why the Criminal Justice (Spent Convictions) Bill 2012 was not brought before Dáil Éireann by the end of 2015 as indicated in her recent reply to Parliamentary Question No. 109 of 18 November 2015; when the Bill will be brought before Dáil Éireann; if this will be before the end of this Dáil, given that justice reform is high on her agenda, yet for over a decade reform has not taken place in the area of spent convictions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2016/16]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 272 and 281 together.

I understand that the Spent Convictions Bill 2012 is scheduled to be re-committed to Committee Stage in the Dáil next week. A decision on scheduling the Bill for Report and Final Stages will be made by the Dáil at that juncture.

Before the Bill could be enacted, a 2013 UK Court of Appeal judgment necessitated a review of the disclosure provisions in both the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012 and the Spent Convictions Bill. That review has been completed and amendments to the Vetting Act 2012 and consequential amendments to the Spent Convictions Bill will be brought by me before Committee in the Dáil. Pending the amendment of the Bill, an Administrative Filter for Garda Vetting Disclosures has been introduced, which provides that certain minor offences that are over 7 years old are no longer disclosed.

The principal amendments which I will bring before the Dáil propose giving effect to these procedures by amending both the Spent Convictions Bill and the National Vetting Bureau (Children & Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012. However, I also propose retaining the existing provisions in the Spent Convictions Bill which allow more serious convictions which result in penalties of up to 12 months imprisonment to become spent, where persons are not working in positions covered by the Vetting Act 2012. A copy of the Administrative Filter is below.

Garda Vetting Procedures

Administrative Filter

In anticipation of the amendment and commencement of the National Vetting Bureau Act 2012, an administrative filter in respect of Garda Vetting Unit Disclosures will operate in accordance with the following procedural guidelines.

A. Criminal Convictions to be disclosed in all cases:

- 1) Offences Against the Person.
- 2) Sexual Offences
- 3) Convictions on indictment.

B. District Court Convictions which will not be disclosed:

- 1) Motoring Offences:

District Court convictions for motoring offences will not be disclosed after 7 years even where more recent offences have been committed. This is because it is considered that old minor motoring offences would not be relevant due to the passage of time.

2) Minor Public Order Offences:

The following convictions under the Criminal Justice (Public Order) Act 1994 will not be disclosed if the offence is over 7 years old even where more recent offences have been committed:

- Section 4 (Intoxication),
- Section 5 (Disorderly conduct),
- Section 6 (Threatening, abusive or insulting behaviour),
- Section 7 (Distribution or display of material which is offensive),
- Section 8 (Failure to comply with direction of Garda),
- Section 9 (Wilful obstruction).

3) Other minor offences – 1 Only :

District Court convictions for any other minor offence will not be disclosed after 7 years where the person has **one such offence only (excluding motoring or public order offences over 7 years old)**.

This provision does not apply to offences against the person or to sexual offences.

C. Probation Act Provisions

Where persons have been dealt with by a district court in accordance with the provisions of section 1(1) (i) or 1 (1) (ii) of the Probation Act 1907, the offences will not be disclosed **except** in cases where the circumstances of the offence gives rise to a bona fide concern that the person concerned may harm a child or vulnerable person.

Where persons have been dealt with by a court in accordance with section 1 (2) of the Probation Act, these will be disclosed in all cases. (Section 1 (2) relates solely to persons “convicted on indictment”.)

D. Offences in respect of which a person is charged but subsequently not prosecuted or acquitted.

Non convictions will be considered for disclosure where the circumstances of an offence gives rise to a bona fide concern that the person concerned may harm a child or vulnerable person.

This information will only be disclosed if the information is of such a nature that its disclosure is necessary, proportionate and reasonable in the circumstances for the protection of children or vulnerable persons, or both, as the case may be.

The Garda Central Vetting Unit will make such decision in the context of:

- The information concerned
- The relevance of the information to the type of work/activity
- The source and reliability of the information
- The rights of the vetting applicant and any submissions made by them.

Where the GCVU makes a determination to disclose information under this section the GCVU will:

- Notify the person who is the subject of the application for the vetting disclosure concerned, in writing, of its determination and of the reasons for it,
- Provide to the person a copy of the information to be disclosed,
- Notify the person of the intention to disclose the information to an Authorised Signatory for the registered organisation concerned after the expiry of 14 days from the date of notification, and
- Allow the applicant the opportunity to make a written submission.
- There will also be an appeals process in respect of a decision to disclose the information.

The GCVU will not issue a vetting disclosure in respect of a person until this process has been completed.

Forensic Science Ireland Laboratory

273. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the date when Forensic Service Ireland will provide its new facility; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1855/16]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The need for a new purpose-built forensic science laboratory appropriate to the State's requirements is longstanding. Well-advanced plans for the construction of a new facility in Backweston, Co. Kildare were previously cancelled due to the economic downturn. I was happy, therefore, to secure the funding necessary to proceed with construction of the new laboratory in the recently announced capital expenditure programme, with these funds set to become available in 2019. In light of the importance of this project, I intend to keep the projected start date under review and if an opportunity arises to bring forward the start date of construction at Backweston, it will be pursued.

Immigration Controls

274. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons refused leave to land at Cork Airport from 25 to 31 October 2015, by reason for refusal, by nationality, by gender, by country to which they were returned, and by the number who subsequently applied for asylum. [1895/16]

275. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons refused leave to land at Dublin Airport from 25 to 31 October 2015, by reason for refusal, by nationality, by gender, by country to which they were returned, and by the number who subsequently applied for asylum. [1896/16]

276. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons refused leave to land at Cork Airport from 15 to 21 November 2015, by reason for refusal, by nationality, by gender, by country to which they were returned, and by the number who subsequently applied for asylum. [1897/16]

277. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons refused leave to land at Dublin Airport from 15 to 21 November 2015, by reason for refusal, by nationality, by gender, by country to which they were returned, and by the number who subsequently applied for asylum. [1898/16]

278. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons refused leave to land at Cork Airport from 6 to 12 December 2015, by reason for refusal, by nationality, by gender, by country to which they were returned, and by the number who subsequently applied for asylum. [1899/16]

279. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons refused leave to land at Dublin Airport from 6 to 12 December 2015, by reason for refusal, by nationality, by gender, by country to which they were returned, and by the number who subsequently applied for asylum. [1900/16]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 274 to 279, inclusive, together.

In general a person may be refused leave to land on one, or more, of the eleven grounds set out in Section 4(3) of the Immigration Act, 2004. Every person refused leave to land in the State is served with a notice in which the reason, or reasons, for refusing an application for permission to enter the State is set out.

I would advise the Deputy that persons refused leave to land and who are subsequently removed from the State are returned to their point of embarkation, which in most cases is within the EU.

I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that a total of 204 persons were refused leave to land at Dublin Airport with a further 17 refused at Cork Airport during the overall periods requested by the Deputy. An overall total 18 persons sought asylum between both locations. I do not propose to disaggregate these figures further as I have a legal obligation to protect the identity of all asylum seekers in accordance with the Refugee Act.

It should be noted that information on numbers refused permission to enter the State may be subject to revision over time where individual cases are examined further and the status of some cases may change.

The further breakdown of data requested by the Deputy is not readily available and would require the search and retrieval of individual records that could only be obtained by the disproportionate expenditure of time and resources relative to the information sought.

Garda Youth Diversion Projects

280. **Deputy Seán Kenny** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she is considering the development of a Garda Síochána youth diversion project for the Baldoyle, Howth and Sutton areas of Dublin 13. [1977/16]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Garda Youth Diversion Programme operates nationally in accordance with Part 4 of the Children Act 2001, as amended, and under the general superintendence and control of the Garda Commissioner. The aim of the Diversion Programme, through the network of Juvenile Liaison Officers is to deal with young people who offend, by way of administering a formal or informal caution, thus

diverting the young offender away from the Courts and minimising the likelihood of further offending. The programme embraces, whenever possible, the principles of restorative justice and, at all times, pays the highest regard to the needs of the victims. The programme has proven to be highly successful in diverting young people away from crime by offering guidance and support to them and their families.

Garda Youth Diversion Projects support An Garda Síochána and Garda Juvenile Liaison Officers in particular, in the implementation of the Diversion Programme. The projects primarily seek to divert young people involved in anti-social/criminal behaviour by providing suitable activities to facilitate personal development, promote civic responsibility and improve long-term employability prospects. The projects may also work with young people who are significantly at risk of becoming involved in anti-social and criminal behaviour. By doing so, the projects contribute to improving the quality of life within communities and enhancing Garda/Community relationships. My Department has responsibility for the Community Programmes Unit of the Irish Youth Justice Service (IYJS) which manages the Garda Youth Diversion Project (GYDP) network nationwide.

During 2014 and 2015, the locations of all Garda Youth Diversion Projects were reviewed in the context of the allocation of additional funding under the Dormant Accounts Action Plan. As a result, significant additional support has been allocated to the Garda Youth Diversion Programme in the Garda Dublin Metropolitan Region Northern Division including the establishment of three new GYDPs in Balbriggan, Donnycarney/Fairview/Clontarf and Kilbarrack/Killester/Raheny. In addition, the existing projects in Ballymun and Coolock were allocated funding to support the recruitment of an additional youth justice worker in each project. Should young people in the area referred to by the Deputy come to the attention of local gardaí, local Garda Management, in conjunction with the National Garda Youth Diversion Office and the Community Programmes Unit of my Department, may work with district GYDP Project Committees to include access to these services, as resources allow.

I was pleased to announce earlier this month that seven new Garda Youth Diversion Projects, including the three that I have already mentioned above, are to commence operations this year. The other new projects are located in Athy, Co. Kildare, Naas, Co. Kildare, Nenagh, Co. Tipperary and Rathkeale, Co. Limerick.

Question No. 281 answered with Question No. 272.

Immigration Status

282. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the options available to a person (details supplied) in County Cork to obtain residency status; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2045/16]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Irish Nationality and Citizenship Regulations 2011 (S.I. 569 of 2011) sets out the fees to be paid by an applicant for a certificate of naturalisation. An application fee of €175 is payable on application for a certificate of naturalisation and a certification fee is payable by applicants on the issue of a certificate of naturalisation. The standard certification fee is set at €950, while a reduced fee of €200 applies in the case of an application made on behalf of a minor or in certain cases where the application is made by a widow, widower or surviving civil partner of an Irish citizen. In the case of refugees and stateless persons the certification fee is nil.

The standard fees payable by an applicant are designed to reflect the effort and cost involved

in processing applications for a certificate of naturalisation.

The Deputy will be aware that formal citizenship ceremonies have been introduced at no extra cost to applicants. These have been universally well received by participants as the ceremonies provide a sense of dignity and occasion that serves to underscore the importance to both the State and the applicant of the granting of Irish citizenship.

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.

All of the fees payable under the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956 are kept under ongoing review by my Department. However, there are no plans to reduce or abolish these fees.

Services for People with Disabilities

283. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 328 of 1 December 2015, if she will provide sign language interpreters to deaf persons for a certain number of hours each year free of charge, as put forward in the Recognition of Irish Sign Language for the Deaf Community Bill 2013, as one of the mechanisms for the promotion, recognition and use of Irish Sign Language, thereby improving service delivery on the ground. [2107/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy Aodhán Ó Ríordáin): As I indicated in my previous reply, the Programme for Government includes a commitment to “examine different mechanisms to promote the recognition of Irish sign language” and in this regard the National Disability Authority (NDA) facilitated consultations with the Deaf Community in Ireland in 2012 at the Department’s request in relation to actions that could make improvements in the lives of deaf people and submissions received from them were considered for inclusion where possible and appropriate in the National Disability Strategy Implementation Plan (NDSIP) which was published in July 2013.

As part of the follow-up to that initiative, the first special themed meeting of the National Disability Strategy Implementation Group (NDSIG) focussed on the issue of Irish Sign Language on 28 November 2013. This meeting brought together representatives of relevant Departments, the NDA, the Deaf Community and other relevant stakeholders with a view to further progressing the implementation of the NDSIP in this regard.

The meeting reviewed the current situation across Government Departments and their Agencies with regard to promoting recognition of Irish Sign Language including in-service provision and provided the Deaf Community with the opportunity of presenting their experience of interaction with the Public Sector. It also provided a useful opportunity to examine mechanisms which could promote the further use and recognition of Irish Sign Language and understand practical implications for service users. Further to this meeting, the Deaf Community prepared a report to reflect their views on key actions and priorities. The intention is that the recommendations from this report will be reflected in the new National Disability Inclusion Strategy, through the incorporation of new actions and related performance indicators and timelines as appropriate. Progress on all relevant actions will then be monitored as part of the Inclusion Strategy’s monitoring process. I should point out that my Department’s role is that of policy coordination and that I have no role in relation to the funding of services or funding of access to services. The focus is on the identification of mechanisms for the further promo-

tion and recognition of Irish Sign Language with a view to promoting and supporting its use, thereby improving service delivery on the ground, rather than on the introduction of legislation or its designation as an official language.

It should be noted that the existing supports for use of Irish Sign Language in Ireland give a level of recognition and practical measures equal to, or above that, in countries which have formally recognised sign language.

Visa Applications

284. **Deputy Joe Costello** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will ensure that when applying for a visa, a non-European Economic Area national who is the spouse of an Irish citizen is not treated less favourably than a spouse of an European Union citizen who is from a third country; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2110/16]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that applications for visas in cases mentioned by the Deputy are made either in accordance with the provisions of S.I. No. 656 of 2006 European Communities (Free Movement of Persons) (No. 2) Regulations 2006 as amended, or in accordance with the Policy Document on Non-EEA Family Reunification. The law in relation to EU citizens is governed by the EU Free Movement Directive. In relation to Irish citizens cases are decided in accordance with the Policy Document as outlined above. The Policy Document is kept under review and is updated on a periodic basis. Further information can be found on the INIS website at www.inis.gov.ie/visas.

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

International Agreements

285. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2122/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy Aodhán Ó Ríordáin): The Government has given a firm commitment to ratify the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and intends to proceed to ratification as quickly as possible, taking into account the need to ensure all necessary legislative and administrative requirements under the Convention are met.

Ireland signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2007 and is one of three EU member states yet to ratify. As the Deputy will be aware, Ireland is a dualist State, Article 29.6 of the Constitution providing that international agreements have the force of law to the extent determined by the Oireachtas. It is essential therefore that the State is in a position to meet the obligations it assumes under the terms of an international agreement from the moment of its entry into force for Ireland. Before the State can ratify the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, enactment of new legisla-

tion and amendment of existing legislation is required to ensure obligations will be met upon entry into force for Ireland.

On 21 October 2015, Minister Fitzgerald and I published a roadmap to Ireland's ratification of the CRPD, which outlines legislative changes to be undertaken to enable Ireland to ratify the Convention, along with the estimated timeframe involved. We also approved the drafting of an omnibus bill to progress miscellaneous legislative amendments necessary to proceed to ratification, the Equality/Disability (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill, the General Scheme of which will be published shortly, with enactment by the end of 2016.

The Roadmap to Ratification is available on my Department's website. It sets out the considerable work currently underway to deal with outstanding barriers to Ireland's ratification, including mental health legislation, the law governing the administration of electro-convulsive therapy (ECT), amendments to the criminal law, and the removal of archaic and offensive references in legislation across Government Departments to persons being "of unsound mind". Other hurdles include the resolution of the constitutional issue concerning reasonable accommodation, and ensuring that the Convention's requirements are met in relation to deprivation of liberty. These, along with any outstanding miscellaneous legislative amendments, will be resolved in the Equality/Disability (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill.

Garda Misconduct Allegations

286. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality why the then Garda Commissioner did not disclose in February 2002 that he designated the death of a person (details supplied) as a hit-and-run road traffic accident and gave directions that names of persons (details supplied) were not to be attributed to this death; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2137/16]

287. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the Morris tribunal, which commenced on 28 March 2002, had been informed by her Department or the Garda Commissioner of the redesignation of the death of a person (details supplied) in February 2002 and the fact that the person's death was no longer considered as a murder; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2138/16]

288. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality why in September 2002 the then Garda Commissioner did not make the inquest into the death of a person (details supplied) aware of the redesignation of that person's death; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2139/16]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 286 to 288, inclusive, together.

As the Deputy will be aware, the circumstances surrounding the death in question and related matters were examined in detail by a Tribunal of Inquiry over a number of years and the reports of Mr. Justice Morris are a matter of public record. Matters of disclosure were a matter for the Tribunal and I do not consider there are any grounds open to me for a re-examination of the matters in question.

Private Security Authority Administration

289. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she is in favour

of the payment of Private Security Authority licences by instalment, given the low pay of many workers in security; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2168/16]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Private Security Authority (PSA) is the regulatory body with responsibility for regulating and licensing the private security industry in the State. The PSA is an independent body under the aegis of my Department and the setting of the Authority's fees is a matter for which the PSA has statutory responsibility.

The PSA issues both contractor and individual (employee) licences. In December 2015, having considered the licence fee structure for individual licences, the PSA replaced the previous 2 year individual licence with a new 3 year licence. This new licence was introduced following a review of licensing charges with a view to reducing the overall cost of licensing for employees. As a result of this change the annual cost of a licence has been reduced for all such licence holders by an average of 25%.

The Authority had advised me that the new 3 year licence for a Security Guard costs €90 while a licence for a Door Supervisor or individual working in the Cash-in-Transit sector costs €150. Where an individual applies for licences in 2 sectors at the same time they received a discount of €20 in the fee payable.

The PSA has previously looked at introducing an instalment payment scheme for individual licensing. However, the cost of administering any such scheme would have to be included in the licence fee and the PSA feels that such an imposition on licence holders is not warranted particularly in light of the relatively small cost of the licence.

Alcohol Sales Legislation

290. **Deputy Ciara M. Conway** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to allow alcohol to be sold on Good Friday; if the sale of alcohol Bill contains measures regarding Good Friday licensing laws; if this Bill will be published before this term of Dáil Éireann ends; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2180/16]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I had intended that the statutory provisions relating to the sale of alcohol on Good Friday, which have historical origins, would be examined in the context of the forthcoming Sale of Alcohol Bill which will update the law relating to the sale, supply and consumption of alcohol in licensed premises by repealing the Licensing Acts 1833 to 2011, and the Registration of Clubs Acts 1904 to 2008, and replacing them with streamlined and updated provisions. However drafting of that complex Bill has been delayed and I have therefore asked my Department to examine whether it may be possible to proceed with a number of pressing reforms to the Licensing Acts in a future separate Bill. However examination of this matter is still at an early stage and no timeframe for a decision is yet available.

Garda Station Closures

291. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the closure of Garda Síochána stations has resulted in an increase in crime in the areas where the closures took place; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2183/16]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The formulation of pro-

posals in relation to the opening and closing of Garda Stations is a matter, in the first instance, for the Garda Commissioner in conjunction with the newly established Policing Authority, the context of annual policing plans, as provided for in section 20 of the Garda Síochána Act 2005, as amended.

The Garda District and Station Rationalisation Programme implemented in An Garda Síochána during 2012 and 2013 resulted in the closure of 39 Garda stations in 2012 and 100 Garda stations in 2013. It is understood from discussions with the Garda Commissioner that the current consolidation process is largely completed and there are no plans at present for further station closures in 2015 and 2016. The primary objective of the Programme was to identify opportunities to introduce strategic reforms to enhance service delivery, increase efficiency and streamline practices within An Garda Síochána.

