

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].

The following Ministers/Ministers of State were not elected as Members of the 32nd Dáil but under their ministerial portfolios are styled Deputy for indexing and search purposes:

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs—James Reilly

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources—Alex White

Minister of State at the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation—Gerald Nash

Minister of State at the Departments of the Taoiseach and Foreign Affairs and Trade—Jimmy Deenihan

Minister of State at the Department of Health—Kathleen Lynch

Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine—Tom Hayes

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government—Paudie Coffey

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection—Kevin Humphreys

Minister of State at the Departments of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Transport, Tourism and Sport and the Environment, Community and Local Government—Ann Phelan

Minister of State at the Departments of Justice and Equality, Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and Health—Aodhán Ó Ríordáin

Jobs Data

1. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach the number of jobs lost and gained in County Kildare in each of the past six years to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7728/16]

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 employment in the State. The most recent figures available are for Q4 2015.

Estimates of employment are produced by NUTS 3 Regions. The NUTS 3 Mid-East region includes Kildare, Meath and Wicklow. Due to methodology and sample size it is not possible to produce reliable Kildare County estimates from the QNHS.

Table 1a shows the number of persons aged 15 years and over in employment classified by NUTS 3 Mid-East region in Q4 of each year from 2009 to 2015.

Table 1b shows the annual change in the numbers of persons aged 15 years and over in employment classified by NUTS 3 Mid-East region in Q4 of each year from 2010 to 2015.

As Table 1a shows the overall stock of persons employed at given points in time, the annual changes which are calculated using these stock figures depend both on the number of jobs lost and jobs created over the period in question. The QNHS does not record whether a job is newly created.

Table 1a Persons aged 15 years and over in employment (ILO) classified by Mid-East region, Q4 2009-Q4 2015 -

‘000

	Q4 09	Q4 10	Q4 11	Q4 12	Q4 13	Q4 14	Q4 15
In em- ployment	232.3	226.3	229.9	225.5	225.9	237.9	235.8

Table 1b Persons aged 15 years and over in employment (ILO) classified by Mid-East region, Q4 2010-Q4 2015 - Annual change -

‘000

	Q4 10	Q4 11	Q4 12	Q4 13	Q4 14	Q4 15
In employ- ment	-6.0	3.6	-4.4	0.4	12.0	-2.1

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

Source: Quarterly National Household Survey, Central Statistics Office.

Reference period: Q4=Oct-Dec.

Appointments to State Boards

2. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Taoiseach the regional breakdown of all members appointed by the Government or him to State boards, agencies and bodies in 2015 and to date in 2016 broken down by agency and by regions (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7485/16]

The Taoiseach: I make appointments to the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) and the National Statistics Board (NSB). Since the start of 2015 I have made one appointment to the NESC and no appointments to the NSB.

Ms. Patricia King, General Secretary of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, was appointed to the NESC in March 2015. Her appointment was made following nomination by the ICTU 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. While the ICTU is a national body, its headquarters is in Dublin.

20 April 2016

3. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Taoiseach the details of vacant State properties and land, including car parks not in use, owned by his Department or by bodies and agencies under the aegis of his Department by square footage, by location and by local authority, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7521/16]

The Taoiseach: My Department does not own any properties, land or car parks. Properties occupied by my Department and the National Economic and Social Development Office are provided and managed by the Office of Public Works.

Departmental Data

4. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Taoiseach if he will each provide a list, in tabular form, of the following information in respect of the period 1 January 2016 to date: each statutory instrument signed; each contract entered into by his Department or agency thereof; each tender issued by his Department or agency thereof; each tender awarded by his Department or agency thereof; each State board appointment made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7522/16]

The Taoiseach: I have made no appointments to the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) or the National Statistics Board (NSB) to date in 2016.

The tables detail each Statutory Instrument signed; each Request for Tender issued and each contract entered into by my Department and the National Economic and Social Development Office (NESDO) from 1 January to 19 April 2016.

Statutory Instruments signed since 1 January 2016

Title of Statutory Instrument	Date signed by Taoiseach
Statistics (Monthly Industrial Inquiry) Order 2016	05/01/2016
Statistics (Monthly Services Inquiry) Order 2016	26/01/2016
Statistics (Business Energy Use Survey) Order 2016	29/02/2016
Statistics (Job Vacancy Survey) Order 2016	29/02/2016
Statistics (Retail Sales Inquiry) Order 2016	29/02/2016
Statistics (National Survey of Transport of Goods by Road) Order 2016	29/03/2016
Statistics (Business Expenditure on Research and Development Survey) Order 2016	08/04/2016

Statutory Instruments signed by the Taoiseach on behalf of the Government since 1 January 2016	Originating Department	Date signed
Maritime Jurisdiction (Straight Baselines) Order 2016	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade	13/01/2016

Planning and Development Act 2000 (Designation of Strategic Development Zone: North Quays, Waterford City) Order 2016	Department of Environment, Community & Local Government	19/01/2016
---	---	------------

Contracts entered into since 1 January 2016

Name of Company	Service	Status of Tender
Banqueting Food Systems	Catering for State Reception, Dublin Castle, 27th March 2016 for the Department of the Taoiseach	Tender issued and awarded. Contract entered into and completed
Apex Fire	Fire Extinguishers Maintenance for the Department of the Taoiseach	Tender issued and awarded. Contract entered into.
Cannon Hygiene	Sanitary / Hygiene Service for the Department of the Taoiseach	Tender issued and awarded. Contract entered into.
Ann Brady McQuillans	Provision of Professional Services (Preparation of Audit File 2015) to National Economic and Social Development Office	Office of Government Procurement Framework. Contract entered into and completed

Requests for Tenders issued since 1 January 2016

Service	Tender Status
Provision and Delivery of Stationery Services for the Department of the Taoiseach	Deadline for receipt of Tenders Monday, 25 January 2016. No contract awarded.
Provision of Annual IT Maintenance and Support Services to National Economic and Social Development Office	Deadline for receipt of Tenders Tuesday, 29 March 2016. No contract awarded.

Child Benefit Eligibility

5. **Deputy Shane Ross** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her plans to extend the payment of the children's allowance beyond a child's 18th birthday in circumstances where they are still in full-time second level education; if not, the alternative sources of financial support for such families; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7361/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Child Benefit is a monthly payment made to families with children in respect of all qualified children up to the age of 16 years. The payment continues to be paid in respect of children up to their 18th birthday who are in full-time education, or who have a disability.

Child Benefit is currently paid to around 620,000 families in respect of some 1.19 million children, with an estimated expenditure in the order of over €2 billion in 2016. Child Benefit is an important source of income for all families and in Budget 2016 the Government increased Child Benefit by €5 per month, at a cost of €72 million.

Budget 2009 reduced the age for eligibility for Child Benefit from 19 years to less than 18 years. A value for money review of child income supports, published by the Department of

Social Protection in 2010, found that the participation pattern of children in education supports the current age limit for Child Benefit.

Families on low incomes can avail of a number of provisions to social welfare schemes that support children in full-time education until the age of 22, including:

- qualified child increases (IQCs) with primary social welfare payments;
- family income supplement (FIS) for low-paid employees with children;
- the back to school clothing and footwear allowance for low income families (paid at the full-time second level education rate).

These schemes provide targeted assistance that is directly linked with household income and thereby supports low-income families with older children participating in full-time education.

Employment Support Services

6. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the extent to which it is expected that the skills available among those persons on the live register can be matched to the skill requirements of the workplace, in respect of both the indigenous and the foreign direct investment sectors, over the course of the next three years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7727/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Pathways to Work 2016-2020 sets out a comprehensive programme aimed at helping jobseekers to return to work. Together with the national and regional Action Plans for Jobs, Enterprise 2015, the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities, the Further Education and Training Strategy, the National Skills Strategy and the Review of Apprenticeships, it is designed to ensure that Ireland's workforce is equipped to respond flexibly to the demands of a growing economy and that unemployed jobseekers are positioned and supported to take up employment opportunities in the economy.

In framing and implementing these strategies the Government has consulted widely with stakeholders including employers, trade unions, and representatives of unemployed jobseekers. In addition the State has a number of institutional arrangements in place that operate on an ongoing basis to inform the development and implementation of strategies. In the case of the Pathways to Work strategy this includes the Labour Market Council, an independent group of industry leaders, advocates for unemployed jobseekers, trade unions and labour market experts.

The Department has also established a dedicated Employer Relations Division and Employer Engagement Teams in every Division who encourage, support and incentivise employers to recruit unemployed people on the Live Register. As part of this role they work to match employer job specifications with people on the Live Register. To support this activity a new www.JobsIreland.ie online system will be implemented later this year that will, among other things, enable employers to readily identify candidates who meet their skills requirements and enable the Department's case officers to further support jobseekers. Data from the new system will provide real-time information on the skills and competencies being sought by employers and on any skills gaps. This will be very useful to the relevant Government Departments and agencies seeking to address such gaps.

In a manner similar to the co-operation between the Department of Social Protection and the Labour Market Council, the planning and provision of education and training programmes by

the Department of Education and Skills and its agencies is informed by the work of the Expert Group of Future Skills Needs which produces annual reports projecting the future skills needs of Irish industry.

The Department of Social Protection also works closely with the Department of Education and Skills, SOLAS and the Education and Training Boards to ensure that the strategic reforms underway in the education and training sectors, such as the establishment of Regional Skills Fora, are informed by the skills and competencies profile of unemployed jobseekers.

In this regard training programmes such as MOMENTUM are specifically designed to provide education and training to long term unemployed people to help them gain skills and to access work opportunities in identified growth sectors. It is delivered in partnership with both public and private education and training providers who have developed linkages with employers. Participants receive training in areas with recognised skill shortages where existing vacancies have been identified.

The Department also collaborates with the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, the IDA and Enterprise Ireland to co-ordinate efforts to respond to the needs of employers and jobseekers. A Steering Group of senior officials monitors implementation of a “Protocol for Co-operation” between the agencies.

As an example of the kind of close inter-agency partnership taking place to ensure that jobseekers are equipped with the skills necessary to meet industry needs, the Departments of Social Protection, Department of Education and Skills and Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation are co-hosting an event focussed specifically on “Effective Collaboration” to take place on 17 May 2017. The event will be attended by representatives from all relevant agencies who will hear best practice exemplars and discuss ways to improve effectiveness.

Social Welfare Benefits Data

7. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her views on the projected numbers of recipients of jobseeker’s benefit and jobseeker’s allowance over the next five years and to provide a table including the estimated number of recipients in a given week each year and the percentage change; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7258/16]

8. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her views on the projected numbers of recipients of supplementary welfare allowance over the next five years and to provide a table including the estimated number of recipients in a given week each year and the percentage change; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7259/16]

9. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her views on the projected numbers of recipients of illness benefit and disability allowance over the next five years and to provide a table including the estimated number of recipients in a given week each year and the percentage change; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7260/16]

10. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her views on the projected numbers of recipients of one-parent family payment over the next five years and to provide a table including the estimated number of recipients in a given week each year and the percentage change; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7261/16]

11. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her

views the projected numbers of recipients of carer's benefit and carer's allowance over the next five years and to provide a table including the estimated number of recipients in a given week each year and the percentage change; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7262/16]

12. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her views on the projected numbers of recipients of State pension, contributory and non-contributory, over the next five years and to provide a table including the estimated number of recipients in a given week each year and the percentage change; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7263/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 7 to 12, inclusive, together.

The following table provides the estimated average weekly numbers of weekly payments underlying allocations in the 2016 REV for each of the schemes covered by the Deputy's questions.

Scheme	Average number of weekly payments in 2016
Jobseeker's Allowance	239,260
Jobseekers Benefit	38,300
Supplementary Welfare Allowance Basic Payments	14,900
One Parent Family Payment	41,390
Disability Allowance	119,270
Illness Benefit	56,550
Carers Allowance	62,860
Carers Benefit	2,300
State Pension (Contributory)	386,800 (Note)
State Pension (Non-Contributory)	95,030

Note: number of recipients on State Pension (Contributory) includes 38,200 due a payment each week but paid once every four weeks.

To qualify for a primary weekly social welfare payment a person must experience a defined contingency, such as unemployment, disability, illness or lone parenthood, and satisfy either a social insurance contribution requirement (for a PRSI based payment) or a means test (for payments funded through general taxation). The incidence of certain contingencies can be difficult to predict and because of this, it is not possible to predict scheme demand over a five year period with accuracy.

For many schemes, it is difficult to project the change in recipients for each year over the next 5 years due to the potential impact of overall economic performance, labour market performance, customer circumstances and demographic changes. Recipient number trends during 2015 and the first half of 2016 will be reviewed over the next few months, with the objective of finalising the forecast of recipient numbers for 2017.

The number of recipients on Jobseekers Allowance and Jobseekers Benefit is dependent upon economic performance, labour force performance, the availability and take-up of in-work supports and transfers to working age employment supports. The 2016 REV Estimates includes a financial provision for jobseekers with an average Live Register of 305,250. The 2016 Expenditure Report published at the time of the 2016 Budget in October 2016, assumed an average Live Register of 289,000 in 2017 and 273,000 in 2018. These Estimates are subject to review

and change having regard to the performance of the labour market in the lead up to Budget 2017 later in the year. At this stage, there is no Live Register forecast for the years 2019 to 2021. Having regard to all of these factors, it is not possible to provide the number of weekly payments on Jobseekers Allowance and Jobseekers Benefit for each year over the next five years.

The number of recipients on State Pension (Contributory) is dependent upon life expectancy, the contributions record of recipients and the age at which a state pension becomes payable. Section 7 of the Social Welfare and Pensions Act of 2011 provides for increasing the pension age to 67 in 2021. At present, demographic factors are likely to see the number of people qualifying for State Pension (Contributory) increasing in the range 17,000 to 18,000 each year up to 2021.

The number of recipients on State Pension (Non-Contributory) is dependent upon the number of people of pension age not qualifying for State Pension (Contributory), and the means of such people. At present, the numbers accessing this scheme are falling by a few hundred each year.

The number of recipients on Illness Benefit is dependent upon the numbers of people in employment, the increasing age profile of the labour force, the average duration of illness or injury and the continuing impact of previous budget measures. Given the range of potential variables, it is not possible to provide the number of weekly payments on Illness Benefit for each year over the next five years.

To qualify for Disability Allowance, a person must be substantially restricted in undertaking suitable employment, be aged between 16 and under 66, must satisfy a means test as well as a medical test and be habitually resident in the State. The following table provides the average number of recipients each year on Disability Allowance over the last five years:

Year	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Average Number of Recipients	100,280	101,550	103,100	108,800	115,030	119,270

While numbers on Disability Allowance have risen significantly over the last three years, it is more difficult to quantify the rate of increase for each year over the next five years given the range of variables outlined above affecting the number of recipients.

The numbers of recipients on One Parent Family Payment is dependent upon the number of lone parents where their youngest child is within the qualifying age for One Parent Family Payment satisfying a means test, availability of in-work supports for parents and economic circumstances of recipients, including their participation in the labour force. The number of recipients on Carers Allowance and Carers Benefit is dependent upon the availability of carers to care for people requiring care. All claims are subject to a medical assessment to determine the level of care required, with Carers Allowance being subject to a means test and Carers Benefit being subject to a contribution condition test. Given the range of potential variables, it is not possible to provide the number of weekly payments on these schemes for each year over the next five years.

Finally, the number of recipients claiming the Social Welfare Allowance Basic Payments scheme is mainly influenced by the number of people receiving interim payments while awaiting a decision on their primary scheme (for example, Disability Allowance or Jobseekers Allowance). Given variations in the throughput of new claims arising from various contingencies outlined above across the Department's range of primary schemes, it is difficult to project trends for each year on this scheme over the next five years.

Social Welfare Benefits Data

13. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection to provide a table indicating the estimated annual cost of index-linking each of the following payments to inflation over the next five years: jobseeker's benefit; jobseeker's allowance; supplementary welfare allowance; illness benefit; disability allowance; one-parent family payment; carer's benefit; carer's allowance; State pension, contributory; and State pension, non-contributory; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7264/16]

14. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the estimated annual cost of index-linking all weekly social protection payments to inflation over the next five years. [7265/16]

15. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the estimated annual cost of index-linking all social protection payments to inflation over the next five years. [7266/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 13 to 15, inclusive, together.

The information that the Deputy has requested is detailed in the table. The costings are based on 2016 recipient numbers, and include the cost of proportionate increases in reduced rates and the qualified adult rates of payment. It should be noted that the costings do not take into account changing trends (increases or decreases) in recipient numbers from 2017 onwards.

The Harmonised Index of Consumer Prices used in the table is sourced from the Department of Finance's 2016 Budget Day book. This provides forecasts for inflation for the five years 2016 to 2020 inclusive; however, there is no projection available for 2021.

Cost of Social Protection Payment Rate Increases linked to the Harmonised Index of Consumer Prices, 2017 to 2020

Year	2017 – 1.5%€m	2018 – 1.7%€m	2019 – 1.9%€m	2020 – 1.9%€m
Jobseeker's Benefit	5.7	6.5	7.6	7.8
Jobseeker's Allowance	39.2	44.5	51.8	52.9
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	2.5	2.9	3.3	3.3
Illness Benefit	8.4	9.6	11.1	11.4
Disability Allowance	18.4	21.0	24.3	24.9
One Parent Family Payment	6.0	6.9	8.0	8.2
Carer's Benefit	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.5
Carer's Allowance	8.1	9.2	10.5	10.7
State Pension (Contributory)	73.2	84.1	96.5	98.6

Year	2017 – 1.5%€m	2018 – 1.7%€m	2019 – 1.9%€m	2020 – 1.9%€m
State Pension (Non-Contributory)	16.6	19.1	22.1	22.1
All weekly Social Welfare payments	246.3	281.5	324.3	331.4
All Social Welfare payments	287.4	328.9	378.2	386.2

The cost of increasing all weekly social welfare payments in line with projected inflation includes the qualified child increase, the Living Alone Allowance and the over 80s allowance. It also includes increasing the rates for Community Employment, Tús, Rural Social Scheme, Gateway, JobBridge and Job Initiative but it does not include increasing the top-ups paid on these schemes. Furthermore, it includes increasing the average payment value of the Family Income Supplement in line with projected inflation.

In addition to the weekly social welfare payments, all social welfare payments includes monthly Child Benefit, Domiciliary Care Allowance and Household Benefits scheme payments, and the annual Carer's Support Grant. Provision is also made for an increase in line with inflation for Fuel Allowance and the Widowed Parent Grant. All of these costings are based on 2016 recipient numbers.

Disability Allowance Applications

16. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if an application under the disability allowance scheme by a person (details supplied) in County Wicklow will be expedited; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7269/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I confirm that the Department is in receipt of an application for disability allowance from the above named person on 26 January 2016. On completion of the necessary investigations on all aspects of the claim a decision will be made and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

The processing time for individual disability allowance claims may vary in accordance with their relative complexity in terms of the three main qualifying criteria, the person's circumstances and the information they provide in support of their claim.

Community Services Programme

17. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection when an application for a community services project for the Cross Roads Community Centre in Cong, County Mayo, was received; when a decision will be made on this application; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7271/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): The community services programme (CSP) provides valuable resourcing for service delivery undertaken by not-for-profit companies and co-operatives in communities around the country. Funding of €46m has been provided for the programme in 2016 which will maintain the current level of activity. Given the restrictions on resources, the Department has been unable to make an open call for new proposals to the programme for a number of years.

Service providers must operate community or social enterprises that are able to deliver tangible services and are capable of generating non-public revenues from their operations by way of charging fees, sales and/or fundraising. The programme is not intended to represent full funding for any operation. Rather, funding is provided on the basis of a contribution to the cost of full-time staffing positions to support the delivery of the service and can include management and non-management elements.

Cross Roads Community Centre in Cong have submitted a proposal for funding under the programme and the final details of their application were received by the Department on 9 March 2016. The Centre's expression of interest is currently being appraised by Pobal and a decision is expected in the coming weeks.

Disability Allowance Applications

18. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection when a person (details supplied) in County Cork will receive a decision on their application under the disability allowance scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7276/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I confirm that the Department is in receipt of an application for disability allowance from the above named person on 15 March 2016. On completion of the necessary investigations on all aspects of the claim a decision will be made and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

The processing time for individual disability allowance claims may vary in accordance with their relative complexity in terms of the three main qualifying criteria, the person's circumstances and the information they provide in support of their claim.

Invalidity Pension Applications

19. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection when a person (details supplied) in County Cork will receive a decision on their application under the invalidity pension scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7279/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned has been awarded invalidity pension with effect from the 28 April 2016. Payment will issue to her nominated bank account on the 28 April 2016. The person in question was notified of this decision on the 14 April 2016.

Social Welfare Code

20. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection to review and revise the casual docket signing-on system to cater for those persons whose working week does not align with that of her Department (details supplied). [7298/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The jobseeker's benefit and jobseeker's allowance schemes provide income support for people who have lost work and are unable to find alternative full-time employment. The 2016 Estimates for the Department provide for expenditure this year on the jobseekers' scheme of €2.8 billion.

It is a fundamental qualifying condition of both schemes that a person must be fully unem-

ployed for four days in any period of seven consecutive days, so a person working four or more days a week will not qualify for jobseeker's allowance. However, there is flexibility to look back as well as forward when considering whether a person is unemployed for four days in any period of 7 consecutive days. This can mean that a casual worker may qualify for a jobseeker's payment subject to the number of days they were unemployed in a previous week.

It is recognised that a changing labour market has resulted in a move away from the more traditional work patterns, resulting in an increase in the number of persons employed for less than a full week.

This is an important policy issue for the Department but any changes to the current criteria could have significant cost implications for the jobseekers' schemes. In particular, increasing flexibility in the system could potentially, depending on the behavioural response, increase the number of people claiming a jobseeker's payment thereby increasing the total cost of the schemes to the Exchequer.

Invalidity Pension Appeals

21. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection when a person (details supplied) in County Carlow will receive notice of the outcome of an appeal under the invalidity pension scheme. [7299/16]

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 referred to an Appeals Officer on 21 March 2016, who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

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

Carer's Allowance Applications

22. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the reason a person (details supplied) in County Cork was refused a carer's allowance; if this claim was appealed to the independent appeals office; if so, the outcome of this appeal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7304/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Firstly, I would like to convey my sympathy and that of the Department to the person concerned for their bereavement.

The person concerned was refused carer's allowance on the grounds that he failed to cooperate with a social welfare inspector (SWI) and, as a consequence, the SWI was not able to complete his report nor to establish means. The person concerned was notified on 4 November 2014 of this decision, the reason for it and of his right of review and appeal.

The person concerned appealed this decision and the case was submitted to the Social Welfare Appeals office for determination. An Appeals Officer (AO), having fully considered all of the available evidence, disallowed the appeal.

The person concerned was notified on the 25 September 2015 of the AO's decision and was

provided at that time with an explanation of the basis for this decision. Under Social Welfare legislation, the decision of an AO is final and conclusive and may only be reviewed in the light of additional evidence or new facts.

Social Welfare Benefits Applications

23. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if an application under the carer's allowance scheme and the household package scheme will be approved for persons (details supplied) in County Kilkenny. [7310/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned was notified on 8 March 2016 that his application for a TV Licence had been approved with effect from the expiry date of his current licence.

The application for carer's allowance from the person concerned was awarded on 8 April 2016 and the first payment issued to the person's nominated post office on 14 April 2016.

Arrears of allowance due from 26 November 2015 were issued by cheque on 12 April 2016. The person concerned was notified of these details on 8 April 2016.

An application for an Electricity Allowance (EA) was received in this office on 4 April 2016 from the person concerned and their entitlement to it is currently being examined. When a decision has been made the person concerned will be notified of the outcome without delay.

Carer's Allowance Applications

24. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection to expedite and approve an application by a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny under the carer's allowance scheme made in November 2015. [7317/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I confirm that the Department received an application for Carer's Allowance (CA) from the person concerned on 4 December 2015. It is a condition for receipt of a CA that the person being cared for must have a disability whose effect is that they require full-time care and attention.

This is defined as requiring from another person, continual supervision and frequent assistance throughout the day in connection with normal bodily functions or continuous supervision in order to avoid danger to him or herself and likely to require that level of care for at least twelve months.

The evidence submitted in support of this application was examined and the deciding officer decided that this evidence did not indicate that the requirement for full-time care was satisfied.

The person concerned was notified on 9 April 2016 of this decision, the reason for it and of his right of review and appeal.

Disability Allowance Payments

25. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if payment under the disability allowance scheme to a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny will be made to the person's parent; and if the application will be expedited. [7320/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): There is already an agency arrangement in existence in relation to the person in question. There is a procedure to be followed in order to vary this arrangement. In the first instance, the person applying to be the new agent must complete and return the form that the Department has issued to her. There is also a section which must be completed and signed by the treating physician of the person in question. On receipt of this completed form, the Department will examine it and make any further enquiries necessary in order to make a decision regarding approval of an agent. Once the decision is made, all relevant parties will be notified.

Invalidity Pension Applications

26. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the status of an application by a person (details supplied) in County Meath under the invalidity pension scheme; and when the person can expect a decision on the case. [7330/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned has been awarded invalidity pension with effect from the 26 November 2015. Payment will issue to his nominated post office on the 21 April 2016. Any arrears due from 26 November 2015 to 20 April 2016 (less any overlapping social welfare payment and/or outstanding overpayment) will issue in due course. The person in question was notified of this decision on 11 April 2016.

Carer's Allowance Data

27. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the waiting time for applications for carer's allowance to be decided upon; the number of applications currently awaiting a decision by a deciding officer; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7332/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Department is committed to providing a quality service to all its customers. This includes ensuring that applications are processed and that decisions on entitlement are made as quickly as possible.

The average waiting time for carer's allowance (CA) applications at the end of March is 19 weeks. At the end of March there were 5,851 CA applications awaiting decision. The current average time to process a CA application is mainly as a consequence of continued strong claim intake. However, delays in processing are frequently caused by the customer failing to fully complete the claim form or failing to attach the supporting documentation that is requested on the application form.

The Department has introduced a number of measures to address the efficiency of claim processing for CA in light of the current waiting times, including the assignment of temporary and full-time staff and the facility to assign overtime working where appropriate.

These measures will, over time, lead to a reduction in the average waiting time. The position is being closely monitored and kept under review by the Department

Carer's Allowance Delays

28. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection to employ ad-

ditional staff to deal with the lengthy delays in assessing carer's allowance application forms; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7333/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): My Department, like all Government Departments and agencies, is required to operate within a staff ceiling figure and a commensurate administrative staffing budget, which for this Department involved a significant reduction in staff numbers for 2015 and a further reduction for 2016.

Within these constraints, the Department is focusing on prioritising the filling of critical posts. The staffing needs for all areas within the Department, including the Carer's Allowance area, are continuously reviewed, taking account of workloads, management priorities and the competing demands arising, to ensure that the best use is made of all available resources with a view to providing an efficient service to those who rely on the schemes operated by the Department.

The Department is committed to providing a quality service to all its customers. This includes ensuring that applications are processed and that decisions on entitlement are made as quickly as possible. Unfortunately, the average time taken at present to decide a new Carer's Allowance application is running at nineteen weeks. Additional resources have recently been provided to the section in order to improve the waiting times for new applications.

Carer's Allowance Applications

29. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection when a decision under the carer's allowance scheme will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7338/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I confirm that the Department received an application for carer's allowance (CA) from the person concerned on 27 January 2016. Unfortunately, the average time taken at present to decide a new application is running at 19 weeks. Additional resources have been provided to the CA section in order to improve the waiting times for new applications and they are working hard to make this happen.

This application will be processed as quickly as possible and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome. In the meantime, both the person concerned and his spouse are in receipt of a weekly social welfare support.

Community Employment Schemes Administration

30. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if bank charges for community employment schemes are to be paid for by her Department or by the sub-schemes involved. [7345/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): The Department provides funding to Community Employment (CE) scheme sponsors with which it has a contract under four sub-headings - participant allowances, supervision, training/development, and materials.

All consumable services and materials necessary for the effective operation of the project will normally be considered for approval, including such items as employers and public liability insurances, tools, stationery, audit fees, bank charges (excluding bank interest), postage, protective clothing, hire of equipment, etc.

Rent Supplement Scheme Applications

31. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection when rent support will be increased in line with market trends in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7353/16]

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

Rent Supplement Scheme Applications

32. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if rent allowance will be reinstated as a matter of urgency in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare whose one-parent family payment has been restored; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7366/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The client concerned was requested to provide verification of her current income from employment on 12/4/16. This documentation has not, to date, been received by the Department. On receipt of same, the client's entitlement can be re-assessed and claim re-instated accordingly.

Family Income Supplement Appeals

33. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection to provide an update on the progress of a family income supplement appeal for a person (details supplied) in County Dublin; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7379/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an Appeals Officer, having fully considered all of the available evidence including that adduced at the oral hearing, decided to disallow the appeal of the person concerned. Under Social Welfare legislation, the decision of an Appeals Officer is final and conclusive and may only be reviewed in the light of additional evidence or new facts.

I am advised that the person concerned has submitted additional evidence and that the file was recalled from the Department of Social Protection. On receipt of the file, the case will be referred back to the Appeals Officer to review and the person concerned will be contacted when the review of his/her appeal has been finalised.

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

Carer's Allowance Applications

34. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the status of an application under the carer's allowance scheme by a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7394/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I confirm that the Department received an application for carer's allowance (CA) from the person concerned on 25 January 2016. Unfortunately, the average time taken at present to decide a new application is running at 19 weeks. Additional resources have been provided to the CA section in order to improve the waiting times for new applications and they are working hard to make this happen.

This application will be processed as quickly as possible and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome. In the meantime, both the person concerned and his spouse are in receipt of a weekly social welfare support.

Carer's Allowance Applications

35. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection when an application under the carer's allowance scheme by a person (details supplied) in County Roscommon will be processed; the reason for the delay; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7406/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned has been in receipt of a carer's allowance (CA) since 14/10/2014.

When an applicant is getting CA, they are entitled to an increase for a qualified child (IQC) up to 22 years of age, if the child is in full-time day education and not in receipt of a social welfare payment in their own right.

As the 18 year old child of the person concerned is in receipt of a social welfare payment in their own right, they cannot be considered to be a qualified child on their parent's CA.

Invalidity Pension Applications

36. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the progress of an application by a person (details supplied) in County Dublin under the invalidity pension scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7409/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned has been awarded invalidity pension with effect from the 31 March 2016. Payment will issue to his nominated bank account on the 28 April 2016. Any arrears due from 31 March 2016 to 27 April 2016 (less any overlapping social welfare payment and/or outstanding overpayment) will issue in due course. The person in question was notified of this decision on 18 April 2016.

Part-Time Job Incentive Scheme Eligibility

37. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the reason a person (details supplied) in County Kildare appears to not qualify for participation in the part-time incentive scheme; if their eligibility can be reviewed with a view to them taking part; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7422/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned made an application in March 2016 for Part Time Job Initiative (PTJI). One of the qualifying conditions of this scheme is that the person making the application must be in receipt of a jobseekers payment that exceeds the rate of payment of the PTJI scheme. The PTJI rate payable

is €119.00 and the jobseekers rate the person concerned qualifies for is €100. Subsequently the application for Part Time Job Initiative was disallowed on the 31st March, 2016

Departmental Programmes

38. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the reason a person (details supplied) in County Donegal was refused entry to a Level 5 certificate in health care support; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7464/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The aim of the Healthcare Support Program is to enable the learner to develop the knowledge, skill and competencies to work as part of a multidisciplinary team in the provision of effective and appropriate healthcare supports to clients in a variety of settings. On successful completion of the programme, learners may progress to further education and training or to employment.