The Programme was based on a review of the Garda Station Network by Garda management which concluded in relation to certain stations, many of which were only open part-time and manned by a single Garda, that resources could be better deployed and more effectively used on the front line if those stations no longer had to be staffed and maintained. In reaching these conclusions, Garda management reviewed all aspects of the Garda Síochána policing model, including the deployment of personnel, the utilisation of modern technologies and the overall operation of Garda stations. The Programme supports the provision of a modern 21st century policing service for both urban and rural areas and allows front line Gardaí to be managed and deployed with greater mobility, greater flexibility, and in a more focused fashion, particularly with regard to various targeted police operations. As a result of the Programme, communities have benefited from increased Garda visibility and increased patrolling hours which has enabled An Garda Síochána to deliver an improved policing service to the public.

While crime trends continue to be monitored closely by local Garda management, I am advised that the available data does not point to a correlation between the closure of Garda stations and increased crime rates.

Garda Deployment

292. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she has introduced measures to replace the Garda Síochána mobile units initiative that was discontinued; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2184/16]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Under the Garda Síochána Act 2005 the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of available Garda resources. This includes personnel, Garda vehicles and the various technologies utilised to support front-line Gardaí and intelligence-led operations against organised crime. This process takes account of annual policing priorities determined through consultation between the Commissioner and the Policing Authority and with the consent of the Minister in accordance with section 20 of the Act.

Community Policing is the underpinning philosophy and ethos through which An Garda Síochána seeks to deliver a service to the community. In this regard the Garda National Model of Community Policing plays a key part in responding to crime by taking into account and responding to local conditions and needs.

I am advised by the Garda authorities that, following the launch of the National Model of Community Policing in 2009, a significant number of Garda clinics have been established. A Garda clinic is a small public Garda facility that provides basic Garda services within the com-

munity and which augments the District Garda Stations. Garda clinics are an established good community policing practice and are designed to place the needs of our communities at the centre of Garda services by improving An Garda Síochána's ability to identify and anticipate community needs through pro-active engagement and effective service provision. Garda Clinics are delivered in partnership with the community and are established and conducted, where practicable, at community orientated venues.

I am also advised that Garda clinics, in addition to focusing on topics such as neighbourhood watch, crime prevention and advice to the older persons, also support the delivery of various Garda services e.g. passport applications, driving license production, age card applications and crime prevention advice. I am informed that these clinics are generally open for 1-2 hours but their frequency and venue would be consistent.

Types of Garda Clinics include:

- Campus Clinic provides a Garda service aimed at Staff & Students at post leaving cert and third level institutes.

- A Business Watch/Retail Clinic is provides a Garda service aimed at the business sector and are generally housed in shopping centres and similar retail outlets.

- A Garda Community Policing Clinic is a Garda clinic offering a basic Garda service to the community.

- A Multi Agency Clinic is a clinic consisting of Garda members and other state and NGO agencies such as HSE, Social welfare, etc and are a place where these wide range of services can be obtained to the general public.

- Themed Clinics are Garda clinics set up for the duration of a special community event be it of a sporting or social nature so a Garda service can be delivered away from a Garda Station and delivered directing within the venue or area of the event.

I am advised that An Garda Síochána are fully committed to continued proactive engagement with communities in addressing crime prevention and community safety issues. The arrangements and measures in place to achieve this objective are subject to ongoing review and analysis to ensure the continued delivery of an effective policing service.

Garda Retirements

293. **Deputy Eric Byrne** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will alleviate the pressure on the Garda Síochána by temporarily allowing serving gardaí who are due to retire the option of extending their service by an additional two years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2190/16]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Retirement of members of An Garda Síochána is governed by statutory provisions which set the mandatory retirement age for all members at 60 years of age. Members of An Garda Síochána who joined the organisation prior to 1 April 2004 may retire on full pension once they have served for at least 30 years and they have reached 50 years of age. Members of An Garda Síochána who joined the organisation on or after 1 April 2004 may retire on full pension once they have served at least 30 years and have reached 55 years of age. Accordingly a member has the option of continuing to serve until they reach 60 years of age. I have no plans to extend the mandatory retirement age at this time.

The Deputy may wish to be aware that there is no barrier to retired members joining the Garda Reserve once they meet certain eligibility criteria, including being under 60 years of age and having an ‘exemplary’, ‘very good’ or ‘good’ discharge from the Garda Síochána.

I can assure the Deputy that this Government is committed to ensuring that An Garda Síochána has the capacity to provide effective and visible policing throughout the country. A crucial element of the Government’s strategy is ensuring ongoing seamless recruitment to renew An Garda Síochána. With this in mind Budget 2016 made provision for the recruitment of 600 new Gardaí this year bringing to 1,150 the number of new Gardaí who will have been recruited since the reopening of the Garda College in Templemore in September 2014. So far 295 of these new recruits have been fully attested and are undertaking Garda duties in communities nationwide. I am assured by Garda management that the needs of all Garda Divisions are fully considered when determining the allocation of newly attested Gardaí.

I am very pleased that the 2016 recruitment campaign announced last November, and which closed on 6 January, has attracted strong interest with in the region of 16,500 applications received by the Public Appointments Service which is organising the competition on behalf of the Garda Commissioner.

Asylum Seeker Accommodation

294. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the Reception and Integration Agency has identified the proposed reception centres in County Dublin for incoming refugees whom Ireland has agreed to accept under the European Union relocation plan; if she will identify the locations or proposed locations in County Dublin; if these centres meet the minimum standards of accommodation required by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; and if accommodation will be on the same basis as existing direct provision centres. [2223/16]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I wish to inform the Deputy that no centres in Dublin have been identified for either refugees coming to Ireland under the resettlement programme or indeed for asylum seekers coming to Ireland under the relevant EU relocation programme. The Government has decided to establish Emergency Reception and Orientation Centres (EROC) to accommodate persons arriving in Ireland from each of these cohorts. The length of time that either cohort will spend in these centres will be very limited and therefore presents no issues of concern.

Garda Data

295. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí serving in each Garda Síochána station and each Garda Síochána district in each of the years 2007 to 2015. [2226/16]

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

I have received the information requested from the Garda Commissioner in relation to the number of Garda stations and the number of Gardaí serving in each Garda Síochána Station and

each Garda Síochána District in each of the years 2007 to 2014 and on the 30 November 2015, the latest dates for which figures are readily available. I have arranged that this information which is set out in spreadsheets be sent to the Deputy directly.

Residency Permits

296. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current and expected residency status of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 24; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2267/16]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned is a national of the Czech Republic and therefore is entitled to reside in the State as an EU national.

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

Residency Permits

297. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current and expected residency status of a person (details supplied) in County Meath; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2270/16]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I have been informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person referred to by the Deputy was granted permission to remain in the State by the Garda National Immigration Bureau on the 16 June, 2015. This permission is valid until the 16 June, 2018. I am further advised by INIS that their Residence Division have no record of any further application for permission to remain in the State by the person concerned.

Residency Permits

298. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current and expected residency status of a person (details supplied) under the European free movement of persons regulations; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2272/16]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned made an application for retention of permission to reside in the State, on an individual and personal basis, arising from a change in their personal circumstances. I am informed that INIS wrote to the person on 15 January, 2016 to advise that she has been granted permission to remain in the State, on Stamp 4 EUFam conditions, until 14 January, 2021.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to the INIS of my Department by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up to date information on such cases to be

obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from the INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Naturalisation Applications

299. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality to outline, further to her reply to Parliamentary Question No. 128 of 10 December 2015, why the child of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare qualified for naturalisation but the person did not despite repeated attempts; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2313/16]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that an application for a certificate of naturalisation from the first person referred to by the Deputy was refused for reasons provided to the person concerned in a letter issued on 31 March 2009 advising of the decision.

An application for a certificate of naturalisation from the second named person was also refused for reasons provided to the person concerned in a letter issued on 12 November 2014 advising of the decision.

It is open to the individuals concerned to lodge a new application for citizenship in accordance with the provisions of the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956 as amended. Detailed information on Irish citizenship and naturalisation is available on the INIS website at www.inis.gov.ie. The website also contains an on-line naturalisation residency calculator which individuals may find of assistance in establishing if the residency requirements are met.

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

Migrant Integration

300. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to ensure that refugees who come to Ireland will be integrated into the communities to which they are sent; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2320/16]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Deputy will be aware that the Government took a decision to establish the Irish Refugee Protection Programme on 10 September 2015 as a direct response to the EU migrant crisis. Ireland has agreed to accept approximately 4,000 persons in total under resettlement and relocation programmes by the end of 2017. The figure of 4,000 includes approximately 2,600 persons to be taken in from migration hotspots in Italy and Greece under the new EU programme and 520 programme refugees from Lebanon and Jordan, which the Irish Government has committed to taking in by the end of 2016 under Ireland's Refugee Resettlement programme. The mechanism by which the balance of the 4,000 will be taken in, has yet to be decided by Government.

Among the measures agreed under the programme was the establishment of a network of Emergency Reception and Orientation Centres which will be used to provide emergency ac-

commodation and meet the basic needs of the 4,000 people who are expected to arrive over the next two years. Also among the measures announced was the establishment of a cross-Departmental Taskforce, chaired by my Department, to coordinate and implement the logistical and operational aspects associated with the Irish Refugee Protection Programme. This will include the provision of emergency accommodation and orientation services in the first instance, and facilitating the longer term integration needs of those with refugee status through the provision of a sustainable housing strategy, health services, education, social welfare, and social inclusion activities.

With specific regard to refugees arriving under resettlement schemes, one hundred and seventy six refugees arrived in the State under the resettlement programme in 2015. Post arrival, the 'programme' refugees participate in a language training and orientation programme for approximately 8-10 weeks before being moved into permanent accommodation in the community. The resettlement team of the Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration convenes and supports a local interagency working group which operates for approximately 18 months after the transfer of the refugees to the receiving community. Grants are made to the receiving community for the establishment of homework clubs, links with sporting and other clubs and the employment of a local resettlement person to support the refugees during their first year in the community.

A similar integration strategy is being developed within the Department of Justice and Equality for the estimated 2,600 persons relocating to Ireland from migration hotspots in Italy and Greece, once they receive refugee status.

Crime Levels

301. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she is aware of the serious concerns of the local community at Kiltalown, Jobstown, Tallaght, Dublin 24, about the alarming number of robberies and hold-ups at a local store (details supplied) over the past six months, including three armed robberies over the past eight days at the store, which contains the local post office, and threats to staff; if she will provide additional resources to Tallaght Garda Síochána station to allow for effective action to be taken in respect of this serious matter; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2323/16]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I can assure that Deputy that An Garda Síochána treat crimes of this nature extremely seriously and that Garda management deploy the necessary crime prevention and investigation resources accordingly. I have however requested a report from the Garda authorities in relation to the specific incidents referred to and I will contact the Deputy directly when the report is to hand.

Immigration Status

302. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of an application for leave to remain in the State by a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath, based upon a de facto long-term relationship; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2335/16]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person referred to is the subject of a Deportation Order signed on 26 January 2011 and therefore has no entitlement to residency in the State.

Representations were received from the person's legal representative pursuant to Section 3 (11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), to revoke the Deportation Order. The Deputy may wish to note that any such decision will be to 'affirm' or to 'revoke' the existing Deportation Order. This application is under consideration at present. In the mean-time, the Deportation Order remains in place.

The person concerned has been evading deportation since 06 June 2013 and, as such, is liable to arrest and detention for the purposes of having the Deportation Order enforced. The person concerned should, therefore, 'present' to the Garda National Immigration Bureau without further delay.

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

Departmental Staff Promotions

303. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality under the Civil Service reform programme, the number of clerical officers who have been promoted to higher executive officer and the number of executive officers who have been promoted to assistant principal officer in her Department through internal competitions after the significant change in eligibility rules; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2580/16]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The most recent internal competitions in my Department for appointment to the position of Higher Executive Officer and Assistant Principal Officer were completed in 2015. These competitions were held in accordance with the provisions regarding cross-streaming and revised eligibility criteria for promotion arising from General Council Report 1526.

I wish to inform the Deputy that 53 Clerical Officers applied for the position of Higher Executive Officer, of which two were subsequently promoted to this grade. For the position of Assistant Principal Officer, 19 applications were received from Executive Officers. While two of these officers reached the final stage of the competition they did not receive the required marks to be placed on the Assistant Principal Officer panel.

School Completion Programme

304. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the funding for the school completion programme for each of the years 2010 to 2015; the projected funding for 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2130/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The School Completion Programme aims to retain young people in the formal education system to completion of senior cycle and to generally improve the school attendance, participation and retention of young people who are at risk of educational disadvantage. The Programme is a targeted intervention aimed at school communities identified through the Department of Education and Skills' DEIS Action Plan for Educational Inclusion. It provides targeted supports annually to approximately 37,000 children.

Since 1st January 2014, Tusla, the Child and Family Agency has operational responsibility for the School Completion Programme, including the allocation of funds to local projects. In line with all major spending programmes in government departments, the School Completion Programme was the subject of a Comprehensive Review of Expenditure in 2011. The review required savings and efficiencies of the order of 6.5% per annum in the School Completion Programme over the period 2012 - 2014. The detailed information, requested by the Deputy, about the funding allocations for the programme in the years 2010 - 2015 is as follows:

Year	Funding Allocations
2015	€24.756m
2014	€24.756m
2013	€26.456m
2012	€28.256m
2011	€30.258m
2010	€31m

Tusla has informed my Department that the projected budget for the School Completion Programme for 2016 is €24.756m.

I have advised Tusla of my commitment to ensuring that there is no diminution in the School Completion Programme services. The School Completion Programme is an important service within the Tusla's educational welfare services. It is highly regarded as a key response in securing improved educational outcomes for children and young people at risk of early school leaving.

My Department, along with Tusla, is participating in the Inter-Departmental Group that the Minister for Education and Skills has established to consider the roles of different Government departments in delivering the DEIS programme in a joined up way.

Child Protection Services

305. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs under the Child Care Act 1991, the number of staff available to undertake section 20 social work court reports, the number of social workers employed in section 20 departments and the number of section 20 reports by District Court, by area, for each of the years 2013 to 2015, in tabular form. [2163/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The information sought by the Deputy has been requested from Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, and I will respond directly to the Deputy when the information is received.

I wish to advise the Deputy that the information requested is not collected on a national basis so it may take some time for the data to be collated. However, it will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as it is available.

Child Care Qualifications

306. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the status of the qualification issue for community employment participants and their use as part of the staffing ratios, further to our discussion at a recent quarterly meeting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2319/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The Community Employment (CE) programme is a labour market activation measure designed to help people who are long-term unemployed and other disadvantaged people to get back to work by offering part-time and temporary placements in jobs based within local communities. After placement, participants are encouraged to seek permanent part-time and full-time jobs elsewhere based on the experience and new skills they have gained while in a Community Employment scheme. The CE programme is administered by the Department of Social Protection.

New qualification requirements announced as part of the Early Years Quality Agenda will be introduced under new Child Care Regulations which will be published shortly. The new regulations will require all staff employed to work directly with children in pre-school settings to hold as a minimum a FETAC Level 5 qualification in early childhood care and education. This new requirement will apply to new services registering with the Child and Family Agency after the commencement of the Regulations and to existing services from 31st December this year.

Following the introduction of these changes only CE workers on placement who hold the necessary qualification will be in position to meet the adult:child ratios.

At the request of my Department, the City and County Childcare Committees have established a project to examine the impact of these changes on the sustainability of childcare services that are currently dependent on CE workers to meet the ratio requirements. My Department has advised childcare providers who consider that the sustainability of their service is an issue as a result of this measure to contact their local City or County Childcare Committee immediately to discuss this matter.

Departmental Staff Promotions

307. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs under the Civil Service reform programme, the number of clerical officers who have been promoted to higher executive officer and the number of executive officers who have been promoted to assistant principal officer in his Department through internal competitions after the significant change in eligibility rules; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2571/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): Since January 2014, eligibility for promotion within the Civil Service is no longer generally based on a defined period of service in the grade immediately below that of the post being filled. As my Department has held no internal competitions since 2013, no Clerical Officers or Executive Officers have been promoted after the significant change in eligibility rules.

Health Services Funding

308. **Deputy Michael McNamara** asked the Minister for Health if he will increase funding for Clarecastle day care centre's dementia unit in County Clare from €35,000 per annum in view of the average of 53 patients per day, five days per week that use the services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46359/15]

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

Hospital Appointment Status

309. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied) in County Kildare at Naas General Hospital in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1835/16]

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.

Water Fluoridation

310. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health the status of his review of evidence on the impact of water fluoridation on the health of the population; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1846/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Department of Health keeps the policy of water fluoridation under constant review. As part of this ongoing work, a review of evidence on the impact of water fluoridation at its current level on the health of the population was conducted by the Health Research Board (HRB) on behalf of the Department. This review was published by the HRB in June 2015. The HRB found no definitive evidence that community water fluoridation is associated with negative health effects.

Accident and Emergency Departments

311. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Health the status of the review of the emergency department at Mayo General Hospital; when the recommendations will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1857/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I convened the ED Taskforce in December 2014 to provide focus and momentum in dealing with the challenges presented by ED overcrowding. Last April, the HSE published the ED Taskforce Action Plan, with a range of time-defined actions to: (i) optimise existing hospital and community capacity; (ii) develop internal capability and process improvement and (iii) improve leadership, governance, planning and oversight. Significant progress has been made to date on implementing the ED Taskforce Plan. The ED Taskforce Implementation Group has been overseeing implementation of hospitals' winter resilience plans in order to ensure that an integrated approach is adopted by Hospital Groups, with Community Healthcare Organisations, to managing winter pressures. During this peak period, my Department is engaging in a weekly meeting/teleconference with the HSE to oversee ED challenges.

With regard to the specific issue raised by the Deputy, this is a matter for the Health Service

Executive; therefore 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 Procedures

312. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 802 of 3 November 2015, why the number of procedures carried out in May 2015 was significantly lower than in other months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1863/16]

313. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 802 of 3 November 2015, the number of persons currently awaiting initial assessment to be placed on a waiting list for cataract surgery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1864/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 312 and 313 together.

As these are service matters, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Hospital Waiting Lists

314. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health the current number of patients waiting to see a consultant neurologist in County Donegal; how long these patients have been waiting; if a second neurologist has been appointed and how an appointment will impact on waiting lists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1866/16]

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

Hospital Staff Data

315. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health how many occupational therapists there are in University College Hospital Galway dealing specifically with rheumatology patients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1870/16]

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 on the matter with them.

Hospital Staff Data

316. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health the make up of the rheumatology team at Mayo General Hospital in Castlebar, including physiotherapists, occupational therapists, nurses and support staff. [1871/16]

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 on the matter with them.

Hospital Services

317. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health the status of the infusion service and if it will be introduced in Mayo General Hospital. [1872/16]

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

Medical Card Applications

318. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health why a person (details supplied) in County Monaghan has had an application for renewal of a medical card rejected. [1874/16]

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.

Cancer Screening Programmes

319. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the status of the roll-out of BreastCheck for women of 65 to 69 years of age; how many women availed of this service in 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1875/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The implementation of the age extension of BreastCheck to 65-69 year olds commenced in Quarter 4 of 2015. BreastCheck invited 1,000 women in this age category for screening in 2015 and approximately 500 of these were screened before the end of the year.

The age extension is being implemented on an incremental basis, in line with the capacity of the system to manage the additional screening and follow up workload. The additional eligible population is approximately 100,000 and, when fully implemented, 540,000 women will be included in the BreastCheck Programme.

Women of any age who have concerns about breast cancer should seek the advice of their GP who will, if appropriate, refer them to the symptomatic breast services in one of the eight designated cancer centres.

Hospital Procedures

320. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health to expedite a date for surgery for a person (details supplied) in County Longford. [1894/16]

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

The National Waiting List Management Policy, *A standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, January 2014*, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the Health Service Executive, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

Health Services Staff Recruitment

321. **Deputy Michael Lowry** asked the Minister for Health if he is aware of the current vacancy at Cré House in Roscrea in County Tipperary for a speech and language therapist, due to maternity leave; if he has put measures in place to fill this position for the maternity leave period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1904/16]

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

Hospital Services

322. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Health if he will reply to this Deputy on a matter (details supplied) regarding hospitals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1909/16]

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

Hospital Complaints Procedures

323. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Health if he will examine correspondence sent of behalf of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1910/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): With regard to specific complaints in relation to experiences of individuals in our hospitals, there is a formal complaints policy, entitled “*Your Service Your Say*”, details of which are on the HSE website, at: <http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/yourhealthservice/feedback/complaints/>. In accordance with this procedure, a complaint must be made in the first instance to the hospital in which the incident causing the complaint occurred.

If an individual is not satisfied with the response from the hospital, a review can be sought from the HSE Director of Advocacy and the Ombudsman, whose details are set out below.

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 particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Hospital Services

324. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Health if he will revert to this Deputy on a matter (details supplied) regarding University Hospital Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1911/16]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

325. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if he will urgently examine a referral for a procedure to Cork University Hospital for a person (details supplied) in County Kerry who is on a waiting list for over two years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1926/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Ser-

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

The National Waiting List Management Policy, *A standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, January 2014*, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the Health Service Executive, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

Health Services Access

326. **Deputy Noel Coonan** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary will receive treatment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1932/16]

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

Hospital Procedures

327. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Clare will be facilitated with required hospital treatment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1979/16]

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.

HSE Properties

328. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when the Health Service Executive-operated training facility (details supplied) for persons with disabilities in County Done-

gal will be relocated to a new premises. [1988/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The HSE is in the process of finalising arrangements to lease the Victor Building as an alternative to the Cleary Centre. A decision on the fire certification application, and some additional clarifications, is awaited by the landlord from Donegal County Council. On the basis that these are resolved the landlord will proceed with the renovations to the Victor building which will take a number of months to complete. The HSE will then transition services to the Victor building and will engage with the Parents/Guardians regarding long term plans for the Cleary Centre Site.

Accident and Emergency Departments

329. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Health given an Taoiseach's acknowledgement in Dáil Éireann that the emergency department at University Hospital Galway is unfit for purpose, the plans in place for replacing the Department, including cost and expected completion time; when it will be funded; why it was not included in the Government's capital spending plan; if it will now be added as a matter of urgency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1992/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The HSE Capital Plan 2016 includes funding for a full option appraisal and Cost Benefit Analysis to inform planning and funding requirements for a new ED at GUH. A cost benefit analysis in relation to a new ED in GUH is currently underway and it is anticipated that this will be completed by March 2016. If favourable, this will go to design phase in 2016.

Pending the development of a new ED in GUH, in order to alleviate pressures and to ensure that patient experience in the existing GUH ED is improved, there are two major developments currently underway in Galway. The HSE made over €2m available in 2015 to develop an additional 30 beds in GUH in order to reduce overcrowding. Structural work is progressing well to create a new Emergency Ward within the existing hospital footprint, which will allow for these 30 extra patient spaces. The first phase of this development became operational on 4 January, 2016 and the second phase is now underway.

Construction work is also ongoing on the new 75 bed ward block which will provide single room in-patient accommodation.

The additional 30 beds and the construction of the new 75 bed ward block demonstrates this Government's commitment to providing more beds and upgrading facilities.

Charities and Voluntary Organisations

330. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Health if funding or grant-aid is available from his Department for a charity called Special Heroes Ireland, which supports siblings of special needs children; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1999/16]

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.

331. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health his views on correspondence regarding the available services for a person (details supplied) in Dublin 3; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2007/16]

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.

Vaccination Programme

332. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of the administration of the human papilloma virus vaccine (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2014/16]

380. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health to support a matter (details supplied) regarding vaccine concerns; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2254/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 332 and 380 together.

The immunisation programme in Ireland is based on the advice of the National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC). NIAC is a committee of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland comprising of experts in a number of specialties including infectious diseases, paediatrics and public health. The committee's recommendations are informed by public health advice and international best practice.

Immunisation is regarded as one of the safest and most cost-effective of health care interventions. The HPV vaccine, which was introduced in 2010, protects girls from developing cervical cancer when they are adults. The vaccine is available free of charge from the HSE for all girls in 1st year of secondary school. This is in accordance with the recommendation received from the NIAC which indicated that the HPV vaccine should be offered on an annual basis to all girls aged 12. The advice, based on public health considerations and supported by the cost-effectiveness analysis, is that HPV vaccines confer maximum benefit both individually and on a population basis if administered prior to HPV exposure. The vaccine protects against two high risk types of HPV (16 & 18) that cause 73% of all cervical cancers. Vaccinated women and girls will still be at risk from other high risk types of HPV that can cause cervical cancer and will therefore need to continue to have regular cervical smear tests.

In Ireland, the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) is the regulatory authority for medicines in Ireland. There are 2 licensed HPV vaccines available in Ireland (Gardasil and Cervarix). Gardasil is the vaccine used by the HSE in the School Immunisation Programme and over 100,000 girls have received this vaccine since its introduction. Decisions on the supply of vaccines into the market are undertaken by specific expert agencies rather than being the responsibility of the Minister of the day.

Gardasil is a fully tested vaccine which was licensed by the European Medicines Agency in 2006. No medicine, including vaccines, is entirely without risk, there is therefore on-going pharmacovigilance and monitoring of medicinal products once they are authorised for use. The

safety profile of Gardasil has been continuously monitored since it was first authorised.

As part of its monitoring of the safety of medicines, the HPRA operates an adverse reaction reporting system, where healthcare professionals and patients are encouraged to report adverse reactions they consider may be associated with their treatment, through the range of options in place for reporting. All reports received are evaluated and considered in the context of the safety profile of the product concerned, with reports followed up as necessary for further information, that may assist in the assessment of the case.

As of the 8 January, the HPRA has received 961 reports of suspected adverse reactions or events notified in association with the use of HPV vaccines. Of the 961 reports received, 958 were associated with use of Gardasil and three were associated with Cervarix. The vast majority have been consistent with the expected pattern of adverse effects for the vaccines, as described in the product information, such as gastrointestinal symptoms, malaise, headache, dizziness and injection site reactions.

The HSE provides information for parents about diseases, the vaccines to prevent them and side effects to allow them to choose whether or not to give consent to vaccination.

All vaccination information provided to parents is prepared from the available licensed documentation for each vaccine, the Summary of Products Characteristics and Patient Information Leaflet. The information is presented in clear simple language and approved by the National Adult Literacy Agency so that it can be understood by all adults as the average reading age in Ireland is 12 years of age.

Prior to all school immunisation parents receive an information pack in a sealed package which contains an information leaflet, consent form and cover letter. Information packs for all immunisation are standardised nationally. The information booklets include information on the most common adverse events that can occur after each vaccination. Parents are also given contact details for their local immunisation office and advised to speak to a member of the school immunisation team if they have any further questions.

Should parents require additional information about vaccines the immunisation leaflet refers to the HSE's national immunisation website (www.immunisation.ie) where further information is available. The national immunisation website has been accredited by the World Health Organisation for credibility, content and good information practices. The website allows members of the public to contact the National Immunisation Office to ask a question if they require further information. These questions, when possible, are answered by the staff of the National Immunisation Office within one working day.

Parents of any child with a suspected adverse reaction following administration of a vaccine are advised to contact the HSE vaccination teams or their general practitioner for advice and are referred for further management if required.

In November 2015 the European Medicines Agency completed a detailed scientific review of the HPV vaccine. The review which the HPRA participated in, specifically focused on rare reports of two conditions, complex regional pain syndrome and postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome associated with heart rate increase. The outcome of the review which was carried out by the EMA Pharmacovigilance and Risk Assessment Committee (PRAC) found no evidence of a causal link between the vaccine and the two conditions examined.

The European Medicines Agency has advised healthcare professionals that available data does not warrant any change to the use of HPV vaccines as there are no new safety concerns regarding HPV vaccines. Healthcare professionals should therefore continue using the vaccines

in accordance with the current product information.

HSE Funding

333. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the funding that was allocated by the Health Service Executive to the early intervention home teacher programme and the Down's syndrome Louth-Meath branch in Counties Louth and Meath for the years 2011 to 2015. [2021/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy. If 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.

HSE Funding

334. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health why the Health Service Executive in County Louth has decided not to allocate funding to the early intervention home teacher programme and the Down's syndrome Louth-Meath branch, deeming them not to meet funding criteria, yet it allocated funding in County Meath for the same services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2022/16]

336. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health how many preschool children avail of places in the early intervention home teacher programme and the Down's syndrome Louth-Meath branch; and how many children have availed of these services from 2011 to 2015. [2024/16]

338. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide a breakdown of total funding allocated by the Health Service Executive to the early intervention home teacher programme from 2011 to 2015. [2026/16]

339. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the current providers of the early intervention home teacher programme; how long each programme has been in operation; and how many children avail of each programme. [2027/16]

340. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health if he will clarify which early intervention home teacher programmes are fully funded by the Health Service Executive and the catchment areas they serve; how many children avail of the service; how many years have they received full Health Service Executive funding; and a breakdown of this funding by year. [2028/16]

341. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health which early intervention and home teacher programmes receive part-funding from the Health Service Executive by the catchment areas they serve; how many children avail of the service; how many years have they received part Health Service Executive funding; and a breakdown of this funding by year. [2029/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I propose to take Questions Nos. 334, 336 and 338 to 341, inclusive, together.

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the questions to be referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the mat-

ter with them.

HSE Funding

335. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health if he will intervene in the decision made by Health Service Executive in County Louth regarding funding for the early intervention, the home teacher programme and the Down's syndrome Louth-Meath branch, and seek to have funding reinstated as a matter of urgency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2023/16]

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 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.

Question No. 336 answered with Question No. 334.

Preschool Services

337. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the cost per preschool child of providing the early intervention home teacher programme. [2025/16]

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

Questions Nos. 338 to 341, inclusive, answered with Question No. 334.

Hospital Appointment Status

342. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a procedure in Cork University Hospital for a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2034/16]

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

The National Waiting List Management Policy, *A standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, January 2014*, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the Health Service Executive, sets out the

processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

Mental Health Services

343. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to improve mental health services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2040/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): Since coming into office, this Government has made significant efforts to prioritise mental health care. We have provided €160 million ring-fenced funding and approved 1,150 new posts for mental health since 2012 up to the end of 2016, to modernise services in line with *A Vision for Change* and Programme for Government commitments. This includes €35 million provided for 2016, bringing the total budget available for the mental health this year to €826.6 million. A key focus has been additional posts to strengthen Community Mental Health Teams for both adults and children. This funding is also being used to enhance specialist community mental health and forensic services, increase the access to counselling and psychotherapy and for suicide prevention initiatives.

In 2016, our priorities will include the continued development of counselling services across both primary and secondary care including the provision of three new Jigsaw mental health services in Cork, Dublin city centre and Limerick; the continued development of Community Mental Health Teams; improved 24/7 response and Liaison Services; Psychiatry of Later Life; Perinatal Mental Health, and two new mental health clinical programmes, specifically, ADHD in Adults and Children, and Dual Diagnosis of those with Mental Illness and Substance Misuse.

The HSE in its National Service Plan for 2016 has also committed to:

- Ensuring that the views of service users, family members and carers are central to the design and delivery of mental health services;
- Designing integrated evidence based and recovery focused mental health services;
- Delivering timely, clinically effective and standardised safe mental health services in adherence to statutory requirements;
- Promoting the mental health of the population in collaboration with other services and agencies including reducing loss of life by suicide; and
- Enabling the provision of mental health services by highly trained and engaged staff and fit for purpose infrastructure.

Plans for the Mental Health Service also include the development of a new National Forensic Mental Health Service (NFMHS) hospital, which will be built on the site of St. Ita's Hospital, Portrane. Work on improving the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) Services will continue, thus ensuring that all aspects of the service are delivered in a consistent and timely fashion, including improved access. The HSE recently introduced a new **Standard Operating Procedure** for both in-patient and community CAMHS services. This will help improve the service overall, such as reducing inappropriate admissions of adolescents to adult units, and reducing Waiting Lists, particularly for those waiting over 12 months. Those waiting

12 months or more has decreased by 55% from 459 at end of April 2015 to 207 in November 2015.

Other priorities include the drafting of a General Scheme of a Bill to reflect the changes recommended by the Expert Group review of the Mental Health Act 2001, the review of *A Vision for Change* which will be 10 years old this year, and the implementation of *Connecting for Life* - Ireland's National Strategy to Reduce Suicide 2015 - 2020.

Health Services

344. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health if assistance is available to a person (details supplied) in Dublin 13; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2041/16]

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

Hospital Appointment Status

345. **Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will have an operation carried out in Saint Michael's Hospital, Dún Laoghaire, County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2047/16]

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

The National Waiting List Management Policy, *A standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, January 2014*, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the Health Service Executive, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

Hospital Appointment Status

346. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2048/16]

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

Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The National Waiting List Management Policy, *A standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, January 2014*, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the Health Service Executive, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

Health Services

347. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding rheumatology services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2052/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): A model of care is being developed by the National Clinical Programme for Rheumatology and this will determine the service developments and associated personnel requirements which will best support the needs of patients requiring Rheumatology treatments.

As the specific questions raised by the Deputy are matters for the Health Service Executive, I have therefore 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.

Mental Health Services

348. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Cork will be assessed at the child and adolescent mental health services in Mahon, County Cork. [2060/16]

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

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Applications

349. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite an application by a person (details supplied) in County Kildare for a nursing home support scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2100/16]

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 Administration

350. **Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor** asked the Minister for Health when a medical card will be returned to a person (details supplied) in County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2104/16]

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.

Medical Card Delays

351. **Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor** asked the Minister for Health why the medical card of a person (details supplied) in County Dublin is on hold; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2105/16]

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.

Medical Aids and Appliances Applications

352. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Health to urgently examine a submission for a medical device by a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2111/16]

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

Hospital Procedures

353. **Deputy Joe Costello** asked the Minister for Health the number of occurrences in which foreign bodies were left in a patient's body following surgery in Our Lady's Children's Hospital in Crumlin, County Dublin in 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2112/16]

355. **Deputy Joe Costello** asked the Minister for Health the number of times a guide wire was left in a patient's body following surgery between 2010 and 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2114/16]

356. **Deputy Joe Costello** asked the Minister for Health the steps Our Lady's Children's Hospital in Crumlin, Dublin 12 took to address occurrences in which foreign bodies were left in a patient's body following surgery in the hospital in 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2115/16]

357. **Deputy Joe Costello** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the delay in producing a report indicating why a guide wire was left in a patient's body in Our Lady's Children's Hospital in Crumlin, Dublin, in 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2116/16]

358. **Deputy Joe Costello** asked the Minister for Health his views on the fact that a guide was left in a patient's body following surgery in 2015; why this occurred given that a similar event was reported in 2014; why procedures were not in place to ensure this did not recur; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2117/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 353 and 355 to 358, inclusive, together.

In relation to your queries in these matters, 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 Procedures

354. **Deputy Joe Costello** asked the Minister for Health the number of occurrences in which foreign bodies were left in a patient's body in children's hospitals in 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2113/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar) (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.

Questions Nos. 355 to 358, inclusive, answered with Question No. 353.

Hospital Procedures

359. **Deputy Joe Costello** asked the Minister for Health what measures hospitals take to ensure that foreign matter is not left in a patient's body following surgery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2118/16]

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 work-

ing days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Child Safety

360. **Deputy Joe Costello** asked the Minister for Health the number of children who were dropped by staff in Temple Street Hospital in County Dublin in 1996; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2119/16]

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.

Child Safety

361. **Deputy Joe Costello** asked the Minister for Health the number of children who were dropped by staff in hospitals between 2010 and 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2120/16]

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

Hospital Appointment Delays

362. **Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor** asked the Minister for Health why a person (details supplied) in County Dublin has been waiting more than eight months to see a consultant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2157/16]

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 Staff

363. **Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor** asked the Minister for Health why there was no replacement for the Parkinson's nurse at the Parkinson's clinic in St. Vincent's Hospital in Dublin 4; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2158/16]

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 work-

ing days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Medical Card Applications

364. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if he will urgently examine an application for a medical card by a person (details supplied) in County Kerry, given that the person has submitted all relevant information; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2173/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information has issued to Oireachtas members.

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

Hospital Appointment Status

365. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Kerry will receive an appointment for a test in relation to a condition; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2182/16]

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

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

Primary Care Centre Provision

366. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Health the up to date position regarding the provision of a primary care health centre for the Knocknacarra area of Galway city which was listed as a priority eight years ago; if a site has been identified; when the necessary planning permission will be sought; if the centre will be delivered as a priority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2187/16]

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

responsibility for the provision, maintenance and operation of Primary Care Centres. Therefore, this matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Hospital Appointment Status

367. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Cork will have assessments carried out. [2189/16]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

368. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if additional resources will be provided to Cappagh National Orthopaedic Hospital Dublin to facilitate persons on the waiting list for a hip operation for 15 months; the plans in place to reduce the waiting list and have those who are waiting over three months dealt with as urgently as possible; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2197/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The latest National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) published waiting list data shows that clear progress has been made to reduce the numbers of patients overall on waiting lists by end December 2015. These figures continue to show the positive trend which was seen in November 2015, with improvements across all waiting list categories.

This has been facilitated by the establishment in January 2015 of maximum permissible waiting times for inpatient / day case treatment and outpatient appointments of 18 months by 30 June and 15 months by year end. Also in 2015, the HSE was provided with additional funding to maximise capacity across the public and voluntary hospitals or to fund outsourcing activity, so that patients' needs could be met within the maximum allowable waiting times.

NTPF figures indicate that Cappagh Hospital has achieved the HSE inpatient waiting list target times and, as a result, there are no patients are waiting longer than 15 months for a hip operation.

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

Hospital Staff

369. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of playroom assistants in the Cashel ward in Kerry General Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2211/16]

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

Health Services Staff

370. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of physiotherapists (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2216/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Physiotherapists Registration Board will soon make the necessary bye-laws under the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005 to allow it to establish its register. The title of physiotherapist will, as a consequence, be protected for the exclusive use of the board's registrants when the register's 2 year transitional period ends in 2018.