Potential participants must satisfy a number of qualifying criteria including having reached a minimum of a FETAC Level 4 Major Award or its equivalent. The person concerned has not reached the FETAC level of qualification required. The Case Officer in the Department's INTREO office in Letterkenny discussed a number of possible training options with the person concerned. These options would enable her to achieve a FETAC level that would subsequently enable her to participate in the Healthcare Support Programme. However the person concerned did not wish to avail of these opportunities.

Appointments to State Boards

39. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the regional breakdown of all members appointed by the Government or her to State boards, agencies and bodies in 2015 and to date in 2016 broken down by agency and by regions (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7484/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The statutory bodies operating under the aegis of the Department of Social Protection are the Citizens Information Board, the Pensions Authority, the Pensions Council, the Pensions Ombudsman (which does not have a Board) and the Social Welfare Tribunal.

Details relating to appointments to State Boards, as requested by the Deputy, are outlined in the following tables.

Citizens Information Board

Year	Dublin	Rest of Leinster	Munster	Connacht	Ulster(9 counties)
2015	4	Nil	Nil	2	Nil
2016 (to date)	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil

Pensions Authority

Year	Dublin	Rest of Leinster	Munster	Connacht	Ulster (9 counties)
2015	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil

2016 (to date)	1	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
----------------	---	-----	-----	-----	-----

Pensions Council

Year	Dublin	Rest of Leinster	Munster	Connacht	Ulster (9 counties)
2015	12	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
2016 (to date)	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil

Social Welfare Tribunal

Year	Dublin	Rest of Leinster	Munster	Connacht	Ulster (9 counties)
2015	5	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
2016 (to date)	0	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil

JobsPlus Scheme

40. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will engage with the Departments of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation and Children and Youth Affairs to make the benefits currently available to employers availing of the JobsPlus scheme available to parents seeking to employ persons to provide affordable child care in the home; her views on the many benefits that would accrue from such a development for the child care worker, parents and Exchequer; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7487/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): As the Deputy is aware, the JobsPlus incentive provides for a direct monthly payment to employers who recruit employees from the Live Register and those transitioning into employment. It provides two levels of payment - €7,500 or €10,000 over two years - paid in monthly instalments provided the employment is maintained. The rate of payment depends on the length of time the person recruited was unemployed.

JobsPlus is open to all eligible employers, including those employing childcare workers. If a parent employs a person to provide childcare in the home, they can avail of the incentive if they are a registered employer and compliant with Irish tax and employment law.

The employment offered to the childcare employee must be of a full-time nature of at least 30 hours per week spanning over four days per week. Under the National Minimum Wage Act 2000, employees are entitled to a minimum wage, currently €9.15 per hour. Employers recruiting under the JobsPlus incentive are required to comply with the Act and other statutory provisions in respect of pay and conditions.

There are many benefits for employers and employees under the JobsPlus incentive. Every new full-time job supported under JobsPlus not only reduces social welfare payments made by the State, but critically reduces the payments made to the longer term unemployed who are more likely to become long-term dependents of welfare. The incentive also influences employers to consider longer-term unemployed jobseekers over those more recently unemployed or moving employment. In addition, these new full-time workers will contribute to the Exchequer in terms of tax and PRSI paid.

Community Welfare Services Data

41. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the number of service users who attended the weekly community welfare service clinic held at the inspector's office in Falcarragh, County Donegal, for each month in 2015 and in 2016 to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7491/16]

42. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the reason the weekly clinics held as part of community welfare services in the Falcarragh and Dunfanaghy areas of County Donegal have been merged; if she is aware of the negative impact which this reduction to services will have on service users in terms of having their individual welfare needs assessed and the appropriate allowances allotted; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7492/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 41 and 42 together.

The number of customers seeking to access the Department's Community Welfare Service (CWS) in Falcarragh has fallen considerably, to a level where it is no longer sustainable to maintain a clinic there. At present the number of weekly customers attending the Falcarragh clinic has fallen to an average of 5 a week or less. The fall in numbers is due to the far quicker turnaround on decisions on long term Social Welfare payments and also due to the administration of rental support being transferred to the Local Authority under the Housing Assistance Payment scheme.

The reduced numbers of clients who may continue to seek assistance at the Falcarragh clinic are being facilitated at the nearby weekly clinic in Dunfanaghy Intreo Office where the full range of DSP Services will also be available to customers.

If a person is unable to travel to the Dunfanaghy clinic, for example due to illness, a phone number has been provided for the customer to contact the CWS. In such circumstances, a home visit by a Community Welfare Officer will be arranged if necessary. Arrangements for emergency cases requiring the assistance of the CWS outside of normal working hours will also continue to remain in place in Falcarragh. A contact phone number for accessing this is with An Garda Síochána, HSE and other relevant Authorities.

The local Social Welfare Inspector will continue to be available to customers in Falcarragh and will continue to provide a public access day on Friday mornings.

The most recent statistics in relation to the numbers of service users who attended the weekly CWS Clinic held at the Inspector's Office in Falcarragh, in County Donegal is set out in the following table.

Attendance at Falcarragh CWS Clinic From 15th July 2015 - 31 March 2016

Date	Number attending
JULY 2015	
15TH	8
22ND	11
29th	5
AUGUST 2015	
5th	4
12th	11

20 April 2016

Date	Number attending
19th	10
26th	4
SEPTEMBER 2015	
2nd	3
9th	2
16th	4
23rd	5
30th	5
OCTOBER 2015	
7th	3
14th	7
21st	5
28th	7
NOVEMBER 2015	
4th	8
11th	3
18th	4
25th	8
DECEMBER 2015	
2nd	3
9th	4
16th	-
JANUARY 2016	
6th	2
13th	-
20th	7
27th	10
FEBRUARY 2016	
3rd	2
10th	11
17th	4
24th	6
MARCH 2016	
2nd	-
9th	5
16th	5
23rd	-
30th	8

Household Benefits Scheme

43. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her plans to expand the eligibility criteria for the household benefits package to allow adult semi-dependent children getting jobseeker's allowance of no more than €100 per week to remain in the family home while parents in receipt of disability allowance or invalidity pension qualify for

the benefit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7495/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The household benefits package (HHB) comprises the electricity or gas allowance, and the free television licence. The package is generally available to people living in the State, aged 66 years or over who are in receipt of a social welfare type payment or who satisfy a means test. The package is also available to carers and people with disabilities under the age of 66 who are in receipt of certain welfare type payments. Widows and widowers aged from 60 to 65 whose late spouses had been in receipt of the household benefits package retain that entitlement. Therefore anyone aged under 70 years of age must be in receipt of a qualifying payment from the Department or satisfy a means test in order to qualify for HHB. They must also satisfy the household composition test meaning they must live alone or only with certain excepted people, which are -

- A qualified adult (a spouse, civil partner or cohabitant is considered a qualified adult if a person is receiving an allowance for him/her with their payment, or would be receiving a payment for them but for the fact that they are in receipt of a payment in their own right)

- Dependent children under the age of 18, or under the age of 22 if in full-time education (a certificate from the school/college must be supplied for those aged 18 or over)

- A person who is so incapacitated as to require constant care and attention for at least 12 months (medical certification may be required)

- A person(s) who would qualify for the allowance in his/her own right (for example, a person getting a State pension)

- A person who is providing the claimant or someone in their household with constant care and attention, if they are so incapacitated as to require constant care and attention for at least 12 months (medical certification may be required).

I have no plans to change the qualifying criteria for the household benefits package at this time as any decision to do so would have budgetary consequences and would have to be considered in the context of budget negotiations.

Community Welfare Services

44. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the analysis completed on the functioning of the community welfare services where face-to-face clinics were withdrawn previously, for example, Clane, County Kildare; how many of the 24 hour commitments were maintained; how many were longer than 48 hours; how the clients were catered for; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7496/16]

46. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her plans for the resources she gains following the closure of community welfare services that are open to the public, including office spaces, equipment and full-time equivalent resources; how she intends to redeploy these; if she intends to allocate offices for other use; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7498/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 44 and 46 together.

Following the transfer of the Community Welfare Service (CWS) from the Health Service Executive to the Department in 2011, the Department has re-engineered its business model and

staffing resources to support the provision of integrated services across all business streams involved in the delivery of localised services. This included transferring CWS staff into case officer roles to meet activation commitments under the Pathways to Work Programme. As part of this strategy, the Department is engaged in the delivery of integrated Intreo centres, which provide a full range of services, including the CWS, generally available in one location.

CWS clinics were generally operating from Health Service Executive (HSE) premises. Where CWS service delivery has been structured these services are now being provided from Departmental offices. Premises, furniture and other equipment that remained in the ownership of the HSE were retained by that Agency. The staffing and office requirements for all areas within the Department are continuously reviewed in the context of the ongoing development of integrated services, to ensure that the best use is made of all available resources with a view to providing an efficient service to those who rely on the schemes operated by the Department.

A number of changes were made in January 2014 in relation to the delivery of CWS in the South Kildare/West Wicklow area including Clane. Service had traditionally been provided as a walk-in-service in local clinics one or two mornings per week for limited hours. From January 2014 the CWS in the South Kildare/West Wicklow area were restructured to three main centres: Naas, Newbridge and Athy. This service is accessible by telephone call, followed up by appointments and home visits as required. There is a commitment that all customers will have their telephone call returned within one working day. This has eliminated the need for unnecessary travel to Department offices. Emergency cases are prioritised and dealt with appropriately. All clients were notified of the changes, including the new extended service times and contact details.

Approximately 1,500 telephone phone enquiries are received each month in the South Kildare/West Wicklow area. While statistics are not maintained on the number of telephone calls returned within the commitment of one working day, feedback from staff indicates that this is the case. However, if the Deputy is aware of any case where difficulties have arisen regarding the level of service provided she should provide details to the Department for review.

Social Welfare Payments Administration

45. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she has evaluated the number of applicants that have to wait a week or longer for a face-to-face appointment to make a claim for social protection support; how this impacts on her customer service charter; the provision she has made for customers that require support in the interim period; the policy changes that drive this; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7497/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Since 2012, the rollout of the new Intreo service delivery model has meant that customers should no longer be experiencing a delay in obtaining an appointment for one of our schemes.

When applying for a jobseeker's payment or a one parent family payment, customers merely present at the integrated reception of their local Intreo Centre and are given the relevant application forms and an early appointment date. They are also informed if any additional supporting information is required.

Provided that the customer presents at his/her appointment with the relevant forms completed and any other requested material, then there would normally not be any undue delay in putting the claim into payment.

Jobseeker's benefit claims are actually decided, on average, in just one week. For job-

seeker's allowance, claims are decided, on average in two weeks. For one parent family payment claims, the average is 6 weeks to award, reflecting the complexity of this payment and the requirement to provide more detailed information.

Historically, where there were delays in processing primary claims, then supplementary welfare allowance payments could be made to customers in the interim period pending award. However, with the improved processing times delivered by the Intreo process, the overall number of supplementary welfare applications pending jobseeker's claims has significantly reduced, as an early decision on the primary claims has negated the need for such applications.

The Intreo process is in line with the Department's Customer Service Charter.

Question No. 46 answered with Question No. 44.

Labour Market

47. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection for an update on the current situation regarding access to job activation, training and education for unrecognised jobseekers not on the live register, following the debate by the Joint Committee for Education and Social Protection. [7503/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): As noted in replies to similar previous Parliamentary Questions, given the scale of unemployment, the key objective of activation policy and labour market initiatives has been to offer assistance to those most in need of support in securing work and achieving financial self-sufficiency. Accordingly, the employment services and schemes provided by the Department are focused, in the first instance, on the cohort of people who are unemployed and in receipt of a qualifying social welfare payment.

For those in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance and Jobseeker's Benefit, it is a condition of their payment to engage in activation measures. Recipients of other payments, including disability allowance (DA) and the one parent family payment (OFP), can voluntarily avail of activation services and supports. The JobBridge internship scheme is now available to recipients of a wide range of payments (DA; OFP; Blind Persons Pension; Deserted Wives Allowance/Deserted Wives Benefit; Widow's, Widower's or Surviving Civil Partner's contributory/non-contributory Pension). Recipients of these payments are not counted on the Live Register.

In addition, unemployed persons (including those formerly self-employed) not in receipt of qualifying payments may be eligible to avail of up-skilling opportunities, for example through ETB training for unemployed people (at present there are 1,009 upcoming day courses and 552 upcoming evening courses). Although not eligible to receive a training allowance while undertaking the course, they may receive some support for expenses on travel, meals and accommodation. Springboard and Skillnets courses for unemployed people, funded through the Department of Education and Skills, are also open to people regardless of their social welfare status.

Many other services are also available to people who are not in receipt of a qualifying social welfare payment. For example employment services, such as advice on job-search activities and the use of online job search tools, are available to people if they register with the Department's employment services offices regardless of their social welfare status.

An unemployed person who does not qualify for a social welfare payment due to the assessment of their means may be eligible to sign for social insurance contribution credits. Persons

who sign for credits for three months (78 days) of the last six months are eligible to participate in the JobBridge programme. Persons signing on for credits for 12 months or longer over the previous 18 months are entitled to participate on Momentum courses through Solas, provided that they have been actively seeking work, however they will not receive any payment. Persons signing for credits for six months or more are entitled to participate on ETB-run VTOS courses subject to availability. In the case of VTOS courses, participants do not receive a training allowance but may receive travel and lunch allowances.

In short, the Government is committed to supporting as many people as possible to participate more fully in employment and to become more self-sufficient by providing supports that address barriers they may encounter in finding and sustaining employment. Within this overall objective it is appropriate to provide priority for those who are in receipt of payments that are conditional on being unemployed.

In developing the new *Pathways to Work 2016 - 2020* strategy, the Government engaged in extensive consultations with stakeholders including front-line workers delivering employment services to unemployed people. The strategy reflects the views and ideas gathered during this process as well as taking account of inputs from across all of Government and from agencies such as the OECD and advisory bodies such as the Labour Market Council and the Joint Committee for Education and Social Protection.

Based on these inputs, the strategy for 2016 to 2020 will reflect a shift in focus from ‘activation in a time of recession’ to ‘activation in a time of recovery and growth’ and in this regard should have two main objectives:

- First, to continue and consolidate the progress made to date with an initial focus on working with unemployed jobseekers, in particular people who are long-term unemployed.
- Second, to extend the approach of activation to other people who, although not classified as unemployed jobseekers, have the potential and the desire to play a more active role in the labour force.

Accordingly *Pathways to Work 2016–2020* includes numerous, specific actions to increase labour market participation and employment progression of people who are not currently active in the labour market and to apply the concept of active inclusion as a guiding principle particularly in the period from 2018 - 2020.

The principal specific actions relevant to job-seekers who are not on the Live Register are as follows:

Expand pro-active engagement to other people of working age who are unemployed but not in receipt of a jobseeker payment:

1. Review by 2017 the Jobseeker Transition (JST) activation model and consider whether changes should be made to the structure and operation of the scheme both to improve its effectiveness in supporting lone parents to transition to employment and/or to extend it as an option for other categories of welfare recipient.
2. Expand pro-active engagement to people who are working part-time but are in receipt of a welfare payment.
3. Develop a pro-active engagement approach to support qualified adult dependants of job-seeker claimants in securing employment. For example, promote the registration of qualified spouses/partners as jobseekers in their own right.

4. Promote the availability of existing services to ‘voluntary engagers’/‘walk-in’ clients, including immigrants, who are not on the Live Register but wish to avail of employment services.
5. Utilise inter-governmental public employment services such as EURES, and build relationships with public employment services in other countries to offer employment services to Irish emigrants seeking to return to work in Ireland.
6. Offer Intreo clients access to the Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme sponsored by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government and to the Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning.
7. Incorporate, as appropriate, time spent as an adult recipient or beneficiary of other full-time welfare payments (e.g. as a one-parent family payment recipient, or as a qualified adult dependent of a primary claimant) when assessing eligibility for access to employment supports.

Extend and intensify the pro-active engagement approach for people with a disability.

1. Review the range of income supports (including in-work supports) for people with disabilities to ensure payments are aligned between schemes and, if appropriate, amend the payment structure to ensure that it supports a return to work for people who wish to do so.
2. Expand the use of Intreo Centres to engage with people with disabilities and increase the number of Intreo staff trained in the provision of employment supports to people with disabilities.
3. Complete a review of the EmployAbility Service to increase utilisation of the service by people with disabilities and improve the level of employment placements.
4. Complete an analysis of existing databases of people in receipt of disability payments who may have a capacity to work and an interest in employment with a view to offering such people an opportunity to engage with the Intreo and/or the EmployAbility service.
5. Consider options to help recipients of Carer’s Allowance to access activation services as they cease their caring role.

Back to Education Allowance Eligibility

48. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she has considered extending access to the back to education allowance for qualified adults. [7504/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): The Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) provides income support for jobseekers and others in receipt of certain social welfare payments that pursue courses of education at second or third level. The objective of the scheme is to raise the educational and skill levels to enable jobseekers better access to the emerging needs of the labour market in line with Government activation strategy.

The qualified adult dependent of a person in receipt of qualifying scheme payments for BTEA purposes may be approved for the Allowance provided they establish an entitlement to a qualifying scheme payment in their own right and subject to satisfying all other BTEA conditions. Periods spent in receipt of a qualified adult allowance are counted, in addition to any periods in receipt of a payment in their own right when establishing the entitlement to the Allowance.

Eligibility to BTEA does not extend to qualified adults of participants of activation schemes.

Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility

49. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection for an update on the current situation regarding enabling jobseekers not on the live register to sign on for credits. [7505/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): PRSI credited contributions (“credits”) are an integral part of the social insurance system. For the most part they are linked to having an underlying entitlement to a social welfare payment while temporarily detached from the labour force or having entitlement to statutory leave e.g. parental or maternity leave. The primary purpose of PRSI credits is to secure social welfare benefits and pensions of employees by covering gaps in insurance where they are not in a position to pay PRSI such as during periods of unemployment or illness for example.

In order to qualify for credits, a person must first have entered insurable employment – he or she must have paid at least one PRSI contribution as an employed contributor and, unless deemed to be exempted, must be available for and genuinely seeking work. Subsequently, insured workers may be awarded credits if they claim a social welfare payment because they are out of work, or they are ill or incapacitated, or if they are engaged in certain training or education courses. When a person does not qualify for a payment, they may sign-on for credits provided they qualify for the award of credits.

The PRSI class at which a contributor paid his or her last PRSI employment contribution while working determines the type of credits which may be awarded. Those whose last paid PRSI contribution was at Class A may be awarded Class A credits. Those who paid PRSI, for example, at Class D (modified rate contributor) may only be awarded Class D credits.

If at any stage in their working life, a person has no PRSI paid or credited contributions for two full tax years, they cannot be awarded credits again until they return to work and pay PRSI contributions for at least 26 weeks. The rationale for this measure centres on the general principle that there should be a reasonable link between entitlement to benefit and a recent participation in the (active) labour force.

Individuals who do not qualify for a payment but are signing for credits are included in the Live Register statistics. The Live Register also includes all claimants for jobseeker’s benefit, excluding systematic short-time workers, applicants for jobseeker’s allowance excluding smallholders/farm assist and other self-employed persons.

With regard to the Live Register it should be noted that the register is not designed to measure unemployment. It includes part-time workers (those who work up to 3 days a week), seasonal and casual workers entitled to jobseeker’s benefit or jobseeker’s allowance. Unemployment is measured officially by the Central Statistics Office’s Quarterly National Household Survey. A person is unemployed if, in the week before the survey, they were without work and available for work within the next 2 weeks.

Question No. 50 withdrawn.

Social Welfare Appeals

51. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the

status of a social protection appeal by a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7519/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an Appeals Officer, having fully considered all of the available evidence including that adduced at the oral hearing, has decided to disallow the appeal of the person concerned. The person concerned has been notified of the Appeals Officer's decision

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

Social Welfare Appeals

52. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the reason a person (details supplied) who has been resident in County Kerry for over a year has not satisfied the habitual residency clause; if this decision will be reviewed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7524/16]

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 referred to an Appeals Officer on 5 April 2016, who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

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

Domiciliary Care Allowance Appeals

53. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection when a decision will be made on a domiciliary care allowance appeal in respect of a person (details provided) in County Meath; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7538/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that the appeal from the person concerned was referred to an Appeals Officer who has decided to hold an oral hearing in this case on 5 May 2016. The person concerned has been notified of the arrangements for the hearing.

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

State Pension (Contributory) Data

54. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the number of A1 contributions a person requires to achieve a full State contributory pension; the average number of contributions per year that a person requires to qualify for a payment less than the full amount; when these specific yearly averages were introduced; the yearly averages that applied prior to this change; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7547/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The State pension (contributory) is one of the State pension schemes, and its rate of payment is related to contributions made over years into the Social Insurance Fund. As such, those with a stronger attachment to the workforce, who have paid more into that fund, are more likely to be paid under that scheme. There are a number of criteria which must be satisfied in order to qualify for a State pension contributory. These include that the person must be aged 66 or over, and that they have at least 520 paid contributions at class A, E, F, G, H, N or S, i.e., a minimum of 10 years of paid contributions.

Since 1961, when contributory pensions were first introduced, the ‘yearly average’ contributions test has been used in calculating the level of pension entitlement, where the total contributions paid or credited are divided by the number of years of the working life (from their entry into insurable employment up to the year prior to their reaching State pension age). Payment rates are banded, on the basis of this calculation.

“Developing the National Pensions System – Final Report of the National Pensions Board” published in 1993, recommended that the number of paid contributions required to qualify for a contributory pension should be increased to 520 and the necessary legislation to effect these recommendations was contained in Section 12 of the Social Welfare Act 1997 which provided for their implementation in two stages, with the paid contribution requirement being standardised at 260 from 2002, rising to 520 from April 2012.

As provided for in Budget 2012, from September 2012, new rate bands for State pension (contributory) were introduced for new pensioners as follows -

Yearly average PRSI contributions	Personal rate per week, €
48 or over	233.30
40-47	228.70
30-39	209.70
20-29	198.60
15-19	152.00
10-14	93.20

The bands in place before this change remained in place for existing pensioners (who qualified before 1 September 2012), and their rates of pension are now as follows -

Yearly average PRSI contributions	Personal rate per week, €
48 or over	233.30
20 - 47	228.70
15 - 19	175.00
10 - 14	116.70

The additional bands now in place more accurately reflect the social insurance history of a person and ensure that those who contribute more during a working life will, generally, benefit more in retirement than those with lesser contributions.

It should be noted that, where people cannot qualify for a full rate contributory pension as a result of an intermittent PRSI record, the social protection system provides alternative methods of supporting such people in old age. For example, if their spouse has a contributory pension, they may qualify for an Increase for a Qualified Adult amounting up to 90% of a full rate pension, which by default is paid directly to them. Alternatively, they may qualify for a means-tested State Pension (non-contributory), amounting up to 95% of the maximum contributory pension rate.

Rent Supplement Scheme Administration

55. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the extent to which she continues to monitor the need for any further increase in rent support with particular reference to the needs of families; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7556/16]

84. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the extent to which her Department continues to monitor the situation in respect of rent supplement with a view to ensuring that everything possible can be done to maximise the impact on the housing situation and homelessness; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7717/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys):
I propose to take Questions Nos. 55 and 84 together.

Rent supplement plays a vital role in housing families and individuals, with the scheme supporting approximately 57,600 people for which the Government has provided approximately €267 million for 2016. There were over 20,100 rent supplement tenancies awarded during 2015 and over 3,000 during the first three months of 2016 showing that significant numbers of individuals and families are being accommodated under the scheme.

The Department undertook a review of the rent limits in 2015 and found that the impact of increasing limits at a time of constrained supply in the private rented market will increase costs disproportionately for the Exchequer with little or no new housing available to recipients. The Department continues to closely monitor the situation and has implemented a national targeted policy approach that allows for flexibility where landlords seek rents in excess of the limits for both existing customers and new applicants to the rent supplement scheme. The circumstances of tenants are considered on a case-by-case basis and rents are being increased above prescribed limits, as appropriate. In addition, the Department, in conjunction with Threshold, operates a special protocol in the Dublin and Cork areas where supply issues are particularly acute, with plans underway to extend this arrangement to commuter areas over the coming weeks.

This flexible and targeted approach has assisted over 7,570 rent supplement households nationwide to retain or acquire rented accommodation through increased rental payments. A county breakdown of these cases is provided in the tabular statement for information.

Under the Exceptional Needs Payments (ENPs) scheme assistance may also be provided towards rent deposits or rent in advance. In 2015, the Department provided a total of 2,500 rent deposit payments at a cost of €1.4 million. From January to March this year, the Department has provided over 530 payments of rent deposits/rent in advance at a cost of approximately €330,000.

I believe this targeted approach and the recent legislative reforms announced to the private rental sector provide a level of stability for those who require rent supplement support in what has become a highly volatile rental market.

Total Increased Rental Payments & Active HAP Tenancies by County as at 18/04/2016

County	Awards under National Tenancy Sustainment Framework	Awards under protocol with Threshold	Total no. of increased payments by County
CARLOW	35		35
CAVAN	22		22

County	Awards under National Tenancy Sustainment Framework	Awards under protocol with Threshold	Total no. of increased payments by County
CLARE	60		60
CORK	349	73	422
DONEGAL	-		-
DUBLIN	3,003	1,958	4,961
GALWAY	155		155
KERRY	51		51
KILDARE	353		353
KILKENNY	127		127
LAOIS	112		112
LEITRIM	64		64
LIMERICK	7		7
LONGFORD	128		128
LOUTH	122		122
MAYO	3		3
MEATH	294		294
MONAGHAN	1		1
OFFALY	60		60
ROSCOMMON	24		24
SLIGO	-		-
TIPPERARY	165		165
WATERFORD	39		39
WESTMEATH	173		173
WEXFORD	15		15
WICKLOW	177		177
Overall Total	5,539	2,031	7,570

Rent Supplement Scheme Applications

56. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the status of an application under the rent allowance scheme by a person (details supplied) in County Carlow. [7563/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The client concerned was requested to provide outstanding documentation on 15/4/16. This documentation has not, to date, been received by the Department. On receipt of same, the client's Rent Supplement application can be assessed.

Rent Supplement Scheme Applications

57. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the status of an application under the rent allowance scheme by a person (details supplied) in County Carlow. [7564/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The client con-

cerned was requested to provide outstanding documentation on 7/4/16. This documentation has not, to date, been received by the Department. On receipt of same, the client's Rent Supplement application can be assessed.

Rent Supplement Scheme Applications

58. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the status of an application under the rent allowance scheme by a person (details supplied) in County Carlow. [7565/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The client concerned was requested to provide outstanding documentation on 11/4/16. This documentation has not, to date, been received by the Department. On receipt of same, the client's Rent Supplement application can be assessed.

Disability Allowance Applications

59. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the status of an application under the disability allowance scheme by a person (details supplied) in Dublin 12; when a decision will issue. [7568/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned was in receipt of disability allowance (DA) up to 20 August 2013, which was stopped as he no longer fulfilled the qualifying conditions, including residency conditions. In July 2015, medical evidence was submitted to the department by the person concerned. This was returned to the person in question on 23 July 2015, along with a DA1 application form, as it could not be dealt with in the absence of a DA application. He was advised to have the DA1 form completed and returned in order to determine his eligibility. To date, no application by the person concerned for DA has been lodged.

Post Office Network

60. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection to consider reversing the policy of systemically transferring post office business to private banks as social protection transactions account for 30% of all post office business and an estimated 50% including spin off transactions; if this is an attempt to initiate a privatisation process of our post office network; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7569/16]

61. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she is aware of letters being sent out to casual and part-time welfare claimants encouraging them to provide bank details for their payments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7570/16]

66. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her views on correspondence (details supplied) which was recently issued to casual workers encouraging jobseekers to use financial institutions rather than the post offices; if it is best practice to actively encourage recipients to use alternative financial institutions, given that the Government has backed processes to secure and develop the post office network; if the Government should be actively supporting the post office network given that it is the full owner of it; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7618/16]

92. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection why she is sending letters to jobseekers who work casual and part-time indicating that their payments can only be received at financial institutions; why she does not give such persons the choice of collecting payments at post offices; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7784/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 60, 61, 66 and 92 together.

The Government is committed to the maintenance of the Post Office network and to the development of a Standard Bank Account by An Post. Mindful of the current and ongoing discussions on Government formation any further development of policy will be a matter for the incoming Government.

The current position is that the department has a cohort of jobseeker customers who are classified as casual jobseekers. These are in-work customers who can claim a jobseekers payment for 2 to 3 days per week or who work week on/week-off. These customers are paid by cheque each week. Not all customers will be paid every week due to their changeable work patterns.

I want to emphasise that these customers have been paid by cheque due to the changing nature of their work/claiming patterns and the short turn-around time to issue payments. It is important to note that they are not paid via post offices under the department's existing cash payments contract with An Post.

In line with the National Payments Plan, my department is seeking to reduce its usage of cheques as a payment method; this is not only a matter of decreasing the significant costs associated with cheques in the department and wider economy but also of moving to a more secure method of payment and enhancing customer convenience.

When paid by cheque, customers have the option of lodging them direct to their accounts or negotiating them at banks or the Post Office. The evidence available to the department is that the vast majority of the department's customers paid by cheque choose to lodge them direct to their accounts.

The department has developed its payment capacity in respect of changing work and claiming patterns and is able to offer payments direct to accounts in financial institutions for casual Jobseeker customers thereby increasing customer convenience. This is in line with wider departmental policy where the focus is on ensuring that in-work customers are paid by the most convenient method possible.

Consequently the department has written to its casual Jobseeker customers asking them to provide their account details to enable direct payments to financial institutions.

I want to emphasise that the department does not issue these cheque payments to Post Offices, they are issued directly to the department's customers. This process does not reduce the number of existing cash payments through Post Offices under the current contract between the department and An Post.

I want to reiterate that what the department is doing is moving customers from cheque payments to the much more secure, customer convenient and cost effective payment method of payment directly into accounts in financial institutions. This is entirely consistent with the National Payments Plan and in line with payment methods that now prevail across the economy. The department must consider the most efficient payment method for our customers who are in employment most of whom get their salary payment into bank accounts. To have weekly income (work + welfare) payable in two different ways is a highly inappropriate and costly way of dealing with people in employment. The department's focus must be on our customers.

Customer choice will be maintained. Customers, if they wish, may continue to receive cheque payments in the medium term.

Carer's Allowance Applications

62. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will expedite a carer's allowance for a person (details supplied). [7605/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I confirm that the department received an application for Carer's Allowance (CA) from the person concerned on 10 August 2015. It is a condition for receipt of a CA that the person being cared for must have a disability whose effect is that they require full-time care and attention.

This is defined as requiring from another person, continual supervision and frequent assistance throughout the day in connection with normal bodily functions or continuous supervision in order to avoid danger to him or herself and likely to require that level of care for at least twelve months.

The evidence submitted in support of this application was examined and the deciding officer decided that this evidence did not indicate that the requirement for full-time care was satisfied.

The person concerned was notified on 30 November 2015 of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

The person concerned has requested a review and submitted additional evidence in support of her application. Further information in relation to the person's application which is required to complete the review has been requested on 15 April 2016 by a deciding officer. Once the information is received the review will be completed and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

Carer's Allowance Applications

63. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will expedite a carer's allowance for a person (details supplied). [7606/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): There is no application in respect of the person mentioned for carer's allowance (CA) that is pending decision.