I am currently examining the issue of also protecting the title of physical therapist under the Act. In the rest of the English speaking world the titles of physical therapist and physiotherapist are interchangeable and their users are qualified physiotherapists. In Ireland, however, the title is used by a number of practitioners who are not physiotherapists but who are competing with physiotherapists in the private sector in the provision of musculoskeletal therapies.

Having consulted with the Health and Social Care Professionals Council, I wrote to a number of relevant organisations regarding my proposal to protect the title of physical therapist as a variant of the title of physiotherapist and invited them to submit their views. The submissions are now being examined and I expect that I will make a decision on the matter shortly that ensures public protection and appropriately addresses the legitimate concerns of all parties.

Hospital Appointment Status

371. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2222/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): In order to address scoliosis service needs, funding was allocated in the HSE Service Plan in 2015 for additional consultant posts including two consultant orthopaedic surgeons, anaesthetist and support staff at Our Lady's Children's Hospital Crumlin. These two orthopaedic surgeon posts will also support the service at Tallaght Hospital.

Capital funding was also provided for a new theatre on site at Crumlin to expand theatre capacity further. The 2016 Service Plan specifically provides for support for the new theatre capacity and the continued development of paediatric scoliosis services to address ongoing capacity deficits. The HSE is continuing to work with the Children's Hospital Group to identify all options to increase capacity further to improve access times for surgery.

As the specific issue raised is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Hospital Appointment Status

372. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2232/16]

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

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

Hospital Services

373. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if he will urgently examine the referral of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry to Cork University Hospital for a procedure to be carried out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2236/16]

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

The National Waiting List Management Policy, *A standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, January 2014*, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the Health Service Executive, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

School Therapy Services

374. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if he will meet with the senior staff of Scoil Aonghusa in Cashel, County Tipperary, given their efforts to improve therapy services at the school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2237/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): My Office has recently received a meeting request from the Deputy and it is currently being considered.

Home Help Service Provision

375. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if he will urgently allocate home help hours to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2245/16]

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.

Respite Care Services

376. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the respite bed capacity at a facility (details supplied) in County Wicklow in each of the years 2013 to 2015; if discussions are taking place regarding funding of respite beds; the status of these discussions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2250/16]

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.

Vaccinations Data

377. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the number of cases of adverse side effects of the human papilloma virus vaccine, Gardasil, including the severity of these side effects in each of the years 2010 to 2015 and in 2016 to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2251/16]

378. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health if he is examining cases of adverse side effects of the human papilloma virus vaccine, Gardasil, and the literature provided with the vaccine; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2252/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 377 and 378 together.

In Ireland, the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) is the regulatory authority for medicines in Ireland. There are 2 licensed HPV vaccines available in Ireland (Gardasil and Cervarix). Gardasil is the vaccine used by the HSE in the School Immunisation Programme.

At the start of the HSE's schools immunisation programme in 2010 the HPRA requested reporting of all suspected adverse reactions (side effects) associated with use of Gardasil and since that time 958 reports have been submitted to the HPRA. A breakdown of reports per year is as follows:

Year	Number of reports of suspected adverse reactions/events submitted to the HPRA in association with Gardasil
2010	256
2011	255
2012	142
2013	129
2014	58
2015	108
2016 (to 08/01/2016)	10

The vast majority of reports received have been consistent with the expected pattern of adverse effects associated with use of Gardasil, as described in the product information. These include vaccination related events occurring at the time of vaccine administration, such as:

- syncope (faints) which have been among the most commonly reported effects. Other commonly reported symptoms include malaise, headache, myalgia (muscle pain), gastrointestinal symptoms, dizziness and injection site reactions;
- Reports of allergic-type reactions including skin rashes.

Other reports include experiences of persisting/chronic fatigue or persistent joint/muscle/nerve pain, in some cases with multiple other symptoms (e.g. headache, malaise, drowsiness, nausea, gastrointestinal upset, joint swelling, nausea, flu like illness, menstrual disorders etc.) following vaccination. Some reports have indicated that a diagnosis of Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS) has been made, while in others, follow up and investigations are on-going.

All reports of suspected adverse reactions submitted to the HPRa were transmitted to the EMA's Eudravigilance database and were considered as part of the ongoing EU review. The first and second stage of this review concluded in late 2015 and the EMA recommended that it did not consider there was any need to change the way the HPV vaccines are used or to amend the current product information. The review recognised that more than 80 million girls and women worldwide have now received these vaccines and in some European countries they have been given to 90% of the age group recommended for vaccination. The matter is now with the European Commission for a final and binding decision. Use of these vaccines is expected to prevent many cases of cervical cancer (cancer of the neck of the womb, which is responsible for tens of thousands of deaths in Europe each year) and various other cancers and conditions caused by HPV. The benefits of HPV vaccines therefore continue to outweigh their risks.

The HSE provides information for parents about diseases, the vaccines to prevent them and side effects to allow them to choose whether or not to give consent to vaccination.

All vaccination information provided to parents is prepared from the available licensed documentation for each vaccine, the Summary of Products Characteristics and Patient Information Leaflet. The information is presented in clear simple language and approved by the National Adult Literacy Agency so that it can be understood by all adults as the average reading age in Ireland is 12 years of age.

Prior to all school immunisation parents receive an information pack in a sealed package which contains an information leaflet, consent form and cover letter. Information packs for all immunisation are standardised nationally. The information booklets include information on the most common adverse events that can occur after each vaccination. Parents are also given contact details for their local immunisation office and advised to speak to a member of the school immunisation team if they have any further questions.

Should parents require additional information about vaccines the immunisation leaflet refers to the HSE's national immunisation website (www.immunisation.ie) where further information is available. The national immunisation website has been accredited by the World Health Organisation for credibility, content and good information practices. The website allows members of the public to contact the National Immunisation Office to ask a question if they require further information. These questions, when possible, are answered by the staff of the National Immunisation Office within one working day.

379. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of children who have received a medical card on the basis of a cancer diagnosis since 1 July 2015. [2253/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information has issued to Oireachtas members. If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, please contact my Private Office who will follow up the matter with them.

Question No. 380 answered with Question No. 332.

Hospital Appointments Administration

381. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health to support a matter (details supplied) regarding a hospital appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2257/16]

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

The National Waiting List Management Policy, *A standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, January 2014*, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the Health Service Executive, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

Hospital Procedures

382. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a procedure for a person (details supplied) in County Kerry, in Cork University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2278/16]

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

The National Waiting List Management Policy, *A standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, January 2014*, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the Health Service Executive, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

Hospital Procedures

383. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Health if he will ensure that a procedure is carried out for a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2286/16]

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

The National Waiting List Management Policy, *A standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, January 2014*, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the Health Service Executive, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

General Practitioner Services

384. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if the general practitioner post in Ballymore, Ballymahon and Colehill in County Longford which has become vacant following the sudden death of the general practitioner will be advertised without delay in order that a replacement is put in place to ensure the continuation of this much-needed service. [2321/16]

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

Hospital Accommodation Provision

385. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health the status of the opening of new beds at Kenmare Community Hospital and at the West Kerry Community Hospital in

County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2322/16]

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

Hospital Services

386. **Deputy John Perry** asked the Minister for Health the status of the tender process for the return of satellite mammography services at Sligo University Hospital; if a successful bidder has been chosen; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2324/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The HSE sought tenders in November 2015 for the provision of a mobile follow-up mammography service for women from the Sligo/Leitrim area who have already received treatment for breast cancer.

The tender process is currently ongoing and it is hoped that it will be concluded shortly.

Hospital Appointment Status

387. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Health if he will ensure that a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath secures a hospital appointment without delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2337/16]

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

Prescription Charges

388. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the cost of the abolition of prescription charges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2344/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): Prescription charges are part of a set of measures introduced by Government in recent years to reduce pharmaceutical drugs expenditure. Medical card holders are required to pay a prescription charge of €2.50 per item for medicines and other prescription items supplied to them by community pharmacists, subject to a cap of €25 per month for each person or family. Prescription charges do not apply to children in the care of the Health Service Executive, asylum seekers living in direct provision, or to methadone supplied to patients participating in the Methadone Treatment Scheme.

There are no plans to amend the prescription charge; however, the charge remains frozen at the level set in 2014.

The cost of abolishing prescription charges is estimated at approximately €112m, based on net prescription charge income for 2014 and adjusted for projected 2016 medical card numbers.

Hospital Consultants Recruitment

389. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the cost of hiring an additional 500 consultants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2345/16]

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 on the matter with them.

General Practitioner Services

390. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the cost of hiring an additional 500 general practitioner consultants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2346/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As the HSE does not directly hire GPs, it is not possible to quantify the financial implications for the HSE of 500 additional GPs being hired to provide services to the public health system under the General Medical Services (GMS) Scheme and other schemes. GPs are remunerated for these services primarily on a capitation basis, with a range of additional support payments and fees for specific items of service. The amount payable in respect of certain of these supports is related to the doctor's panel size. In addition, medical indemnity insurance premia are refunded to contracted GPs, also based on the size of each doctor's GMS patient panel. The HSE pays into a superannuation scheme a sum equivalent to 10% of total capitation fees payable to contracted GPs.

The most recently published Statistical Analysis of Claims and Payments of the HSE's Primary Care Reimbursement Service relates to the year 2013. This report indicates that payments totalling €451.7 million were made to some 2,400 GMS contract holders. In total these costs related to approximately 1.9 million GMS patients. There was substantial variation in the average amount paid, ranging from €14,753 for a patient panel of up to 100 patients to €448,960 for a panel of 2,001 or more patients. The addition of substantially more contract-holding GPs would enhance the choice available to patients in the first place but any impact on the Exchequer would be dependent on the distribution of the eligible patients across the panels of contracting doctors. Where newly-qualified GPs obtain a GMS contract, they can only attract patients from the existing pool of GMS patients until such time as further phases of universal GP care are introduced.

Health Services Staff Recruitment

391. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the cost of hiring 100 additional nurses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2347/16]

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 on the matter with them.

Health Services Staff Recruitment

392. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the cost of hiring 100 additional therapists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2348/16]

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 on the matter with them

Public Sector Staff Grades

393. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health under the Civil Service reform programme, the number of clerical officers who have been promoted to higher executive officer and the number of executive officers who have been promoted to assistant principal officer in his Department through internal competitions after the significant change in eligibility rules; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2578/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): No internal promotion competitions have been completed in my Department since the introduction of the change in eligibility rules for such competitions. Therefore no Clerical Officer has been promoted to Higher Executive Officer and no Executive Officer has been promoted to Assistant Principal Officer.

Deportation Orders

394. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he is aware of the deportation from the United Arab Emirates of a person (details supplied) who was arrested and held overnight before being deported for a human rights investigation for The New York Times in May 2014 which documented how Bangladeshi and Pakistani workers working for Britain's largest construction firm, Balfour Beatty, were beaten, tasered, jailed and deported for going on strike; if he is aware that this person was placed under surveillance before being arrested; and if he has raised this case with the Government of the United Arab Emirates. [2012/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): In line with our consular policy, my officials and staff at Irish Embassies, Missions and Consulates overseas stand ready to assist Irish citizens when such assistance is requested. In this case we do not have any record of being contacted by this citizen at the time of his arrest. The Embassy of Ireland in Abu Dhabi was only made aware of the deportation of this Irish citizen six months after it was carried out in October 2014.

Human Rights Issues

395. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he is aware that the Jerusalem offices of the Israeli human rights group B'Tselem were damaged in a fire on 10 January 2016; his views on the general and increased incitement against human rights organisations in Israel, particularly since the new Israeli Government came to office; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2013/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I understand from our contacts with B'Tselem that the fire in their offices is believed to have resulted from an electrical fault. However, Ireland and our EU partners have expressed our concerns about long running efforts by some political elements in Israel to hinder the work of NGOs which are active on justice and human rights issues, particularly in the occupied Palestinian territory. The Foreign Affairs Council yesterday adopted Conclusions on the Middle East which reiterated

this concern. It is only fair to recognize however that Israel enjoys a vibrant and highly active civil society, unparalleled in the region, and often deeply critical of official policies, and that other political voices in Israel continue to resist encroachments on this sector.

International Relations

396. **Deputy Eric Byrne** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on correspondence from a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2101/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have seen reports of a further Holocaust cartoon competition being planned in Tehran. I do not have the details, including whether this would be an officially supported event. Media reports of this nature from the region are not always firmly based, and need to be confirmed. However, if true, the holding of such an event would be deeply inappropriate and grossly offensive, and I would condemn it without question. On the basis of the reports, officials of my Department have already raised these concerns with the Embassy of Iran in Dublin and asked that our concerns be passed to Tehran.

Human Rights Issues

397. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his efforts to secure the release of a person (details supplied) from detention in Israel, who has been on hunger strike for in excess of 50 days; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2259/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I share the concerns about the detention of this man, who was arrested on 21 November and given a six-month Administrative Detention order on 20 December, after a month of questioning. The subjects of these orders are given no indication of the allegations or concerns for which they are being detained. This person has been on hunger strike, reportedly taking only water, since 25 November, in protest both at his detention without charge and what he states was his questioning under duress. Ireland has consistently made clear our view that administrative detention, which if it exists at all should only be an exceptional emergency measure, is being used far more widely against Palestinian activists. If there are genuine security concerns about individuals, they should be charged and tried under the law.

Ireland has conveyed these views to the Israeli authorities both directly and through our interventions at UN level and, at the urging of Ireland and others, in EU Council Conclusions. We will continue to do so. Our Missions in the area are monitoring this case and have raised it at EU level.

I must however also urge this prisoner to end his hunger strike, which has reached the point where his health is in serious danger. There has been a series of hunger strikes in recent years in relation to administrative detention, although in all cases the prison authorities have achieved a successful resolution. I am deeply concerned however that, however much one might appreciate the frustration of persons detained without trial, such strikes, if repeated, may eventually end in a tragic outcome. I call on all sides to ensure this does not occur.

Consular Services Provision

398. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent of communication and correspondence he has had with the Australian authorities as part of efforts to provide assistance and support to Irish citizens in Australia who have been found to have violated the terms of their visa by remaining in the country beyond the permitted duration of stay; the financial assistance afforded to undocumented Irish citizens who find themselves in this situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2288/16]

399. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of Irish citizens who have been deported, returned or removed from Australia as a result of having violated the terms of their visa by remaining in the country beyond the permitted duration of stay in each year since 2010, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2289/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 398 and 399 together.

My Department has three offices in Australia, the Embassy, which is located in Canberra, a Consulate-General in Sydney and an Honorary Consulate in Perth.

The Embassy and Consulates meet regularly with the Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) and with the Australian Border Force (ABF) on all visa-related issues affecting Irish citizens, including overstaying, deportation and related matters at Federal and State levels as appropriate. Embassy officials met most recently in November with senior officials from DIBP. The Honorary Consul in Perth is in regular contact with the Australian Border Force, and in particular with the Management of the detention facilities in the area.

The Embassy and Consulates work to ensure that Irish citizens are not disadvantaged and are able to avail of all protections which would apply to Australian citizens in comparable circumstances. Typically, cases involving visa issues where citizens are held in detention come to the attention of the Embassy or Consulates if the person involved is in need of a travel document; seeks to challenge a deportation; or if they or their family have particular concerns about their detention. Consular assistance is provided when requested by an Irish citizen.

This assistance is supported by the Consular Assistance Team in my Department in Dublin which liaises with families at home and can request the Embassy and Consulates to raise any issues of concern that they may have with the authorities.

I also wish to acknowledge the excellent support work in this area undertaken across Australia by the Irish Welfare Bureaus, Support Associations and Irish Clubs, many of whom receive financial support from my Department's Emigrant Support Programme. These groups complement the work of the Embassy and Consulates and provide support and local advice to visiting Irish citizens and to those experiencing difficulty while in Australia.

The Emigrant Support Programme (ESP), which is administered by my Department, provides funding to not-for-profit organisations and projects to support Irish communities overseas and to encourage closer links between these communities and Ireland.

ESP funding allocated to welfare organisations in Australia has increased in recent years, largely due to the challenges associated with the significant increase in young Irish people arriving there, and additional outreach work by the organisations to the elderly in the community. Total ESP funding awarded to Australia based organisations from 2004 to 2014 amounts to over €2.7m.

Organisations supported in Australia include the Irish Australian Support Association of Queensland (Brisbane), Irish Australian Welfare Bureau and Resource Centre New South Wales

(Sydney), Irish Australian Support and Resource Bureau Inc. (Melbourne) and the Claddagh Association (Perth).

I have also included a table provided to our Embassy by the Australian authorities showing the numbers of Irish citizens who over-stayed their visas and were returned or removed from Australia from 2010 to 31 December 2015.

Irish national over stayers returned or removed from Australia - 2010-2011 to 2015-2016 (31 Dec)*

-	Programme Year					
-	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16 (31 Dec 15)
Returned from the community	251	253	255	338	279	125
Removed from immigration detention	15	26	27	61	61	28
Total	266	279	282	399	340	153

*This table accounts for onshore compliance departures

Emigrant Support Services

400. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the cost of the emigrant support programme in each of the years 2008 to 2015; the estimated cost in 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2343/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Emigrant Support Programme (ESP) provides funding to not-for-profit organisations and projects to support Irish communities overseas and to facilitate the development of more strategic links between Ireland and the global Irish. The focus of the Emigrant Support Programme is on initiatives that:

- address the needs of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable Irish emigrants;
- enhance access for Irish emigrants and Irish community organisations to local statutory and voluntary services;
- foster a more vibrant sense of community and Irish identity amongst the Irish abroad; and,
- encourage closer links between Irish communities abroad and in Ireland, to the benefit of both.

In addition, since 2009, the Programme also supports projects aimed at creating practical results orientated links between Ireland and the global Irish, and projects that emerged as a consequence of the Global Irish Economic Forum.

The overall spend for the Programme from 2008 to 2015 is set out below. With regard to 2015, end of year accounts are currently being finalised so the figure provided below remains provisional. I would be happy to provide the Deputy with a complete list of 2015 grants in the coming weeks and they will also be published on my Department's website at <https://www.dfa.ie/our-role/policies/the-irish-abroad/emigrant-support-programme>

The allocated budget for the Emigrant Support Programme in 2016 is €11,595,000.

Funding Year	Emigrant Support Programme Total
2008	€15,182,714
2009	€14,884,660
2010	€11,904,695
2011	€11,297,365
2012	€11,455,364
2013	€10,539,850
2014	€11,998,575
2015	€11,416,077*

* *Provisional figure*

Public Sector Staff Grades

401. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade under the Civil Service reform programme, the number of clerical officers who have been promoted to higher executive officer and the number of executive officers who have been promoted to assistant principal officer in his Department through internal competitions after the significant change in eligibility rules; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2577/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): All civil servants in my Department with the requisite skills and experience are eligible to apply for internal promotion competitions irrespective of their grade. Since the change in eligibility rules for promotion came into effect in December 2013, one Clerical Officer has been promoted to Higher Executive Officer. No Executive Officer has been promoted to Assistant Principal Officer.

Education Schemes

402. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the cost of her Department's engagement with the College for Every Student scheme in 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2001/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The College for Every Student (CFES) scheme is run by Trinity College Dublin (TCD) through its Trinity Access 21 (TA21) initiative. The aim of the scheme is to address educational disadvantage and to develop and disseminate innovative education models. TA21 was established in 2014 with support from Google Ireland. The scheme mainly focuses on students in second level schools that are targeted by the social inclusion measures of the Department through the DEIS Programme. The objective of CFES is to increase students' college and career aspirations through participation in three core practices which are: mentoring; leadership through service; and pathways to college. The CFES model has been adapted from the USA to the Irish context and is based on a strong evidence base in the US showing a 90% college progression rate for participating students.

One of the objectives of the new National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-2019 is that the HEA support the dissemination of best practice in the provision of mentoring programmes for students in second level. In 2015 the HEA allocated €4,795 to support a symposium by TA21 to share the practices developed through CFES with a wider group of stakeholders, including those from other higher education institutions and second level schools.

Third Level Qualifications Data

403. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Education and Skills for details, in tabular form, on the progress made in meeting 74% of industry demands domestically for information and communications technology, ICT, professionals by 2018, as set out in the 2014 ICT skills action plan, by year, total number and percentage; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2194/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): ICT graduate output from the higher education sector has doubled since the first ICT action plan was published in 2011. In 2012, 31% of demand was met by graduates from mainstream Level 8, 9 and 10 courses in ICT from Universities and Institutes of Technology. The total number of graduates from ICT courses has doubled since 2011. The 2014 ICT Action Plan contains a range of measures to seek to increase supply of graduates including awareness raising, incentivised places on mainstream courses and full-time and part-time ICT courses provided through Springboard+.

In 2014, total ICT graduate output was 57% of demand. The progress in increasing the supply of graduates in 2014 and the projected increase for 2015 is set out in the following table.

Progress towards ICT Action Plan targets

Source	2014	2015 (Projected)
L 8/9/10 mainstream graduate supply (SRS)	2,261	2,552
Total L8 Springboard+ full-time ICT conversion graduate supply	523	633
Total L8/9 Springboard+ part-time ICT graduate supply	574	625
Incentivised L8 additional places 2014 (4-year) and 2015 (3-year)	0	0
Total Irish-based Level 8+ graduate supply	3,358	3,810
74% target of Level 8+ job openings	4,328	4,819
Total NFQ Level 8 - 10 graduate supply as % of job openings	57%	59%

It should be noted that the data above does not include non-Springboard+ Level 8 ICT graduates from the private higher education providers (e.g. National College Ireland, Dublin Business School, Griffith College et al).

Labour Court Recommendations

404. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when she will implement a judgment of the Labour Court which was delivered in February 2009; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2283/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): My Department gives support and funding to a number of Education and Training Boards to operate Outdoor Education Centres. There are 12 centres in all. The Teachers’ Union of Ireland (TUI) lodged a claim with my Department for a substantial pay increase on behalf of the Directors of each of these Centres. Following protracted negotiations, my Department consented to an ad-hoc referral of the claim to the Labour Court. The Labour Court subsequently issued a non-binding recommendation on 9 February 2009 in respect of this claim.

As the Deputy will be aware, in recent years arising from the financial crisis any adjustments to pay have been informed and governed by legislation enacted under the various Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Acts and by the public service agreements. There is no provision outside of these for the awarding of pay increases and therefore it has not been possible to implement the pay increases as per the February 2009 Labour Court decision.

Teachers' Remuneration

405. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills in the event of a secondary school teacher resigning from a union, if the extension of the grace period under the Lansdowne Road agreement applies in terms of calculating retirement pension level; if the teacher would go up the incremental scale after the ending of the Haddington Road agreement in June 2016; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2340/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The position is that the extension of the grace period (during which a teacher who retires will have their superannuation entitlements calculated by reference to the pay scales and pensionable allowances applying to him/her on 30 June 2013) to 1 April 2019 applies to all teachers who are members of a public service pension scheme, regardless of which sector the teacher is working in or whether the teacher is a member of a trade union.

In relation to progression on the incremental scale, the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2015 provides that, unless a collective agreement applies to a public servant, no increment shall be awarded to the public servant and the operation of the pay scale that applies in respect of the public servant shall stand suspended until 1 July 2018.

Teacher Redeployment

406. **Deputy Olivia Mitchell** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will introduce a permanent voluntary redeployment scheme for teachers; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1840/16]

416. **Deputy Peter Mathews** asked the Minister for Education and Skills regarding the voluntary redeployment scheme and the Croke Park agreement, when the process will be available for secondary school teachers (details supplied) based in a school in County Cavan who seek redeployment to a school in Dublin; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2000/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 406 and 416 together.

The core function of the redeployment arrangements is to facilitate the redeployment of all surplus permanent and CID holding teachers to other schools that have vacancies. The redeployment of all surplus permanent teachers is key to my Department's ability to manage within its payroll budget and ceiling on teacher numbers.

The criteria used for the allocation of teachers to post-primary schools for the 2016/17 school year, including the redeployment arrangements for the 2016/17 school year are available on my Department's website.

Teachers' Remuneration

407. **Deputy Eric Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a matter (details supplied) regarding primary education; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1841/16]

440. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will address the continued unequal salaries for primary school teachers who commenced teaching after February 2012 as this differentiation is contrary to the principle of equal pay for equal work and this discrimination is incentivising newly qualified teachers to leave the profession and in many cases to go abroad; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2238/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 407 and 440 together

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

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

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

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

The Lansdowne Road Agreement will, through salary increases and a reduction in the Pension-Related Deduction, begin the process of restoring the reductions to public service pay which were implemented over recent years. The issue of equalised pay scales was not one which could be resolved in the discussions which led to the Agreement. However, the flat-rate increases contained in the Agreement will be proportionately more favourable to new entrants to teaching (who are lower on the pay scale) than to longer serving teachers. Circular letter 0066/2015 which issued in December 2015 sets out the revisions to the thresholds for the Pension Related Deduction from 2015 and revised salary scales for teachers which take effect from 1 January 2016.

School Accommodation

408. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to provide the additional accommodation urgently required by a school (details supplied) in County Cork; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1847/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I can confirm that the school referred to by the Deputy recently submitted an application to my Department for capital funding for additional school accommodation. The application will be considered and a decision conveyed to the school authority when this process has been completed.

School Accommodation

409. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if additional accommodation works will be provided for a school (details supplied) in County Cork; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1859/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): My Department has no record of receiving an application for additional accommodation from the school to which the Deputy refers. It is open to the school authorities to make an application should an additional mainstream class teacher be approved and subject to no accommodation being available within the school currently for this purpose.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

410. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she has or will consider excluding the carer’s support grant, formerly the respite care grant, from reckonable income for applications for student support grants; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1906/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The Deputy will be aware that the Student Grant Scheme is reviewed annually. The review of the Student Grant Scheme 2016 is ongoing. As such, all aspects of the Scheme remain under review at this point.

Apprenticeship Programmes

411. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the spend on apprenticeship training and the number of apprentices in training by employment sector in each year since 2010; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1965/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The information sought is provided in the following table.

End of Year Live Population by Sector and Trade 2010 - 2015 - (numbers of apprentices recorded as in employment at 31 December each year).

-	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Construction Total	3808	2761	1693	1197	1437	1735
Brick and Stonelaying	202	147	85	54	53	54
Cabinet Making	150	101	34	10	4	5
Carpentry and Joinery	1745	1169	718	406	471	657
Floor and Wall Tiling	21	15	7	4	2	1
Painting and Decorating	101	89	68	37	33	40
Plastering	175	115	63	40	28	34

-	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Pipefitting						34
Plumbing	1396	1098	687	604	779	798
Stonecutting and Stonemasonry	0	0	0	0	16	28
Wood Machinery	5	4	2	0	0	0
Wood Manufacturing and Finishing	13	23	29	42	51	84
Electrical Total	3566	2997	2167	2030	2552	3099
Aircraft Mechanics	137	126	113	124	136	132
Electrical	3059	2557	1784	1622	2033	2491
Electrical Instrumentation	113	89	82	102	163	211
Electronic Security Systems	48	49	37	35	35	48
Instrumentation	19	16	17	17	25	28
Refrigeration	190	160	134	130	160	189
Engineering Total	964	943	893	1021	1233	1441
Farriery	23	32	31	23	20	20
Industrial Insulation	10	10	10	11	16	28
M.A.M.F.	421	392	359	395	480	527
Metal Fabrication	370	361	322	365	441	552
Sheet Metalworking	71	54	44	43	58	81
Toolmaking	69	94	127	184	218	233
Motor Total	1780	1586	1443	1440	1668	2016
Agricultural Mechanics	132	109	89	98	112	140
Construction Plant Fitting	163	142	127	147	166	199
Heavy Vehicle Mechanics	383	309	286	277	344	429
Motor Mechanics	914	861	808	815	932	1130
Vehicle Body Repairs	188	165	133	103	114	118
Printing & Paper Total	54	40	26	23	23	26
Printing	2	1	2	0	0	0
Bookbinding	1	1	0	0	0	0
Print Media	51	38	24	23	23	26
Grand Total	10172	8327	6222	5711	6913	8317

	€'000	€'000	€'000	€'000	€'000	€'000
Cost per Year:*	68,015	43.353	32.166	27.942	25.900	34.800 - Budget for 2015

*excludes provision costs in Institutes of Technology

Apprenticeship Programmes

412. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to list the category 2 and category 3 apprenticeships referred to in the 2015 Apprenticeship Council report on new apprenticeship programme proposals; when these categories will be completed and operationalised for immediate roll-out; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1966/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I understand that the Apprenticeship Council has provided feedback to category 2 and 3 consortia in relation to their proposals. The Council intends to engage more fully with those consortia as work on progressing category 1 proposals reaches a more advanced stage. Consortia engaged with the call for proposals on the basis that details would only be published of proposals approved for progression to a detailed planning stage. At this stage, I do not propose to publish details of category 2 and 3 proposals.

Student Support Schemes

413. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the full-year cost in 2016 of extending the Fund for Students with Disabilities to students participating in part-time education; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1983/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The HEA estimate that it would cost an additional €172,000 per year to extend the Fund for Students with Disabilities (FSD) to students participating part-time in higher education.

Student Grants Data

414. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Education and Skills how many applications for a Third Level Maintenance Grant were refused in each of the years 2013 to 2015 as a result of an independent mature student being unable to provide proof of independent residence according to the Student Universal Support Ireland requirements; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1997/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): There were 196 students in the 2014/15 academic year and 278 students in the 2015/16 academic year (to date). The statistics requested are not available for 2013/14.

Student Data

415. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of third level students from Counties Galway and Mayo who have started degree, diploma and certificate courses at the National University of Ireland Galway and Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology in the past five years but have subsequently dropped out without completing their course; the number of students in each college during that period who have started courses and the number who have completed those courses each year; the steps she is taking to ensure that students make the best choices when completing their Central Applications Office applications; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1998/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Presently, the HEA can only analyse non-progression rates by county for the academic year 2012/13 to 2013/14. The following table shows the rate of non-progression by level between 2012/13 and 2013/14, for students from county Galway and Mayo attending NUIG and GMIT. The progression of students into, and through, higher education is supported at national level through a range of initiatives, including the on-going reform of the transitions from second-level to higher education, the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015–2019, and the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning.

The HEA is also monitoring higher education institutions' success in improving progression rates through the process of strategic dialogue. Appropriate targets have been included in the compacts agreed between the HEA and individual institutions.

The HEA's studies on student progression, along with the qualitative data generated through the Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE), enhance the evidence-base for the development of policy and practice to tackle non-progression amongst students in higher education. The fourth Study in Progression in Higher Education 2012/13 to 2013/14 was published in January 2016 and is available at http://www.heai.ie/sites/default/files/hea-progression-irish-higher-education_final.pdf.

Table 1: % Non-Progression of students from Galway & Mayo attending GMIT & NUIG - 1st to 2nd year, 2012/13 – 2013/14)

Institute Name	County	Level			
		Level 6	Level 7	Level 8	All Levels
Galway-Mayo IT	Galway	28%	27%	13%	25%
	Mayo	33%	31%	13%	28%
National University of Ireland, Galway	Galway			12%	12%
	Mayo			11%	11%

Table 2: % Non-Progression of all students attending NUIG - 1st to 2nd year, 2008/09 – 2013/14

Discipline	March 8-March 9	March 11 – March 12	March 12-March 13	March 13-March 14
Level 8	9%	9%	11%	13%

Table 3: % Non-Progression of all students attending GMIT - 1st to 2nd year, 2008/09 – 2013/14

Discipline	March 8-March 9	March 11 – March 12	March 12-March 13	March 13-March 14
Level 8	22%	24%	29%	18%
Level 7	30%	31%	39%	31%
Level 6	34%	37%	30%	30%

Question No. 416 answered with Question No. 406.

Education and Training Boards

417. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of examinations (details supplied) in St. John's College in County Cork; and if she will make a

statement on the matter. [2009/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): This is an operational matter for Cork Educational Training Board (CETB). I have asked the ETB to contact the Deputy directly to clarify the position.

Grant Payments

418. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if funding or grant-aid is available from her Department for a charity called Special Heroes Ireland, which supports siblings of special needs children; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2043/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department provides funding to all recognised schools. Significant resources are allocated to ensure that pupils with special educational needs can participate fully in education. Some €1.37 billion, which represents approximately 15% of my Department’s budget, will be spent this year to ensure that such children can have access to an education appropriate to their needs. A range of supports and services are provided to schools, to enable individuals to achieve their full potential, including additional learning and resource teaching support, Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support, special transport arrangements, building adaptations, enhanced capitation, funding for the purchase of specialised equipment, services of the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), enhanced levels of capitation in Special schools and Special Classes and additional teacher training.

As Special Heroes Ireland is not a recognised school as defined by the 1998 Education Act it does not, therefore, qualify for State funding directly from my Department. The Department of Education and Skills has no responsibility or mandate for providing support directly to the organisation. As the Deputy will be aware all Departments must adhere to current legislation and public financial management policies set out for each Department.

School Funding

419. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide funding for a project (details supplied) in County Clare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2053/16]

422. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will look favourably on an application for a grant for a general practitioner room for a school, the population of which has doubled in recent years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2121/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 419 and 422 together.

I can confirm that my Department has received an application for the provision of a General Purpose Room from the school in question.

I wish to advise the Deputy that due to the competing demands on my Department’s capital budget imposed by the need to prioritise available funding towards the provision of essential classroom accommodation, it is not possible at this point to provide an indicative timeframe for the provision of funding for the facility sought.

As the Deputy will be aware, my Department recently sanctioned a major capital project at the school comprising eight additional classrooms to meet the school's immediate accommodation needs. My Department provided in excess of €1.2m for the project, which was completed last November.

Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Board

420. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount of funds distributed by Caranua, by heading and by the number of persons in 2015; and the amount of funds remaining to be distributed. [2058/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): Caranua is an independent statutory body established pursuant to the Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Act 2012 to oversee the use of the cash contributions of up to €110 million, pledged by the religious congregations, to support the needs of survivors of institutional child abuse. Caranua provides regular updates on its website (www.caranua.ie) in regard to the number of applications received, the amounts expended by it and related matters. Figures in relation to the year to 30 November 2015 may be accessed on that website and end December figures will be published in due course. Full details regarding Caranua's expenditure will be set out in the organisation's accounts which are subject to audit by the Comptroller and Auditor General. In accordance with the relevant legislative provisions, Caranua's audited annual accounts will be laid before both Houses of the Oireachtas in the normal manner.

I am advised that to date Caranua has incurred expenditure totalling some €43 million, and accordingly it has a further €67 million available to it to meet future expenditure needs.

Summer Works Scheme Applications

421. **Deputy Eric Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a school (details supplied) in Dublin 8; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2099/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I wish to advise the Deputy that the school in question has submitted an application for funding for toilet improvement works under the current Summer Works Scheme. 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.

My Department has no application from the school in question in respect of any additional accommodation. The school received the Minor Works Grant for 2015/2016 which issued last November and this grant has been issued since 1997 to primary schools with the exception of the 2012/2013 school year. The rates of the grant which are unchanged since 2006 are a basic grant of €5,500 plus a per pupil rate of €18.50.

I can inform the Deputy that in 2015 a total of 80% of the capital outturn on the school sector was expended on the provision of permanent school places to accommodate the growing school population. The balance was expended on the Summer Works Scheme, Emergency Works, the Minor Works Grant, furniture and equipment provision and other smaller programmes.

Question No. 422 answered with Question No. 419.

Departmental Staff

423. **Deputy Ciara M. Conway** asked the Minister for Education and Skills why it took over five months to attain relevant requested information from the service history details and pension entitlement information section in her Department in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2154/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The Pension Unit of my Department is responsible for policy, regulatory, advice and operational functions relating to the pensions of staff within the education sector.

Within this work, priority is given to processing retirement benefits (lump sum payments and fortnightly pensions) for teachers and non-teaching staff who are scheduled to retire and to spouses/children of deceased members. When the person to whom the Deputy refers first sought a pension statement, end of August 2015, it coincided with the busiest period in the pension calendar - between the end of the school year and the calendar year.

In addition each year the Pension Unit provides pension statements to more than 2,000 members and again priority is afforded to those who indicate that they intend to retire in the coming school year.

As the person in question indicated she was considering retirement, she was afforded priority within this caseload and as a result the process of preparing her statement commenced once all of the retirement cases had been completed and issued to her as soon as possible after that. The Pension Unit regrets this delay and any inconvenience caused to the person concerned.

Schools Building Projects Status

424. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a new building for a school (details supplied) in County Donegal; if she will ensure works commence on this building in 2016, given the poor condition and state of repair of the existing accommodation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2155/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): As the Deputy is aware, the project for the school referred to, is included in the 6 Year Construction Programme that I announced on 17 November last, and is listed to proceed to tender and construction in the period 2019-21.

My Department will be in contact with the school authorities in the near future regarding the next steps to be taken to progress the school project into the architectural planning process.

Third Level Institutions

425. **Deputy Jonathan O’Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number and names of agencies that are used to recruit foreign students by the third level sector; the gross cost to the State of using these agencies including value added tax for each of the past five years; the number of these agencies based here; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2159/16]

426. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the rules or guidelines governing spending by third level institutions on external agencies used to recruit foreign students and the role of the Office of Government Procurement, in terms of professional services, in this process. [2160/16]

427. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an accreditation process is in place for the agencies used to recruit foreign students to third level institutions; the persons responsible for carrying out supplier reviews, approving legal contracts, and for ensuring student aftercare is at an acceptable standard. [2161/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 425 to 427, inclusive, together.

My Department allocates recurrent funding to the Higher Education Authority (HEA) for direct disbursement to the HEA designated higher education institutions. The HEA allocates this funding to the institutions and the internal disbursement of funding is then a matter for the individual institution and my Department has no role in the day to day operational affairs of the institutions.

Higher education institutions are bound by public procurement procedures in relation to its spending, including that on any external agencies used for the recruitment of foreign students. The tender process and legal arrangements are a matter for the individual institutions as autonomous bodies. The aftercare of international students is also a matter for the individual institution.