The application for carer's allowance in respect of the person concerned was awarded on 21 May 2015 and the first payment issued to the person's bank nominated bank account on 28 May 2015.

Arrears of allowance due from 15 January 2015 were also issued to the bank. The person concerned was notified of these details on 21 May 2015.

This allowance is payable at the maximum personal rate for a person caring for one care recipient. If these circumstances are not correct and up-to-date, the person concerned should contact the department as soon as possible to inform them of any change(s).

Social Welfare Schemes

64. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection when a decision will be reached on a carer's allowance application by a person (details supplied) in County Mayo. [7609/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I confirm that the department received an application for carer's allowance (CA) from the person concerned on 20 August 2015.

The application was referred to a local social welfare inspector (SWI) on 11 January 2016 to assess the level of care being provided, assess means and confirm that all the conditions for receipt of carer's allowance are satisfied.

The delay in this case is regretted. Once the SWI has reported, a deciding officer will make a decision as quickly as possible. The person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

Disability Allowance Applications

65. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will expedite an application for a disability allowance by a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7613/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I confirm that an application from the person concerned for disability allowance (DA) was received by the Department on 19 November 2015. The application has been referred to a Social Welfare Inspector (SWI) for a report on the person's means and circumstances. Once the SWI has submitted his/her report to DA section, a decision will be made on the application and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

Question No. 66 answered with Question No. 60.

Employment Support Services

67. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the details of her contract with Turas Nua; the process by which persons are selected from the live register; if persons who have been engaging with the Tús and Gateway programmes can be selected; the fee she pays to Turas Nua for each person returned to the workforce; if there are stipulations as to how permanent the positions need to be; the number of persons who have been returned to the workforce since the inception of this programme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7619/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): JobPath is not a programme but a new approach to resourcing and delivering employment activation services to people who are long-term unemployed and those most at risk of becoming long-term unemployed. In this regard it complements the service provided by the Department's own staff in Intreo Centres and by the Local Employment Service providers.

Turas Nua Limited is one of two companies with which the Department has entered into contracts for the delivery of JobPath services. The other company is Seetec Limited.

Under the contract the companies act as agents of the Department and must accept, work with and deliver a service to all and any clients that are referred by the Department. The companies must deliver a guaranteed baseline level of service to all clients. Participants on JobPath

receive intensive individual support to help them address barriers to employment and to assist them in finding jobs. Each person is assigned to a personal advisor who assesses a person's skills, experience, challenges and work goals. A "personal progression plan" is drawn up that includes a schedule of activities, actions and job focused targets. Participants are also provided with a range of training and development supports including online modules, career advice, CV preparation and interview skills. Clients receive this service over the duration of a year or until they find employment and if they are placed into a job they continue to receive support for at least three months, and up to twelve months, while in employment.

JobPath providers are paid fees if and when they place clients into sustained employment. In this regard employment is defined as work of at least thirty (30) hours per week lasting for at least thirteen (13) weeks. Contractors are paid a fee, in arrears, for each thirteen week period of employment up to a maximum of four payments or one year's work. This payment approach incentivises the contractors not just to find work for people but to strive to ensure that the work is full-time and sustained.

For the purposes of JobPath all long term unemployed jobseekers on the Live Register are categorised into groups based on their duration of unemployment (e.g. 1- 2 years, 2 - 3 years etc.). Selection for referral to receive employment activation services from a JobPath provider is by means of stratified random sampling using these groupings; the objective being to ensure equity in selection and also that people referred to JobPath are a representative of the long term cohort on the Live Register.

Participants on TÚS and Gateway are not eligible to receive the JobPath service while they are on such programmes. However, once they have completed their time on TÚS or Gateway they may then be selected for JobPath.

It is not intended to publish the individual fees that are payable 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.

The roll-out of JobPath is not yet completed. It is expected to be finalised towards mid-year. Given that clients will spend 52 weeks on JobPath it is necessary to allow sufficient time to elapse before a meaningful assessment can be carried out. At the present time it is too early to undertake an evaluation of job placement performance. As indicated in "Pathways to Work 2016 – 2020" the Department intends to publish JobPath performance statistics from Q3 2016.

Carer's Allowance Applications

68. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection to expedite an application under the carer's allowance scheme by a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath. [7626/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Department has no record of an application for carer's allowance from the person concerned. I can confirm that the department received an application for disability allowance from the above named person on 1 February 2016.

On 18 April 2016 the person concerned was requested to complete parts of the application form which were left blank and to supply supporting documentation as requested on the application form and as required by the deciding officer in order to make a decision on his eligibility. On receipt of this information a decision will be made and the person concerned will be notified of the outcome.

Carer's Allowance Applications

69. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection to expedite an application under the carer's allowance scheme by a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath. [7627/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I confirm that the Department received an application for carer's allowance (CA) from the person concerned on 15 February 2016. Unfortunately, the average time taken at present to decide a new application is running at 19 weeks. Additional resources have been provided to the CA section in order to improve the waiting times for new applications and they are working hard to make this happen.

Frequently, delays are outside the control of the Department and are caused by the customer failing to fully complete the claim form or failing to attach the supporting documentation that is requested on the application form.

This application will be processed as quickly as possible and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

In the meantime, if the means of the person concerned are insufficient to meet his needs he should apply for a means-tested supplementary welfare allowance from his local community welfare service.

Carer's Allowance Applications

70. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection to expedite an application under the carer's allowance scheme by a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath. [7628/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I confirm that the Department received an application for Carer's Allowance (CA) from the person concerned on 4 December 2015. It is a condition for receipt of a CA that the person being cared for must have a disability whose effect is that they require full-time care and attention.

This is defined as requiring from another person, continual supervision and frequent assistance throughout the day in connection with normal bodily functions or continuous supervision in order to avoid danger to him or herself and likely to require that level of care for at least twelve months.

The evidence submitted in support of this application was examined and the deciding officer decided that this evidence did not indicate that the requirement for full-time care was satisfied.

The person concerned was notified on 3 February 2016 of this decision, the reason for it and of his right of review and appeal within 21 days.

Carer's Allowance Applications

71. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection to expedite an application under the carer's allowance scheme by a person (details supplied) in County Longford. [7629/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I confirm that the

Department received an application for Carer's Allowance (CA) from the person concerned on 16 October 2015. It is a condition for receipt of a CA that the person being cared for must have a disability whose effect is that they require full-time care and attention.

This is defined as requiring from another person, continual supervision and frequent assistance throughout the day in connection with normal bodily functions or continuous supervision in order to avoid danger to him or herself and likely to require that level of care for at least twelve months.

The evidence submitted in support of this application was examined and the deciding officer decided that this evidence did not indicate that the requirement for full-time care was satisfied.

The person concerned was notified on 9 February 2016 of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal within 21 days.

It is open to the person in question to make a new application for carer's allowance if she wishes.

Carer's Allowance Applications

72. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection to expedite an application under the carer's allowance scheme by a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath. [7630/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The application for carer's allowance in respect of the person concerned was awarded on 1 February 2016 and the first payment issued to the person's bank nominated bank account on 4 February 2016.

Arrears of allowance due from 3 September 2015 were also issued to the bank. The person concerned was notified of these details on 1 February 2016.

Carer's Allowance Applications

73. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection to expedite an application under the carer's allowance scheme by a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath. [7631/16]

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 18 February 2016. Unfortunately, the average time taken at present to decide a new application is running at 19 weeks. Additional resources have been provided to the CA section in order to improve the waiting times for new applications and they are working hard to make this happen.

Frequently, delays are outside the control of the Department and are caused by the customer failing to fully complete the claim form or failing to attach the supporting documentation that is requested on the application form.

This application will be processed as quickly as possible and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome. In the meantime, the person concerned is in receipt of a weekly social welfare support.

Carer's Allowance Applications

74. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection to expedite an application under the carer's allowance scheme by a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath. [7632/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I confirm that the Department received an application for Carer's Allowance (CA) from the person concerned on 4 November 2015. It is a condition for receipt of a CA that the person being cared for must have a disability whose effect is that they require full-time care and attention.

This is defined as requiring from another person, continual supervision and frequent assistance throughout the day in connection with normal bodily functions or continuous supervision in order to avoid danger to him or herself and likely to require that level of care for at least twelve months.

The evidence submitted in support of this application was examined and the deciding officer decided that this evidence did not indicate that the requirement for full-time care was satisfied.

The person concerned was notified on 10 February 2016 of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

Carer's Allowance Applications

75. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection to expedite an application under the carer's allowance scheme by a person (details supplied) in County Longford. [7633/16]

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 1 December 2015. Unfortunately, the average time taken at present to decide a new application is running at 19 weeks. Additional resources have been provided to the CA section in order to improve the waiting times for new applications and they are working hard to make this happen.

Frequently, delays are outside the control of the Department and are caused by the customer failing to fully complete the claim form or failing to attach the supporting documentation that is requested on the application form.

This application will be processed as quickly as possible and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome. In the meantime, the person concerned is in receipt of a weekly invalidity pension, including an increase for a qualified adult and a disablement pension.

Disability Allowance Applications

76. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection to expedite a review of an application under the disability allowance scheme for a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath. [7634/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The application for disability allowance (DA) from the person in question, based upon the evidence submitted, was refused on medical grounds and the person concerned was notified in writing of this decision on 25 February 2016.

Further evidence was received on 15 March 2016 and this is currently being reviewed by a deciding officer. The person in question can expect a decision on the review of his DA application shortly. If the decision to refuse the allowance is confirmed following review, the person concerned will have the right to appeal to the Social Welfare Appeals Office.

Carer's Allowance Applications

77. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection to expedite an application under the carer's allowance scheme by a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath. [7635/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I confirm that the Department received an application for carer's allowance (CA) from the person concerned on 4 September 2015. The person concerned was refused carers allowance on the grounds that he failed to co-operate with a social welfare inspector (SWI) and, as a consequence, the SWI was unable to complete his report or to establish means.

The person concerned was notified on 21 March 2016 of this decision, the reason for it and of his right of review and appeal.

National Internship Scheme Data

78. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the number of internships that were completed, by age group and by county, in 2014 and 2015; if these reports are available for 2016; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7656/16]

79. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the number of internships that were not completed; the reason for this; the results by age group and by county in 2014 and 2015; if these reports are available for 2016; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7657/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 78 and 79 together.

JobBridge, the National Internship Scheme, was introduced in July 2011 in response to the unprecedented collapse in the economy – particularly the sharp increase in unemployment. The aim of the scheme was to help unemployed people to break the cycle whereby they could not get a job without experience, but could not get experience without a job.

To date, a total of 46,537 people started an internship, of which 15,211 progressed into employment immediately on completing the internship. Independent research indicates that c 60% of jobseekers who participated in JobBridge progressed into paid employment within 5 months of completing an internship. There are currently 4,005 participants on the programme.

A breakdown of the JobBridge internships that were completed and those that were not by age group and by county and showing the reasons provided by interns for non-completion for 2014, 2015 and 2016 to date follows.

Breakdown by County 2014

County	Finished Early	Completed in Full	Total
CARLOW	65	82	147

County	Finished Early	Completed in Full	Total
CAVAN	77	107	184
CLARE	130	125	255
CORK	517	525	1042
DONEGAL	164	239	403
DUBLIN	1993	1742	3735
GALWAY	356	385	741
KERRY	127	203	330
KILDARE	205	210	415
KILKENNY	70	91	161
LAOIS	78	87	165
LEITRIM	41	40	81
LIMERICK	300	328	628
LONGFORD	27	49	76
LOUTH	156	155	311
MAYO	170	194	364
MEATH	169	154	323
MONAGHAN	88	121	209
OFFALY	86	78	164
ROSCOMMON	41	58	99
SLIGO	105	132	237
TIPPERARY	165	225	390
WATERFORD	137	211	348
WESTMEATH	150	151	301
WEXFORD	145	176	321
WICKLOW	112	110	222
Total	5674	5978	11652

Breakdown by County 2015

County	Finished Early	Completed in Full	Total
CARLOW	77	73	150
CAVAN	56	97	153
CLARE	76	132	208
CORK	422	474	896
DONEGAL	110	226	336
DUBLIN	1548	1571	3119
GALWAY	304	385	689
KERRY	153	234	387
KILDARE	209	216	425
KILKENNY	60	100	160
LAOIS	75	86	161
LEITRIM	30	47	77
LIMERICK	246	351	597
LONGFORD	37	53	90

Questions - Written Answers

LOUTH	143	183	326
MAYO	123	197	320
MEATH	130	163	293
MONAGHAN	74	123	197
OFFALY	70	104	174
ROSCOMMON	49	66	115
SLIGO	88	123	211
TIPPERARY	126	224	350
WATERFORD	135	214	349
WESTMEATH	117	167	284
WEXFORD	112	189	301
WICKLOW	90	131	221
Total	4660	5929	10589

Breakdown by County 2016 to date - 25th March

County	Finished Early	Completed in Full	Total
CARLOW	15	12	27
CAVAN	11	15	26
CLARE	10	24	34
CORK	109	96	205
DONEGAL	25	49	74
DUBLIN	245	312	557
GALWAY	60	73	133
KERRY	31	60	91
KILDARE	42	46	88
KILKENNY	13	20	33
LAOIS	9	18	27
LEITRIM	5	12	17
LIMERICK	42	69	111
LONGFORD	7	4	11
LOUTH	38	33	71
MAYO	23	47	70
MEATH	18	25	43
MONAGHAN	10	23	33
OFFALY	11	15	26
ROSCOMMON	8	14	22
SLIGO	15	16	31
TIPPERARY	15	56	71
WATERFORD	27	53	80
WESTMEATH	32	37	69
WEXFORD	30	38	68
WICKLOW	8	26	34
Total	859	1193	2052

Breakdown by age

2014				
Age	Finished Early	Completed Full Term		Grand Total
18-19	181	143		324
20-24	1555	1428		2983
25-34	2418	2438		4856
35-44	924	1099		2023
45-54	464	645		1109
55+	132	225		357
Grand Total	5674	5978		11652
2015				
Age	Finished Early	Completed Full Term		Grand Total
18-19	192	163		355
20-24	1150	1274		2424
25-34	1959	2287		4246
35-44	850	1253		2103
45-54	406	717		1123
55+	103	235		338
Grand Total	4660	5929		10589
2016 (to March 25th)				
Age	Finished Early	Completed Full Term		Grand Total
18-19	41	28		69
20-24	196	211		407
25-34	364	474		838
35-44	163	270		433
45-54	75	167		242
55+	20	43		63
Grand Total	859	1193		2052

Reasons for non-completion of internships

2014	2014
Caring responsibilities	65
Cost factors	153
Emigrated	71
Got job elsewhere	1441
Got job with Host Organisation	957
Got job with Host Organisation - PRSI Scheme	113
Health reasons	290
In further education and training	270
JobBridge Follow-up (Internal)	34

Questions - Written Answers

Maternity Leave	28
No further update available	513
Other (Unknown)	8
Personal reasons	541
Placement wasn't suitable	700
Returned to job search	371
Suspension - Various reasons	3
Took up another JobBridge placement	109
Took up WPP	3
(blank)	4
Grand Total	5674

2015	
Caring responsibilities	59
Cost factors	106
Emigrated	65
Got job elsewhere	1139
Got job with Host Organisation	835
Got job with Host Organisation - PRSI Scheme	105
Health reasons	224
In further education and training	207
JobBridge Follow-up (Internal)	32
Maternity Leave	22
No further update available	421
Other (Unknown)	1
Personal reasons	404
Placement wasn't suitable	641
Returned to job search	316
Suspension - Various reasons	5
Took up another JobBridge placement	74
Took up WPP	3
(blank)	1
Grand Total	4660

2016 - TO March 25th	
Caring responsibilities	9
Cost factors	25
Emigrated	8
Got job elsewhere	177
Got job with Host Organisation	182
Got job with Host Organisation - PRSI Scheme	26
Health reasons	58
In further education and training	25
JobBridge Follow-up (Internal)	5
Maternity Leave	6

2016 - TO March 25th	
No further update available	71
Personal reasons	90
Placement wasn't suitable	117
Returned to job search	45
Suspension - Various reasons	1
Took up another JobBridge placement	14
Grand Total	859

Child Benefit Eligibility

80. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if child benefit will be paid for persons over 18 years of age who are in their leaving certificate year; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7677/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Child Benefit is a monthly payment made to families with children in respect of all qualified children up to the age of 16 years. The payment continues to be paid in respect of children up to their 18th birthday who are in full-time education, or who have a disability.

Child Benefit is currently paid to around 623,607 families in respect of some 1.19 million children, with an estimated expenditure in the order of over €2 billion in 2016. Child Benefit is an important source of income for all families and in Budget 2016 the Government increased Child Benefit by €5 per month, at a cost of €72 million.

Budget 2009 reduced the age for eligibility for Child Benefit from 19 years to less than 18 years. A value for money review of child income supports, published by the Department of Social Protection in 2010, found that the participation pattern of children in education supports the current age limit for Child Benefit.

Families on low incomes can avail of a number of provisions to social welfare schemes that support children in full-time education until the age of 22, including:

- qualified child increases (IQCs) with primary social welfare payments;
- family income supplement (FIS) for low-paid employees with children;
- the back to school clothing and footwear allowance for low income families (paid at the full-time second level education rate).

These schemes provide targeted assistance that is directly linked with household income and thereby supports low-income families with older children participating in full-time education.

Parental Leave

81. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection how she allows for force majeure in circumstances, other than late claims, where the claimant was unable to fulfil all of the qualifying criteria for a genuine force majeure reason. [7679/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Under the Parental Leave Acts, a civil servant is entitled to force majeure leave, which is leave with pay for urgent family reasons owing to the injury or illness of an immediate relative. Entitlement to force ma-

jeure leave is limited to circumstances where the immediate presence of the officer is indispensable, at the place where the ill or injured person is situated. In determining whether an officer is entitled to force majeure leave the following considerations apply:

- the reason is urgent when the officer has to act without delay, there is no advance notice of the illness/injury and there is little time to plan or manage it or to make alternative arrangements. In this sense, a scheduled hospital appointment or a routine childhood illness would not attract force majeure leave. An event might be urgent on the first day, but not on subsequent days if the initial urgency has passed;

- the need for the officer's presence is immediate when the officer's presence with the sick person could not have been delayed because of the seriousness/urgency of the illness/injury. The officer had to be with or go to the sick/injured person without any delay;

- the officer's presence is indispensable when the situation demands the presence of the officer. Nobody else will do, or will be able to give the support that the sick/injured person requires.

These three criteria for force majeure leave must apply on each individual day for which force majeure is requested, not just the first day.

Force majeure leave shall not exceed 3 days in any period of 12 consecutive months or 5 days in any period of 36 consecutive months. An absence for part of a day is counted as one day for the purposes of force majeure leave.

During an absence on force majeure leave, an officer is deemed for all purposes to be in employment. Force majeure leave is paid leave. It cannot be treated as part of any other leave such as sick leave, maternity leave, adoptive leave, annual leave or parental leave to which the officer is entitled.

The HR Division of my Department is required, in applying the foregoing provisions, to be satisfied that, in the circumstances, an application for force majeure leave is fully justified. Where this is not the case, the officer should apply for annual leave or other form of special leave.

Maternity Leave

82. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will review and address the anomalous position relating to the qualifying criteria for maternity benefit where current rules can mean that a mother who has to end their employment very early in their pregnancy due to a pregnancy related illness is denied entitlement to maternity benefit, as the rules do not make any allowance for such an illness when calculating if she satisfies the criteria for the minimum number of weeks since employment; if this matter has been raised with her Department previously; and if so, the rationale for not allowing force majeure allowances in such circumstances or providing specific amendments to legislation to deal with this scenario. [7692/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Maternity benefit is a payment made for 26 weeks to employed and self-employed pregnant women who satisfy certain pay related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions in order to obviate the need for them to work pre and post-delivery of their baby. The original scheme was introduced in 1970 and was extended to include self-employed mothers with effect from June 1997.

In 2016 it is estimated that my Department will spend approximately €266 million on maternity benefit in respect of an average of 22,000 recipients per week.

The fundamental qualification criteria for maternity benefit are that a woman must be in insurable employment or self-employment and is contingent on entitlement to statutory maternity leave. The applicant must also satisfy certain PRSI contribution conditions.

As stated above, to qualify for maternity benefit, a claimant must:

- be in employment which is covered by the Maternity Protection Act, 1994, immediately before the first day of her maternity leave. The last day of insurable employment must be within 16 weeks of the end of the week in which her baby is due. (If she ceases employment, her Maternity Leave must commence from the following day) and

- be certified by her employer as entitled to maternity leave under the Maternity Protection Act, 1994 and

- have her expected date of confinement certified by a registered medical practitioner and

- have at least 39 weeks PRSI paid in the 12 months before the first day of her maternity leave

or

- at least 39 weeks PRSI paid since first starting work and at least 39 weeks PRSI paid or credited in the Relevant Tax Year or in the year following the Relevant Tax Year

or

- at least 26 weeks PRSI paid in the Relevant Tax Year and at least 26 weeks PRSI paid in the Tax Year prior to the Relevant Tax Year.

If a person is pregnant, unemployed and claiming illness benefit they will continue to be paid illness benefit provided they have a condition other than pregnancy to warrant their being on illness benefit.

Pregnancy itself cannot be used as a medical reason to claim illness benefit. However, medical complications arising from pregnancy can satisfy the medical criteria for illness benefit. When the baby is born they may qualify for an increase in their illness benefit for a child dependant.

If a person is on sick leave from work and getting illness benefit immediately before they are due to start their maternity leave, they will be paid maternity benefit in the normal way if they satisfy the social insurance contributions.

The social insurance contributions for maternity benefit and illness benefit are not the same. Therefore, if a person is in employment but on sick leave and not getting illness benefit they may still qualify for maternity leave and maternity benefit. However, they must satisfy the social insurance contributions.

Where an individual has insufficient social insurance contributions to qualify for maternity benefit, they may be eligible for another social welfare payment provided they meet the relevant contingency conditions. For instance, new mothers who do not qualify for maternity benefit may be eligible for a payment under the supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) scheme. This scheme is considered a “safety net” within the overall social welfare system for eligible people in the State whose means are insufficient to meet their needs and those of their dependants. The

main purpose of the scheme is to provide immediate and flexible assistance for those in need who do not qualify for payment under other State schemes.

Social Welfare Benefits Waiting Times

83. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the degree to which the reduction in the live register can contribute to expediting the process for various social protection payments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7716/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Department is committed to ensuring that claims are processed as expeditiously as possible and that backlogs in claims are kept to a minimum. Each scheme area continuously monitors and reviews claim processing operations to ensure that customers are responded to as quickly as possible.

Processing times vary by scheme but this principally reflects the fact that the eligibility criteria such as means tests, family circumstances and medical status are more complex for some schemes than for others.

Claims processing in Intreo Centres also involves the scheduling of appointments for new jobseekers and customers are informed of the documentation required in advance of his/her appointment. This ensures that the claim itself can normally be processed without delay.

The reduction in the Live Register has enhanced the Department's capacity to process claims in that overall numbers claiming jobseekers payments is reducing year-on-year. However, it should be noted that the number of people coming on – and off - the register is substantial and this movement of customers continues to require repeated administrative intervention at each entry point.

For example, the decrease of 4,123 people on the Live Register in March 2016 was made up of 26,876 people who came onto the register and 30,999 who left.

The staffing needs of the Department are regularly reviewed, having regard to workloads and the competing demands arising. This is to ensure that the best use is made of all available resources.

Question No. 84 answered with Question No. 55.

Mortgage Interest Relief Application

85. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if any examination has been done as to the extent to which cessation of mortgage interest relief has negatively impacted upon particular families; if anything can be done by way of support where loss of the family home is imminent through no fault of the family; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7718/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The administration of the mortgage interest relief scheme is a matter for the Revenue Commissioners and any changes to current arrangements is a matter for the Minister for Finance.

The most appropriate way in which families experiencing mortgage difficulties can be supported is through on-going engagement with their lender to explore sustainable solutions.

The Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) assists people who are over-indebted and need help and advice in coping with debt problems, in particular those on low incomes and people living on social welfare payments. In addition to its traditional core business MABS has been developed to provide additional services targeted at supporting mortgage holders in arrears. Guidance has recently issued to the Department's staff in the Community Welfare Service to inform persons experiencing difficulties with their mortgage repayments of these additional supports.

A Dedicated Mortgage Arrears MABS (DMA MABS) service has been established across 24 locations, which is focused on post-MARP cases, assisting mortgage holders to assess the extent to which the option on offer from the lender is the best and most sustainable option, and where required, negotiating with the lender on the client's behalf.

Together with the Insolvency Service of Ireland, MABS has established a national network of Court Mentors to attend relevant Courts nationwide, where repossessions hearings are listed, to provide support to distressed borrowers and direct them to the appropriate services which can provide them with the necessary help and assistance.

In addition, there are currently approximately 2,980 mortgage interest supplement recipients. This scheme was discontinued for new applicants from 1 January 2014, with customers availing of this support prior to 1st January 2014 retaining entitlement until the cessation of scheme on 1st January 2018. The continued payment of mortgage interest supplement, the purpose of which was to provide short-term support to meet mortgage interest repayments, does little to assist families in improving the long term difficulty in addressing their mortgage problem. It is expected that over the remaining period existing customers will exit the scheme through: sustainable solutions being put in place with their lenders; securing employment; or exit strategies sponsored by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, such as the Mortgage to Rent Scheme.

Youth Unemployment Measures

86. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the extent to which her Department continues to provide youth unemployment alleviation measures; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7719/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Government's primary strategy to tackle youth unemployment is through policies to create the environment for a strong economic recovery by promoting competitiveness and productivity. Reflecting the impact of government policy, and the overall improvement in the labour market, youth unemployment continues to fall with a rate of 19.0% in March 2016 (as estimated by CSO, compared to 21.5% in March 2015 and with a peak of over 31% in 2012).

However, the Government recognises that as the recovery continues, there is a need for additional measures to ensure that as many as possible of the jobs created are taken up by unemployed jobseekers and, in accordance with the EU Council recommendation for a Youth Guarantee by young jobseekers in particular. This is the rationale behind the Government's Pathways to Work 2016-2020 strategy and the Youth Guarantee plan.

As, under services such as Intreo, Youthreach, VTOS, PLC programmes, and JobBridge, Ireland already had many of the recommended component parts of a Youth Guarantee, the main approach in Ireland is to prioritise access to these existing supports for young people, who become unemployed, with the objective of ensuring that they have an opportunity for employ-

ment, further education or work experience within the recommended period of four months as per the EU council recommendation.

The key objective is to help newly unemployed young people find and secure sustainable jobs. In this regard there is monthly engagement with all young people by case officers to discuss and achieve personal progression plans. For those who do not find employment through the process just described, additional offers are provided for, both through existing schemes and through youth-specific measures. Most such offers (over 70%) are in existing further education or training programmes. Others are in existing community-based employment programmes such as CE, Gateway and Tús. Overall, over 19,100 opportunities were taken up on the relevant programmes in 2015.

Pathways to Work 2016-2020 continues to prioritise these measures for the young unemployed and additionally commits to: increasing the share of workplace-based interventions for youth unemployed; ensuring that monthly engagement, at a minimum, is consistently applied and maintained; restructuring the First Steps programme; and implementing the Defence Forces Skills for Life programme.

Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility

87. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection why those in receipt of carer's benefit while signing for credits are not entitled to jobseeker's benefit when their carer's position ends; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7758/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Carer's Leave Act 2001 allows employees to leave their employment temporarily to provide full-time care for someone in need of full-time care and attention. An employee is entitled to take carer's leave of at least 13 weeks up to a maximum of 104 weeks. Carer's leave from employment is unpaid but the Carer's Leave Act ensures that those who propose to avail of carer's leave will have their jobs kept open for them for the duration of the leave. An employee may be eligible for Carer's Benefit if they have enough PRSI contributions. If they do not qualify for Carer's Benefit they may qualify for Carer's Allowance, which is a means-tested payment.

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.

It is a fundamental qualifying condition for the jobseeker's benefit scheme that a person must be available for and genuinely seeking full-time work. The schemes also require that persons must be fully unemployed for at least four in any seven consecutive days. They must also satisfy social insurance contribution and substantial loss of employment conditionality.

A person is regarded as having sustained a substantial loss of employment if s/he has lost at least one day of insurable employment in any period of 6 days as an officer of the Minister may determine, provided his/her reckonable earnings or reckonable income are reduced as a consequence of the loss of employment.

The full scheme criteria are established in the Social Welfare (Consolidation) Act 2005, as amended and associated regulations. These provisions inform detailed scheme guidelines which are available, along with further information on the schemes, at www.welfare.ie. Each application for jobseeker's benefit is assessed by one of the Department's Deciding Officers on a case by case basis.

Where an individual does not have entitlement under jobseeker's benefit, they may qualify for means tested jobseeker's allowance. Where an individual does not have entitlement under jobseeker's benefit or allowance, they may be eligible for the supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) scheme, which is considered the "safety net" within the overall social welfare system. The SWA scheme provides assistance to eligible people in the State whose means are insufficient to meet their needs and those of their dependants. The main purpose of the scheme is to provide immediate and flexible assistance for those in need who do not qualify for payment under other State schemes.

A person who is not satisfied with the outcome of their claim for a Department of Social Protection payment has the right to appeal against the decision to the independent social welfare appeals office.

Housing Adaptation Grant

88. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the help in place for those who receive a grant for house adaptations but cannot afford the balance themselves. [7762/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): The means tested housing adaptation grant for people with a disability and local authority home improvement loans, for persons who cannot get a loan from a bank or building society, are provided by local authorities and come within the remit of the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government.

This Department's Exceptional Needs Payment (ENP) scheme is not intended to cover circumstances where responsibility for the expenditure rests with another Government Department or Agency.

Departmental Funding

89. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she is considering reversing the significant funding cuts that occurred in recent years, to support the vital work that is conducted in communities; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7770/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): This Department is the main provider of funding for social need in Ireland. In 2016, it is expected that expenditure on income support schemes to support the unemployed, lone parents, people with a disability and older people will be €19.6 billion, despite the requirements for fiscal consolidation measures. The Department is not a direct funder of social programmes delivered by the charitable, community and voluntary sector and, therefore, has not reduced its funding for these organisations.

The Department does, however, support community initiatives through funding community work placement programmes such as community employment, Tús, rural social scheme, gateway and the community services programme. These programmes are delivered locally through sponsor organisations or local development/partnership companies. During the economic crisis, the Department examined all aspects of its expenditure which resulted in a reduction to some of the funding paid to the sponsor organisations and local development/partnership companies e.g. training grants. To minimise the effects of these reductions, the Department

examined the income and expenditure of schemes that were experiencing difficulties in absorbing the changes made to the grants.

As the Deputy is aware, the recovery has allowed some leeway to increase spending in targeted areas. Any decision to increase grant payments would have budgetary consequences and would have to be considered in the context of budget negotiations.

Social Welfare Code

90. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the benefits available for widows; if widows who are working and paying pay related social insurance can receive additional benefits such as illness benefit; her plans to improve the position of widows generally; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7778/16]

91. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection if she will pay widows under 66 years of age the same rate of payment given to those on the State pension together with the associated benefits; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7779/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 90 and 91 together.

Entitlements under the social welfare system are primarily based on a number of defined contingencies such as sickness, unemployment, old age or widowhood. There are two basic principles which underpin the Irish social insurance system. Firstly there is the contributory principle which links the PRSI contributions that a person has paid and their entitlement to a range of benefits and pensions. Where a person has sufficient PRSI contributions, then benefits and pensions may be paid, subject to legislative provisions, where a particular contingency arises, and without a means test. Secondly there is the solidarity principle where the benefits and pensions that are paid are not directly related to the amount of PRSI contributions paid by insured persons. PRSI contribution income is instead redistributed to support contributors who are more likely to have an income need as a result of circumstances that have arisen in their lives. In this regard, it should be noted that most PRSI contributors do not experience all of the contingencies during their life. For example, one contributor may never require access to Invalidity Pension whereas it may be a crucial support for another. It should also be noted that access to Widow's/Widower's/Surviving Civil Partner's Contributory Pension is available to those who have been married or in a civil partnership only, and that scheme will not benefit someone who has been single all their life.

The purpose of the benefits and pension system is to provide a person with an adequate income. The rate of payment is set with this objective in mind, and the fact that there are a number of ways one can qualify for a pension does not mean someone may qualify for multiple PRSI-funded payments at the same time. As is common with social security systems across the world, the Irish social welfare system generally applies the principle of one person, one payment. It can happen that a person may experience more than one contingency at the same time, e.g., an unemployed person may also become sick and incapable of work. The PRSI paid by the person and their employers only provides coverage for one payment at such times. Under the legislation for the schemes, if a person experiences more than one of these contingencies at the same time, generally he or she can receive only one core payment. Amending the social welfare system to allow Illness Benefit to be paid in addition to a pension such as a Widow's pension would be a significant change to the system, providing certain people with the income considered necessary for two people, and would greatly increase costs. This extra cost would have to be financed from either an increase in the rate of PRSI contributions, an increase in the

Exchequer subvention to the scheme, or a reduction in the rate of payments.

Widows over the age of 66 are less likely to be in a position to take up employment than those of working age. When a person on a Widows' contributory pension reaches the age of 66, their rate of payment will generally be aligned with the maximum personal rate for the State pension contributory. Increasing the rate of payment for widows under 66 to that of those who have reached State pension age would also result in a significant additional cost that would have to be met from either increased PRSI/subvention or a reduction in the rate of payments. I have no plans to introduce such a change.

There are a number of supports in the social welfare system which benefit widows, including those of working age. 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.

In addition, 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.

Question No. 92 answered with Question No. 60.

Family Income Supplement Applications

93. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection how long an application for family income supplement by a person (details supplied) in County Mayo has been ongoing; when a decision will be made on the application; when the application was received; when a review was sought; the date the file was sent to the social welfare inspector; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7787/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): An application for family income supplement (FIS) was submitted by the person concerned on 29 September 2015. That application was disallowed on the grounds that the net weekly assessable earnings exceeded the prescribed income level for the number of people in the family.

Following additional information being provided by the claimant regarding additional eligible children attending full time education, the FIS file has been sent to a Social Welfare Inspector (SWI) on 25 November, 2015 for further investigation. The SWI has been making efforts to confirm the residency of the children in question and will complete her report shortly and return it to FIS section.

Once the SWI has returned the completed report, a review of the decision in relation to FIS will be undertaken and the person in question will be informed of the outcome.

Mortgage Arrears Proposals

94. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Finance the steps he will take to deal with the 38,000 mortgages that are in arrears of 90 days or more; and if he will provide reasonable

protection for these borrowers. [7284/16]

111. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which his Department continues to monitor the manner in which the various banks continue to accommodate customers who have found themselves in difficulty during the past number of years, with particular reference to the need to ensure a positive accommodation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7733/16]

115. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which the level of mortgage arrears continues to be managed in a way that is accommodating to the circumstances of the borrower; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7737/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 94, 111 and 115 together.

The Deputies will be aware that the Government strategy to deal with mortgage arrears has developed and been enhanced over recent years and additional measures have been introduced as the nature and circumstances of those in arrears has evolved.

Data released on 10th March 2016 by the Central Bank on Mortgage Arrears and Repossessions Statistics for quarter 4 of 2015 provided further evidence that progress is being made in addressing mortgage arrears. In summary, the position is: Quarter 4 2015 marks the tenth consecutive quarter of decline in the number of mortgage accounts for principal dwelling houses in arrears. This cohort has declined by 20 per cent relative to Q4 2014.

1. Over 120,730 PDH mortgage accounts were classified as restructured at end-December, reflecting a 5.3 per cent increase in restructured accounts relative to Q4 2014. 86.4 per cent of restructured accounts were deemed to be meeting the terms of their current restructure arrangement.

2. All maturity categories of arrears, including the over 720 days category, declined in Q4 2015, with the over 720 days category recording a second consecutive decline. Currently the number of PDH mortgage accounts in arrears for more than 720 days stands at 36,351.

Based on Central Bank data, mortgage accounts with no arrears now make up 88 per cent of all mortgage accounts. The continuing improvement in data trends shown in the Central Bank quarter 4 mortgage arrears returns are welcome and show that where there is meaningful engagement between lender and borrower, in the majority of cases an outcome that is beneficial to both parties can be reached.

In addition my Department continues to monitor and publishes Mortgage Restructures data on a monthly basis that covers mortgage accounts for the six main lenders. The figures in the latest publication for February 2016 (published on 14 April 2016) show that Primary Dwelling Home (PDH) mortgage accounts in arrears continue to decline and now stand at 67,234 representing an improvement of almost 21 per cent compared to February 2015.

The Deputies will also be aware that the Central Bank's Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears (CCMA) and the Consumer Protection Code provide a strong consumer protection framework to ensure that each borrower who is struggling to keep up mortgage repayments is treated in a timely, transparent and fair manner by lenders. The CCMA recognises that it is in the interests of borrowers and lenders to address financial difficulties as speedily, effectively and sympathetically as circumstances allow.

I would also refer Deputies to a new Government-funded scheme announced by the Minister for Justice in January to help people who are insolvent, and in mortgage arrears on their

home, to access independent expert financial and legal advice. MABS will act as the gateway to refer eligible distressed borrowers to access this scheme.

In conclusion, I must reiterate that active engagement by indebted borrowers with their lender is key to achieving a sustainable resolution, and I would urge borrowers in arrears, who have not already done so, to take that first step by contacting their lender directly or MABS for an independent assessment of their situation and advice on available resolution options.

Tax Clearance Certificates

95. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Finance if a hard copy of a tax clearance certificate will be issued to a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny. [7311/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Section 95 of the 2014 Finance Act requires that all tax clearance certification must be provided via an electronic system with effect from 1 January 2016. The only exceptions in this regard relate to taxpayers who are not e-enabled, for example no technology access or suffer from an infirmity that restricts them from availing of electronic services.

The introduction of electronic tax clearance (eTC) means that taxpayers no longer need to provide a paper certificate to confirm tax clearance to a third party. Instead, it can now be verified by simply supplying a system generated 'Tax Clearance Access Number' in addition to the relevant PPSN to the third party in question. The eTC system is based on real time information rather than at a particular point in time like the old paper based system and where there are issues to be resolved, for example any outstanding tax payments and tax returns, the eTC system confirms the remedial action required of the taxpayer.

The eTC system, which can be accessed via ROS (business customers) or MyAccount (PAYE and non-ROS customers) has been developed to the very highest standards, is user-friendly and is fully secure. The system is available twenty four hours a day and can be accessed at a time that best suits individual circumstances. Revenue has advised me that it has published easy to follow instructions on its website at www.revenue.ie to assist taxpayers that may experience any difficulties. Revenue also provides telephone assistance via the Collector-General's Helpline at 1890 203070.

In regard to the specific case mentioned by the Deputy, Revenue has confirmed to me that the person in question successfully applied for tax clearance through the eTC system on 18 February 2016 and a 'Tax Clearance Access Number' was provided to him. He is not required to have a hard copy and if a third party has asked him to produce one he should provide the access number and his PPSN to confirm his Tax clearance status. He can also print the relevant details from his eTC record should he choose to do so.

Insurance Compensation Fund

96. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance to provide the moneys paid out by the Insurance Compensation Fund for each of the past five years; the amount that would have been paid out if the ICF had no caps, absolute or based on percentage, on payments for third party claims, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7339/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The payments from the Insurance Compensation Fund outlined below were in respect of insurance undertakings in administration and

consequently no caps or limits applied, with the exception of 2014. Payments in respect of that year included one claim relating to an insurance company in liquidation and thus the ICF limit of a maximum payment of 65% of the value of the claim or €825,000, whichever is lower, applied to the payment.

Payments made from the Insurance Compensation Fund 2011-2015

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Payments	€331,173,695.00	€499,173,695.00	€350,000,000.00	€29,165.70	€275,207,542.48
Notional amount no cap	No difference	No difference	No difference	€42,640.00	No difference

Note 1: The payments detailed above do not include costs/fees paid.

Note 2: The ICF payments were reduced in 2014 as no payments were required to be made in respect of Quinn Insurance (In Administration).

Mortgage Applications Approvals

97. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 160 of 6 April 2016, if he will direct Allied Irish Banks, as a State-owned bank, to provide the information requested, namely, the value of approved mortgages that are outside the normal 80% cap for non-first-time buyers or the equivalent cap for first-time buyers under the Central Bank of Ireland's macro-prudential lending rules and to show this figure as a percentage of the total approved mortgages since the rules came into operation and as a figure for 2016 mortgages to date, in tabular form, as was provided by Permanent TSB in the same reply; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7371/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As advised in answer to the Deputy's previous PQ, the Central Bank's macro-prudential limits on mortgage lending came into effect on 9th February 2015. The policy sets restrictions on the loan-to-value (LTV) and Loan-to-Income (LTI) ratios on products that can be offered by mortgage providers. There are a number of exemptions allowed for within the CBI guidelines, for example mortgage switchers or forbearance cases.

I must re-iterate that the macro-prudential limits on mortgage lending are designed, implemented and monitored by the Central Bank in its role as regulator of the Irish banking sector, and therefore fall outside of my remit as Minister for Finance. Moreover, the Central Bank does not provide prudential lending disclosures on an industry-wide or institutional basis and there is no regulatory requirement for AIB to publicly disclose the value of approved mortgages that are exceptions to the macro-prudential limits. My role as Minister of Finance, as set out in the Relationship Framework Agreements between the Minister and the banks in which the State is a shareholder, does not involve me in the relationship between the banks and their regulator. The Relationship Framework Agreement for AIB can be found here: <http://finance.gov.ie/sites/default/files/Allied-Irish-Banks1.pdf>.

Nonetheless, I have received assurances from AIB that the bank complied fully with Loan-to-Value (LTV) and Loan-to-Income (LTI) limits as set by the Central Bank of Ireland during the year to 31st December 2015, and that AIB continues to operate within the constraints set by its regulator.

Banking Sector Regulation

98. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the recent International Monetary Fund warning that banks following the international financial reporting standards are systemically overvaluing their loan portfolio by recording profits on non-performing loans (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7386/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Deputy is aware that I have answered a number of Parliamentary Questions in the past in relation to rules adopted by banks when valuing assets including loans. These rules are determined by the relevant accounting standards and it is the responsibility of the directors of the respective banks to ensure these rules have been properly applied. To provide assurance that this is the case, the proper application of the rules is subject to an annual independent external audit review.

As I have stated in the past, nothing has been brought to my attention to suggest that these rules have not been correctly applied by the banks. Notwithstanding this, should the Deputy have concerns in this regard, he may wish to refer such concerns to the Irish Auditing and Accounting Supervisory Authority (IAASA), the independent body responsible for the examination and enforcement of certain listed entities' financial reporting.

Finally, the requirement for banks to prepare financial statements is laid out in the Companies Acts. The Companies Acts come under the scope of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Innovation. The Director of Corporate Enforcement has widespread powers and functions in relation to potential breaches of the Companies Acts.

Tax Code

99. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Finance if he will examine ways of reducing the tax component of residential rental prices to ease the burden on renters; if an emergency finance Bill will be considered to implement such a measure to allow these reductions to be passed on to renters immediately; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7410/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): According to the Private Residential Tenancies Board, rents increased 9.8 per cent on an annual basis in Q4 2015. At a regional level annual growth in the Dublin market was 9 per cent in Q4 2015. Similar rental inflation was experienced outside of Dublin with rents increasing by 9.9 per cent compared with Q4 2014.

The indications are that this increase is being driven by an excess of demand over the available supply in the market. For example, the Daft Rental Report for Q4 2015 noted that rental inflation has been driven by a shortage of rental properties. This lack of availability is primarily attributed to the current housing output falling short of the demand for housing. Forecasts for housing demand suggest that an average of around 25,000 units are required annually over the medium to longer term. At present, the sector is falling well short of this target with completions in 2015 of just over 12,500 units.

In such market conditions, it is likely that a reduction in the tax payable by landlords, such as that proposed by the Deputy, could lead to increased profit for landlords rather than a reduction in rent paid by tenants.

It must also be noted that the level of income tax payable by a landlord in respect of a given amount of rental income can vary significantly, depending on the level of deductible expenses incurred by the landlord. For example, in the case of rental investment properties which have been purchased using loan financing, it could be expected that the net taxable rental income from a newly-purchased property would be much lower than the net income from an equivalent property owned for a longer term by the landlord, as the deductible interest expense incurred

would be higher.

With regard to rented residential premises, a landlord may, in general, deduct 75% of the interest paid on borrowed money used to purchase, improve or repair rented premises when calculating rental income. The cost to the landlord of any goods provided or services rendered to a tenant and the cost of maintenance, repairs, insurance and management of the property are deductible. Wear and tear allowances are also available in respect of expenditure incurred on fixtures and fittings provided by a landlord for the purposes of furnishing rented residential accommodation.

The Deputy will also be aware that I introduced in Finance Act 2015 a new tax relief which allows a full 100% mortgage interest deduction where a landlord undertakes, for a period of at least three years, to provide accommodation to tenants in receipt of social housing supports. The relief is designed to incentivise landlords to commit to letting their property to tenants in receipt of social housing supports over the longer term, thereby improving the stability of supply of property to such tenants.

This relief was one element of an overall package of measures designed by the Government aimed at stabilising rent and boosting supply in the housing market which, in my view, was the most appropriate and effective route to addressing rental price increases driven by supply constraints.

Tax Reliefs Data

100. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Finance the number of instances between 2000 and 2014, inclusive, in which tax relief on pension contributions paid in during the period of their assignment abroad was granted under section 774(7)(d) of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997, either through carrying forward or refunding, to executives of State agencies who had served abroad under identical conditions; the number of instances where this tax relief was denied; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7433/16]

101. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Finance if, within the cohort of executives of State agencies who served abroad under identical conditions, some were granted tax relief on pension contributions paid in during the period of their assignment abroad, by carrying forward or refunding, under section 774(7)(d) of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 while others were denied the same benefits; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7434/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 100 and 101 together.

These questions both relate to the carry forward of tax relief on pension contributions under the provisions of section 774(7)(d) Taxes Consolidation Act 1997; I propose taking them together.

I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that section 774 of the Taxes Consolidation Act, 1997 provides tax relief for contributions by an employee to an occupational pension scheme against tax due in respect of the remuneration of the employment in relation to which the scheme is effected. In this regard, section 774(7)(a) provides that relief for ordinary annual contributions is given by way of a deduction in determining the employee's income tax liability under Schedule E for the year in which the contributions are paid.

Relief for an employee's ordinary annual contributions is normally provided by an employer under what is known as the net pay arrangement whereby the contributions are deducted

from gross remuneration before tax under Schedule E is calculated. In the case of special contributions, relief is normally granted by way of a claim made by the taxpayer to Revenue after the end of the relevant tax year.

In any tax year, the amount of contributions on which relief can be granted to an employee is limited to an age-related percentage of the employee's remuneration from the office or employment in respect of which the contributions are paid (subject to an overall annual earnings cap, which currently stands at €115,000).

The age-related percentages are as follows:

Age	% of Remuneration
Under 30	15
30 to 39	20
40 to 49	25
50 to 54	30
55 to 59	35
60 or over	40

Where a person's contributions in a year exceed the amount on which relief can be granted (based on his or her age-related percentage limit or the overall earnings cap as appropriate), section 774(7)(d) provides that the unrelieved amount is carried forward and treated as a contribution made in a later year or years.

The carry forward of unrelieved contributions under section 774(7)(d) is provided for only in cases where an individual's pension contributions in a year exceed the amount for which relief can be granted in that year. It is not provided for in any other circumstances.

In relation to the specific questions the Deputy has posed regarding the number of instances where this relief was granted by way of carry forward or refunded to executives of State agencies during the period of their assignment abroad, data are not collected in respect of section 774(7)(d) in a manner which enables Revenue to isolate these claims or the amounts associated with this particular aspect of the relief.

Finally, if the Deputy's query concerns a particular individual then that individual may wish to contact his or her local Revenue office who should be able to assist in any queries they may have with regard to the operation of section 774(7)(d).

Property Tax

102. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance to review the local property tax in order to make it a fairer system (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7436/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Revenue provides a wide range of payment and phased payment options that allow property owners to meet their Local Property Tax (LPT) obligations in a manner that best suits individual circumstances. One of the available phased payment options is Deduction at Source from ten separate payment schemes operated by the Department of Social Protection (DSP).

The Deputy should note that deductions are not taken from Jobseekers Allowance as the temporary and intermittent nature of the allowance could result in shortfalls in the amount of LPT deducted leaving property owners with outstanding liabilities at year-end. Also, the

concept of a de minimis welfare payment from the Department of Social Protection (DSP) is enshrined in social welfare legislation and deductions that would have the effect of reducing a person's take-home amount to below the minimum weekly rate of supplementary welfare allowance, currently €186 per week, cannot be made. In regard to the operation of "deduction at source" (DAS) from DSP payments, it has been ensured, through ongoing dialogue between Revenue and DSP officials, that individuals impacted by the €186 threshold are given early notification that Local Property Tax (LPT) payments cannot be deducted and alternative payment methods are put in place.

In cases where LPT cannot be deducted from DSP payments, there are other phased payment options available to assist property owners in spreading the liability over the course of the year. These options include monthly Direct Debits through banks and certain credit union accounts and flexible payments through four approved Payment Service Providers including An Post, Payzone, Omnivend and PayPoint. Each of these service providers applies various transaction charges that are outside of Revenue's control.

The option to defer payment of LPT is provided for in Part 12 of the Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 (as amended) including full Deferral and Partial Deferral (50%) of LPT liabilities for property owners meeting certain conditions including 'Income Level', 'Hardship', 'Personal Insolvency' and 'Personal Representative of a Deceased Person'. The income threshold for a full deferral is €15,000 (single person) per annum and €25,000 (couple) per annum and for a partial deferral is €25,000 (single person) per annum or €35,000 (couple) per annum. These thresholds can also be increased by 80% of any gross mortgage interest payments. However, 'Deferral' and 'Partial Deferral' are not exemptions and the tax becomes payable at a later date and carries an annual interest rate of 4%.

Any property owners who wish to apply for a 'Deferral' or 'Partial Deferral' can access their records online at www.revenue.ie and amend the payment instruction as required. Alternatively they can contact the LPT Helpline at 1890200255 where an agent will confirm any balances due and assist with making alternative payment arrangements, including Deferral/Partial Deferral as necessary.

I engaged Dr Don Thornhill to consider the operation of the Local Property Tax, in particular, any impacts on LPT liabilities due to recent property price developments. In his report on his review of the Local Property Tax - which was published on Budget Day 2015 - Dr Thornhill made a number of recommendations including that the existing deferral provisions should be continued and be reviewed and revised at frequent intervals. Dr Thornhill also recommended that for owner-occupiers over 80 years of age or those with stated certified long term illnesses and disabilities who are living alone, consideration be given to raising the income limit for deferrals to €20,000.

In my Budget 2016 statement, I announced that I would be proposing to Government that the revaluation date for the LPT be postponed from 2016 to 2019. This postponement means that home owners will not be faced with significant increases in their LPT in 2017 as a result of increased property values. The postponement also gives sufficient time for the other recommendations in Dr Thornhill's report to be considered fully by the next Government.

The Finance (Local Property Tax) (Amendment) Act 2015 gives effect to the postponement of the revaluation date of residential property for LPT purposes, and also to two of the recommendations in Dr Thornhill's report, involving LPT relief for properties affected by pyrite and relief for properties occupied by persons with disabilities (recommendations numbers 11 and 12 respectively).

As I have indicated, issues relating to the implementation of other recommendations in the

Report will be a matter for further consideration.

Mortgage Arrears Proposals

103. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance his views on correspondence regarding mortgage difficulties for a person (details supplied) in Dublin 5; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7437/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy is aware, I, as Minister for Finance, have no direct function in the relationship between EBS (a subsidiary of AIB) and its customers. Notwithstanding the fact that the State is a significant shareholder in the institution, the Minister must ensure that the bank is run on an independent basis to ensure the value of the bank as an asset to the State. It would therefore be inappropriate for me to intervene in any particular case. A Relationship Framework has been specified that defines the arms-length nature of the relationship between the Minister for Finance and the bank. These Frameworks were published on 30 March 2012 and the AIB Relationship Framework can be found at: <http://finance.gov.ie/sites/default/files/Allied-Irish-Banks1.pdf>.

While it is not possible for me to comment on the position of an individual customer, in the vast majority of cases the best course of action is to engage directly with the bank to establish the status of the mortgage in question and come to a realistic and sustainable repayment arrangement. If an EBS customer is not satisfied with their financial service provider's decision(s) they can make a complaint to AIB Customer Support Centre, Bankcentre, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4, using the internal formal complaints procedure. Should this process come to a conclusion which they are not satisfied with, they may wish to refer the matter to the Financial Services Ombudsman to have it independently investigated. The Financial Services Ombudsman can only take on complaints when the lender's appeals process has first been exhausted. Contact details are as follows: Address: The Financial Services Ombudsman, 3rd Floor, Lincoln House, Lincoln Place, Dublin 2. Lo call 1890 88 20 90; Email - enquiries@financialombudsman.ie. Website: www.financialombudsman.ie.

Separately, confidential and independent advice on money and debt issues is available free of charge from MABS advisers (MABS Helpline, lo call 1890 283 438, Monday to Friday 9am to 8pm, www.MABS.ie). They can help ensure that customers are fully aware of their rights and responsibilities in dealing with mortgage arrears difficulties.

Appointments to State Boards

104. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Finance the regional breakdown of all members appointed by the Government or him to State boards, agencies and bodies in 2015 and to date in 2016, by agency and by region (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7478/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): In response to the Deputy's query, please see below a regional breakdown of members appointed to bodies under the aegis of my Department in 2015 and to date in 2016.

Body	Appointee Name	Appointed	Region
Central Bank Commission	John FitzGerald	Re-appointed 1/10/2015	Dublin

Questions - Written Answers

Body	Appointee Name	Appointed	Region
	Alan Ahearne	Re-appointed 8/03/2015	Connacht
	Philip Lane	Appointed 21/10/2015 *in ad- vance of commenc- ing as Governor	Dublin
Financial Services Ombudsman Council	Dermott Jewell(chairman)	Re-appointed 29/10/2015	Dublin
	Paddy Leydon	Re-appointed 29/10/2015	Connaught
	Frank Wynn	Re-appointed 29/10/2015	Dublin
	Caitríona Ní Charra	Re-appointed 29/10/2015	Connaught
	Michael Connolly	Re-appointed 29/10/2015	Dublin
	Elizabeth Walsh	Re-appointed 29/10/2015	Munster
	Tony Kerr	Re-appointed 29/10/2015	Dublin
	Valerie Bowens	20/01/2016	Dublin
	Deborah Reidy	20/01/2016	Munster
	Ken Murnaghan	20/01/2016	Dublin
Irish Fiscal Advisory Council	Dr Íde Kearney	11/03/2015	Other
	Michael G Tutty	Appointed 24/09/2015 Re-ap- pointed 01/01/2016	The rest of Leinster
	Seamus Coffey	01/01/2016	Munster
Office of the Appeal Commissioners	Mark O'Mahony	09/11/2015	Dublin
	Lorna Gallagher	21/12/2015	Dublin
Strategic Bank- ing Corporation of Ireland	Ann Nolan	12/03/2015	Dublin
	Tom McAleese	24/03/2015	Dublin
	Barbara Cotter	18/03/2015	Dublin
	AJ Noonan	18/03/2015	Dublin
	Eilis Quinlan	18/03/2015	The rest of Leinster
	Richard Pelly	18/03/2015	Other
	Rosheen McGuckian	27/03/2015	Dublin

Body	Appointee Name	Appointed	Region
	Conor O'Kelly (Chairperson)	12/03/2015	Dublin
The Investor Compensation Company Ltd.	Enda Newton	19/10/2015	Dublin
	Siobhán Madden	19/10/2015	Dublin
	Valerie Bowens	19/10/2015	Dublin

VAT Rate Application

105. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Finance if he will take action to scrap value added tax payable on defibrillators, or the automated external defibrillator, in recognition of the life-saving potential of such pieces of equipment, for which many community groups are struggling to fund-raise to purchase; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7591/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The VAT rating of goods and services is constrained by the requirements of EU VAT law with which Irish VAT law must comply. Defibrillators, other than implantable defibrillators, are liable to VAT at the standard rate, currently 23%. Parts or accessories and training are also liable to VAT at the standard rate.

There is no provision in VAT law that would make it possible to apply a reduced rate or zero rate to the supply of such products. Under the EU VAT Directive, Member States may retain the zero rate on goods and services which were in place on 1 January 1991, but cannot extend the zero rate to new goods and services. In addition, Member States may only apply a reduced VAT rate to those goods and services which are listed under Annex III of the VAT Directive. While Annex III does include the supply of medical equipment for the exclusive personal use of a disabled person, it does not include defibrillators for general use. In this regard, a reduced rate cannot be applied to the supply of defibrillators. Therefore the only rate that can apply to the supply of defibrillators and their accessories is the standard VAT rate of 23%.

Credit Union Regulation

106. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Finance his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding credit unions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7617/16]

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

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

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

A number of matters have been raised in this question which I will address in the order in

which each was asked.

- The Department has received a number of social housing proposals which are at various stages of development. The Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government is the Department primarily responsible for the formulation and implementation of policy and for the preparation of legislation in relation to housing. It must be pointed out that any such proposal, including the funding of SMEs will ultimately be a matter for regulatory approval by the Registrar of Credit Unions.

- The Personal Microcredit Scheme was commenced on a pilot basis in November 2015. 30 credit unions are involved in providing individual loans of between €100 and €2,000 with a maximum interest rate of 12%. The initiative is being led by the Department of Social Protection in conjunction with the Department of Finance and other interest groups. Monitoring data are being collected on a regular basis which will inform the structure and support necessary for a national roll-out.

- The Credit Union Advisory Committee (CUAC) is currently carrying out a review of implementation of the recommendations of the Commission on Credit Unions. This report is due to be completed by end June 2016.

- The Government provided €250 million in the Credit Union Fund. This funding is ring-fenced specifically to provide financial support for credit unions restructuring under the Credit Union Restructuring Board (ReBo). The terms of the Restructuring Scheme, agreed between the Department of Finance and DG Competition at the European Commission, are specific to restructuring credit unions and are measures granted under a State aid scheme. There is no flexibility within the Scheme to provide funding for any measure other than restructuring.

- The Deposit Guarantee Scheme (DGS) protects depositors in the event of a bank, building society or credit union, authorised by the Central Bank of Ireland being unable to repay deposits. The DGS protects depositors up to €100,000 per person per institution. While Article 13(1) of the DGS Directive states that Member States may provide for lower contributions for low-risk sectors regulated under national law, this must be read in conjunction with the entirety of Article 13 and, in particular, Article 13(2) which states that the method for calculating contributions to the DGS shall be approved by the competent authority which is the Central Bank, in co-operation with the designated authority, which also is the Central Bank. In accordance with the requirements of Article 13, the European Banking Authority (EBA) issued guidelines on methods for calculating contributions to DGSs. Competent authorities must ensure that these guidelines are applied by DGSs when developing methods for calculating risk-based contributions by their members. The Central Bank as the competent authority has indicated that it intends to follow those guidelines. I have been informed by the Central Bank that the calculation methodology currently being developed will assess and rank each credit institution separately. Therefore, individual credit unions will be separately assessed and ranked, and those deemed to be lower risk under the risk categories as set out in the EBA guidelines will pay a lower contribution. Conversely, individual credit unions deemed to be higher risk under these risk categories will pay a higher contribution. It is important to highlight that neither the Minister for Finance nor the Central Bank can act outside the parameters of Article 13 as a whole, which gives the Central Bank the mandate to determine and calculate risk based contributions.

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

Insurance Industry

107. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Minister for Finance further to my many written questions on this issue to confirm if there has been any update in relation to the Setanta Insurance issue following the recent decision indicating that claims should be made through the Motor Insurers' Bureau of Ireland; to confirm if he has received a clarification relating to this decision being appealed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7622/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy is aware, progress on the Setanta Insurance issue 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 was subsequently appealed by the MIBI and the Court of Appeal upheld the High Court decision in the case. The MIBI has announced that it has decided to apply to the Supreme Court for leave to appeal the Court of Appeal judgement.

I expect to be in a better position to inform the House further after the legal proceedings are concluded.

Credit Availability

108. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Finance the total rate of credit lending to small and medium enterprises via the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland; the total level of take-up from the fund by businesses at 31 December 2015 and in quarter one of 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7654/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) began lending in March 2015. Its goal is to increase the provision of funding to SMEs at a lower cost and on more flexible terms than has been available in recent times on the Irish Market. The SBCI channels its funds through lending partners known as on-lenders. The SBCI currently has three bank on-lending partners and two non-bank on-lending partners.

The SBCI publishes results bi-annually. To the end of December 2015, the SBCI has lent just under €172 million to circa 4,600 SMEs. The average loan size was €37,000 and the loans were for a variety of purposes including investment, working capital and refinancing. The SMEs who received SBCI finance were from a variety of business sectors. 85% of the lending was to SMEs based outside of Dublin (West 13%, Midlands 7%, Mid West 14%, South West 19%, South East 11%, Mid East 10%, border region 11%). The SBCI will publish half year results at the beginning of the third quarter of 2016 for the first half of the year.

Betting Regulations

109. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Finance if he will revisit the decision to impose a 1% levy on track bookmakers who have a remote licence; if he will consider spreading the burden more evenly over the industry, particularly to online betting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7702/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Licensed bookmakers and remote bookmakers are liable to 1% betting duty on the value of all bets accepted in a registered bookmaking premises and on the value of all bets accepted by internet, phone or other electronic means from persons in the State.

Betting duty is not charged on bets accepted on-course by a licensed bookmaker at an authorised racecourse during race meetings. However, where bets are entered into by the on-course bookmaker by any means of telecommunications, these bets are liable to betting duty at 1% of the value of the bet.

Tax Rebates

110. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Finance the status of a claim for a tax rebate by a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7703/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by Revenue that there is no outstanding claim for a tax rebate from the person concerned. The person concerned was advised in writing by Revenue last September of the position as regards his rebate claims at that time and any refunds due issued then.

Question No. 111 answered with Question No. 94.

Economic Competitiveness

112. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which the economy continues to remain competitive when compared to other competing jurisdictions within the European Union and without; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7734/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Substantial progress has been made in terms of improving Ireland's competitiveness in recent years. The latest figures from Eurostat, the statistics arm of the European Commission, estimated that nominal unit labour costs (a widely used measure of competitiveness internationally) in Ireland declined by 4.2 per cent annually in 2015. This is the largest decline across all EU Member States for whom data is available.