Details in respect of the number and names of agencies used to recruit foreign students in the higher education sector, including the cost and number of agencies based here, are not available in my Department. My officials have requested the HEA to seek to compile this information from the institutions and I will arrange for the information to be sent to the Deputy as soon as it is available.

Third Level Admissions Entry Requirements

428. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she is aware of concerns raised by teaching staff regarding dual standards in the admissions process for students applying through the Central Applications Office and external applications. [2162/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The responsibility for managing access to third level places rests with the Central Applications Office (CAO) and the third level institutions generally.

The higher education institutions have delegated to the CAO the task of processing applications to their first year undergraduate courses. However, the participating institutions retain the function of making decisions on admissions. Neither my Department nor the Higher Education Authority has any role to play in relation to the operation of the CAO or the admissions policies of third level institutions.

Special Educational Needs Staffing

429. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Education and Skills why a person (details supplied) in County Offaly has not received a response to an application under a National Council for Special Education scheme; what is an acceptable timeframe to process such ap-

plications, given that this person is attending school with parents and cannot be supported by a teacher outside of the classroom as there is no teacher available, and that the parents have received no information from her Department as to what stage the application is at; why the parents have not received this; and when the school will be allocated the resource hours to allow this pupil to follow the proposed reintegration place developed by the National Educational Psychological Service, the person's parents and the school. [2166/16]

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 resource teachers and 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. The criteria by which SNA support is allocated to pupils is set out in my Department's Circular 0030/2014, while the criteria for the allocation of resource teaching support is set out in DES Circular 02/05.

All schools were asked to apply for SNA or resource teaching support for the 2015/16 school year by 18th March 2015. The NCSE also continued to accept applications after this date in recognition that enrolments may not have been completed or where assessments were not completed. The NCSE has published details of SNA allocations for schools for the current school year on its 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 on www.ncse.ie.

Details of the manner in which a school, or parent, may appeal an SNA allocation decision is also available at www.ncse.ie

As the question raised by the Deputy relates to an application for support for an individual child, I have arranged for this question to be forwarded to the NCSE for direct reply to the Deputy.

Residential Institutions

430. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding the Education Finance Board; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2181/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The Education Finance Board (EFB) was financed by the €12.7 million contribution provided by the religious congregations under the 2002 Indemnity Agreement. It allowed for educational support for former residents and their families. The fund was exhausted in 2011 and the investment account used by the EFB was closed and the Board dissolved. The legislation which subsequently established the Residential Institutions Statutory Fund does not permit Caranua to take on any of the functions conferred on the dissolved EFB. This legislation (the Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Act 2012) sets out the approved services that can be funded. These services include an educational service but only for former residents, not for their families.

Funding is no longer available for educational courses for relatives of former residents.

Schools Building Projects Status

431. **Deputy Anthony Lawlor** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the building programme for the new community college in Naas, County Kildare; at what stage is the planning process; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2185/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The project to which the Deputy refers is being delivered by the Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board (KWETB). It is at stage 2A (developed sketch scheme) of the design process.

An examination of the design team’s stage 2A submission was recently completed in the Department and the Department has since been in contact with the KWETB to make arrangements for the normal meeting with it and its design team to discuss the outcome of this examination.

Weight of Schoolbags

432. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her views on the weight of schoolbags for primary and secondary school pupils; if their weight could cause injury to pupils; the action she has taken or will take to address this issue; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2186/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The report of the Working Group on the Weight of School Bags recognised that many of the solutions to this issue belong at local school level and made various recommendations in this regard, such as optimum use of storage facilities, developing pupil organisation skills and timetabling.

My Department issued circulars to all primary and post-primary schools in 2005 to highlight the potential health hazard of overweight schoolbags and to outline a range of local measures that could be put in place to help alleviate the problem.

The circulars referred to the recommendations of the report. It is a matter for each individual school to determine which particular measures are most suited to its individual circumstances and to how the school concerned organises teaching and learning.

The circulars (PC 13/05 and M35/05) and the report of the Working Group on the Weight of School Bags are available on my Department’s website at www.education.ie.

Special Educational Needs Staffing

433. **Deputy Pat Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of teachers and special needs assistants employed in primary and post-primary schools in the 2010-11 school year and in the 2015-16 school year; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2217/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I wish to advise the Deputy that the number of Special Needs Assistants allocated to primary and post-primary schools for the 2010/11 school year was 10,543 as at May 2011. In 2015, 11,940 SNAs were available for allocation to primary and secondary schools, of which 11,820 were initially allocated in September 2015.

The Statistics Section of my Department’s website contains extensive data relating to schools, including details of teacher numbers for the 2010/11 school year which can be ac-

cessed through the following link: <http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/Key-Statistics-2010-2011.pdf>

The most recent published information for teacher numbers relates to the 2014/15 school year and this can be accessed through the following link: <http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/Key-Statistics/Key-Statistics-2014-2015.pdf>.

Data for the current 2015/16 school year, including teacher numbers, will be published when the national school annual census has been processed later in the current school year.

Teachers' Remuneration

434. **Deputy Pat Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of primary teachers who are paid a qualification allowance at the minimum pass primary degree rate; the number who are not being paid a qualification allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2218/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): A Qualification Allowance in respect of a Pass Primary Degree is paid to 7,199 Primary Teachers.

Qualification allowances were abolished for teachers appointed after the 1 February 2012. The full details are outlined in Circular 8/2013 which can be accessed on my Department website. Due to other priority commitments at present it is not possible to obtain data in relation to the number of teachers not being paid a qualification allowance.

Departmental Properties

435. **Deputy Pat Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will use the vacated building at the former St. Peter's primary school, Greenhills, Dublin 12 for education purposes; if discussions have taken place with the Dublin Archdiocesan authorities regarding this; when such discussions will be completed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2219/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): My Department officials and representatives of the Dublin Archdiocese and of the local parish have agreed that the property to which the Deputy refers will be made available to the Department for educational use. My officials are continuing to work closely with the Archdiocesan authorities on the practicalities of the property issues involved and work is well advanced in this regard.

Question No. 436 withdrawn.

School Accommodation

437. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the primary schools wholly housed in temporary accommodation, including the duration for which they have been in temporary accommodation, by county, in tabular form; the year in which these schools received full recognition from her Department; the patron of each school; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2233/16]

438. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the pri-

mary schools that have moved from wholly temporary to permanent accommodation in tabular form, by county, since January 2000; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2234/16]

442. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the cost of rental for primary schools wholly housed in temporary accommodation by school, by county, since January 2011 in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2290/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 437, 438 and 442 together.

The information sought is being compiled, and will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as possible.

School Accommodation

439. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the planned address of the new premises for the Shellybanks Educate Together national school in Dublin 4. [2235/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): As the Deputy will be aware, this school opened in temporary accommodation in 2014 and a permanent site is being acquired.

With regard to permanent accommodation, due to the commercially sensitive nature of land acquisitions generally it is not possible to give an indication of site location or other information at this time.

Question No. 440 answered with Question No. 407.

School Transport Eligibility

441. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills why a school bus ticket was withdrawn from a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2244/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Damien English): The child referred to by the Deputy is eligible for school transport under the terms of my Department’s Post Primary School Transport Scheme.

The closing date for receipt of payments for school transport was 31st July 2015. Bus Éireann has advised that payment details for this child were only submitted in September 2015 and at that time the service was operating to capacity. They have also advised that this child was not issued with a ticket.

Children for whom late payments are received cannot be guaranteed a seat on a school transport service.

Question No. 442 answered with Question No. 437.

Autism Support Services

443. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if autism spectrum

disorder units are being approved for schools where there are no students with autism enrolled; the names of these schools; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2326/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): As the Deputy is aware 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. Progress in developing this network has been significant and in addition to the special school placements there are over 1,000 special classes throughout the country at primary and post primary level, of which 762 are for children with Autism. Each special class for autism has a 6:1 pupil teacher ratio at primary level, and 6:1.5 at post primary level.

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 and where an identified need for such classes exists. In this regard, where schools indicate that they will open a special class, the SENO will sanction the establishment of this class. However, the NCSE will only allocate staffing resources once pupils are enrolled in the class, in accordance with my Department’s policy.

SENOs will be engaging with schools for 2016/17 school year in order to plan for, and to open, new special classes, in order to ensure there are sufficient placements available to meet demand in an area. A full list of special classes is available on the NCSE website www.ncse.ie.

The 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.

SOLAS Training and Education Programmes Data

444. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of trainees who have participated in the SOLAS Safe Pass training programme in each of the years 2006 to 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2350/16]

445. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of accredited SOLAS Safe Pass tutors; the number of candidates who applied for accreditation in each of the years 2006 to 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2351/16]

446. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of

candidates who applied to be accredited as SOLAS Safe Pass tutors; the number who were accredited in each of the years 2006 to 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2352/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 444 to 446, inclusive, together.

This is an operational matter for SOLAS who manage the Safe Pass programme. I have asked SOLAS to contact the Deputy directly to provide the information.

Departmental Staff Promotions

447. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills under the Civil Service reform programme, the number of clerical officers who have been promoted to higher executive officer and the number of executive officers who have been promoted to assistant principal officer in her Department through internal competitions after the significant change in eligibility rules; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2574/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Following the changes to eligibility requirements for promotion of staff in the Civil Service, which arose following the implementation of new cross streaming arrangements recommended in a Report of the Commission for Public Service Appointments (CPSA), the Department of Education and Skills has promoted one Clerical Officer (CO) to the position of Higher Executive Officer (HEO) and one Executive Officer (EO) to the position of Assistant Principal Officer (APO).

Local Authority Housing Provision

448. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will allocate additional funds for the provision of social housing across the country, and in County Wexford alone; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2005/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The national targets in respect of social housing have been set out in the Government’s Social Housing Strategy 2020, along with details of the financial resources to deliver those targets. The Strategy provides a comprehensive response to the need for social housing and targets the provision of over 110,000 social housing units to 2020, through the delivery of 35,000 new social housing units and meeting the housing needs of some 75,000 households through the Housing Assistance Payment and Rental Accommodation Scheme. In line with the prioritisation of funding for social housing, the overall Exchequer provision for Housing has increased by almost €145 million in 2016, so that the combined capital and current housing allocation is almost €821 million across a range of housing programmes. In addition, local authorities will fund a range of housing services from their own resources to the value of over €112 million, bringing the total Housing provision in 2016 to €933 million. This year will also see continued expansion in social housing provision under the Social Housing Strategy, with over 17,000 new homes to be delivered this year under a range of social housing initiatives.

Targets and provisional funding allocations for delivery under my Department’s main capital and current programmes were issued to all local authorities, including Wexford County Council, in April 2015. The targets are for the period out to 2017 and the available funding is being invested in a combination of building, buying and leasing schemes by the local authorities designed to accommodate 25% of those currently on the housing waiting lists. Wexford

County has a target of 677 units, supported by €25.4m of investment, broken down as follows:

-	Local Authority Housing/ AHB delivery via Capital Assistant Scheme / Return of vacant properties	Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme	Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme	Rental Accommodation Scheme	Rental Accommodation Scheme
Period	2015-17	2015	2016/7	2015	2016/7
Social Housing Units	114	89	251	110	113

The detailed implementation of the programmes and projects to deliver on these targets is a matter for each individual local authority, but I am confident that good progress is being made in their achievement. To date I have announced new social housing construction projects to the value of approximately half a billion euros, including 54 new units for Wexford at a cost estimate of €7.3 million, and I will be making further announcements shortly. Details of the projects I have already announced are available on my Department's website at the following links: <http://www.environ.ie/en/DevelopmentHousing/Housing/News/MainBody,41340,en.htm>

<http://www.environ.ie/en/DevelopmentHousing/Housing/News/MainBody,42225,en.htm>

Given the time-lag between approval and delivery in terms of construction projects, a successful programme to remediate vacant social housing units, as well as the acquisition by local authorities of properties through turn-key developments and other purchases, have been important parts of social housing delivery to date. I was determined that local authorities would have the opportunity to maximise the number of vacant units brought back into productive use and so, in 2015, I funded the remediation of some 2,700 units nationally.

I am confident that by utilising all delivery mechanisms available to them, local authorities will continue to deliver new social housing across all programmes in 2016.

Motor Tax Rates

449. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the status of the recently reduced road tax for the haulage industry; if he will extend this to all commercial haulage vehicles whose carrying capacity is under seven tonnes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2247/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Motor tax for goods vehicles is based on the unladen weight of the vehicle. Reductions in motor tax for goods vehicles announced in Budget 2016 took effect for licences taken out with a commencement date on or after 1 January 2016. While the top band was reduced from €5,195 to €900, tapering reductions applied to the lower weight bands, with the exception of the two lowest bands, which already carry a relatively favourable rate of tax.

The reductions that applied to vehicles with an unladen weight of 7,000kg (7 tonnes) or less are as follows:

Unladen weight (kg)	2015 annual rate of tax (€)	2016 annual rate of tax (€)	Reduction (€)
6,001 to 7,000	1,019	500	519
5,001 to 6,000	753	500	253

Unladen weight (kg)	2015 annual rate of tax (€)	2016 annual rate of tax (€)	Reduction (€)
4,001 to 5,000	543	500	43
3,001 to 4,000	420	420	-
3,000kg or less	333	333	-

Legislative Process

450. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding the wording of referendums; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1845/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I refer to the reply to Question No. 1514 of 22 September 2015 which sets out the position in this matter.

Motor Tax Collection

451. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount of motor tax collected in counties Galway and Mayo; the amount of money retained, the amount returned to each county and how the remaining balance received from these counties was spent in 2014 and 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1994/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): All Motor Tax income accrues to the Local Government Fund. The Minister for Finance also pays an amount equivalent to the Local Property Tax that was collected in the particular year, from the Central Fund to the Local Government Fund. Local Property Tax (LPT) was introduced in 2013 to provide an alternative, stable and sustainable funding base for local authorities, providing greater levels of connection between local revenue raising and associated expenditure decisions. Given that local authorities vary significantly from one another in terms of size, population, public service demands, infrastructure and income sources, the Government decided that no local authority would receive less allocation from LPT in 2015 than they received from General Purpose Grants in 2014. Under the process known as equalisation, 80% of LPT is retained locally and the remaining 20% is re-distributed to provide top-up funding to certain local authority areas that have lower property tax bases due to the variance in property values across the State. Ultimately, all LPT proceeds are re-distributed to local authorities.

Based on its shortfall position when expected 2015 LPT receipts are compared to GPG Allocations 2014, Galway County Council and Mayo County Council were in receipt of equalisation funding in 2015. The table below shows the 2015 LPT allocations for Galway City, Galway County and Mayo County Councils.

-	2015 LPT Retained Locally	Equalisation Funding	Total LPT Funding Provided in 2015
Galway City Council	6,709,100	Nil	6,709,100
Galway County Council	11,973,614	532,767	12,506,381
Mayo County Council	8,568,212	8,924,382	17,171,286

Apart from its role as a vehicle for distributing LPT proceeds, the other income accruing to the Local Government Fund, including the proceeds of Motor Tax, is used for a range of purposes, including to provide funding to the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport for on-wards allocation in support of local authority roads and public transport infrastructure, and for supports for miscellaneous local authority related schemes such as rural group water schemes and shared services initiatives.

Gross motor tax receipts (including online receipts) for Galway City and County and Mayo in 2014 and 2015 were as follows:

-	2014 €	2015 €
Galway City and County	64,009,463	62,680,012
Mayo	34,570,463	33,242,996

The overall allocation from my Department from the Local Government Fund to Galway City, Galway County and Mayo in 2014 and 2015 is set out in the table below.

-	2014 €	2015 €
Galway City	2,589,084.24	7,573,665.42
Galway County	18,729,482.37	17,404,360.77
Mayo	23,150,022.74	22,403,976.12

As the Local Government Fund also provides funding to the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, the local authorities concerned will have received further funding from that Department for the support of local authority roads and public transport infrastructure in 2014 and 2015, details of which are a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport.

Water Conservation Grant Applications

452. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of households who have registered and have been paid the water conservation grant to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2069/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Current levels of registration with Irish Water are a matter for the utility and one in which I have no function. Irish Water has established a dedicated team to deal with representations and queries from public representatives. They may be contacted via email at oireachtasmembers@water.ie or by telephone on 1890 578 578.

The legislative basis for the Water Conservation Grant scheme is set out in Section 5 of the Water Services Act 2014 and statutory regulations under the section, *inter alia*, provide for the general administrative procedures for the scheme.

Persons who registered with Irish Water, as required under Section 5(2)(a) of the Water Services Act 2014, on or before 30 June 2015, were eligible to receive the grant in 2015, in respect of their principal private residence only.

As at the 30 June 2015, a total of 1.308m households had registered with Irish Water and were therefore eligible to apply for the 2015 Water Conservation Grant. To date, 887,127 have applied for and have received the grant.

Dublin Docklands Development Authority

453. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government given the passing of the Dublin Docklands Development Authority (Dissolution) Act 2015, which provides for a 21-person forum of local stakeholders to preside over local matters in partnership with Dublin City Council, to detail the process and schedule by which the five local resident representatives will obtain their positions on the forum, given the response of the chief executive of Dublin City Council (details supplied) stating that a ministerial order is required to initiate the process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2123/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The Docklands Oversight and Consultative Forum is being established under Part 5 of the Dublin Docklands Development Authority (Dissolution) Act 2015 and the associated schedule to the Act. Under the 1997 Act establishing the DDDA, input from interested parties in Docklands was previously channelled via the Docklands Council to the Authority, and the advice and feedback from that Council, which included representatives from community groups and business interests as well as from Government Departments, Agencies and semi-State bodies, was invaluable in formulating policy and strategies in the past.

In dissolving the Authority and transferring its functions to Dublin City Council, I am committed to ensuring that the voices of residents, business and other parties with an interest in the area will continue to be heard.

In devising the composition, role and functions of the new Forum, the consensus of the outgoing Docklands Council, the Board of the Authority and the City Council were sought. The definition, composition, role and functions of the Forum are detailed in Part 5 of the 2015 Act and the related Schedule. Under Section 39(4)(a) of the Act, the Community representatives must come from organisations that represent the interest of Communities and Residents within the Docklands area.

Under sections 5 and 6 of the Act, a day shall be appointed by Order to be the dissolution day and on that day, the Dublin Docklands Development Authority shall stand dissolved. The exact date of dissolution is currently under consideration .

Section 1(3) of the Act provides for the establishment of the Oversight and Consultative Forum by Dublin City Council and this provision will be commenced when I bring Part 5 of the Act into operation. It is my intention to do so on the dissolution date. The bodies to be invited to nominate persons for consideration for appointment to the Forum will be set out in Regulations, which will be made following the coming into operation of Part 5 and following consultation with Dublin City Council.

Closed Circuit Television Systems

454. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the cost incurred by his Department in the Laois closed circuit television pilot project scheme, by year; his future plans for the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2132/16]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Ann Phelan): My Department has provided €50,000 towards the cost of a pilot rural CCTV initiative located in Laois. This is in addition to the €20,000 raised locally towards the overall cost of the project. CCTV cameras will be located in strategic positions in

rural locations, with the aim of increasing public safety and deterring criminal or anti-social behaviour. The images from the cameras will be reviewed at the request of An Garda Síochána in the event of a crime or incident occurring. This will act not only as a deterrent but also assist with the possible prosecution of offenders through facilitating the detection and investigation of offences, as well as providing recorded evidence of occurrences of incidents and also facilitating quicker responses.