The decline in unit labour costs in 2015 is a continuation of the trend of significant improvement in Ireland's economy-wide cost competitiveness since 2008 (the peak year for unit labour costs in Ireland). It is estimated that nominal unit labour costs in Ireland fell by 20 percent between 2008 and 2015. This compares with an increase of 14 per cent in the UK and 9 per cent in the euro area over the same time period.

In addition, relatively low consumer price inflation over the last number of years has contributed to the improvement in Ireland's competitiveness as Irish price levels have fallen considerably relative to those of our euro area peers. For instance, annual HICP inflation in Ireland has been below or equal that of the euro area every year since 2008.

The gains in Irish competitiveness achieved since 2008 have been hard-won through productivity improvements and wage and price moderation. It is important that this competitiveness is preserved and continues to support growth. In this regard we must be cognisant that favourable exchange rate movements can reverse, as can be seen for example in the recent strengthening of the euro against Sterling. Similarly gains from the fall in oil prices may unwind in the future. Therefore we need to stay focused on continuing to improve Ireland's competitiveness through other channels such as wage and productivity improvements.

Bank Charges

113. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which he and his Department continue to monitor the levels of bank charges being imposed by various banks; the basis for such charges, nationally and internationally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7735/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy is aware, all credit institutions in Ireland are independent commercial entities. I, as Minister for Finance, have no statutory role in relation to the charges applied by credit institutions. Section 149 of the Consumer Credit Act 1995 requires that credit institutions, prescribed credit institutions and bureaux de change must make a submission to the Central Bank if they wish to introduce any new customer charges or increase any existing customer charges in respect of certain services. Section 149 does not cover interest rates, rather it applies to fees and commissions only. The Central Bank may direct the institution not to impose the new or increased charge or it may approve the charge, or approve it at a lower level than requested by the institution. Once approved, the bank is entitled to impose the charge.

My Department published a report on the review of the regulation of bank fees and charges in December 2013. This contains a detailed description of the process by which the Central Bank makes decisions on whether or not to approve proposed charges. It is available on my Department's website at www.finance.gov.ie. Among the key findings of the review was that while fee and commission income has become a more important source of income to the banks in recent years, net fee and commission income in Irish banks was well below the average of their European peers.

The European Communities (Payment Services) Regulations 2009 (the Payment Services Regulations) include requirements for banks and other payment institutions to provide information to the consumer about charges, interest and exchange rates on the accounts and these are reflected in the Central Bank's Consumer Protection Code 2012, which contains requirements in relation to the provision of information on charges to consumers. The website of the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) also lists the various charges imposed by the various financial institutions in Ireland for different types of transactions www.ccpc.ie.

Irish financial institutions have varying models for charges and have different regimes and conditions under which they are willing to grant transaction free banking. Individuals' use of their bank account will be specific to each individual and I would strongly encourage people to look at this comparison site with their specific circumstances in mind in order to decide which institution offers the best product for their pattern of account usage.

UK Referendum on EU Membership

114. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the degree to which his Department continues to monitor the potential economic fallout in the event of a partial or entire United Kingdom exit from the European Union; if the full implications continue to be examined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7736/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Government's position on developments in relation to British membership of the EU has been clearly articulated, in particular by the Taoiseach and the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade: we very much want the UK to remain an integral member of the Union.

This is important for both our economy and the ongoing development of the excellent bilateral relations Ireland and the UK now enjoy; independent research indicates that Ireland is the EU Member State which would be most affected by any change in the EU/UK relationship.

In addition to the important bilateral considerations, we also believe that the EU itself is stronger and more effective with the UK as a member.

The UK's continued membership of the Union is therefore a matter of strategic importance for the Government. In this regard, Government Departments, including my own, have been working on this matter for some time. Under the Department of Finance/Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) research programme agreement, my Department commissioned research to be undertaken on scoping the potential economic implications on Ireland of a change in the EU/UK relationship. The research was published on 5 November 2015 and is an important contribution to understanding the potential issues arising.

My Department, and other Government Departments, are continuing our assessment of all the issues involved in protecting Ireland's interests and we are continuing to explore the potential risks and to plan accordingly in the period up to 23 June 2016.

Question No. 115 answered with Question No. 94.

Wards of Court

116. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance to provide a report on the implementation of the Committee of Public Accounts recommendations in relation to wards of courts' funds that were lost in the crash. [7761/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): In response to the Deputy's question I wish to advise him that the matter he raises is one, in the first instance, for the Court Service which falls within the policy remit of my colleague the Minister for Justice and Equality.

I understand that the Public Accounts Committee examined and reported on issues related to Wards of Court last year, including relating to the management and investment of the funds awarded to Wards of Court by the Courts. Consideration and implementation of these recommendations is a matter for the Courts Service, and I am advised by the Court Service that the recommendations made by the Public Accounts Committee are under active consideration and that the Minute of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform in response to the Report of the Committee is to issue shortly.

Insurance Industry Regulation

117. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to require insurance companies to engage in far greater data sharing as occurs in Northern Ireland so that fraud can be reduced and to make it easier for consumers to switch to a competitor. [7771/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): My Department has commenced a Review of Policy in the Insurance Sector. This is being undertaken in consultation with the Central Bank, Departments and Agencies and other relevant stakeholders.

The objective of the Review is to recommend measures to improve the functioning and regulation of the insurance sector. This Review will include an examination of the factors contributing to the cost of insurance, which will include the issue of availability of insurance data.

Work on this review is currently underway, with the first phase examining the framework for motor insurance compensation in Ireland in conjunction with the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport.

Work on the Review of Policy in the Insurance Sector will continue over the coming months and is expected to be completed by the end of this year. The final report will be presented to Government in due course.

Tax Code

118. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Finance if he will reconsider reducing the rate of value added tax payable by ice cream parlours to 9% in recognition of the labour intensive nature of the business and the heavy dependency that such businesses have on tourism; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7788/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The standard rate of VAT, currently 23%, applies to the sale of ice-cream, as it does to most confectionery and sugary foods. In this respect, ice-cream parlours selling ice cream to customers must charge the 23% rate on the supply of ice-cream. Where ice-cream is provided as part of a meal by a caterer, such as a restaurant, the meal, including the ice-cream element, is liable to VAT at the 9% reduced rate.

Tax Code

119. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance the status of the case of persons (details supplied) in County Kerry who would like clarification on consolidating their farms without incurring capital gains tax; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7805/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that section 599 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 gives relief from Capital Gains Tax for the disposal by a person, who has attained the age of 55, of a farm to his/her children.

There is provision for a clawback of the relief where the assets transferred to the children are subsequently disposed of by the children within 6 years of the date of transfer. In any such case, the capital gains tax which would have been charged on the transferor (if the relief had not applied) is assessed and charged on the children, in addition to the tax on any gain made by the children on his/her disposal of the assets.

The issues around whether the beneficiaries of the gifted land in this case would qualify for the farm restructuring relief provided for in section 604B of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997, in the circumstances outlined in the details supplied by the Deputy, are being examined by the Revenue Commissioners. I will write to the Deputy again in this matter shortly when Revenue's considerations are completed.

Tax Data

120. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Finance the number of persons qualifying for the rent-a-room tax relief for each year since 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7821/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that a Costs of Tax Expenditures Table is available on the Revenue Statistics webpage at <http://www.revenue.ie/en/about/statistics/costs-expenditures.html>.

This table displays the estimated cost, in terms of revenue forgone, as well as the numbers who availed of the main tax credits and reliefs, including the rent a room relief. In regards to the Deputy's question, the latest information on rent a room relief is for the year 2013.

Office of Public Works Staff

121. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to recruit guides and grounds staff for Kilkenny Castle for the tourist season; and if positions will be offered on a permanent or part-time basis. [7315/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): The OPW proposes to recruit a total of 18 Seasonal Guides at Kilkenny Castle for the coming summer period. These positions will be offered on short term contracts of varying lengths ranging from 5 to 9 months and will supplement the existing Permanent Guide workforce during the peak summer months.

The Permanent Guide cohort at Kilkenny now numbers 10 in total, 2 new Permanent appointees having commenced there since December 2015.

There are 7 existing grounds staff working at the Kilkenny Castle demesne. There are no plans to recruit additional external staff on either a temporary or permanent basis in the short term.

Kilkenny Castle is open all year round as follows:

March 9.30-17.00

April-May 9.30-17.30

June-August 9.00-17.30

September 9.30-17.30

October-February 9.30-16.30

General Elections Expenditure

122. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the cost to date of the 2016 general election; if all the costs are now accounted for; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7319/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Having regard to the cost of the 2011 general election €29m, it is estimated that the cost of the 2016 election could be around €29m. The final certified accounts after an election would not normally be available until around 6 months after the holding of the election poll.

To date €14m has been advanced to Returning Officers whose costs include staff costs and other disbursements such as conveying polling screens, ballot boxes, and hiring and fitting out polling stations and count centres.

Payments from the Central Fund in respect of election expenditure are reconciled so that any outstanding expenses incurred over and above advances are paid or unspent balances are returned.

Flood Relief Schemes Status

123. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of flooding in an area (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7413/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): Local flooding issues are a matter in the first instance for each local authority to investigate and address. They may carry out flood alleviation works using their own resources or, if necessary, apply to the Office of Public Works (OPW) for funding under the Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme. This administrative scheme generally applies to relatively straightforward cases of flooding where a solution can be readily identified by a local authority and achieved in a short time frame. Any application received will be considered in accordance with the scheme eligibility criteria, and having regard to the overall availability of resources for flood risk management. The scheme's eligibility criteria can be viewed on the OPW website www.opw.ie.

The OPW approved funding of €144,000 under the Minor Works scheme to Kerry County Council (KCC) in 2014 with a further €58,520 approved in 2016 for flood mitigation works on the Glenshearoon Stream and tributaries of the River Maine at Castleisland. The advancement of these works is a matter for the Council. €10,567 of the allocated funding has been drawn down to date. I am advised that some of the works in the application have been undertaken and that other works are to take place in the near future.

Public Procurement Contracts

124. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding Government contracts being given to companies that are registered in tax haven countries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7435/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Public procurement in Ireland is governed by International, EU and National Law and National Guidelines. The EU Treaty principles of equal treatment and non-discrimination, transparency, mutual recognition, proportionality, free movement of goods and services and the right of establishment must be observed on all tenders. The main purpose of the EU public procurement regime is to open up the market and to ensure the free movement of supplies, services and works within the EU having regard to Treaty of Rome principles including transparency, proportionality and equal treatment.

Public procurement procedures require all applicants to meet certain standards when applying for public contracts. The criteria upon which contracting authorities may exclude applicants from the award procedure of public contracts are set out in Regulation 53 of SI 329 of 2006 European Communities (Award of Public Contracts) Regulations 2006 and Article 45 and Recitals (34) and (43) of 2004/18/EC, the EU Directive on the co-ordination of procedures for the award of public works contracts, public supply contracts and public service contracts. A contracting authority is required to exclude from tendering any tenderers who to their knowl-

edge have been convicted of specified offences, including corruption, fraud, money laundering, and participation in a criminal organisation. The law also includes various permissible grounds for the exclusion of a tenderer from a procurement competition at the contracting authority's discretion, including bankruptcy/insolvency, grave professional misconduct, serious misrepresentation, and non-payment of tax or social security.

In relation to tax compliance, it is a condition of award of all public contracts above €10,000 (inclusive of VAT) within any 12-month period that the successful applicant provides to a contracting authority either a current Tax Clearance Certificate or demonstrate a satisfactory level of subcontractor tax compliance in the case of the construction, forestry or meat processing sectors, who are subject to Relevant Contracts Tax (RCT). The same tax clearance requirement applies to any non-resident contractor being awarded a public contract.

Payments under a contract are at all times conditional on compliance with these requirements. It is the responsibility of each contracting authority to ensure that tenderers comply with all the requirements of the process.

Flood Risk Assessments

125. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which any assessment has been done throughout the country with a view to identifying areas of potential flooding which could be remedied by way of improved drainage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7756/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): Local flooding issues are, in the first instance, a matter for each local authority to investigate and address. They may carry out flood alleviation works from their own resources or apply to the Office of Public Works (OPW) for funding under the Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme. This 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. Any application received will be considered in accordance with the scheme eligibility criteria, which comprise economic, social and environmental criteria including a requirement that any measures are cost beneficial, and having regard to the overall availability of resources for flood risk management.

The core strategy for addressing areas at potentially significant risk from flooding, is the OPW's Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) Programme. 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 and impact from flooding. It is the principal vehicle for implementing the EU Floods Directive and national flood policy.

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 production of flood risk management plans.

Good progress is being made on the CFRAM Programme, the draft mapping is now being finalised following completion of the national statutory public consultation on 23rd December, 2015. Work on the development of preliminary options to address flood risk is underway. Fol-

lowing 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 that can address in a comprehensive and sustainable way the significant flood risks identified. The Plans, which are scheduled for completion by the end of 2016, 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.

The Government recently announced increased levels of investment in the area of flood relief as part of the overall Capital Investment Plan 2016-2021 and this investment programme will allow for consideration of measures arising from the Flood Risk Management Plans.

The OPW's Capital Investment Programme has already seen 36 major flood relief schemes implemented since 1995. The Government has allocated €80.7m in 2016 for the OPW's overall Flood Risk Management Programme of which €52.5m is for the continued implementation of the 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, 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 in 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 also progress some of these schemes to construction in 2016.

The OPW has statutory responsibility for maintenance of the drainage works carried out by it under the Arterial Drainage Acts 1945 and 1995. Each year the OPW carries out work to approximately 2,000 km of channels and about 200 structures around the country as part of its ongoing and rolling arterial drainage maintenance programme. While the average cycle of maintenance is generally in the range 4 to 7 years, the OPW assesses annually the maintenance requirement.

Prior to the enactment of the Arterial Drainage Act 1945 various drainage works were carried out in locations around the country. Responsibility for maintenance of these works (known as Drainage Districts) rests with the relevant local authority in each case.

Public Procurement Contracts

126. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of the report from the Office of Government Procurement into the use of social clauses in public contracts, particularly regarding the issuing of guidelines to local authorities in order to provide them with the ability to insert social clauses in local contracts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7328/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The Government is keen to explore the scope for including social clauses in public contracts where they are suited to the objective of the contract and therefore would have the greatest impact. In this context, the Office of Government Procurement (OGP) is examining social clauses with a view to assessing where they can be deployed to contribute to employment or training opportunities for long term unemployed. The purpose of this work is to:

- the provision of general guidance: and,

- identification of suitable contract clauses developed in conjunction with the Chief State Solicitor's Office;

It is important to adopt a targeted approach to the use of social clauses in contracts where employers are likely to be hiring additional workers to deliver the contract. This is likely to mitigate the risk of displacing workers already in employment while offering the opportunity of assisting with labour activation measures for the long-term unemployed.

Two examples of this approach currently in progress are the Grangegorm Development and Devolved Schools Build Programme. In relation to the latter, a clause has been included in the Public Works contracts which require that

- 10% of the aggregate time worked on site to have been undertaken by individuals who have been registered on a national unemployment register within the EU for a continuous period of at least 12 months immediately prior to their employment on the project.

- 2.5% of the aggregate time worked on site to have been undertaken by individuals who are employed under a registered scheme of apprenticeship or other similar national, accredited training or educational work placement arrangement.

Experience of this pilot have been positive. It is important to learn from such practical experience of where community benefit clauses are utilised. This is a complex area. It is important to develop a robust structure that will assist the contracting authority to develop the correct clause and to provide the support from the appropriate agency to aid the company in implementing the clause. I have instructed the OGP to issue practical guidance designed to assist Contracting Authorities to carry out this important role in a consistent manner. I expect that this guidance to issue shortly after the transposition of the new public procurement Directives.

Drainage Schemes Expenditure

127. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the funding that has been allocated to Cavan County Council to date in 2016 to carry out essential drainage work; if it is proposed to allocate further funding to the council and, if so, to outline the drainage work to be undertaken; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7402/16]

128. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the funding that has been allocated to Monaghan County Council to date in 2016 to carry out essential drainage work; if it is proposed to allocate further funding to the council; if so, to outline the drainage work to be undertaken; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7403/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 127 and 128 together.

It is a matter for Cavan and Monaghan County Councils in the first instance to identify and address minor or localised flooding issues in their counties. It is open to the Councils to undertake any local flood mitigation works using their own resources or, if necessary, to submit an application for funding under the Office of Public Works' (OPW) Minor Flood Mitigation Works & Coastal Protection scheme.

To date in 2016, the OPW has approved funding of €52,530 to Monaghan County Council under the above scheme in respect of proposed projects at Drummillard/Lakeview, Castleblaney (€37,530) and Corleck/Annahaia (€15,000 for study).

Applications for funding from Monaghan County Council in respect of two other proposed projects at the Bunroe river and at Donaghmoynne (Carrickmacross) are currently being assessed by OPW engineering staff. No applications for funding from Cavan County Council are currently to hand in the OPW.

All applications for funding under the Minor Works administrative scheme are assessed in accordance with the eligibility criteria for the scheme which includes a requirement that all proposed works are cost beneficial and subject to the availability of funding for flood risk management. The eligibility criteria for the scheme are published on the OPW's website www.opw.ie

The OPW only funds drainage works related to fluvial or river flooding. Any necessary works to address flooding caused by pluvial or inadequate surface water drainage systems are the responsibility of the local authority. The local authority is responsible also for the ongoing maintenance of certain watercourses within Drainage Districts in the county.

The OPW carries out its own programme of Arterial Drainage Maintenance to a total of 11,500km of river channel and approximately 730km of embankments nationally. These maintenance works relate to arterial drainage schemes completed by the OPW under the Arterial Drainage Acts 1945, whose purpose was primarily to improve the drainage of agricultural lands. 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.

The planned OPW maintenance programme in Co Cavan in 2016 includes work on some 18km on the Inny scheme, approximately 7km on the Boyne scheme and 3km Glyde and Dee scheme.

The planned OPW maintenance programme in Co Monaghan in 2016 includes work on approximately 65km of the Monaghan Blackwater Arterial Drainage Scheme and some 35km of the Glyde and Dee scheme.

Appointments to State Boards

129. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the regional breakdown of all members appointed by the Government or him to State boards, agencies and bodies in 2015 and to date in 2016, broken down by agency and by regions (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7483/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): In answer to the Deputy's question the following table details all members appointed to State Boards, agencies and bodies under the aegis of my Department in 2015. There were no appointments made in 2016.

Year	Board	Name of Board Member	Region*
2015	Public Appointments Service	Ms. Oonagh McPhillips	Dublin
2015	Public Appointments Service	Mr. Damien McCallion	Connaught
2015	Public Appointments Service	Mr. David Cagney	Dublin

Year	Board	Name of Board Member	Region*
2015	Interim Public Sector Procurement Board*	Mr Martin Sisk	Dublin

*This is an interim board set up in advance of the OGP being established on a statutory basis.

Office of Public Works Properties

130. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform further to Parliamentary Question No. 265 of 14 April 2016 if he will dispose of a site purchased for a Garda Síochána station in Letterfrack, County Galway; the proposed method of sale; if he will make it available to the local community on a long lease for community purposes; when he will make a decision on this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7615/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): The policy of the Office of Public Works (OPW) with regard to non-operational (vacant) properties and sites is to:

1. Identify if the property is required/suitable for alternative State use by Government departments or the wider public sector.

2. If there is no other State use identified for a property, the OPW will then consider disposing of the property on the open market if and when conditions prevail, in order to generate revenue for the Exchequer.

3. If no State requirement is identified or if a decision is taken not to dispose of a particular property the OPW may consider community involvement subject to detailed written submission which would indicate that the community/voluntary group has the means to insure, maintain and manage the property and that there are no ongoing costs for the Exchequer.

I am advised by the Commissioners of Public Works that they are currently assessing the options for the site on the Clifden Road, Letterfrack, Co. Galway in line with the above policy. On completion of this process a final decision will be taken on the future of the property.

Drainage Schemes

131. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the embankment at Roscullen and Shanakeale, Castlemaine, County Kerry, will be prioritised for repair and strengthening works following the recent damage caused by storms; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7643/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): This embankment is part of the 96 kilometres of flood defence embankments on the River Maine Catchment Drainage Scheme which is maintained by the Office of Public Works (OPW). OPW is prioritising the repair of flood defences which have suffered damage in the storms of recent years. Prioritisation is based on the severity of damage suffered and the number of properties which are protected by the defences concerned. Repair work on the embankments at Roscullen and Shanakeale will be advanced as soon as priorities allow.

Drainage Schemes Status

132. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if a matter (details supplied) will be addressed at lands in Boolteens, Castlemaine, County Kerry, following works to address recent damage caused by storms. [7644/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): The query relates to part of the River Maine Catchment Drainage Scheme which is maintained by the Office of Public Works (OPW). Regional staff of the OPW have liaised regularly with the person named. Excessive rainfall has been experienced in recent months which has resulted in a high water table throughout the catchment. The OPW will continue to monitor the situation.

Drainage Schemes Status

133. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if a matter for a person (details supplied) will be addressed at lands in Castleisland, County Kerry, following previous works to address river erosion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7645/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): As outlined to the Deputy in previous replies to Parliamentary Questions on this subject, the channel in question is part of the River Maine Catchment Drainage Scheme which was carried out by the Office of Public Works (OPW) under the Arterial Drainage Act, 1945. The OPW continues to have a statutory responsibility for the maintenance of this scheme.

Each year the OPW carries out work to approximately 2,000 km of channels and some 200 structures around the country as part of its ongoing and rolling arterial drainage maintenance programme. While the average cycle of maintenance is generally in the range of 4 to 7 years, the OPW does routinely inspect all channels and structures for which it has maintenance responsibility. The timing of work on individual projects is determined having regard to the needs of regular maintenance and the prioritisation of urgent jobs.

In the case of the River Maine Catchment Drainage Scheme, maintenance resources are currently concentrated on works to damaged defences in tidal reaches and it is not possible at this stage to provide a specific timeframe when work will proceed at the location mentioned by the Deputy.

Public Expenditure Policy

134. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which he remains confident that public expenditure and reform expectations remain in line with previously identified targets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7749/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Public expenditure has been managed in line with key fiscal targets over the last number of years with Ireland on track to be assessed as exiting the corrective arm of the Stability and Growth Pact at the end of 2015.

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.

Public Service Reform was a key element of the Government's response to the crisis and the strategy for recovery. The reforms implemented over the past five years enabled us to maintain and improve public services in the face of the necessary reduction in staff numbers and budgets, at a time of increased demand for public services.

Significant progress has been made since the publication of the first Public Service Reform Plan in 2011. The current Public Service Reform Plan was published in January 2014 and covers the period 2014-2016. While maintaining an emphasis on efficiency and reducing costs, this Plan puts a particular focus on improved service delivery and achieving better outcomes. The first Progress Report on the Public Service Reform Plan 2014-2016 was published in March 2015 and can be seen on my Department's website. A second Progress Report will be published shortly.

Public Procurement Contracts

135. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which procurement has featured in a positive way in the context of achieving savings in the course of the past four years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7750/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The OGP and its partner sector sourcing organisations in Health, Education, Local Government and Defence have enabled procurement savings estimated at €162m over 2013, 2014 and 2015. Additional direct and indirect benefits attributable to the new model arise from cost avoidance, reduced administration overhead and improved specifications. Increasing the application of professional procurement also reduces risk to the State by identifying risk and establishing contractual arrangements to manage those risks, such as damages payments for non-performance where applicable.

It is important to note that the consistent approach enabled by the new procurement structures can also deliver savings to businesses who bid for State contracts through standardised documents, proportional insurance requirements and reduced administration in submitting documents only when short-listed or successful in competitions.

Public Service Reform Plan Update

136. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which reform, as a component in economic strategy, continues to achieve savings in line with projections; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7751/16]

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 our strategy for recovery. The reforms we implemented over the past five years enabled us to maintain and improve public services in the face of the necessary reduction in staff numbers and budgets, at a time of increased demand for public services.

Significant progress has been made since the publication of the first Public Service Reform Plan in 2011. Pay and pension measures reduced the Exchequer pay bill by over 20% between 2009 and 2014, and staff numbers were also reduced by around 10% in that period. Other reforms included changes to terms and conditions such as reduced sick leave entitlements and additional working hours. In addition to the reduced cost of the Public Service overall, reform is also delivering savings across a range of specific areas such as shared services, procurement reform and property management.

The 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 and property management; 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 and service improvements across the Public Service.

The first Progress Report on the Public Service Reform Plan 2014-2016 was published in March 2015 and can be seen on my Department's website. A second Progress Report will be published shortly.

The Deputy will also be aware that the Taoiseach and I published a Civil Service Renewal Plan in October 2014. The implementation of this ambitious three year plan is leading to major changes right across the Civil Service.

Overall, I am satisfied that we made significant progress on Public Service Reform over the last five years. It is my view that this should remain a key element of strategy for the future.

Finally, I would like to commend public servants for the role which they have played in delivering what I consider to be the most significant programme of reform in the history of the State.

Trade Data

137. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the extent to which Ireland's trade with various European countries throughout the European Union continues to grow; the way this compares with other countries globally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7723/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The value of Goods and Services exported from Ireland in the past 5 years is shown below:

€ million	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
EU	101,252	104,731	102,589	109,185	124,717
Non EU	73,407	74,307	79,296	85,181	104,155
Total	174,659	179,038	181,885	194,366	228,872
EU As a % of the Total	58%	58%	56%	56%	54%

These figures show general and consistent growth in our exports both to EU and non-EU markets.

The figures above are compiled from various CSO reports.

Personal Injury Claims

138. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will direct the Personal Injuries Assessment Board to update its book of quantum; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7322/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Personal Injuries Assessment Board (PIAB) is an independent statutory agency and I, as Minister, am not permitted in my executive function to interfere in any way with the day to day operations and functions of PIAB.

Section 54 of the Personal Injuries Assessment Board Act 2003 sets out the principal functions of the Board. Section 54(1)(b) states: ‘to prepare and publish a document (which shall be known as the “Book of Quantum”) containing general guidelines as to the amounts that may be awarded or assessed in respect of specified types of injury’.

The Book of Quantum was last produced in June 2004 and data was sourced by independent consultants on behalf of PIAB from a number of sources including, the Courts Service, the Insurance Industry and the State Claims Agency. PIAB are currently reviewing the Book of Quantum and have engaged outside consultants to assist in this work.

PIAB hope to have the revised Book of Quantum ready as soon as possible. The Book isn’t a recommendation for compensation levels but rather a reflection of the prevailing level of awards, i.e.:

- compensation values awarded by the courts
- settlements agreed by the Insurance Industry
- settlements agreed by the State Claims Agency; and
- settlements agreed through the PIAB process.

Motor Insurance

139. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will list all advice on the issue of motor insurance premiums he has received in the past 18 months; if he will publish these reports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7324/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): With the exception of motor insurance which falls under the remit of the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, the Minister for Finance has policy responsibility for insurance. The sector is regulated by the Central Bank. I have no direct policy responsibility for insurance.

The National Competitiveness Council (NCC), established in 1997, is an independent Council which reports to the Taoiseach and Government on key competitiveness issues facing the Irish economy and offers recommendations on policy actions required to enhance Ireland’s competitive position.

In 2015 the National Competitiveness Council (NCC) considered the commercial non-life insurance market in Ireland as part of its Costs of Doing Business in Ireland report. The focus

of the NCC's analysis was on commercial insurance costs as they pertain to business – life assurance and health insurance costs were excluded. The NCC examined the nature of the commercial insurance market in Ireland and provides an overview of the competitiveness of the commercial insurance market in Ireland, compared to European and non-European counterparts.

Overall, it found that, at present, the Irish commercial non-life market is competitive but not particularly attractive to new entrants given relatively low levels of profitability. However, the NCC concluded that the absence of timely micro level price data (apart from CPI inflation data) makes it very difficult to assess market conditions, price competitiveness and the rationale for price increases across various categories of commercial non-life insurance.

The NCC's analysis on the commercial insurance market set out a range of potential actions which could help facilitate enhanced cost competitiveness in the non-life commercial insurance market. These were set out in its Costs of Doing Business 2015 and Competitiveness Challenge 2015 reports.

Both of these reports were brought by me, as Minister, to Government for consideration. The Reports are available on the NCC's website at www.competitiveness.ie.

Industrial Development

140. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of jobs created by companies supported by the IDA Ireland in County Wicklow in each of the past ten years in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7337/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): IDA Ireland's employment figures are presented on an annual basis through the Annual Employment Survey. Over the last ten years, there were a total of 906 new jobs created by companies supported by IDA Ireland in County Wicklow. The table sets out the number of IDA supported jobs created from 2006 to 2015 in the county.

Table shows the number of new jobs created by companies supported by IDA Ireland in Co. Wicklow from 2006 to 2015

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
New Jobs	9	168	150	61	172	84	105	73	35	49

EU Directives

141. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if EU Directives 51 of 2003 and 34 of 2013 must first be transposed into law before they can become binding on banks and auditors; following on from this, if the domestic law of a member state can or cannot alter the content of Regulation 1606 of 2002; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7388/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Directive 2003/51/EC amending Directives 78/660/EEC, 83/349/EEC, 86/635/EEC and 91/674/EEC on the annual and consolidated accounts of certain types of companies, banks and other financial institutions and insurance undertakings, was originally transposed into Irish law by means of

the European Communities (International Financial Reporting Standards and Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2005 (S.I. No. 116 of 2005). The transposed provisions are now reflected in Part 6 of the Companies Act 2014 and, insofar as they relate specifically to credit institutions, in the European Union (Credit Institutions: Financial Statements) Regulations 2015 (S.I. No. 266 of 2015).

Directive 2013/34/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 on the annual financial statements, consolidated financial statements and related reports of certain types of undertakings, amending Directive 2006/43/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council and repealing Council Directives 78/660/EEC and 83/349/EEC, was due to be transposed by 20 July 2015. Heads of Bill to give effect to that Directive were approved by Government in February 2015 and are with the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel for drafting.

The question of whether any particular Directive is binding in the absence of national transposing legislation is a legal one. As a rule, EU Directives are addressed to Member States, who are then obliged to implement them, and not to individuals or companies.

The content of Regulation (EC) 1606 of 2002 was adopted at EU Level, so any proposal to amend that content would be a matter for the EU legislature.

That said, the Regulation does include options for Member States to consider.

Article 4 of Regulation (EC) No 1606/2002 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 July 2002 on the application of international accounting standards requires companies with securities admitted to trading on a regulated market (as defined) of any Member State to prepare their consolidated accounts (financial statements) in conformity with international accounting standards adopted by the European Commission in accordance with the procedure specified in the Regulation. This requirement has direct legal effect but is supported by section 1376 of the Companies Act 2014.

Article 5 of the Regulation then gives Member States the option to permit or require a wider use of international accounting standards. In Ireland, this wider use is permitted but not required. The use of the option is now reflected in Part 6 of the Companies Act 2014. In the specific context of banks, Regulations 3 to 5 of the European Union (Credit Institutions: Financial Statements) Regulations 2015 (S.I. No. 266 of 2015) are relevant.

Child Care Services Regulation

142. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation his plans to regulate the au pair system and educate families on their rights and responsibilities on this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7392/16]

145. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will consider a review of the position of au pairs in view of the recent Workplace Relations Commission decision which now creates a grey area for families who have been relying on them for child care and would like to see regulation introduced to bring this area in line with the position in other European Union countries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7612/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Gerald Nash): I propose to take Questions Nos. 142 and 145 together.

There is no separate legal definition of the term “au pair” in Irish legislation, and individu-

als described as “au pairs”, “nannies” or “child-minders” are not exempted or treated as separate categories of workers under Irish employment law. Ireland’s body of employment rights legislation protects all employees who are legally employed on an employer-employee basis, regardless of what title is given to them. Therefore, once it is clear that a person is working under a contract of employment (written or verbal), on a full-time or part-time basis, that person has the same protection under employment law as other employees, including entitlement to the national minimum wage.

The recent WRC decision does not constitute any change to existing employment law and any persons working under a contract of employment must continue to have the full protection of employment law.

All employers, including those in private homes, carry the same obligations in relation to compliance with employment law. Where the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC), which is responsible for securing compliance with employment legislation, receives a complaint involving somebody described as an au pair, the WRC will investigate with a view to establishing whether a person has statutory entitlements under employment law. Complaints involving au pairs are considered on a case-by-case basis, in the light of the facts of each case.

In relation to public awareness, the WRC maintains a high profile as the State body primarily responsible for information and compliance on employment rights in a number of ways. All employers, including those in private homes, carry the same obligations in relation to compliance with employment law. To ensure that awareness of these obligations is maintained, the WRC collaborates with key partners including civil society organisations, the trade union movement, employer organisations and other State bodies. WRC publications are widely distributed through the offices of community organisations, NGOs and Citizen Information Offices. The WRC also participates in conferences and events and makes presentations not only to employer and employee groups but also to community and educational groups.

Work Permits Applications

143. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if a decision has been made on a work permit for a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7416/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The application referred to by the Deputy was refused on 15 March 2016 as the occupation was on the List of Ineligible Categories of Employment and therefore an employment permit could not be issued in this instance.

Additional refusal reasons notified to the applicant included that the remuneration offered was less than the annual remuneration laid down in Regulations for the employment permit type sought, and that the legislative requirements for a Labour Market Needs Test were not satisfied.

This decision was communicated in writing to the applicant. The applicant was also provided with information on how to seek a review of the decision but did not exercise this right.

Appointments to State Boards

144. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the regional breakdown of all members appointed by the Government or him to State boards, agen-

cies and bodies in 2015 and to date in 2016 broken down by agency and by regions (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7481/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): All appointments made in 2015 and 2016 to date to the State Boards and Agencies under the aegis of my Department, are listed in the tables. Information on the home addresses of candidates is not a necessary requirement on documentation provided by PAS to the Department. Candidates may provide, for example, email addresses, business addresses, etc. Accordingly the Department does not have statistics on the regional breakdown of appointees to the boards.

Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) (Dublin Based)

Membership	Method of Appointment	Date of Appointment
Paul Duffy - Chair	Ministerial	01/10/2015
Deirdre O'Brien	Ministerial - via PAS	01/10/2015
Maeve Mc Elwee	Ministerial - via PAS	01/10/2015
Liam Berney	Ministerial - via PAS	01/10/2015
Shay Cody	Ministerial - via PAS	01/10/2015
Geraldine Hynes	Ministerial - via PAS	01/10/2015
Audrey Cahill	Ministerial - via PAS	01/10/2015
Richard Devereux	Ministerial - via PAS	01/10/2015
Michelle O'Sullivan	Ministerial - via PAS	01/10/2015

Labour Relations Commission (LRC)

(The LRC Board was dissolved with the establishment of the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) on 1 October 2015).

Membership	Method of appointment	Date of reappointment
Breege O'Donoghue Chair	Ministerial	07/07/2015
Brendan McGinty	Ministerial (IBEC nominee)	07/07/2015
John Hennessy	Ministerial (IBEC nominee)	07/07/2015
Fergus Whelan	Ministerial (ICTU nominee)	07/07/2015
Peter McLoone	Ministerial (ICTU nominee)	07/07/2015

Low Pay Commission (Dublin Based)

Membership	Method of Appointment	Date of Appointment
Dr. Donal de Buitléir - Chair	Ministerial	16/07/2015
Vincent Jennings	Ministerial - via PAS	16/07/2015
Patricia King	Ministerial - via PAS	16/07/2015
Gerry Light	Ministerial - via PAS	16/07/2015
Caroline McEnery	Ministerial - via PAS	16/07/2015
Edel McGinley	Ministerial - via PAS	16/07/2015
Mary Mosse	Ministerial - via PAS	16/07/2015
Tom Noonan	Ministerial - via PAS	16/07/2015
Prof. Donal O'Neill	Ministerial - via PAS	16/07/2015

Enterprise Ireland (Dublin Based)

Membership	Method of Appointment	Date of Appointment
David Walsh	Ministerial via PAS	23/10/2015

Lisa Dillon	Ministerial via PAS	17/11/2015
Dave Shanahan	Ministerial via PAS	23/10/2015

Personal Injuries Assessment Board (PIAB) (Dublin Based)

Membership	Method of Appointment	Date of Appointment
Dr. Fionnuala O'Loughlin	Ministerial	01/08/2015
John Lynch	Ministerial	01/08/2015
Karen O'Leary	Designated Member - CCPC	16/06/2015
Margot Slattery	Designated member - IBEC nominee	30/04/2016
Walter Cullen	Designated member - ICTU nominee	30/04/2016
Conor O'Brien	Chief Executive - designated member	01/10/2015

National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI) (Dublin Based)

Membership	Method of Appointment	Date of Appointment
Kieran Cox	Ministerial - Staff Rep by vote	14/04/2015
Jacinta Kenneally	Ministerial - Staff Rep by vote	14/04/2015
Kevin Early	Ministerial - Staff Rep by vote	01/10/2015

Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) (Dublin Based)

Membership	Method of Appointment	Date of Appointment
Dermot Mulligan	Ministerial - Dept Rep (Asst Sec)	12/09/2015
Dr. Pat Duane	Ministerial - on application	25/07/2015
Ms. Bernie Cullinan - Deputy Chair	Ministerial	25/07/2015

Irish Auditing and Accounting Supervisory Authority (IAASA) (NAAS Based)

Membership	Method of Appointment	Date of Appointment
Mary Burke	Ministerial - nominated by Central Bank	14/10/2015
Deirdre Behan	Ministerial - nominated by Revenue Commissioners	02/01/2015
Marie Daly	Ministerial - nominated by IBEC	03/01/2015
Sean Hawkshaw	Ministerial - nominated by the Irish Association of Investment Managers	03/01/2015
Sylvia McNeece	Ministerial - nominated by the Pensions Board	03/01/2015
Michael Kavanagh	Ex-Officio - Acting CEO IAASA	15/01/2016

IDA Ireland (Dublin Based)

Membership	Method of Appointment	Date of Appointment
Barry O'Sullivan	Ministerial via PAS	04/09/2015
Caroline Dowling	Ministerial	04/09/2015
Denis Collins	Ministerial	04/09/2015
John Murphy	Ministerial - Dept Rep (Secretary General)	06/05/2015

Information in relation to the current membership of the State Boards under the aegis of my Department is available at www.stateboards.ie.

Question No. 145 answered with Question No. 142.

Public Procurement Contracts Data

146. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will provide, in tabular form, details of each tender awarded by him or by an agency of his Department; the bids received; the firms or companies to which the tenders were awarded, from 1 January 2016 to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7652/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The following tenders have been awarded by my Department since 1 January 2016:

Tenders Awarded - Purpose/Details	Number of Bids Received	Company to which Tender was awarded
Study of Competitiveness and Rental and Housing affordability	6	Indecon International Economic Consultants
Window Cleaning for WRC/CRO Offices in Carlow	8	Evaluation of tenders ongoing.
External Landscaping/ Grounds Maintenance Carlow	2	Mr Harry Merlehan T/A Harry Merlehan Landscaping
Purchase of a high Volume Document Scanner Note: (Tender issued 21/12/2015, Contracted awarded in 2016)	2	DIS Technologies Ltd T/A Digital Imaging Services Ltd
Purchase of 11 Life Jackets and 5 PLB Fastfind GPS becons for WRC Inspectors	3	Kehoe Marine Ltd T/A Hardware & Marine Supplies
Printing of WRC Statement of Strategy 2016-2018	3	VestiGO Print Solutions
Request for quotes for the provision of ICT Training	3	Olas Software Training and Development
RFT for Supply, installation and support of audio visual equipment	3	Image Supply Systems

Tenders Awarded - Purpose/Details	Number of Bids Received	Company to which Tender was awarded
Request for Tender for the Supply of Cisco Hardware under the Dept. of Justice Voice and Network Framework	2	Plannet21
RFT for the Provision of ICT Security Hardening (Lot 1), ICT Security Testing (Lot 2), and ICT Security Advice (Lot 3) (issued 2015)	Lot 1 – 6 Lot 2 – 9 Lot 3 - 3	Lot 1 – not awarded Lot 2 – Ward Solutions Ltd. Lot 3 - Information Security Assurance Services Ltd. (ISAS)
Translation into Irish of the Official Guidelines to the Consumer Protection Act 2007 (Grocery Goods Undertakings) Regulations 2016.	2	Word Perfect Translations Ltd.
Request for Expressions of Interest for the Provision of Services – Legal Researcher	44	Simon Halpin B.L. Lisa Maher B.L.
Contract awarded for the provision of Systems Development Resources to Support and Maintain CRO Registry (Database and Web Services) following a tender process in late 2015. Note: This contract was entered into following a tender process that was initiated before 1st January 2016	1	Enterprise Registry Solution Limited
Provision of Eircode Address Validation Services to the CRO	4	Auotaddress Ltd
Design & Layout of ODCE Annual Report.	5	Clever Cat Design

The last tender listed above is an addition to the list provided to the Deputy in response to question number 158 of 14 April 2016.

My response to question number 158 of 14 April 2016 also outlined details of a number of additional contracts entered into by my Department since 1 January 2016 which did not require tendering processes as the costs involved were below the required threshold.

My Department awards contracts and procurements based on the most economically advantageous tender and strives to ensure that all contracts or procurements offered provide the greatest value for money possible. Officers of my Department closely monitor these contracts for their full duration.

In relation to the agencies of my Department, the awarding of contracts to external providers is a day to day matter for the individual agencies concerned for which I have no direct function.

I have asked the agencies under the aegis of my Department to advise me of any such contracts between the dates concerned and I will communicate this information to the Deputy.

UK Referendum on EU Membership

147. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if his Department has carried out an impact analysis of the effect on Irish enterprises in the event of the United Kingdom voting to leave the European Union in the upcoming referendum; if his Department has examined the effect such an event would have on competitiveness levels and the ability to attract future businesses to establish here; the impact on exports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7655/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The EU-UK question is a strategic priority for Government, and for my Department. This is because UK membership of the Union is hugely important both to Ireland's interests, and to the interests of a stable, successful and prosperous EU as a whole. The Government's overriding focus has been, and remains, on helping to keep the UK in the Union, not preparing for its departure.

Work has been underway across Government Departments, including my own, for some time to ensure we best understand the range of issues at stake.

The Department of the Taoiseach also plays a leading role, given the whole-of-government dimension that is essential in this work. In this context, last May, a unit was established in the Department of the Taoiseach, specifically dealing with British-Irish and Northern Ireland affairs.

The Department of Finance, for example, commissioned the research published last November by the Economic and Social Research Institute on Irish-British macroeconomic links in the context of our joint EU membership.

We know from this and various other published assessments that there are very significant strategic and economic risks for Ireland if the UK were to leave the EU. In order to mitigate these risks, the Government played a constructive role in the negotiations that took place at EU level, including in the context of the discussions leading up to the European Council in February, working with the British Government and all our EU partners towards a consensual basis for the UK's continued membership of the Union.

Given the importance to the enterprise sector of this issue, both IDA and Enterprise Ireland are factoring this issue into their own contingency planning and continue to track where potential impacts may arise.

Clearly, the pace at which any potential exit was achieved, and the terms which the UK might negotiate with the EU across a wide range of domains will be a key determinant of the impact on the economy, particular sectors and individual firms.

Enterprise Ireland already has a significant number of programmes available to companies who face competitive threats from various sources. These include Lean Programmes, Market Diversification, Innovation and Management Development. These will be the tools available to assist companies with planning and preparation.

Further, a key policy priority in recent years both for my Department and for Enterprise Ireland has been to support geographic market diversification, so that Irish owned exports to non-UK markets increase by 50% to reach exports of between €5 and €6 billion by 2020.

As a result, both Service and Manufacturing firms' exports have shown a clear reduction in dependency on the UK market. A growing number of Enterprise Ireland supported exporters are exporting to more than five countries - an indication of a strengthening resilience in market diversity terms. In 2014, 41.8% of EI assisted exporting firms exported to more than five countries compared to 33% in 2009.

Enterprise Support Services Provision

148. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he is satisfied that all means of assistance available to the indigenous business sector are readily available and accessible; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7725/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) are 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. This information is easily accessed through the 'Supporting SMEs' online search tool at: www.actionplan-forjobs.ie.

The LEOs can also provide funding for projects that meet certain criteria, generally with regard to export potential, and other non-financial supports such as training and mentoring. Businesses should contact their local LEO by telephone or by email - contact details for all LEOs are available at: www.localenterprise.ie.

A new online tool which sets out the variety of supports available to all enterprises across all sectors is embedded or linked to over 30 Government websites including my Department's website and the websites of the Local Enterprise Offices and Enterprise Ireland.

Enterprise Ireland (EI) works in partnership with Irish enterprises to help them start, grow, innovate and win export sales in global markets. They provide funding and supports for companies - from entrepreneurs with business propositions for a high potential start-up through to large companies expanding their activities, improving efficiency and growing international sales. Availability of all EI supports are communicated via www.enterprise-ireland.com/en/ and also through EI's Development Advisors, EI Regional Offices and through public calls for applications.

In September 2015 I launched a new guide setting out the range of State supports available for the manufacturing sector. As part of the Government's plans to support employment growth in the manufacturing sector, a key step is to ensure that businesses in the sector become more aware of the Government supports that are available to support them in their expansion. This new brochure which is available on my Department's website brings together all these services in a single publication to assist the sector to tap into these supports and clarify the details of what is available from the various Government Organisations and Agencies. Details are at: <https://www.djei.ie/en/News-And-Events/Department-News/2015/September/14092015.html>.

In the area of access to finance, the last Government introduced a range of initiatives - from Microfinance Ireland to the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland, and from the Credit Guarantee Scheme to the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund - and continued to invest in seed and venture capital through Enterprise Ireland. These initiatives remain available and accessible to business and continue to provide increased access to credit and finance for Irish enterprise.

The Design and Crafts Council works closely with Enterprise Ireland to create and sustain jobs, and grow exports in the design sector. Under the Action Plan for Jobs 2016, the Council

will continue to work to increase the profile of the design and craft sector in Ireland through its involvement in a number of key initiatives which will seek to maximise the economic impact and job creation potential of the sector. Information on the work of the Council including opportunities for those involved in the sector can be found at: www.dccoi.ie.

Job Creation

149. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the extent to which he expects foreign direct investment to play a part in job creation over the next five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7726/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) continues to be a key contributor to Ireland's economic development and growth. Over 3,300 foreign-owned companies have put down roots in Ireland. These include many of the world's most successful global businesses, which have chosen Ireland as their strategic base in Europe.

The number of new investments secured by IDA Ireland in 2015 rose by 8% against a background of global economic uncertainty, intense competition from other jurisdictions and a changing global taxation landscape. There are now 187,056 people employed in IDA Ireland client companies. This is the highest in the history of the Agency.

More than one in five private sector jobs in the economy result from FDI, representing a vital economic contribution by the multinational sector. Net job creation by the IDA supported client companies was 11,833 in 2015. This was as a result of the strong pipeline of new investments and the lowest ever level of job losses as a percentage of overall employment by the sector. 54% of all jobs created in 2015 were based outside of Dublin, demonstrating the strength and resilience of FDI in regional locations.

More broadly, our efforts to continue to attract international investment in Ireland will be guided by both my Department's Policy Statement on Foreign Direct Investment and IDA Ireland's own five-year strategy "*Winning - Foreign Direct Investment 2015-2019*". The strategy details both how the Agency will broaden its target sectors further and seek new markets over the next five years. Its ambitious targets include boosting FDI in Ireland by over 40% and creating 80,000 new jobs in the economy.

As part of the growth strategy, IDA Ireland is committed to increasing the level of investment into each region of Ireland by between 30% and 40% by working closely with local stakeholders. This investment includes a €150m property investment plan, which will support the achievement of the organisation's regional goals. The funding will be used to upgrade Ireland's business and technology parks, make investments in a number of strategic utility-intensive sites and build new advanced technology buildings in regional locations.

A strong economy with full employment that supports vibrant public services for our people is within our grasp if we make the right choices.

IDA Site Visits

150. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of visits to County Kerry by prospective Industrial Development Agency Ireland companies to date in 2016; the details of these visits; if he is content with this level of visitation and

if not, the action he will take; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7781/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): IDA Ireland markets Kerry as part of its South West region, along with Cork. There are 12 IDA Ireland client companies employing 1,931 people in the county.

In the first quarter of 2016, there was one site visit by a potential investor to Co. Kerry. For reasons of client confidentiality, it is not possible for IDA Ireland to provide details of the visit. It should be noted that data on site visits is not a true measure of FDI activity in a region or county, given that 70% of all new FDI investment comes from existing client companies.

This Government, through the development of the Action Plan for Jobs – Regional, has placed an increased emphasis on supporting business development and jobs growth in all regions. Published last July, the South West Action Plan for Jobs (SWAPJ) focuses on Cork and Kerry. This plan aims to develop the full potential of the region through the delivery of 261 collaborative actions focusing on increasing the number of start-ups, developing the capacity of existing enterprises, winning new IDA Ireland investments and capitalising on the strengths and opportunities of the region.

While my Department has facilitated the compilation of the SWAPJ through engagements with stakeholders in the South West, ownership of the Plan – and ensuring its delivery - rests with the people, businesses, education providers and public bodies in the South West Region.

As part of the Regional Action Plan for Jobs process, IDA Ireland is set to invest €150 million over five years in property solutions designed to allow it to create opportunities to win additional projects for all regions. This investment includes the delivery of an advance facility in Tralee, Co. Kerry.

The IDA Ireland property investment programme is a positive development for attracting Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) into regional locations. It will provide access to modern property solutions which, when combined with a strong local talent pool and existing FDI cluster, will give these locations an enhanced proposition to offer international investors.

The tender process is underway for the appointment of a contractor for the construction of the facility in Tralee. The notification of the decision to grant planning permission was received from Kerry County Council on 25 February 2016 and the contractor will be appointed after the final grant of planning permission is received by IDA Ireland. The anticipated completion of the building is quarter 1 2017.

Workplace Relations Services

151. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the rationale for regional adjudications by the Workplace Relations Commission for Waterford taking place in Gorey, County Wexford; his views on whether this is a cost effective situation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7820/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): With effect from 1 October 2015, the activities of the Labour Relations Commission, the National Employment Rights Authority, the Equality Tribunal and the first instance functions of the Employment Appeals Tribunal and the Labour Court were merged into a new Body of First Instance, known as the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC). From 1 October 2015, all complaints fall to be referred to the Workplace Relations Commission in the first instance, and, on appeal, to the Labour Court.

The WRC's core services include the provision of early resolution, mediation, conciliation, facilitation and advisory services, adjudication on employment and equality complaints, the monitoring of employment conditions to ensure the compliance and enforcement of employment rights legislation, the provision of information, and the processing of employment agency and protection of young persons (employment) licences.

The WRC is independent in the exercise of its quasi-judicial function and I have no direct involvement in its day to day operations.

I am informed that the WRC is working in conjunction with the Office of Public Works to identify offices/venues for possible use for hearing venues. While the WRC is currently using the venue in Gorey, this may change in the context of developments in other venues on a regional structure and having regard to other related factors such as case volume in different regions, development costs, adjudicator location, and transport links. It is a work in progress to arrive at a regionalised hearing structure for the WRC, which will simplify matters for both parties and will reduce costs to the state.

I understand from the WRC that the regional venues for hearings are not set in stone and the venues will be reviewed in light of experience, volume of claims in different locations, costs, availability of adjudicators in proximity to hearing venues, etc.

Forestry Sector

152. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he has finalised arrangements for the establishment of a compensation scheme for the replanting of forestry damaged by the recent storm events; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7372/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Approval to fund a reconstitution scheme for forests affected by the winter storms of 2013/2014 was sought by my Department from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform has sought further information on the impacts of such a scheme on the insurance market for forestry and also on other issues of concern. My Department is currently examining these requests.

Farm Inspections

153. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of farm inspections carried out by his Department in 2015 and in 2016 to date, by county and in tabular form. [7593/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The wide-ranging information requested is in the process of being compiled by my Department and will be forwarded directly to the Deputy on completion.

Farm Inspections

154. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of holdings which were inspected more than once in 2015 and to date in 2016 by county and in tabular form. [7594/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The wide-ranging information requested is in the process of being compiled by my Department and will be forwarded directly to the Deputy on completion.

Agriculture Scheme Penalties

155. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the penalties imposed on farmers as a result of inspections carried out on their holdings in 2015 and to date in 2016 by county and in tabular form. [7595/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The wide-ranging information requested is in the process of being compiled by my Department and will be forwarded directly to the Deputy on completion.

Agriculture Scheme Applications

156. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of an application for farm payments by a person (details supplied). [7250/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named submitted a Private Contract Clause application to my Department seeking the transfer of land and entitlements by lease as Transferor. A review of this case showed that the Transferee under this application already held the allocation right and value for the entitlements that were the subject of the transfer application. On that basis the transfer application submitted was not required and has therefore been deemed rejected and payment under the Basic Payment Scheme will issue very shortly.

Young Farmers Scheme Eligibility

157. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding an application under the national reserve young farmers' payment by a person (details supplied) in County Mayo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7253/16]

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. The application for the National Reserve was not successful as the applicant was deemed to have exceeded the €40,000 off farm income limit. The applicant was notified of this decision in writing and was offered the opportunity to submit an appeal.

My Department has now received an appeal from the person named in relation to their National Reserve application. This appeal will be considered by my Department based on the information set out by the applicant and a decision with regard to the outcome of the appeal will be notified in writing to the applicant as soon as possible.

The application for the Young Farmers' Scheme has been fully processed and payment issued on 23 February 2016.

Basic Payment Scheme Payments

158. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason for the delay in issuing payment under the basic payment scheme to a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7281/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named established 33.27 Entitlement Allocation Rights under the 2015 Basic Payment Scheme with a total value of these entitlements is €3,215.97 including the Greening payment. The person named formed a registered farm partnership with another party, and submitted an application on behalf of the farm partnership under the 2015 Basic Payment Scheme.

A farm partnership is a legal business arrangement where two or more individuals come together combining their respective resources to achieve mutual benefits. Members of a farm partnership who own individual sets of entitlements receive a combined payment. It is therefore incumbent on my Department to identify and ensure that entitlements held are licensed for use in the partnership. Consequently, should the partnership dissolve the entitlements return to the relevant owners.

The total entitlement value including greening established under the registered Farm Partnership is €11,044.97 and 97% payment has issued to date. Balancing payment will issue when all cases are finalised.

A Private Contract Clause application to transfer of leased entitlements to the partnership was also received. Processing of this application has recently been finalised, and payment will issue shortly to the nominated bank account of the Farm Partnership concerned.

Agriculture Scheme Administration

159. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason maps issued for the 2016 single payment scheme, disadvantaged areas scheme and other area-based schemes show a reduction in area, when the area concerned is currently under appeal following the 2015 decision by his Department with respect to qualifying claimed area by a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7292/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named is an applicant under the Agri Environment Options Scheme (AEOS) and was subject to an inspection under that scheme during 2015. This inspection resulted in findings whereby the area found to be eligible was less than the area claimed. The person named was notified of this decision on 8 January 2016.

Under EU regulations governing all Area Based Schemes, including the Basic Payment Scheme and Areas of Natural Constraints Scheme, the determined area following inspection is applied to all such schemes. Accordingly the maps that issued to the person named in respect of the 2016 schemes are based on the area determined for the 2015 schemes.

The person named has sought a review of this decision, which is currently being examined by the AEOS Regional Inspector. The person named will be notified of the outcome of this review as soon as possible. In the event that the outcome of this process results in an increase in eligible area, all area based schemes will be up-dated appropriately.

Rural Environment Protection Scheme Payments

160. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the

status of a payment to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry under the rural environment protection scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7306/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named commenced his REPS4 contract on 1 February 2009. He was a participant in the Scheme for a full 5 years and 11 months and his contract ended on 31 December 2014. All payments due to him have now been made and he is not due any further payments under the Scheme.

Pesticide Use

161. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the measures that are available to control the pest, willow beetle, given that the growing of willow crop has become more prevalent in recent years; if he is aware that the willow beetle causes distress to householders in the vicinity of lands growing the crop; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7382/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I wish to draw the Deputy's attention to a publication on 'Short Rotation Coppice Willow – Best Practice Guidelines' which is available on my Department's website. This publication is the outcome of research by Teagasc and AFBI (Agri-Food and Bioscience Institute, Belfast) and contains information in relation to Pests and pest control. It is noted that beetle populations vary considerably from year to year and that a heavy infestation in a particular year does not mean that the following year will be equally affected. The Guidelines also advise that if population numbers are large, they can be reduced by target spraying the borders of the plantation with insecticide when the beetles are re-colonising the plantation from their overwintering sites in early spring. The Guidelines however advise that this is a one-off operation and routine spraying is not recommended for both economic and ecological reasons.

As there tends to be a large amount of parasitism and predation of willow beetle eggs from natural enemies, any chemical intervention needs to be sympathetic to natural control mechanisms. While currently there are no insecticides authorised for use on willow, my officials are examining the possibility of issuing such approval.

GLAS Applications

162. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of an application under the green low-carbon agri-environment scheme by a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7395/16]

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 October 2015. GLAS applicants with a start date of 1 October 2015 are eligible for a 2015 part-year payment in respect of 2015 eligible actions, for the three month period 1 October 2015 - 31 December 2015.

My Department has reviewed this case and I can confirm an area of 2.56 ha which was excluded from the application will now be included in the payable Hen Harrier area for this case. The 2015 part year payment, to which the person named is entitled, will be recalculated and the 2015 balancing payment outstanding will include the full Hen Harrier area and GLAS+ when all required regulatory checks are fully completed.

Departmental Correspondence

163. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he received correspondence in March 2012 regarding allegations of serious fraud in an organisation (details supplied); and the action that was taken by his Department to investigate these allegations following receipt of this correspondence. [7407/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department received correspondence in 2012 in which allegations were made against the named organisation. I asked officials in the Investigations Unit of my Department to examine the situation and meet with the person who submitted the correspondence.

Following their meeting, the investigating officers concluded that there was no evidence available to warrant an investigation under my Department's legislation but advised the person alleging the offences that a number of allegations appear, of their nature, to involve matters for consideration by the Garda Síochána. My understanding is that the Garda Síochána were subsequently contacted.

Question No. 164 withdrawn.

Beef Data Programme

165. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment will be made to a person (details supplied) in County Laois; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7423/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named submitted an application under the Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP) 2015 – 2020 on 2 May 2015.

EU Regulations governing the administration of these schemes require that full and comprehensive administrative checks including in some cases on the spot inspections be completed before any payments issue. These checks have been successfully completed, payment has been processed for the person named and will issue in the coming days.

Forestry Sector

166. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the present status of aid to producer groups and the implementation of the knowledge transfer scheme for forestry owners, following previous meetings and correspondence from the Irish Co-operative Organisation Society and forestry producer groups; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7424/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Aid for Producer Groups is provided for under sub chapter 2.7 of the European Union Guidelines for State Aid in the agricultural and forestry sectors and in rural areas for 2014 to 2020. Such aid is confined to the establishment of new Producer Groups and cannot be used to support those groups already established. On the other hand support for Knowledge Transfer Groups (KTGs) does offer potential for supporting existing groups. This matter is now under consideration by my Department.

Animal Welfare

167. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the procedure for a person to take back possession of dogs seized under the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7425/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): In accordance with Section 38(4) of the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013, an officer, authorised under the Act may seize animals where the officer has reasonable grounds for believing that an offence is being or has been committed under the Act and may detain animals for use in evidence for proceedings for an offence under the Act.

Seized animals can be held pending determination of any legal proceedings. The Act provides for forfeiture of an animal on conviction of an offence and, if the Court fails to convict, the animal would have to be returned to its owner.

Sheepmeat Sector

168. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding small sheep farmers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7441/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Supports for the sector include direct payments and a range of measures under the Rural Development Programme to support environmentally sustainable production, and also improve efficiency and profitability on farms to help to address this efficiency gap. These include the Basic Payments Scheme, which incorporated payments under the former Grassland Sheep Scheme, provided exclusively for the sheep sector.

In addition, a range of schemes under the Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020 have been designed to support the sheep sector. Sheep farmers continue to be significant beneficiaries from the Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) scheme. The ANC Scheme is worth €195 million annually to some 100,000 farmers and in excess of €1.3 billion over the lifetime of the RDP.

Funding has also been made available under the RDP for the Green Low Carbon Agri Environment Scheme (GLAS). Access to GLAS is on a tiered basis with those in Tier 1 receiving priority. Tier 1 participants are mainly those with Priority Environment Assets, which include Natura Land and Commonage. Many sheep farmers are commonage shareholders and will qualify for Tier 1 access. Some 38,000 farmers have been approved under the first two tranches of the Scheme.

Increased provision has also been made for improving efficiency and profitability in sheep production under Knowledge Transfer Groups under the RDP. Building on the successful Sheep Technology Adoption Programme, it is expected that the Sheep Knowledge Transfer Groups will commence shortly.

A range of capital supports for sheep farmers is also available under the TAMS II scheme, including: solid floor housing with or without penning, slatted floor housing, mobile sheep handling facilities, fixed sheep handling facilities, replacement of sheep slats in addition to many other capital investments available to all livestock enterprises such as manure pits, silage pits etc.

Additionally approval has been sought by DAFM from the European Commission to include sheep fencing as an eligible item of expenditure in the TAMS II.

My Department also funds the activities of Teagasc, Bord Bia and Sheep Ireland in the areas of research, advice, education, breed improvement and marketing and promotion.

In relation to a further direct payment per ewe, any coupled payment would require a redistribution of existing funds and would involve cuts in other farm payments from Pillar 1. Any nationally funded payment would have to be considered in the context of exchequer funding availability and also State aid. Any consideration of further funding for the sheep sector under the RDP could only be considered in the context of an overall review of the implementation of the RDP and would require a re-distribution of funds within the RDP.

The sheep sector is an important component of our agriculture sector and the third largest farming sector in Ireland with over 34,000 producers and 2015 proved to be another good year for the sheep sector. A combination of higher carcass weight (up 1.9%) and higher factory prices (up 1.5%) meant that output value of the sector increased by over 3%. Total sheepmeat exports increased by an estimated 5% to €230 million between 2014 and 2015. At farm level, prices reached highs not seen in five years and thankfully these strong prices have continued into this year.

Increasing consumer demand and market access is a key component in driving the growth in the sheep farming sector in addition to improving technical efficiencies at farm level. My Department continually works on securing new markets for all Irish agri-food products including sheep meat. In addition last year Commissioner Hogan set up the Sheepmeat Reflections Group at EU level to examine the sheep sector and the support it needs going forward in order to continue to make an important contribution to agricultural output. My Department is participating in this group and I expect the outcome of this exercise to be reflected in future deliberations on EU policy in the sheep sector.