The initial pilot is to be located in Dunmore, Co. Laois, and will be managed by Dunmore Community Alert, in cooperation with the local community, An Garda Síochána and Laois County Council. My Department will review the operation of this pilot project later in 2016.

The Government is committed to tackling crime in both rural and urban communities and to ensuring that An Garda Síochána has the resources to deliver highly-mobile and responsive Garda patrols in all communities. The 2016 Budget allocation of €1.5 billion for An Garda Síochána includes over €67 million in additional funding, which will allow the recruitment of 600 new Gardaí on top of the 550 Gardaí recruited since this Government reopened the Garda College in September 2014. It will also provide additional funding for Garda Surveillance, special operations and targeted, intelligence-led policing. This additional recruitment and budget allocation builds on the current high level of investment in Garda vehicles. Taken together, this step-change in investment in policing will ensure that the Gardaí can be mobile, visible and responsive, on the roads and in the community.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

455. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of social housing units provided in each of the years 2010 to 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2134/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Information on social housing units constructed and acquired in respect of all local authorities and approved housing bodies and funded by direct capital investment by my Department, is published on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/StatisticsandRegularPublications/HousingStatistics/FileDownload,15291,en.xls>. Data up to Quarter 3 of 2015 are currently available, including a breakdown across the different categories of delivery for all local authorities. Data for the full 2015 calendar year will be available in the first months of 2016.

In addition to social housing units constructed and acquired by local authorities, my Department in recent years has placed a particular focus on returning vacant and boarded-up units to productive use. Between 2014 and 2015, approximately 5,000 social housing units have been returned to use with direct exchequer support to local authorities.

In addition to delivery of social housing through the above methods, local authorities avail of a range of flexible delivery options to meet housing needs within their areas. Under the Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme (SHCEP - previously referred to as the Social Housing Leasing Initiative) local authorities can enter into long term leases or rental arrangements for housing units and make them available for social housing. In addition, approved housing bodies can purchase, lease or construct housing units and make them available for social housing under the SHCEP. To the end of November 2015, over 6,700 housing units have been delivered under SHCEP since it began in 2009.

The Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) has been an important contributor to social

housing supply in the period since its introduction in 2005. Details of the number of households transferred from rent supplement to RAS in the period 2010 to end November 2015 are set out in the table below.

The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) is being rolled out incrementally to local authorities and is now available to all qualified households in 18 local authority areas with just over 6,300 households supported since the statutory pilot commenced in September 2014. Details of the number of tenancies supported by HAP since commencement are set out in the table below.

Number of households accommodated under RAS, SHCEP and HAP 2010 - 2015

-	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
S HC EP	866	1,193	1,205	899	1,022	1,084*
HAP	-	-	-	-	485	5,680
RAS	4,258	4,234	3,571	2,875	2,173	1,644*

* 2015 figures for RAS and SHCEP relate to output to end November 2015

Building Energy Rating Compliance

456. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the total cost of the administration of the Building Energy Rating system for 2015. [2135/16]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): The European Union (Energy Performance of Building) Regulations 2012 provide for the transposition in Ireland of Directive 2010/31/EU on the Energy Performance of Buildings. This includes the requirement for assessing the energy performance of buildings before they are occupied, sold or leased in line with the Building Energy Rating (BER) Scheme administered by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI). The BER scheme is self-financing with costs being met from levies and charges collected by the SEAI in respect of BER-related activities. I understand from the SEAI that the total cost of the administration of the BER Scheme in 2015 was approximately €2.4m.

Electoral Reform

457. **Deputy Peter Mathews** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will introduce pre-ballot day voting and foreign postal voting for those registered voters who have emigrated or are abroad on the day of voting in this Government's lifetime or in the lifetime of the 32nd Dáil, should he be elected to the same post; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2167/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): In order to be able to vote at elections and referendums, a person's name must be entered in the register of electors for a constituency in the State in which the person ordinarily resides. Provision is made in the Electoral Act 1992 for persons to be deemed to be ordinarily resident if they intend to resume residence within eighteen months after giving it up. I have no current plans to amend this provision generally; however it may be subject to consideration in the analysis that I am undertaking of the issues that would arise in the extension of the franchise at Presidential elections to citizens resident outside the State. The Convention on the Constitution recommended in its Fifth Report that the Constitution be amended to give citizens resident

outside the State the right to vote in Presidential elections. In considering a response to this recommendation the Government decided that it would be necessary to analyse the full range of issues that would arise in any significant extension of the franchise, before any decision could be made on the holding of a referendum. The Government acknowledges that such an extension of the franchise might be welcomed by many in the diaspora. However, it would be challenging to introduce and to manage and a range of issues arise for analysis in that context, including policy, legal and practical issues. I am undertaking the necessary analysis in co-operation with the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Minister for Diaspora Affairs.

There is no provision in electoral law to allow for pre-ballot day voting other than in the context of postal voting or voting on islands. Postal voting is provided for in electoral law in respect of certain categories of person who are entered in the register of electors - whole-time members of the Defence Forces; members of An Garda Síochána; Irish diplomats serving abroad and their spouses or civil partners; electors living at home who are unable to vote because of a physical illness or a physical disability; electors whose occupation, service or employment makes it likely that they will be unable to vote in person at their local polling station on polling day and full-time students registered at their home who are living elsewhere while attending an educational institution in the State; certain election staff employed at the poll outside the constituency where they reside; and electors who because of the circumstances of their detention in prison pursuant to an order of a court are likely to be unable to go in person on polling day to vote.

While electoral law is subject to ongoing review, I have no proposals at present to introduce pre-ballot day voting or to extend existing arrangements for postal voting. In responding to the recommendation of the Convention on the Constitution in their fourth report, that there should be greater access to postal voting, the Government proposed that an Electoral Commission be tasked in due course with considering the issue and advising in detail on the electoral and operational implications, including costs, of implementing change in this area.

Local Authority Staff

458. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the retirement requirements that exist for local authority workers, particularly in Water Services; if there is a uniform application of retirement ages in these services across local authorities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2178/16]

459. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if local authority water services employees turning 65 years of age in 2016 are obliged to retire or if they have the option to stay working for an additional year; what local authorities provide this option; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2179/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 458 and 459 together.

Under current Local Government Superannuation Scheme rules, most employees appointed prior to 1 April 2004 must retire by the age of 65. There are no plans to extend this retirement age.

The minimum retirement age for employees appointed between 1 April 2004 and 31 December 2012 is 65 but they may work beyond that date. Employees appointed since 1 January 2013 are members of the Single Public Service Pension Scheme and for most members their minimum pension age is linked to the State Pension age.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

460. **Deputy Pat Rabbitte** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he is aware that up to 50% of housing applicants at particular locations are declining offers of housing; if he appreciates that careless tenanting policies and poor estate management are the principal causes of housing offers being rejected in certain areas; if he is aware that South Dublin County Council has withdrawn from any structured involvement by the local community in terms of tenanting and managing local authority estates; if he will require housing authorities to invite participation from respectable local community organisations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2207/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Offers of social housing support are made by individual housing authorities in accordance with their allocation schemes and I, as Minister, am precluded by law from intervening in individual housing cases. I am aware of the level of refusals of offers of social housing across the local authority system and of the various reasons put forward for such refusals. I am concerned with the high levels of refusals reported in some local authority areas. However, I understand that South Dublin County Council has one of the lowest levels of refusals in the country. The Council reported 5% as the percentage of overall offers refused during the 12 month period to 30 September 2015. One of the key reasons identified for the low level of refusals in South Dublin County Council is the use of a Choice Based Letting (CBL) allocation system to allow social housing applicants to choose properties themselves from those available from the Council's stock.

In order to address the refusals issue on a sectoral basis, I requested that every local authority immediately consider the introduction of a CBL allocation system. Local authority chief executives are currently considering the optimum approach to the introduction of CBL across the entire local authority system.

The management of local authority estates is a matter for each local authority in accordance with well established principles of good estate management and specific local circumstances that may prevail.

Homeless Persons Data

461. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government why the latest routine monthly updates (details supplied) of the homeless statistics for November and December 2015 have yet to be published on his Department's website; if he will provide these figures in a spreadsheet format; and what the protocol is within his Department for publishing these figures on a regular basis. [2212/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): My Department has just concluded the compilation of details from housing authority reports for November 2015 and is in the process of collecting reports for December 2015. Homelessness has been a standing agenda item at meetings of the Cabinet Committee on Social Policy and Public Sector Reform since January 2015; the normal procedure within my Department is to publish the monthly figures on my Department's website when they have been noted by the Cabinet Committee.

Tree Remediation

462. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he has considered legislation in relation to neighbouring overhanging trees which block light and cause structural damage and create danger in case of storms or high winds and where the neighbour is not agreeable to the overhang being cut back or removed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2249/16]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): Planning legislation places no specific restrictions on the height of trees, nor does it make any particular provision for remedy from any other nuisance which may be caused by trees in an urban residential area. However there is currently a civil remedy available concerning branches or roots of neighbouring trees encroaching on a person's property. The previous Minister of State for Housing and Planning wrote to the Minister for Justice in June 2012 to explore the possibility of providing a broader civil law remedy for parties affected by high trees and hedges on adjoining properties. In this regard, advice was sought on the possibility of legislative provision being made whereby a person substantially deprived of the enjoyment of their property, such as the deprivation of light caused by high trees on a neighbouring property, could apply to the Courts for an order, and that the Courts could make an order as they see fit, e.g. to cut the trees back to an appropriate height. The Minister for Justice responded in July 2012 suggesting that disputes of this nature between neighbours could perhaps be more appropriately dealt with through mediation – which is being increasingly used internationally as a tool for the resolution of civil disputes - rather than through the Courts. In this regard, I understand that the Minister for Justice is giving consideration to a Mediation Bill which would assist in speeding up the resolution of civil disputes of this nature, reduce legal costs and ameliorate the stress of contested court proceedings.

Tax Reliefs Eligibility

463. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government to advise on a matter (details supplied) regarding tax relief for landlords; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2258/16]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): The Finance Act 2015 provides for 100% tax relief in respect of mortgage interest payments on borrowings used by a landlord to fund the purchase, improvement or repair of a residential rental property. The tax relief is available where the property is let to an individual in receipt of rent supplement or housing assistance payment, or leased to a local authority for social housing. In order to avail of this relief, it is necessary for the landlord to submit an undertaking to the Private Residential Tenancies Board (PRTB) that they will let the premises under a qualifying lease for a continuous period of three years in the period from 1 January 2016 to 31 December 2019. The tax relief is also available to landlords for existing qualifying tenants already in place at 31 December 2015. In such cases, the undertaking to the PRTB must be made by 31 March 2016. In the case of new leases commencing on or after 1 January 2016, the undertaking must be made at the time the landlord is required to apply to register the tenancy with the Private Residential Tenancies Board.

Security of tenure under the Residential Tenancies Act is based on rolling four-year tenancy cycles. Where a tenant has been in occupation of a dwelling for a continuous period of 6 months and no notice of termination has been served in respect of that tenancy before the expiry of the period of 6 months, the tenancy is established for the remainder of the four year period. This is referred to in the Act as a 'Part 4' tenancy.

Landlords and tenants may not contract out of any of the provisions of Part 4 of the Residen-

tial Tenancies Act and no lease, tenancy agreement, contract or other agreement may operate to vary or modify the provisions of Part 4 of the Act. A Part 4 tenancy may only be terminated on specific grounds set out in section 34 of the Act including where, for example, the tenant has failed to comply with the obligations of the tenancy or the landlord intends to sell the dwelling within the next 3 months .

Notice periods for the termination of a tenancy by the landlord vary depending on the duration of the tenancy but periods of up to 224 days are provided for under the Act. Where there is a dispute regarding the appropriate period of notice to be given in respect of a tenancy or the validity of a notice of termination, or where the tenant does not comply with the notice of termination, the dispute may be referred to the Private Residential Tenancies Board for resolution.

Drainage Schemes

464. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the statutory body responsible for the maintenance of rivers here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2310/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Responsibility for the maintenance of our rivers and waterways is shared between a range of statutory bodies and local riparian landowners. Under the Arterial Drainage Acts 1945 and 1995, the Office of Public Works (OPW) has statutory responsibility for the maintenance of rivers on which it has executed works since the 1945 Act. These arterial drainage schemes had as their primary purpose the improvement of drainage on agricultural lands. This typically involved lowering or widening river beds to facilitate the drainage and discharge of neighbouring lands and drainage channels. While new arterial drainage schemes are no longer being undertaken, the OPW has a statutory duty to maintain the completed schemes in proper repair and in an effective condition. The annual maintenance programme typically involves some clearance of vegetation and removal of silt build-up on an average five-yearly cycle.

Additionally, Drainage Districts are areas where drainage schemes to improve land for agricultural purposes were constructed under the Arterial Drainage Acts from 1842 up to 1943. When a subsequent scheme covered the same ground as one of the earlier schemes, the previous Drainage District was abolished. Of the 293 schemes carried out, 170 remain and the statutory duty of maintenance for these schemes rests with the relevant Local Authorities.

Waterways Ireland, a North/South Implementation Body, manages, maintains, develops and promotes over 1000km of inland navigable waterways principally for recreational purposes. The waterways under the remit of the body are the Barrow Navigation, the Erne System, the Grand Canal, the Lower Bann, the Royal Canal, the Shannon-Erne Waterway and the Shannon Navigation.

The OPW is the responsible authority for coordinating the development and implementation of policy on the management of flood risk in Ireland. The Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) Programme is its core strategy for addressing areas at potentially significant risk from flooding. The Programme is focussing on 300 Areas for Further Assessment (AFAs) identified as being at potentially significant risk of flooding and this is the principal vehicle for implementing the EU Floods Directive and national flood policy. Implementation of this Directive is being coordinated with the requirements of the EU Water Framework Directive

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

OPW operates the Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme. 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. The scheme generally applies to relatively straightforward cases where a solution can be readily identified and achieved in a short time frame.

From a water quality perspective, the key EU directive is the EU Water Framework Directive which requires all member states to protect and improve water quality in all waters so that good ecological status is achieved by 2015 or, at the latest, by 2027. This objective is to be supported through implementation of successive river basin management plans (RBMPs). The RBMPs describe the measures planned to protect and improve Ireland's water environment covering rivers, lakes, groundwater, transitional (estuaries) and coastal waters. The first plans were completed in 2010 covering the period to 2015; the second planning cycle for the period 2015-2021 is now underway but will not be completed until end-2017.

In June 2015, I published a consultation document on Significant Water Management Issues in Ireland. This document provided an overview of the current status of our waters and outlined the challenges ahead and sought views on what are considered to be the significant water management issues. The submissions received during this consultation are currently being examined and will be reflected in the development of the draft RBMPs.

Departmental Staff Promotions

465. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government under the Civil Service reform programme, the number of clerical officers who have been promoted to higher executive officer and the number of executive officers who have been promoted to assistant principal officer in his Department through internal competitions after the significant change in eligibility rules; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2575/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): My Department has completed one round of internal competitions for various administrative grades since the change in rules governing eligibility. There have been no instances of Clerical Officers being promoted to Higher Executive Officer or Executive Officers being promoted to Assistant Principal Officer resulting from these competitions.

Broadband Service Provision

466. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the status of the roll-out of broadband in a town (details supplied) in County Mayo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1876/16]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): The Government's National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to ensure that every citizen and business, regardless of location, has access to a high quality, high speed broadband service. This will be achieved through a combination of commercial investments and a State led intervention in areas where commercial services will not be provided. The commercial telecommunications sector is currently investing approximately €2.5 billion in network upgrades and enhanced services. These very significant investments represent a step change in the quality of broadband services available.

On the 22 December 2015, I formally launched the procurement process for the State Intervention to provide high quality, high speed broadband to all premises in Ireland that may not be served through commercial investment. The formal procurement commenced with the publication of the Project Information Memorandum and the Pre-Qualification Questionnaire. In addition, my Department also published:

- the National Intervention Strategy – updated in December 2015, which takes account of responses to the public consultation which took place in July 2015 and subsequent expert analysis; and
- the High Speed Broadband Map 2020 which follows ongoing engagement with industry and public consultation.

The Intervention strategy sets out a detailed service specification including a requirement that the State-funded network must be capable of delivering high-quality, high speed broadband of at least 30mbps download and 6mbps upload. It must also be capable of catering for higher performance in the future so as to keep pace with consumer demand. It is therefore a matter for bidders to select the technology which will show how they propose to meet these contractual requirements.

The 2020 map is available at www.broadband.gov.ie. The map shows Ireland with two colours, BLUE and AMBER. The areas marked BLUE represent those areas where commercial providers are either currently delivering or have plans to deliver high speed broadband services by the end of 2016. The areas marked AMBER represent the target areas for the proposed State intervention. Members of the public can see whether their individual premise is in the BLUE or AMBER area by inserting their Eircode, and/ or address, or scrolling through the map.

Based on information provided by commercial operators, and the current high speed broadband map, 97% of the townland of Belmullet will be covered by the commercial sector this year, while the remaining 3% of the townland will be part of the State intervention.

The Government is determined to ensure that the network is built out as quickly as possible and engagement with industry stakeholders has indicated that this could be achieved within 3-5 years of the contract award.

In this context, the NBP proposes that through the combination of commercial investment and State intervention, 85% of addresses in Ireland will have access to high speed services by 2018, with all addresses passed by 2020.

More generally, I am informed by the commercial operators that next generation broadband services have been rolled out to over almost 18,000 premises to date in County Mayo with over 15,500 more expected to be serviced by commercial investment. Almost 51,000 remaining premises in County Mayo will be covered either by further commercial investment or the proposed State intervention.

Electric Vehicle Grants

467. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the cost of extending the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland electric vehicle grant until 2017 and until 2020, assuming the 2020 targets for electric vehicle usage are met, and not assuming they are not met. [2124/16]

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 Electric Vehicle Grant Scheme supports and incentivises, through grants of up to €5,000, the deployment of electric vehicles (EVs) in Ireland. These grants are in addition to the Vehicle Registration Tax reliefs of up to €5,000 which apply to EVs. The grant scheme commenced in 2011 and, to end 2015, the purchase of 1,090 new EVs has been supported. The scheme, which will be kept under review, is continuing this year and an allocation of €4.5 million has been provided for this purpose.

Building Energy Rating Administration

468. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the cost of administering of the building energy rating system for 2015. [2136/16]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): The Building Energy Rating System is administered by the Department for the Environment, Community and Local Government. I refer to the reply to Question No 456 on today's Order Paper.

Broadband Service Speeds

469. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources to address the serious issues concerning broadband raised by a business in the Rosemount area of County Westmeath (details supplied) and to offer real and viable solutions rather than statistics which have no direct bearing on this business. [2140/16]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): The Government's National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to ensure that every citizen and business, regardless of location, has access to a high quality, high speed broadband service. This will be achieved through a combination of commercial investments and a State led intervention in areas where commercial services will not be provided. The commercial telecommunications sector is currently investing approximately €2.5 billion in network upgrades and enhanced services. These very significant investments represent a step change in the quality of broadband services available.