Young Farmers Scheme Eligibility

169. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will consider granting a person (details supplied) in County Donegal the 2015 young farmers scheme payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7462/16]

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 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 2001 which is outside the eligibility period for the measures applied for and as such this application was not successful. The applicant was notified of this decision in writing and was offered the opportunity to submit an appeal.

My Department has now received an appeal from the person named in relation to their National Reserve application. This appeal will be considered by my Department based on the information set out by the applicant and a decision with regard to the outcome of the appeal will be notified in writing to the applicant as soon as possible.

GLAS Appeals

170. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal will receive a decision from the agriculture appeals office regarding an application under the green low-carbon agri-environment scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7463/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application for Tranche 2 of the GLAS Scheme was received in this case on the dedicated GLAS online system on the 8 December 2015.

The unprecedented level of applications to the Scheme has meant that for GLAS 2, priority is being given to what are called Tier 1 and Tier 2 candidates, i.e. those who either manage key environmental assets like endangered birds, protected habitats or high-quality water courses, or who have committed to undertake particularly valuable environmental actions like growing feed-crops for wild birds, adopting low-impact tillage techniques or using low-emission slurry spreading methods.

The application for the person named was ranked as a Tier 3 application and it was therefore not selected into the scheme. A letter issued to the person named notifying him of this decision and giving him the option of appeal to GLAS section. An appeal was received from the person named and following review the original decision was upheld. The applicant has been informed of his right to appeal this further to the Agriculture Appeals Office (AAO) but to date there is no record of an appeal having been made.

A third tranche of GLAS (GLAS 3) will open later this year and the person named and any applicant who was unsuccessful in the second tranche will have the opportunity now to re-examine their proposed farm-plan, in consultation with their adviser, and see how it might be improved to increase their chance of selection under GLAS 3 and to submit a new application for GLAS 3 when the scheme is opened.

Harbours and Piers Development

171. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 290 of 6 April 2016, if he will make available the study as referenced in the reply in which a chemical re-evaluation was carried out in 2015-16 indicating at least 85% of sediments near Smooth Point at the Killybegs Fishery Harbour Centre in County Donegal is suitable for disposal at sea; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7469/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Deputy is referring to a project for a proposed pier extension at Smooth Point on the new pier at Killybegs Fishery Harbour Centre, which will require the dredging of a quantity of silt, gravel and rock. As outlined in a previous answer to Parliamentary Question Number 290 of 6 April 2016, a chemical re-evaluation of the sediments was carried out in 2015 and early 2016, as part of the current development proposal. Results currently indicate that at least 85% is suitable for disposal at sea, subject to EPA approval.

My Department intends to submit a Dumping At Sea Application to the Environmental Protection Agency in the coming months. Any material that is determined to exceed the environmental standards set for sea disposal will not be dumped at sea. Other options are being considered should this arise, including disposal on land or other remediation measures. The issue of disposal of quantities of contaminated dredge spoil is a matter which is regularly encountered

in marine dredging works. A variety of appropriate solutions exist to address such situations.

The chemical re-evaluation of the sediments is part of the comprehensive Site Investigation and Report on the area to be dredged and developed at Smooth Point. While the investigation is at an advanced stage the report on the investigation is not yet complete.

The report once complete, in addition to other earlier reports, will comprise the supporting documentation to accompany the Dumping at Sea (DAS) Licence application to the Environmental Protection Agency. In accordance with the DAS legislation, the application and all associated documentation will be made publicly available and open to inspection by all interested parties.

Appointments to State Boards

172. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the regional breakdown of all members appointed by the Government or him to State boards, agencies and bodies in 2015 and to date in 2016 broken down by agency and by regions (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7471/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): It is not possible to provide this information in the required time. I will forward it to the Deputy as soon as it is available.

Herd Data

173. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of an application for a herd number transfer by a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7506/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The application for the herd number from the person in the question has been approved by my Department and a letter of approval issued on 19 April 2016.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Applications

174. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of an application under the agri-environment options scheme by a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7508/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named commenced their AEOS contact 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 all AEOS 1 participants will be receiving their final payments under the scheme, re-checks on payments made for all scheme years must be completed before final payment can be processed. Officials are working through these files and payment will be made in all cases as soon as possible.

Basic Payment Scheme Applications

175. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of an application under the basic payment scheme by a person (details supplied) in County Mayo [7525/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department received a 2015 Private Contract Clause application from the person named seeking the transfer of land and entitlements by sale as a Buyer. Under the Terms and Conditions governing the Transfer of Basic Payment Scheme Entitlements by way of Private Contract Clause, the Seller must meet the definition of an “active farmer” in 2015 and must submit a 2015 Basic Payment Scheme application on which he/she declares at least one hectare of eligible land.

An application under the 2015 Basic Payment Scheme was received from the seller, however, it would appear that this application was submitted outside the timeframe allowed and the land declared has already been declared by another applicant. This application is currently under review and the person named will be informed of the outcome as soon as possible.

TAMS Payments

176. **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. [7551/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The applicant in question carried out a number of investments under the Farm Safety Scheme in TAMS I including safety covers on external agitation points, replacement door, rewiring, yard lights and a head scoop. The claim for these items was received on the 2 September 2015 and payment issued on 2 October 2015. The payment is based on 40% of the proposed costings initially submitted by the applicant when applying for the scheme. There are no further payments due to the applicant in respect of this Scheme.

TAMS Applications

177. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of an application under the targeted agricultural modernisation scheme by a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7575/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The applicant in question has applied for a concrete tank and animal housing in the first tranche of the Animal Welfare, Safety and Nutrient Storage Scheme of TAMS II. All applications received are examined, validated and then have to be ranked and selected. Approvals will commence when this process is complete and this is anticipated before the end of this month.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

178. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a person (details provided) in County Cork has received full payment under the single payment, disadvantaged area payment and grassland sheep schemes; and if he will make a statement on

the matter. [7590/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under the 2015 Basic Payment Scheme (BPS)/Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) Scheme was received from the person named on 26 May 2015. There was no separate Grassland Sheep Scheme in 2015 as payments under this scheme have been integrated into the value of entitlements under the BPS. 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 2015 application of the person named was selected for a Remote Sensing eligibility inspection. This inspection was completed and the outcome resulted in no area-based reductions. Payment due under the Basis Payment Scheme issued on 21 December 2015 to the nominated bank account of the person named.

Under EU Regulation 21/2004, all flock owners/sheep keepers are obliged to count the sheep in their flock and on their holding. They are also legally obliged to return this number to my Department via the annual Sheep/Goat Census return. The 2014 census return, which is required for eligibility to schemes such as ANC in the 2015 scheme year, was due by the closing date of 30 January 2015. My Department's records confirm that no 2014 Sheep Census has been received from the person named. Therefore, no payment is due under the ANC scheme.

The person named has been notified of this outcome in writing and advised of their right to seek a review of the decision within ninety days by the Agriculture Appeals Office.

Basic Payment Scheme Applications

179. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the single farm payment due to a person (details supplied) in County Longford will be immediately paid; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7608/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named submitted an application for allocation of entitlements under the 'Scottish Derogation' measure of the Basic Payment Scheme. Under EU Regulations governing the Basic Payment scheme, processing of applications involves administrative and on farm checks and verification of land details submitted. These checks are now complete and the application has been finalised. Payment under the 'Scottish Derogation' category will issue in the coming days.

Sugar Industry

180. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to revive the sugar beet industry here; if his Department has been approached by any private firms which want to revive the sugar beet industry; and if his Department will assist attempts to re-establish this industry here. [7610/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Prior to the last CAP reform negotiation I met with two separate groups which had conducted feasibility studies into the possibility of establishing a new sugar/bioethanol processing facility in the country. The figures published by the interested groups who are investigating the possibility of building a new facility, indicated that the overall capital costs involved could range from €250 million to €400 million, depending on what type of facility would be constructed.

I informed both groups that any venture to develop a combined sugar/bioethanol production facility in Ireland, would have to be a viable commercial proposition, and supported by a business case which is sufficiently robust to attract the funding from investors for the very substantial capital investment required. I indicated at the time that it was my job to look for agreement at EU level to allow for the growing of sugar beet for the manufacture of sugar, at the earliest possible date.

In this connection, I secured agreement as part of the overall CAP reform package at the last EU Council of Agriculture Ministers, which I chaired in June 2013, to abolish all sugar quotas by 30 September 2017. This agreement removes, with effect from 1 October 2017, the current EU quota barrier for operators in Ireland or other Member States, wishing to re-establish a sugar industry. At the time, this agreement was welcomed by those parties who are interested in seeking to re-establish a sugar industry here. It is now up to those same entities to move the project forward and to garner sufficient commercial and financial support to turn their plans into a viable reality. I have met with the interested parties a number of times since 2011 to hear from them how the projects are developing.

Young Farmers Scheme Eligibility

181. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his Department will confirm receipt of an application from a person (details supplied) in County Cork for entitlements from the national reserve as a qualified young farmer; if this application was received by registered post indicating postage date of 30 March 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7611/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named submitted an application for the 2015 Young Farmer Scheme which was received by my Department via standard post on 14 March 2016. The application was not successful as it was received after the Scheme's closing date of 29 May 2015. The applicant was notified of this decision in writing and was offered the opportunity to submit an appeal.

My Department has now received an appeal from the person named in relation to their Young Farmers' Scheme application. This appeal will be considered by my Department based on the information set out by the applicant and a decision with regard to the outcome of the appeal will be notified in writing to the applicant as soon as possible.

There is no record of an application in respect of the National Reserve having been submitted by Registered Post for the person named on the date specified. An Official from my Department will contact the person named directly to establish further information with regard to the issue of any application by Registered Post in 2015.

Young Farmers Scheme Eligibility

182. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine why the young farmers' payment was refused to a person (details supplied) in County Galway; the income threshold that is used in such decisions; if pensions are reckonable in such calculations; if appeals are allowed; if issues surrounding pension income are detailed in the terms and conditions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7667/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The persons named submitted applications under the 'young farmer' category of the 2015 National Reserve

and the Young Farmers' Scheme with the second person named as the 'young farmer'. The application to the National Reserve was not successful as the applicants were deemed to have exceeded the €40,000 income threshold. The application to the Young Farmers' Scheme was not successful as the applicants held no activated entitlements in 2015, the basis upon which the Young Farmers' Scheme is paid. The applicants were notified of the decisions in relation to the National Reserve and Young Farmers' Scheme applications in writing and were offered the opportunity to submit an appeal.

My Department has now received an appeal from the persons named in relation to their National Reserve application. This appeal will be considered by my Department based on the information set out by the applicants and a decision with regard to the outcome of the appeal will be notified in writing to the applicants as soon as possible.

The process of deciding objective criteria for the National Reserve is carried out in consultation with the Direct Payments Advisory Committee which includes members of the main farming bodies and advisory services. After consultation with this Committee it was decided that an off farm income limit of €40,000 would be applied to all applicants under the 2015 National Reserve. The corresponding off farm income limit under the previous National Reserve was €30,000. Applicants under the 2015 National Reserve also have the flexibility of choosing either the 2013 or 2014 tax year, whichever is more advantageous.

The Terms and Conditions of the National Reserve clearly state that for joint applicants under the National Reserve, such as in the case of the persons named, the gross off-farm income of all persons named on the herd number is taken into consideration. The Department of Social Protection 'State Pension', including Widow's, Widower's or Surviving Civil Partner's Pension is excluded from the calculation to determine off-farm income. Retirement pensions resulting from other employment are reckonable as off-farm income under the 2015 National Reserve.

Forestry Sector

183. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 319 of 29 September 2015, to provide a re-instatement grant to persons whose forestry was damaged in the storm in February 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7675/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Approval to fund a reconstitution scheme for forests affected by the winter storms of 2013/2014 was sought by my Department from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. That Department has responded to this request and in doing so has sought further information on the impacts of such a scheme on the insurance market for forestry and also on other issues of concern. My Department is currently examining these requests.

Single Payment Scheme Applications

184. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a claim for a parcel of land in a 2014 single payment application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry will be reviewed in light of new information; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7681/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named submitted an application for the 2014 Single Payment Scheme which was received in the

Department on 13 May 2014. A dual claim and over claim were identified during the Department's administrative checks on a land parcel. The Department issued a letter on foot of this, and a reply has recently been received and is under review.

An Official from my Department will be in direct contact with the person named to establish further information regarding both the dual claim and over claim and a decision regarding the review will issue thereafter.

Transfer of Entitlements Application

185. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding payments to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7682/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): This case involves a double transfer of entitlements. As the first step in the double transfer the person named submitted a Transfer of Entitlements Allocation Right and Reference Value application to my Department seeking the transfer of allocation rights and values by Change of Registration Details of Herd Number to a Farm Partnership as transferor. This application was processed, following which the allocation rights and values are now held by the person named and another person under the Partnership number.

As the second step the person named submitted a Private Contract Clause application to my Department seeking the transfer of allocation right with sale/lease of land to a third party. The PCC form submitted was signed by the person named only. As the allocation rights and values are now held by the person named and another person under the Farm Partnership it was necessary to have the PCC application form returned to have it signed by both persons on the herd number. This form has been returned to my Department duly signed by both persons. The Private Contract Clause application can now be fully processed to facilitate the discharge of the Basic payment to the person named in respect of his remaining entitlements as soon as possible.

Pigmeat Sector

186. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the proposals he has to establish a pork forum, similar to the beef forum, representative of all the interests within the pigmeat sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7687/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The development of a viable pigmeat sector is a priority for me given the crucial role which the industry plays. I am very conscious of the fact that prices have come under pressure over the last year and the difficulties that this is causing for producers. It is for this reason that I proposed measures at the March meeting of Agriculture Ministers specifically for the sector including the re-opening of the PSA scheme for pigmeat which I am pleased to say was accepted by Commission.

Given the strategic importance which the sector plays in our agri-economy, I established last year a Pig Industry Stakeholder Group which was chaired by Dr Sean Brady and whose membership was drawn from across the sector, including farmers and processors. This Group's remit was to address these challenges facing the sector under themes such as biosecurity, animal welfare, quality assurance, antibiotic usage, animal health, salmonella control programme, marketing, feed, non-intensive sector and other production models. This was a very compre-

hensive exercise stretching over many months which also included a public consultation phase during which submissions were received and presented to the Committee by many different stakeholders. The Group completed its report in February and presented it to the High Level Implementation Committee overseeing the implementation of the Food Wise 2025 strategy. This reflected the fact that the preparation of this report is one of the key recommendations under the Food Wise Strategy.

This timely report afforded all industry stakeholders including farmers, processors and Government Agencies a chance to take a collective view of how best to address the challenges facing the industry in order to support its development in accordance with the Food Wise 2025 vision. The focus now must turn to its implementation and my Department is working on a plan for its implementation in the context of the Food Wise 2025 strategy. Given the comprehensive nature of the report, its support from stakeholders and its wide-ranging conclusions I believe that a focus on its implementation represents best use of available resources for all parties and most importantly will deliver the most meaningful outcome for the sector in its current difficulties.

Pigmeat Sector

187. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the outcome of discussions at the recent European Union Agriculture Council in relation to the serious problems facing the pigmeat sector; the proposals there are to provide additional assistance at European level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7688/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The development of a viable pigmeat sector is a priority for me given the crucial role which the industry plays in supporting approximately 7,000 jobs including production, slaughter, processing, feed manufacture and services. In 2015 export volumes increased by approximately 8%, with growth to the UK, Continental Europe and International markets. Export values at €570 million, fell marginally by 2% during 2015 due to lower pig prices. Pigmeat prices tend to be cyclical in nature with periods of lower prices followed by a supply response and/or a recovery in demand. My Department carefully monitors developments in the pig sector, both domestically and internationally.

I am conscious of the fact that prices have come under pressure over the last year and a half and the difficulties that this is causing for producers. This is not an exclusively Irish phenomenon, and Irish prices have actually remained ahead of the EU average for the last five months. However I would also add that like any other EU Minister I do not have a role in the setting of prices. This is a function of the market.

At the March meeting of the Council of Agriculture Ministers in Brussels, I put forward a number of measures for the pigmeat and dairy sectors which I believe were needed immediately to help producers through their current difficulties. On pigmeat my priority was to secure the re-opening of the Pigmeat Private Storage Aid Scheme as I believe its closure did not appear justified by the current state of the EU and global pigmeat market. Given that the sector does not enjoy direct EU supports, market tools available in times of extreme price volatility must be deployed when necessary. I am pleased to note that the Commission has agreed to the re-opening of this scheme in 2016. At the April meeting I reiterated the need to move quickly on the proposals agreed in order to bring about the desired stabilising effects.

In relation to the Russian pigmeat ban, the adverse effects of the effective closure of this market are still being felt by farmers. Ireland has requested the Commission to continue and intensify its political, technical and diplomatic efforts to unlock the Russian market for EU pig-

meat. We proposed that the Commission reengage and secure access for products outside the scope of the Presidential decree, such as pig fats and offals.

In the interim, a direct aid package payment will issue in the coming week to all pig farmers in Ireland with a minimum level of supply of 200 pigs slaughtered in 2015. This means a flat rate payment of over €3,000 to each farmer. This will ensure that the payment is directed to those farmers most affected by price volatility, thus meeting the requirements of the EU Regulations providing the funding. Furthermore, Commissioner Hogan has reiterated his determination to promote the EU's interests and open up new markets for EU products, with a specific €30 million envelope for dairy and pigmeat available under the EU Promotion Scheme to reflect the market disturbances in those sectors. Ireland, through Bord Bia, will be making an application for a proportion of this funding in the very near future.

Dairy Sector

188. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the outcome of discussions at the recent European Union Agriculture Council in relation to the serious problems facing the dairy sector; the proposals there are to provide additional and much needed assistance at European level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7694/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The price of milk and dairy commodities is determined by a range of factors, including supply and demand at international level. Food commodity markets including dairy markets have been characterised by significant levels of volatility for a number of years and this trend has continued throughout 2015 and into early 2016.

Factors contributing to global price volatility in 2015 included the Russian Ban and the softening of Chinese demand on one side, coupled with increased production among key global producers including the EU on the supply side. The longer term demographic and demand perspectives remain positive, but 2016 will be a challenging year.

Production decisions are made by producers, taking prevailing market conditions as well as their efficiency of production and price of inputs into account. The challenge posed by price volatility has been highlighted by my Department and others over a number of years, and indeed my Department has, including through its agencies, invested significant resources in providing farmers with advice and technology designed to improve on farm efficiency, reduce production costs, and make farm businesses more resilient in times of downward price pressure. The abolition of dairy quotas in April 2015 allows farmers the freedom to make these production decisions on a commercial basis.

That said, we obviously must offer support to the sector in times of prevailing difficulty such as we are now experiencing. In this respect, I very much welcome the Presidency conclusions on the proposal for the package of support measures to address challenges in the dairy and pigmeat sectors which was agreed in Brussels at last month's Council. This follows on from an earlier package of measures agreed in September of last year and takes account of the ongoing difficulties being experienced in the sector, where the duration of market turbulence has gone well beyond previous expectations.

The package includes a number of proposals by Ireland to the Commission and other Member States in advance of Council, in particular the doubling of the intervention ceiling for skimmed milk powder and butter. I also welcome the Commissioner's undertaking to consider further flexibilities in the PSA scheme for Skimmed Milk Powder, and to look at further flex-

ibilities in the State Aid regime.

In terms of input costs at farm level, I have called on the Commission to consider looking at temporary suspension of EU import tariffs on fertilisers to reduce input costs for Irish and EU farmers and I understand that the Commission is looking favourably on this request. The Presidency conclusions also refer to the possibility of advance payments under CAP, as was done in 2015. In addition my Department is in the final stages of issuing €26.4m in direct aid to dairy farmers funded by the exchequer and the EU.

Furthermore, with respect to financial instruments, I welcome the proposal for the European Investment Bank (EIB) and member states to work together with the Commission on the feasibility of an EU export credit tool.

It remains clear that we need to deal urgently and effectively with this temporary problem. We must ensure that EU farmers are protected from the worst impacts of low commodity prices in an appropriate way, but remain well placed to avail of emerging opportunities when markets recover. Ireland is strongly positioned as a competitive producer of dairy, and while conditions are extremely difficult at present, Irish dairy farmers will be well placed to avail of the opportunity presented by market recovery in due course.

Single Payment Scheme Applications

189. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a single payment for a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7701/16]

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 6 May 2015. The processing of this application is on-going. An official from my Department will be in direct contact with the person named to finalise processing in this case.

Direct Payment Scheme

190. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he proposes to take in conjunction with his European Union colleagues to protect the concept of the viability of the family farm enterprise throughout Europe; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7742/16]

192. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which he remains satisfied that farm families here will continue to benefit from Common Agriculture Policy reform in a fair and equitable fashion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7744/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 190 and 192 together.

The need to protect the viability of the family farm is an imperative that informs all discussions with my counterparts at European level, and I am fully satisfied that farm families in Ireland will continue to benefit in a fair and equitable manner from the ongoing reform of the Common Agricultural Policy. These twin imperatives informed my approach to the negotiations in 2012 and 2013, and they continue to inform the process by which the various elements of CAP reform are now being delivered.

Taking the direct payments system as an example, the Deputy may recall that I proposed an alternative approach to the redistribution of direct payments than that originally advocated by the European Commission, precisely because I wanted to ensure that the direct payments system could be made fairer and more equitable while at the same time ensuring that the level of transfer of payments between farmers was not of a scale that might jeopardise our objectives for the development of the sector. We now have a system which satisfies these two requirements. Last year's payments under the Basic Payment and other schemes represented the start of a process that, by 2019, will see a considerable shift in the balance of payments from those previously receiving very high rates per hectare to those previously receiving much lower rates of payment. I believe that this not only makes the direct payments system fairer, but also ensures that it continues to provide support and income stability that will allow farmers to respond to the demands of the market. As such, it also provides a vital tool to help us achieve the objectives outlined in the Food Wise 2025 strategy.

I have also taken significant steps to encourage the participation of young farmers in agriculture, which is vital in terms of securing the critical role that farm families play in the development of the sector. In addition to providing for a top-up of direct payments, I have ensured that young farmers are prioritised in the allocation of payment entitlements from the national reserve. These direct payments measures are further complemented by supports under the 2014-2020 Rural Development Programme where, for example, enhanced support for capital investment by young farmers has been made available under the TAMS schemes.

More generally under Pillar 2 of the CAP, I am focussed on the socio-economic development of our farms and of our rural areas so that all farm families have an opportunity to realise their potential. Schemes for improving sustainability (such as GLAS and the Beef Data and Genomics Programme) and competitiveness (such as TAMS) are complemented by continued strong support for disadvantaged areas (now known as Areas of Natural Constraint). I believe this combination provides a vital range of supports that will allow farm families to continue to benefit from the CAP in an equitable manner while supporting their development over the coming years.

Basic Payment Scheme

191. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which all farm support payments already due in 2016 have been paid up to date; the number, if any, outstanding for technical or other reasons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7743/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The position in relation to the main farm support payments in 2016 is as follows:

The closing date for applications under the 2016 Areas of Natural Constraints scheme is 16 May 2016. Payments are due to commence in late September on cases which have fulfilled the necessary area and stocking requirements under the scheme.

The closing date for applications under the 2016 Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) scheme is 16 May 2016. Under European Union legislation governing the implementation of the BPS, the earliest date on which advance payments may be made, in respect of fully processed and clear applications, is 16 October of this year.

Payment applications under BDGP, AEOS, GLAS and Organics Schemes will be processed later this year when programme requirements are met by applicants and required checks com-

pleted.

Question No. 192 answered with Question No. 190.

Food Industry Development

193. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which indicators in respect of the Food Harvest 2020 and Food Wise 2025 remain in line with expectations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7745/16]

196. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which he expects agriculture production to increase throughout each sector in the next four years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7748/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 193 and 196 together.

The main targets set out in the Food Harvest report published in 2010 were, by 2020, to increase the value of: primary output by 33% and agri-food exports by 42% (both from a 2007-09 average baseline); and to increase value added production by 40% (from a 2008 baseline). In addition to these value increases, the dairy industry targeted a 50% increase in milk production by 2020, to be progressed following the abolition of milk quotas in April last year.

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

Food Wise 2025, the new ten year strategy for the agri-food sector published in July last year, builds on the successful vision of Food Harvest 2020. It identifies the opportunities and challenges facing the sector and provides an enabling strategy that will allow the sector to grow and prosper. Food Wise includes more than 400 specific recommendations, spread across the cross-cutting themes of sustainability, innovation, human capital, market development and competitiveness; as well as specific sectoral recommendations.

If these recommendations are implemented, the expert committee which drew up the Food Wise 2025 Strategy believes that the following growth projections are achievable by 2025: increasing the value of agri-food exports by 85% to €19 billion; increasing value added in the sector by 70% to in excess of €13 billion; and increasing the value of primary production by 65% to almost €10 billion. With regard to employment, Food Wise foresees the creation of 23,000 additional jobs in the agri-food sector all along the supply chain from primary production to high value added product development. Realising these growth projections will be challenging, but I am confident that they can be achieved.

I chair the High Level Implementation Committee, including senior officials from relevant Departments and State agencies, which will drive implementation of the Food Wise recommendations. The HLIC has met three times so far. The fourth meeting takes place tomorrow and will deal specifically with competitiveness and the dairy sector.

Food Marketing Programme

194. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine

the extent to which new markets for beef, lamb, pigmeat, poultry or products thereof continue to be established; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7746/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): There is a strong demand for meat globally and my role as Minister is to facilitate market access and to enable Irish exporters to take advantage of the opportunities that arise. My Department engages on an ongoing basis with many Third countries, in collaboration with Bord Bia, the meat industry, Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade and the European Commission on various market access issues. 2015 was a very successful year for meat exports. According to Bord Bia overall exports of beef, sheepmeat, pigmeat and poultry increased by €140 million to €3.5 billion. Although exports to the EU account for the majority of meat exports, Third Country markets are increasingly an important alternative outlet for the industry.

I am constantly seeking to develop long-term trading relationships in new and expanding international markets for Irish meat products, raising the profile of Ireland and increasing international confidence in Irish meat production and control systems. Since taking office I have led trade missions to a wide variety of destinations, including China, the United States, Algeria, Japan, West Africa and the Gulf States, in order to promote Irish food and beverages, including meat exports, and to open up new markets abroad.

These initiatives and efforts have led to several notable successes in securing agreement to export Irish beef to the USA, Japan, the Philippines, Canada, Singapore, Egypt, Iran and Oman; to export sheepmeat to Canada, Singapore, South Africa, the Philippines, Hong Kong, the UAE, Canada and Oman; to export pigmeat to Australia, Vietnam, the Philippines and Serbia; and to export poultry meat to Singapore and the UAE.

The opening of the US market to Irish beef in early 2015 has provided an important outlet that holds enormous potential for future development given that we are the first EU Member State to gain access. An estimated 1,800 tonnes valued at € 14 million was exported in 2015. In Quarter 1 of 2016 approximately 700 tonnes with a value of €6 million are estimated to have been exported, continuing the positive trends from last year. My Department remains engaged with the US authorities to allow for the extension of beef exports to include manufacturing beef/ Beef Intended for Grinding (BIFG).

Significant progress has been made along the path to securing access to the Chinese market for Irish beef with the lifting of the BSE ban by China in February 2015, and an inspection visit by a delegation from AQSIQ to Ireland was hosted in January 2016. Steps have been taken towards the opening of the Israeli market for beef exports once again following an audit visit to approve selected plants in February 2016. A delegation from South Korea is expected to conduct a systems audit visit regarding beef access in May.

Other market access opportunities being actively pursued at present include beef access for Vietnam, pigmeat access for Mexico and beef and pigmeat access for the Ukraine. The search for new markets will continue in conjunction with various stakeholders. This will also be guided by the implementation of Food Wise 2025 strategy which identified the future global growth opportunities which Ireland is well placed to benefit from, including: our reputation for food safety and controls; our natural competitive advantage in sustainable grass-based production; and a world class agri-food industry, backed by strong State support services. These strengths and opportunities should enhance our search for new Third Country markets.

Food Safety Standards

195. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he is satisfied regarding the adequacy and frequency of checks and inspections in respect of food and food product labelling here and throughout the European Union with particular reference to the need to preserve the integrity of the food industry and recognise its importance to the economy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7747/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): As the Deputy will be aware, I attach great importance to the food and drink industries exports and their contribution to our economic recovery. Agri food exports account for 7% of GDP and continue to grow year on year.

My colleague, the Minister for Health, has overall responsibility for the general food labelling legislation and new EU food information regulations which were adopted by the Council of Health Ministers in December 2011. However, my Department plays an important role in the enforcement of this legislation under service contract to the Food Safety Authority of Ireland.

Primary responsibility under EU law for the safety and traceability of food placed on the market lies with food business operators. The role of National Competent Agencies is to verify compliance with this requirement. This is done via a combination of inspecting establishments and auditing the food safety management systems which operators have in place. These controls are applied at different stages in the food supply chain. Regulation (EC) No. 178 of 2002 sets out the general principles and requirements of EU food law and stipulates that food business operators must, at all stages of production, processing and distribution within their business, ensure food law requirements are satisfied. In regard to traceability, the regulations require that food business operators have systems to identify any person who supplies the business with a food, and a system to identify other businesses to which their product has been supplied. This is referred to as the 'one step forward, one step backward' traceability system. There are additional requirements for certain fishery and aquaculture products under the Control Regulation (Regulation 1224/2009 and Implementing Regulation 404/2011) from first sale to subsequent stages of production, processing and distribution up to retail.

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

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

Question No. 196 answered with Question No. 193.

Fishery Harbour Centres

197. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine why there is a mandatory charge for the use of water and refuse services for all boats, irrespective of size and whether they avail of both services or not, under charge number 5 and under charge number 10 of the Schedules of SI 214 of 2012 (Fisheries Harbour Centres (Rates and Charges) Order 2012); if he will amend these regulations and provide an exemption for currachs that do not use these services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7767/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Pursuant to the Fishery Harbour Centres Act 1968 (as amended), my Department is responsible for the six Fishery Harbour Centres located at Castletownbere, Dingle, Dunmore East, Howth, Killybegs and Ros an Mhíl. Charges for the use of facilities and services at each of the Fishery Harbour Centres are levied by virtue of the Fishery Harbour Centres (Rates & Charges) Order 2012 (S.I. No. 214 of 2012) which came into effect on 1 July 2012. Different rates apply according to the type and nature of the vessel, the different use made of the facilities by the vessel, the size of the vessel and the quantity and species of fish landed (where applicable).

The mandatory nature of the charges referred to is nothing new, and is consistent with the situation as it pertained in the previous Order S.I. No. 439 of 2003. For ease of reference and for clarification, the relevant charges under S.I. No. 214 of 2012 are set out in the following table.

S.I. No. 214 of 2012 provides *inter alia* that charge no. 9 of Schedule 1 for the use of fresh water is "...mandatory on all vessels using a Fishery Harbour Centre whether or not they use fresh water..." other than vessels paying under charge no. 5, charge no. 10 in Schedule 1 or charge no. 17 in Schedule 2. In this regard, please note the following:

- Charge no. 5 of Schedule 1 relates to landing of whitefish. It is generally only larger fishing vessels that opt to be invoiced under this charge.
- Charge no. 10 of Schedule 1 relates to use of the harbour by passenger boats/vessels and cruise vessels.
- Charge no. 17 of Schedule 2 relates to berthing of yachts and pleasure crafts.
- Charge 9 takes account of different types of vessel, drawing a distinction as it does between fishing vessels, pelagic vessels and other vessels. Within this framework, it also differentiates on size, between fishing vessels over and under 6 metres in length overall.