On the 22 December 2015, I formally launched the procurement process for the State Intervention to provide high quality, high speed broadband to all premises in Ireland that may not be served through commercial investment. The formal procurement commenced with the publication of the Project Information Memorandum and the Pre-Qualification Questionnaire. In addition, my Department also published: - the National Intervention Strategy – updated in December 2015, which takes account of responses to the public consultation which took place in July 2015 and subsequent expert analysis; and - the High Speed Broadband Map 2020 - which follows ongoing engagement with industry and public consultation.

The Intervention strategy sets out a detailed service specification including a requirement that the State-funded network must be capable of delivering high-quality, high speed broadband of at least 30mbps download and 6mbps upload. It must also be capable of catering for higher performance in the future so as to keep pace with consumer demand. It is therefore a matter for

bidders to select the technology which will show how they propose to meet these contractual requirements.

The 2020 map is available at www.broadband.gov.ie. The map shows Ireland with two colours, BLUE and AMBER. The areas marked BLUE represent those areas where commercial providers are either currently delivering or have plans to deliver high speed broadband services by the end of 2016. The areas marked AMBER represent the target areas for the proposed State intervention and includes Rosemount in the townland of Ballintober, County Westmeath. Members of the public can see whether their individual premise is in the BLUE or AMBER area by inserting their Eircode, and-or address, or scrolling through the map.

The Government is determined to ensure that the network in the AMBER area is built out as quickly as possible and engagement with industry stakeholders has indicated that this could be achieved within 3-5 years of the contract award. While the Government intervention will make high speed services available in Rosemount over the coming years, the business in question could engage with all commercial operators in the meantime, to see if any improvements on existing services can be achieved.

In this context, the NBP proposes that through the combination of commercial investment and State intervention, 85% of addresses in Ireland will have access to high speed services by 2018, with all addresses passed by 2020.

More generally, I am informed by the commercial operators that next generation broadband services have been rolled out to over 20,000 premises to date in County Westmeath with over 6,500 more expected to be serviced by commercial investment. Almost 18,000 remaining premises in County Westmeath will be covered either by further commercial investment or the proposed State intervention.

Broadband Service Charges

470. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if the Government has transposed the European Broadband Directive (2014/61/EU) which will reduce the cost of deploying high-speed electronic communications networks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2153/16]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): Directive 2014/61/EU 14, on measures to reduce the cost of deploying high-speed electronic communications networks, among other things, will require operators of networks providing communications, district heating, electricity including public lighting, gas, transport or and waste water services to negotiate agreements to share their network physical infrastructure with public communications networks operators from 1 July 2016, unless there are objective reasons not to do so in any particular case. It is proposed to implement the required legislation by Regulations under the European Communities Act 1972 and the required legislative text is well advanced. I expect that the Regulations will be adopted shortly, pending the conclusion of discussions with relevant Government Departments on provisions relating to permits to install telecommunications infrastructure above, on or below public roads and an obligation to require building developers to make provisions for telecommunications ducting in future planning applications.

Broadband Service Speeds

471. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the cost of carrying out the national broadband plan high speed mapping exercise; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2312/16]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): The development of the High Speed Broadband map under the National Broadband Plan (NBP) was only one aspect of the very detailed intervention strategy under the NBP. The mapping exercise was undertaken by officials within my own Department and its advisors and involved extensive discussion with industry. The stages involved in the mapping exercise comprised: - An information request to all authorised undertakings in July 2013 - A Call for Inputs in June 2014 to assist in the development of the assessment criteria

- Publication of High Speed Broadband Map in November 2014 – further public consultation

- A supplementary information request issued to industry in April 2015

- Consultation on managing the map – October 2015

- Publication of High Speed Broadband Map 2020 in December 2015.

All information gleaned from the various stages of this process was required to be validated before being transferred to an interactive map and colour coded BLUE and AMBER. The BLUE area indicates that commercial services will be provided by the end of 2016. Premises in the AMBER area will be included in the State intervention. This process culminated in the production of the High Speed Broadband map 2016 initially and subsequently the High Speed Broadband Map 2020.

The 2020 map which is available at www.broadband.gov.ie allows all member of the public, be they business or residential, to see whether their premises or home will have access to commercial high speed broadband services or whether they will be included in the Government's intervention. Citizens can search for their individual premises using their Eircode, or address, or by scrolling through the map, and see whether that premises will be covered by commercial investment or the State intervention. Every townland in Ireland has been mapped, and information on the number of premises in each townland and the percentage that are in commercial (BLUE) and non-commercial (AMBER) areas are provided.

The Map is a critical aspect of European State Aid compliance and the mapping process remains open, in accordance with terms that have been published on my Department's website www.broadband.gov.ie so that any new developments can be managed.

I do not have precise figures for all elements of the mapping exercise as it impacts on all aspects of the intervention strategy and is integrated with several work streams. I can confirm however that the in-house ICT related cost to the Department to date of producing the map is in the region of € 203,000 including VAT.

Departmental Staff Promotions

472. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources under the Civil Service reform programme, the number of clerical officers who have been promoted to higher executive officer and the number of executive officers who have been promoted to assistant principal officer in his Department through internal competitions after the significant change in eligibility rules; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2572/16]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): I can confirm that no Clerical Officers have been promoted to Higher Executive Officer and, similarly, no Executive Officers have been promoted to Assistant Principal Officer in this Department through internal competitions since the eligibility criteria for promotion competitions were changed in January 2014 to remove restrictions in relation to service in particular grades.

National Roads Authority Staff

473. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of staff in the National Roads Authority in each of the years 2010 to 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1970/16]

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

National Roads Authority

474. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the administrative costs of operating the National Roads Authority from 2010 to 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1971/16]

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

Bus Éireann

475. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on whether it is appropriate that the Freight Transport Association is carrying out safety inspections on Bus Éireann buses when over 50% of the members of the FTA are associated with Bus Éireann directly through the ownership of buses. [2038/16]

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

Driving Test Regulations

476. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of driver testing for powered two-wheeled vehicles (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2042/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The categories into which vehicles are divided for driver licensing and testing purposes are set at EU rather than national level. Irish requirements in regard to the matter raised are therefore a transposi-

tion of EU law, rather than a national policy decision. I therefore have no power to change the current procedure.

Automatic Number Plate Recognition Cameras

477. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the cost of installing automatic number plate recognition cameras; the number of cameras in operation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2131/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport has no role in the use of automatic number plate recognition cameras. Such devices are used by the M50 Concession for the purpose of the collection of tolls and as such are entirely a commercial matter for that company.

Automatic number plate recognition cameras are used by An Garda Síochána in the enforcement of road traffic legislation. As such, this is an operational matter for that organisation under my colleague, the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

Road Projects

478. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the Northern Ireland Executive has updated him on its revised plans for expenditure on the A5 dual carriageway (details supplied); the amount of money the Executive will spend on the project; the timescale within which this expenditure will happen; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2165/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy is aware, the *Stormont House Agreement and Implementation Plan - A Fresh Start* reaffirms the Government's commitment to provide funding of £50 million for the A5 project and commits 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. Under the Agreement 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 is to be provided in three tranches of £25 million in the years 2017, 2018 and 2019 respectively.

Northern Ireland Executive decisions on funding allocations are a matter for the Executive and it is not a matter on which I propose to comment. The Irish Government will be liaising with the Northern Ireland authorities on project implementation under the aegis of the North South Ministerial Council and an initial meeting of senior officials from both sides has taken place regarding implementation of commitments under the Agreement.

Rail Services

479. **Deputy Seán Kenny** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will request Iarnród Éireann to increase the number of carriages from three to four on the 06.15 train service from Cork to Dublin Heuston each weekday; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2176/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The issue raised

is an operational matter for Iarnród Éireann in conjunction with the National Transport Authority (NTA) and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Rail Services

480. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the rationale for the continued closure of the waiting rooms at Newbridge train station, County Kildare, for a number of years, given that it is a very busy station and is regularly used by persons travelling to seek hospital services in the Dublin area. [2229/16]

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 issues of the provision and operation of waiting rooms at rail stations are operational matters for Iarnród Éireann; I have no function in such matters.

I have referred the Deputy's question to Iarnród Éireann for a more detailed reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Public Transport

481. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of rickshaws (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2242/16]

483. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the person who is responsible for the supervision and regulation of rickshaws in the Dublin area; the names of the companies that are involved in this transport business; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2256/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 481 and 483 together.

Rickshaws are covered by road traffic law. Pedal-powered rickshaws come within the definition of 'pedal cycles' and powered rickshaws are classified as 'mechanically propelled vehicles'. They, like all other road traffic, are obliged to obey road traffic law. The measures which I introduced recently to allow An Garda Síochána to issue fixed charge notices to cyclists also apply to pedal powered rickshaws and will provide an important tool for An Garda Síochána in enforcing the law.

At present there is no legislation in place to regulate the carriage of passengers by rickshaws. Rickshaws by their nature operate at a local level. Local authorities regulate many activities at local level through bye-laws made under local government regulation. In response to concerns (primarily of a health and safety nature), and following a consultation process with relevant stakeholders, Dublin City Council (DCC), has prepared draft bye-laws under the Local Government Act 2001 to regulate the operation of rickshaws.

As I set out in my reply to Parliamentary Question No. 1186 of 3rd November 2015, it is my understanding that DCC, subject to receipt of certain legal clarifications, intend to bring the draft bye-laws, which would provide for a licensing regime for rickshaws, before the Strategic Policy Committee of the Council for its consideration.

National Driver Licensing Service

482. **Deputy John Perry** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to intervene in the return of a C1 Licence to a person (details supplied) in County Sligo; which was taken away without the person's knowledge; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2246/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The operation of the National Driver Licensing Service is the statutory responsibility of the Road Safety Authority, and I have no power to intervene in individual cases. I have therefore referred the Question to the Authority for direct response. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response has not been received within ten days.

Question No. 483 answered with Question No. 481.

Departmental Staff Promotions

484. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport under the Civil Service reform programme, the number of clerical officers who have been promoted to higher executive officer and the number of executive officers who have been promoted to assistant principal officer in his Department through internal competitions after the significant change in eligibility rules; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2584/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Since the introduction of the change in promotion eligibility rules there have been no Clerical Officers promoted to Higher Executive Officer and no Executive Officers promoted to Assistant Principal Officer through internal competition in my Department. The Department welcomes and supports these new rules which have been fully implemented in recent competitions.

Easter Rising Commemorations

485. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the State's preparations for the 1916 commemoration; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2015/16]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Ireland 2016 Centenary Programme, which was launched on 31 March 2015, includes a rich diversity of programmes and events, complementary and additional to the formal State occasions, which will run throughout 2016 to commemorate the centenary of the 1916 Easter Rising. The programme is an invitation to everyone on the island of Ireland and to the global Irish community to shape and engage in a diverse range of historical, cultural and artistic activities – all designed to facilitate reflection, commemoration, celebration, debate and analysis and an active imagining of our future.

Officials from my Department have facilitated an intensive consultation period during 2015, including active engagement with schools, universities, colleges, business and voluntary organisations, arts and culture institutions, historical societies, local authorities and representative groups – at home and in our Diaspora around the world – to inform, to stimulate debate and discussion about 2016, and to foster programme initiatives. Work has been ongoing to implement a comprehensive programme and planning is well underway for the range of initiatives within the seven programme strands.

Among the key milestones achieved to date are the following:

- A programme of State ceremonial events, which represent the formal and solemn marking of 1916 by the citizens of Ireland as the seminal event that led to our independence, has been initiated. The first of these State ceremonial events took place on 1st January with a flag raising ceremony at Dublin Castle, which was attended by President Michael D. Higgins and An Taoiseach, Enda Kenny, T.D. This solemn commemoration was followed by the Ireland 2016 Peace Proms, which took place in partnership with the Cross Border Orchestra of Ireland and choirs representing all parts of the country. A significant number of State ceremonies are due to take place throughout 2016, particularly around Easter time, and plans for each of these events are progressing well.

- Over 84 public consultation meetings were held with local communities all around the country, with 31 individual county plans launched on 8th October 2015, comprising over 1,800 events nationwide. €1m was allocated to facilitate these plans last year, with a further €3m to be made available this year.

- An allocation of €22 million in capital funding was provided through my Department's Vote in 2015 for the 'Permanent Reminder' projects, with a further €31m being allocated this year. These capital projects are progressing well.

- The Global and Diaspora Programme was launched on 29th June 2015 and was very positively received at home and abroad.

- On 6th August 2015, the Arts Council announced 9 major arts projects to commemorate 1916.

- The National Flag Initiative was launched on 14th September 2015, marking the commencement of the delivery by the Defence Forces of our National Flag and the Proclamation to over 3,300 national schools across the country. Some 3,000 flags have now been delivered and the project has been very well received by the schools and children involved.

- The Irish Language strand - *An Teanga Bheo* - was launched at the end of October 2015 by An Taoiseach.

- The Education Programme strand was launched on 22nd September 2015 for the primary, post-primary and third-level education sectors.

- Consultation is ongoing with relevant stakeholders in Northern Ireland, including official, political, media, artistic and NGO stakeholders.

- The National Cultural Institutions are advancing a range of innovative exhibitions and projects.

- The official Culture Ireland programme "*I am Ireland*" was launched by Minister of State Ó Ríordáin on 3rd October 2015. This will showcase the best of Irish arts and culture on the international stage.

- On 10th November 2015, I announced that work was to start on the conservation and restoration of the National Monument in Moore Street, acquired by the State earlier in the year, which will facilitate its development as a new Commemorative Centre for the public.

- On 14 January, together with my colleague, Minister of State Ó Ríordáin, I chaired a workshop to explore the development of new proposals to ensure that 2016 will produce a legacy of gender inclusion befitting a republic founded on the values of equal citizenship. The workshop

was attended by representatives of a broad cross section of society, including members of the arts, business and sports communities, media professionals and the charity and social care sectors.

Further information in relation to the various events, activities and initiatives taking place under each of 7 strands of the Programme, including the 31 county plans launched in October 2015, can be found on my Department's dedicated website at www.ireland.ie.

Offshore Islands

486. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding funding and ensuring equal footing with other island companies; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [1905/16]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): As indicated in *Budget 2016*, the current funding allocation available to my Department for the offshore islands has been increased from €5.9m in 2015 to €6.631m in 2016. This additional allocation will be available for various support measures, including funding for island companies. As the Deputy will be aware, this service was provided by the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government up to May 2015. It is intended that the same level of support will be made available for these companies in 2016 as was available to them in 2015.

Scéim na bhFoghlaimoirí Gaeilge

487. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht an bhfuil plan aici níos mó tacaíochta a thabhairt do Mhná Tí i gceantair Ghaeltachta chun dul i ngleic leis na costais ollmhóra a bhaineann le lóistín na mac léinn Gaeilge agus le costais ghaoimhara; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [1987/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh): Tá áthas orm a rá go bhfuil sé i gceist go leanfaí ag íoc cúnaimh faoi Scéim na bhFoghlaimoirí Gaeilge don bhliain atá romhainn. Agus cúinsí airgid mar a bhí, tá ríméad orm fosta go raibh ar chumas mo Roinne an deontas a íoctar a choinneáil ag an ráta céanna le cúpla bliain anuas. Ní miste a lua, ar ndóigh, go bhfuil aon airgead a shaothraíonn na teaghlaigh saor ó chain. Ní chuirtear san áireamh ach oiread é agus iarratais ar éileamh íocaíochta leasa shóisialaigh ón Roinn Coimirce Sóisialaí á meas. Caithfear a chur san áireamh freisin gur coláistí príobháideacha iad na coláistí Gaeilge agus go n-íocann siad táille breise leis na teaghlaigh atá níos airde ná an deontas a íocann mo Roinn. Ar ndóigh, tá ról fíor-thábhachtach ag na coláistí Gaeilge samhraidh i gcur i bhfeidhm na Straitéise 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge. Tá mo Roinn ag tabhairt gach cúnamh agus is féidir dóibh chun an ról sin a chur i gcrích, go háirithe maidir le forbairt áiseanna agus cóiríochta sa Ghaeltacht.

Turf Cutting Compensation Scheme

488. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the status of the cutting of turf (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2031/16]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Since this Government has come into office, huge efforts have been made to solve the issue of the

protection of Ireland's raised bog special areas of conservation within the framework of the EU Habitats Directive. This has included intense and on-going engagement with turf cutting interests, farmers, non-governmental organisations and with the European Commission. A long-term compensation scheme has been introduced to compensate turf cutters for their loss arising from the cessation. This cessation of turf cutting compensation scheme is comprised of a payment of €1,500 per annum, index-linked, for 15 years or relocation, where feasible, to a non-designated bog, together with a once-off incentive payment of €500.

The draft National Raised Bog SAC Management Plan was published in January 2014. It sets out how the raised bog special areas of conservation are to be managed into the future and how the needs of turf cutters are to be addressed. It is expected that this Plan will be finalised over the coming period.

Final resolution of all issues in relation to the protection of Ireland's raised bog special areas of conservation will only be brought about by everyone working together, within the law, with my Department and with the Peatlands Council, which was established with the purpose of ensuring the input from all stakeholders.

Vacancies on State Boards

489. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht when a final decision will be taken regarding the vacancy on the Irish Film Board; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2188/16]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The process to appoint a new member to the Irish Film Board is underway following advertisement by the Public Appointments Service with a closing date of 4 January 2016.

National Parks and Wildlife Service

490. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she is aware of the grievance within some rural communities that responsibility for sporting and leisure activities such as dog trials, shooting and game hunting in bogs and other State owned lands passed from the Land Commission to the National Parks and Wildlife Service in 2000 without any consultation; and if she will ensure that the concerns of those rural communities are heard and acted upon. [2230/16]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Irish Land Commission was dissolved in 1992 and I understand that its successor in law is the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. In 1988, the then Irish Land Commission nominally transferred management of shooting rights to the Wildlife Service, which is now the National Parks and Wildlife Service, a constituent part of my Department. I am not aware of any specific grievances within rural communities in the context of state-owned shooting rights, but I would certainly ask my Department to examine any such grievances brought to my attention.

Arts Funding

491. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the sources of public funding available from her Department, from any body under the aegis of her Department, or from the European Union for remedial and improvement works to a not-for-

profit art gallery; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2314/16]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department operates an Arts and Culture Small Capital Grants Scheme. The scheme allows for the funding of capital projects for not-for-profit organisations of up to €10,000, to meet up to 70% of project costs. A call for applications was made under the current scheme in August last year and I hope to make an announcement shortly in relation to the award of grants under this scheme.

In addition, the Government has announced investment of €18m for arts and cultural centres across the country under the Exchequer Capital Investment Framework over the next six years. I also intend to announce further details in this regard shortly.

Departmental Staff Promotions

492. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht under the Civil Service reform programme, the number of clerical officers who have been promoted to higher executive officer and the number of executive officers who have been promoted to assistant principal officer in her Department through internal competitions after the significant change in eligibility rules; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2570/16]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I am advised that, under the Civil Reform Programme, one Clerical Officer in my Department was promoted to Higher Executive Officer and one Executive Officer in my Department was promoted to Assistant Principal Officer through internal competitions following the change in eligibility rules.