Waste charges are mandatory on all vessels using a Fishery Harbour Centre whether or not waste is disposed of, as set out in Charge 10 of Schedule 2. The mandatory nature of the charge arises from national and EU legislative requirements and is also designed to reduce any incentive to discharge waste at sea. A key principle underpinning this charge is that larger vessels generally tend to generate more waste and are charged more accordingly. The 2012 Order revoked its 2003 predecessor and while vessels were categorised somewhat differently under the 2003 Order, there has been no increase in the quantum of water or waste charges since then.

In March 2015, following a complaint the Office of the Ombudsman found no issue with the mandatory nature of these particular charges.

That said, the Department is currently undertaking an internal review of the Fishery Harbour Centres (Rates & Charges) Order 2012 (S.I. No. 214 of 2012), with the intention of introducing a new Order in 2017. It should be noted that Statute requires a full public consultation process to be undertaken before any new Rates and Charges Order is introduced.

Charge No/ Schedule No	Description of Facility or Service	Rate or Charge
Charge 9/Schedule 1	Use of fresh water (mandatory on all vessels using a Fishery Harbour Centre whether or not they use fresh water) other than vessels paying under charge no. 5 and charge no. 10 in this Schedule and charge no. 17 in Schedule 2: (a) fishing vessels (6 metres or more in length overall — Loa)	€30 per month per vessel or €2.50 per cubic metre metered
	(b) pelagic vessels	€90 per month per vessel or €2.50 per cubic metre metered
	(c) all other vessels *Note: If a charge for fresh water is levied at one Fishery Harbour Centre this charge will not be levied in another Fishery Harbour Centre used within that month.	€2.50 per cubic metre metered
Charge 10/Schedule 2	Disposal of ship generated waste*. A vessel of — (a) less than 10 gross tons	€20 per month
	(b) 10 or more gross tons	€40 per month
	(c) 20 or more gross tons	€60 per month
	(d) 30 or more gross tons	€80 per month
	(e) 100 or more gross tons	€100 per month
	*Note: 1. This charge is mandatory on all vessels using a Fishery Harbour Centre whether or not waste is disposed of. 2. If a charge for disposal of waste is levied at one Fishery Harbour Centre in a month this charge will not be levied in another Fishery Harbour Centre used within that month.	

Fishery Harbour Centres

198. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when sanction will be given for the dredging of Howth fishery harbour centre, given that it is silting up; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7777/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Howth Fish-

ery Harbour Centre is one of the six designated Fishery Harbour Centres which are owned, managed and maintained by my Department under Statute. While first and foremost a working fishery harbour, Howth, similar to the other five Fishery Harbour Centres, has its own unique features and is home to a broad range of diverse economic and social activities.

My Department is conscious of the importance of both fishing and non fishing activities in Howth and endeavours to facilitate and develop both. This involves day to day operational support by Harbour staff and management and development and repair of infrastructure subject to available financial resources. I am happy to advise the Deputy that, notwithstanding the prevailing economic environment in which we operate, in excess of €5.9 million has been invested in maintenance, development and upgrading works at Howth FHC as part of my Department's Fishery Harbour and Coastal Infrastructure Development Programme from 2011 to 2015.

On the 11th of January I announced funding of €1.45 million for the maintenance and development of Howth Fishery Harbour Centre during 2016; in addition I have set aside €420,000 for safety and maintenance, disability access and contractual commitments accruing from 2015. Significant works in this year's programme include the continued upgrading of the electrical system, provision of pontoons to west pier for ferry landings and traffic management works.

Of importance in the context of a possible future dredging project at Howth is the allocation of €100,000 for the preparation of a Dumping at Sea Licence which will be required before any dredging project could commence.

A draft report from a €150,000 site investigation project which was commissioned in 2015 was received in March 2016. The draft report is being assessed by the Department's engineers. This report includes vital information on the nature of the material to be dredged in any future dredging project. This information is necessary for the preparation of the Dumping at Sea licence which will be submitted to the EPA in due course. Depending on the outcome of this process Dredging Works will be considered subject to available funding.

As the Deputy is aware, all developments in the six Fishery Harbour Centres, including a possible future dredging project at Howth Fishery Harbour Centre will be considered under future Capital Programmes on the basis of available exchequer funding and competing priorities.

Single Payment Scheme Appeals

199. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment will issue to persons (details supplied) in County Mayo following their successful appeal to the agriculture appeals office; why the case is being further reviewed by his Department's inspectorate; and if he will make a full statement on the matter particularly as the appeal decision was made on 3 March 2016. [7785/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): In order to comply with EU requirements, the 2013 Single Farm Payment/Disadvantaged Areas' Scheme application of the person named was selected for a ground eligibility inspection. The inspection identified discrepancies between the areas declared and the area found resulting in an over-declaration in area of greater than 50%. Based on the terms and conditions of the scheme this resulted in no payment being due under the 2013 Single Payment Scheme and the application of an administrative fine to be offset against any future EU payments.

The person named was notified of this decision on 2 January 2014. The person named sought a review of this decision and the outcome was to uphold the original inspection decision. The person named was notified of this outcome on 20 November 2014. The person named sub-

mitted an appeal to the independent Agriculture Appeals Office and an oral hearing was held. The outcome of the appeal process was to allow the appeal and the person named was notified of this decision by the Agriculture Appeals Office on 3 March 2016.

My Department is currently examining this appeal decision and will be seeking clarification on some aspects of the decision from the Agriculture Appeals Office. This clarification on detailed points is needed before any payment can be made. The person named will be notified when this examination is completed and any payments due will be processed as soon as possible thereafter.

Departmental Staff Recruitment

200. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when jobs (details supplied) in his Department will be advertised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7819/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Throughout 2016, my Department is seeking to recruit up to 200 new staff in a range of disciplines including veterinary and agricultural science graduates, laboratory and Information Technology experts, technical agricultural officers, engineers, and general administrative staff with a range of expertise.

Competitions are carried out in conjunction with our recruitment partners the Public Appointments Service (PAS) through their dedicated website *www.publicjobs.ie*. A competition for Engineer Grade 1 was announced on 1 April 2016, and Forestry Inspector Grade 3, and Technical Agricultural Officer competitions launched on 15 April 2016. It is expected that Assistant Agricultural Inspector posts will be advertised in the coming weeks, with Veterinary Inspectors following later in the year. Additionally PAS carries out on-going recruitment for the general administrative grades for all Government Departments and my Department continues to fill critical business needs from these recruitment processes.

Humanitarian Assistance Scheme

201. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Defence if he will expedite and approve three separate applications for assistance under the flood damage schemes submitted by businesses (details supplied) in County Kilkenny. [7312/16]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Government approved the allocation of €5m for an emergency humanitarian support scheme to small businesses and community, sporting and voluntary bodies which through no fault of their own have been unable to secure flood insurance and suffered flood damage during the severe weather in December 2015 to January 2016. The scheme is being administered by the Irish Red Cross.

The Irish Red Cross Society is an independent charitable organisation with full power to manage its own affairs. I as Minister for Defence have no function in the administration of the Irish Red Cross Society and do not get involved in the day to day running of its affairs.

I am advised that the Irish Red Cross is in correspondence with the applicants.

Appointments to State Boards

202. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Defence the regional breakdown of all members appointed by the Government or by him to State boards, agencies and bodies in 2015 and to date in 2016 broken down by agency and by regions (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7475/16]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): The only State body currently under the aegis of the Department of Defence is the Army Pensions Board. The Army Pensions Board is an independent statutory body established under the Army Pensions Act 1927 and is based in St. Bricin's Military Hospital in Dublin.

The position of Army Medical Corps ordinary member of the Army Pensions Board became temporarily vacant in September 2015 due to the deployment overseas of the serving member Commandant Adam Lagun. On the recommendation of the Chief of Staff, I appointed Commandant Zdenek Osecky, Army Medical Corps to be an ordinary member of the Army Pensions Board from 10 September 2015 until 30 June 2016 inclusive, to cover this temporary vacant position.

I have not made any appointments to the Army Pensions Board from 1 January 2016 to date.

Members of the Defence Forces may from time to time be assigned to different locations across the country. For security reasons it is not proposed to highlight the location in which individual members are assigned.

Flood Relief Schemes Funding

203. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Defence the position regarding an application for funding (details supplied) in County Cork which has been passed to his Department. [7544/16]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): In December 2015, the Government approved the allocation of €5m for an emergency humanitarian support scheme to small businesses and community, sporting and voluntary bodies which through no fault of their own had been unable to secure flood insurance on their premises and were flooded during the storms of December 2015 to January 2016. The scheme is being administered by the Irish Red Cross.

The Irish Red Cross Society is an independent charitable organisation with full power to manage its own affairs. This is a matter for the Irish Red Cross who I am advised have been in correspondence with the applicants.

Defence Forces Retirements

204. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Defence to investigate the status of members of An Fórsa Cosanta Áitiúil who retire from their positions after a number of years of service but receive no official recognition or commendation marking this milestone; if he will address this and honour this voluntary service; if the Minister has made any plans to do so; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7624/16]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): Upon retirement from the Reserve Defence Forces (RDF), Other Ranks personnel are presented with an AF42 RDF, Certificate of Discharge which recognises their service with the RDF. Officers of the RDF receive a Certificate of Service, which similarly recognises their service. In addition, there are specific service awards made to members of the RDF depending on the duration of service. In this regard, RDF

personnel are awarded a Service Medal after seven (7) years service, after twelve (12) years service they receive a bar to their Service Medal and after twenty one (21) years service they receive a second bar to their Service Medal.

I value highly the spirit of service and voluntarism of members of the RDF and I am greatly appreciative of the time and effort which they freely give through participation in training and other reserve activities. I believe that the awards and certificates, already in place, satisfactorily recognise this service and have no plans to introduce any further proposals for further recognition.

Defence Forces Personnel Data

205. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Defence the number of officers who have left the Defence Forces across all services in each of the years 2011 to 2015. [7642/16]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Simon Coveney): It has not been possible in the time available to compile the information in the format sought by the Deputy. The information is currently being compiled by the Department and I will provide the information directly to the Deputy as soon as it becomes available.

Defence Forces Recruitment

206. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Defence the personnel strength of the Permanent Defence Forces when 1,450 new members are recruited following the recruitment campaign announced on 13 April 2016. [7663/16]

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.

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, the establishment of the Permanent Defence Forces and available resources. As there is significant turnover of personnel in the Permanent Defence Force targeted recruitment takes place so as to maintain personnel numbers at or near the agreed strength levels as set out above in accordance with available training capacity. This approach is underlined by the recently announced recruitment strategy which envisages an intake in 2016 of 600 general services recruits and a further 850 in 2017. This recruitment will be phased over the 2016 and 2017 period in a manner designed to restore the established strength and plans are being put in place to this end.

International Terrorism

207. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the efforts, if any, being made by the Government to prevent a terrorist attack here; if any new measures have been taken in the aftermath of the Belgian terrorist attacks; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7650/16]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As I indicated to the Deputy in my reply to Question No. 268 of 14 April 2016, the current assessment of the threat is

that while an international terrorist attack on Ireland is possible, it is not considered likely. Notwithstanding that, the level of threat from this source is kept under close and constant review by An Garda Síochána and all appropriate measures will continue to be taken by the authorities here, in co-operation with their international partners, in responding to any identified threats and in seeking to prevent attacks. There is no complacency in this regard.

I should emphasise that the main security threat in the State is from the so-called ‘dis-sident’ republican paramilitary groups who continue to be a priority counter-terrorism focus for An Garda Síochána. The Garda authorities will continue to target those involved and to work closely with their counterparts in Northern Ireland in bearing down on these groups. The Gardaí and the PSNI deserve praise for their ongoing work in this regard.

An Garda Síochána has developed considerable operational capacities in countering terrorism and in responding to critical incidents. There is, in particular, a highly-trained and well equipped special intervention capability in the Emergency Response Unit that is supported by the regional Armed Support Units. All the relevant agencies here cooperate closely in respect of any threats identified. Where necessary, the considerable skills of the Defence Forces are also available in aid to the civil power.

The ability to prevent attacks is as important as an ability to deal with such an eventuality. The gathering of intelligence both domestically and from international sources plays a priority role in ensuring An Garda Síochána can perform this task. The sharing of information and the use of modern information technology structures to support this function is a key priority internationally. The Government is committed to providing An Garda Síochána with the necessary resources to enable them to interact effectively at this level. This includes connecting to the European Schengen Information System and, indeed, to other EU and Interpol information-sharing resources relevant to countering the terrorist threat.

Increasing the effectiveness of information and intelligence-sharing and enhancing border security have been priority themes at recent meetings of the EU Justice and Home Affairs Council and they will remain at the top of the agenda for the foreseeable future. A series of measures is being rolled out to build on and improve current operational co-operation and to develop the EU’s legal framework for information-sharing, combating terrorism and controlling illegal firearms. Ireland is fully engaged in pursuing these developments.

Garda Operations

208. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to provide Garda surveillance cameras in the Connemara area of County Galway to increase security there, particularly in view of the small number of roads leading into the region and the need to ensure a high level of security for the population; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7270/16]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Deputy will be aware that the operation of CCTV schemes in public areas is governed by the provisions of section 38 of the Garda Síochána Act 2005. Under those provisions, decisions in relation to the introduction or extension of such schemes are a matter for the Garda Commissioner.

Garda CCTV systems are planned and implemented on the basis of the identified operational needs and priorities of An Garda Síochána and are kept under review by the Garda authorities. In this context, the CCTV Advisory Committee was established to advise on all aspects of CCTV operated for the purpose of increasing public safety and reducing the risk of anti-

social and criminal activity. The Committee also examines applications for CCTV schemes and makes appropriate recommendations having regard to the provisions of the Garda Síochána Act and the Garda Policy for the operation and use of CCTV schemes. I am informed that the Committee is not currently in receipt of any formal application to introduce a CCTV scheme in area referred to by the Deputy.

I am very conscious of the value that communities, especially rural communities, place on CCTV as a means of deterring crime and assisting in the detection of offenders. With this in mind, I have instigated a review of the effectiveness of the Community CCTV Scheme in conjunction with the Garda authorities and this will inform future decisions on the continuation of the Scheme. The Deputy may also be aware that my colleague, the Minister for Environment, Community and Local Government, made an announcement in September 2015 in relation the provision of CCTV in rural areas which is to be funded from the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020.

Garda Deployment

209. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality to provide a breakdown of both civilians and members of An Garda Síochána based in Stepside and Dundrum Garda Síochána stations since 2010 to date. [7288/16]

233. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality to provide a breakdown of both civilians and members of An Garda Síochána based in Stepside and Dundrum Garda Síochána stations since 2010 to date in 2016. [7546/16]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 209 and 233 together.

As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of resources, including personnel, among the various Garda Divisions and Districts and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. Garda management keeps this distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the optimum use is made of these resources.

I have been informed by the Garda Commissioner that the number of Garda and civilians attached to Stepside and Dundrum Garda stations from 31 December 2010 to the 29 February 2016, the latest date for which figures are readily available, are as set out in the tables overleaf. The Deputy will be aware that Stepside Garda Station closed on the 14 March 2013.

As the Deputy will appreciate it is vital that An Garda Síochána is renewed in order to ensure that it has the capacity to provide effective and visible policing throughout the country. With this objective in mind, there have been seven intakes of Garda Trainees to the Garda College since it was reopened in September 2014 giving a total intake of 700. A further 450 will be taken in this year. So far 395 of the new Garda Trainees have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream uniform duties in communities nationwide. It is expected that a further 300 trainee Gardaí will attest this year and it will be a matter for the Garda Commissioner to assign them as she considers appropriate. I am assured that the needs of all Garda Divisions are fully considered when determining the allocation of newly attested Gardaí.

Garda Strength 2010-2106		
Year	Stepaside	Dundrum
2010	31	78
2011	29	73
2012	35	74
2013	0	100
2014	0	89
2015	0	85
2016*	0	85

Civilians 2010-2016		
Year	Stepaside	Dundrum
2010	1	2
2011	1	2
2012	1	2
2013	0	3
2014	0	2
2015	0	2
2016*	0	2

Garda Deployment

210. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will increase the number of gardaí in the mid-Louth Ardee district (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7331/16]

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

Ardee District forms part of the Louth Division. I have been informed by the Garda Commissioner that on the 29 February 2016, the latest date for which figures are readily available, there were 285 members assigned to this Division. On the same date, there were 35 members and 9 Garda Reserves assigned to Ardee Garda District. The District includes Castlebellingham, Collon and Louth Garda Stations.

I am further informed that the work of local Gardaí in the Louth Division is augmented by a number of Garda national units which are assisting with covert and overt operations targeting prolific criminals and dissidents who reside within and outside this jurisdiction. Furthermore there is ongoing liaison between An Garda Síochána and the Police Service of Northern Ireland under the auspices of an agreed Cross-Border Policing Strategy to continue the excellent levels of cooperation between both police services in addressing crime and terrorist activities in all its manifestations.

As the Deputy will appreciate it is vital that An Garda Síochána is renewed in order to ensure that it has the capacity to provide effective and visible policing throughout the country.

With this objective in mind, there have been seven intakes of Garda Trainees to the Garda College since it was reopened in September 2014 giving a total intake of 700. A further 450 will be taken in this year. So far 395 of the new Garda Trainees have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream uniform duties in communities nationwide. The Garda Commissioner has informed me that 18 of these newly attested members have been assigned to the Louth Division. It is expected that a further 300 trainee Gardaí will attest this year and it will be a matter for the Garda Commissioner to assign them as she considers appropriate. I am assured that the needs of all Garda Divisions are fully considered when determining the allocation of newly attested Gardaí.

Garda Districts

211. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she is aware of media reports (details supplied) which state that she is proposing a review of Garda districts; to provide further information on the proposed review and its potential impact on the constituency of Louth and east Meath; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7340/16]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): During 2011 and 2012, An Garda Síochána completed a comprehensive review of its district and station network. The objective of this review was to identify opportunities to introduce strategic reforms to enhance service delivery, increase efficiency and streamline practices within the organisation. The review concluded that a revised district and station network commensurate with the organisation's resource base would best meet public demand. As a result, the Garda District and Station Rationalisation Programme was implemented in An Garda Síochána during 2012 and 2013.

This was reflected in An Garda Síochána's Policing Plans for 2012 and 2013 which set out the details of the closure of 39 Garda stations in 2012 and 100 Garda stations in 2013.

I am informed by the Garda Authorities that there are currently no plans to alter existing districts and that any further organisation development initiatives will similarly be outlined in future Policing Plans.

Garda Deployment

212. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí in every Garda station in south County Kildare on 23 April 2015 and each year since 2006, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7344/16]

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

I have been informed by the Garda Commissioner that the strength of each Garda station in the Kildare Garda Division on the 31 December 2006 - 2015, and on the 29 February 2016 being the latest date for which figures are readily available was as set out in the following table. The Deputy should be aware that Ballytore, Kill and Ballymore Eustace Garda stations closed in 2013. The number of Gardaí in every station in south Co. Kildare on 23 April 2015 is not readily available.

Kildare Garda Division 2006 - 2016											
Station	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
ATHY	19	18	25	27	29	31	34	32	30	29	27
BALLY-TORE	1	1	2	2	2	2	1	0	0	0	0
CASTLE-DERMOT	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	4	4	3	3
KILDARE	31	30	32	31	32	26	27	29	30	31	31
MONAS-TEREVIN	3	5	6	4	4	5	4	4	4	4	4
NEW-BRIDGE	33	33	35	44	45	47	50	49	47	49	49
RATHAN-GAN	2	4	4	4	4	3	3	3	3	3	2
CARBURY	2	4	4	5	4	4	5	6	5	8	8
CELBRIDGE	19	20	20	18	18	17	17	14	13	12	11
KILCOCK	5	5	8	8	8	9	10	9	9	9	9
LEIXLIP	25	24	28	33	35	34	30	38	34	37	37
BALLY-MORE EUSTACE	1	1	2	1	1	2	2	0	0	0	0
MAY-NOOTH	17	16	16	15	15	13	14	13	13	13	13
CLANE	8	7	8	8	10	11	9	8	7	7	7
KILCULLEN	3	4	4	3	2	2	2	4	4	3	3
KILL	3	3	3	3	4	2	2	0	0	0	0
NAAS	89	98	106	107	101	101	103	100	96	101	102
ROBERT-STOWN	3	5	2	4	5	6	2	2	2	3	3
Total	266	280	307	321	322	318	318	315	301	312	309

Naturalisation Eligibility

213. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the options available to a person (details supplied) other than returning to Somalia to obtain photo identification to satisfy conditions for naturalisation; if, given that the person was eight years of age on arrival here in 2001, this condition can be dispensed with; if not, the reason; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7373/16]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Persons making an application for a certificate of naturalisation are required to provide satisfactory evidence of their identity and nationality. This is usually in the form of a currently valid passport and may include other original supporting documents, such as a birth certificate and marriage certificate. In rare circumstances where an applicant cannot produce their passport or other supporting documents the applicant will be required to provide a full explanation. Such explanation should be supported by satisfactory evidence that they have attempted to obtain such documentation and correspondence from the relevant authorities responsible for the issuing of passports in their country, clearly stating the reasons the documentation cannot be provided. INIS will consider the reasons given and, if satisfied it is for reasons genuinely beyond the applicant's control, may suggest alternative means to the person to assist in establishing their identity and nationality.

In this particular case, correspondence issued to the person concerned on 29 December

2015 and reminders on 2 March 2016 and 21 March 2016, requesting her national passport or satisfactory explanation from the relevant authorities stating a reason why a passport is unobtainable. To date, despite two time extensions granted, the applicant has only furnished a photocopy of a birth certificate. Upon receipt of the requested information, or in the event that the person does not respond, the case will be further processed and will be submitted to me for decision as expeditiously as possible. I understand from INIS that applications are regularly received from nationals of the country concerned which are supported by appropriate documentation, including passports.

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

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.

Garda Deployment

214. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will ensure that new Garda recruits will be assigned to the Sligo-Leitrim division, when the next school of Garda recruits pass out of the Garda college in Templemore, County Tipperary, later in 2016; the reason no new recruits were allocated to the same division from the last allocation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7404/16]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Deputy will be aware that the allocation of Garda personnel, including the newly attested Gardaí, to particular areas is a matter for the Garda Commissioner and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. I am assured that Garda management keeps this distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the optimum use is made of these resources.

The Deputy will appreciate that it is vital that An Garda Síochána is renewed in order to ensure that it has the capacity to provide effective and visible policing throughout the country. With this objective in mind, there have been seven intakes of Garda Trainees to the Garda College since it was reopened in September 2014 giving a total intake of 700 to date. A further 450 will be taken in during the remainder of 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 395 of the new Garda Trainees have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream uniform duties in communities nationwide. I have been informed that of these 5 have been assigned in the Sligo/Leitrim Division. It is expected that a further 300 trainee Gardaí will attest this year and it will be a matter for the Garda Commissioner to assign them as she considers appropriate. I am assured that the needs of all Garda Divisions are fully considered when determining the allocation of newly attested Gardaí.

Legislative Measures

215. **Deputy Josepha Madigan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when, further to the signing into law of the Legal Services Regulation Act 2015, the Act will commence; the impediments that prevent commencement; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7418/16]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald) (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): There are no impediments as such to the roll-out of the 2015 Act; however, its implementation does require careful planning and sequencing between now and the end of this year. This is especially the case given the important issues relating to professional misconduct and to the adjudication of legal costs that are concerned. We also have to manage the transition from the existing statutory, regulatory or other powers currently exercised by the Office of the Taxing-Master and by the Law Society, the Bar Council and the King's Inns.

A necessary first step is the appointment of the new and independent Legal Services Regulatory Authority after which the Authority will appoint its own Chief Executive. I am happy, therefore, to confirm that nominations to the new Legal Services Regulatory Authority, which will have 11 members with a lay majority and a lay Chair, have already been sought from the relevant nominating bodies as set out in the Legal Services Regulation Act. The appointment of the relevant nominees and Chair under the various criteria set out in the Act will then be subject to approval by resolution of both Houses of the Oireachtas. At the same time, preparations are also being made in support of the public recruitment, by the new Regulatory Authority, of its Chief Executive whose terms and functions are similarly set out in the 2015 Act. A start-up support team is being established and efforts are already underway to find a suitable premises from which the new Authority can operate.

These various measures represent the initial steps that will enable the members and Chief Executive of the new Regulatory Authority to spear-head the coming into operation of the new legal services regulatory regime. This phase will also include, at the appropriate time, the commencement of other Parts of the Act such as those dealing with legal costs, the new Office of the Legal Costs Adjudicator, the Roll of Practising Barristers and Pre-Action Protocols.

Following establishment of the Regulatory Authority, its recruitment of a Chief Executive and such commencements of the Act as take place between now and September, the key remaining Parts of the Act dealing with the new public complaints and professional conduct and disciplinary procedures and the appointment of the new Legal Practitioners Disciplinary Tribunal, will then be introduced. The managed commencement of these critical functions is planned for the Autumn in order to allow adequate time to ensure their effectiveness and success as crucial components of the new regulatory framework.

In support of the planned and managed commencement of the relevant Parts of the 2015 Act proposed, as I have outlined, between now and the end of this year, an allocation of €1 million has been made under the Justice Vote for 2016 as set-up support for the new Regulatory Authority which will be provided on a recoupable basis.

Garda Overtime

216. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if her proposal to cut overtime in An Garda Síochána will have serious implications in combating violent crimes, especially as these crimes are on an increase; her proposals for combating the increase of violent crimes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7438/16]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Deputy will ap-

preciate that the detailed allocation of resources within An Garda Síochána, is a matter for the Garda Commissioner and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. I would however point out that the 2016 Budget allocation of €1.5 billion for An Garda Síochána includes over €67 million in additional funding which, in addition to funding the recruitment of new Gardaí, also provides additional funding for Garda surveillance, special operations and targeted, intelligence-led policing. This forms part of a programme of very considerable ongoing investment in Garda resources which will benefit all policing activities. I can assure the Deputy that I have no proposals to cut these resources.

In fact, earlier this year the Government moved decisively to strengthen the resources available to An Garda Síochána to deal with the violent criminals involved in organised criminal gangs through a special ring-fenced additional allocation of €5 million, including steps to establish a dedicated Armed Support Unit in Dublin. These measures are supporting concentrated policing measures in Dublin City and An Garda Síochána are implementing a robust response to violent criminals through a range of targeted and intelligence based operations, often disrupting and preventing incidents, as well as detecting and prosecuting those involved.

Garda Transport Data

217. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of patrol cars available to members of An Garda Síochána undertaking policing in each of the Loughrea, Ballinasloe and Tuam Garda districts in each year since 2011; the current number of patrol cars attached to each of the relevant Garda stations; and the number attached to each on 1 January 2011. [7446/16]

218. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide in tabular form the number of patrol cars currently available to members of An Garda Síochána for each Garda station in the Loughrea, Ballinasloe and Tuam Garda districts according to the year they entered service. [7447/16]

219. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide in tabular form for each Garda station in the Loughrea, Ballinasloe and Tuam Garda districts the number of patrol cars currently unavailable owing to the need for repairs. [7448/16]

220. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of motorcycles available to members of An Garda Síochána undertaking policing in each of the Loughrea, Ballinasloe and Tuam Garda districts in each year since 2011; the current number of motorcycles attached to each of the relevant Garda stations; and the number attached to each on 1 January 2011. [7450/16]

221. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide in tabular form the number of motorcycles currently available to members of An Garda Síochána for each Garda station in the Loughrea, Ballinasloe and Tuam Garda districts according to the year they entered service. [7451/16]

222. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide in tabular form for each Garda station in the Loughrea, Ballinasloe and Tuam Garda districts the number of motorcycles currently unavailable owing to the need for repairs. [7452/16]

223. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of vans available to members of An Garda Síochána undertaking policing in each of the Loughrea, Ballinasloe and Tuam Garda districts in each year since 2011; the current number of vans attached to each of the relevant Garda stations; and the number attached to each on 1 January

2011. [7453/16]

224. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide in tabular form the number of vans currently available to members of An Garda Síochána for each Garda station in the Loughrea, Ballinasloe and Tuam Garda districts according to the year they entered service. [7454/16]

225. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide in tabular form for each Garda station in the Loughrea, Ballinasloe and Tuam Garda districts the number of vans currently unavailable owing to the need for repairs. [7455/16]

226. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of 4x4 vehicles available to members of An Garda Síochána undertaking policing in each of the Loughrea, Ballinasloe and Tuam Garda districts in each year since 2011; the current number of 4x4 vehicles attached to each of the relevant Garda stations; and the number attached to each on 1 January 2011. [7456/16]

227. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide in tabular form the number of 4x4 vehicles currently available to members of An Garda Síochána for each Garda station in the Loughrea, Ballinasloe and Tuam Garda districts according to the year they entered service. [7457/16]

228. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide in tabular form for each Garda station in the Loughrea, Ballinasloe and Tuam Garda districts the number of 4x4 vehicles currently unavailable owing to the need for repairs. [7458/16]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald) (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 217 to 228, inclusive, together.

As the Deputy will appreciate decisions in relation to the provision and allocation of Garda vehicles are a matter for the Garda Commissioner in the light of her identified operational demands and the availability of resources and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter.

Since 2012, some €34 million has been invested in the Garda fleet, with over 640 new vehicles coming on stream since the start of 2015. This significant investment provides the Gardaí with additional high-powered vehicles, marked and unmarked patrol cars, and motorcycles for high-visibility road policing. Investment in a modern, effective and fit-for-purpose Garda fleet will continue under the Government's Capital Plan 2016-2021 which provides €46 million for new Garda vehicles, ensuring that Gardaí can be mobile, visible and responsive on the roads and in the community to prevent and tackle crime.

I am informed by the Garda Authorities that the allocation of Garda vehicles is monitored and reviewed on a continual basis and vehicles are allocated between districts as required by operational circumstances including, for example, when vehicles are required in other districts to substitute for vehicles under repair.

In that context I am advised by the Garda Authorities that the information requested by the Deputy is set out as follows:

Vehicles assigned on 18/04/2016							
	CARS						
	MARKED	UN-MARKED	VANS	MBIKES	4X4	Others	Total
BALL- INASLOE	3	2	1	0	0	0	6

Questions - Written Answers

LOUGHREA	3	2	2	0	0	1	8
TUAM	6	2	1	2	0	0	11
Total	12	6	4	2	0	1	25
Vehicles assigned on 01/01/2016							
	CARS						
	MARKED	UN-MARKED	VANS	MBIKES	4X4	Others	Total
BALL- INASLOE	3	1	1	0	0	0	5
LOUGHREA	4	2	2	0	0	1	9
TUAM	6	2	1	1	0	0	10
Total	13	5	4	1	0	1	24
Vehicles assigned on 01/01/2015							
	CARS						Total
	MARKED	UN-MARKED	VANS	MBIKES	4X4	Others	
BALL- INASLOE	3	1	1	0	0	1	6
LOUGHREA	3	1	2	0	0	1	7
TUAM	4	3	1	2	0	0	10
Total	10	5	4	2	0	2	23
Vehicles assigned on 01/01/2014							
	CARS						
	MARKED	UN-MARKED	VANS	MBIKES	4X4	Others	Total
BALL- INASLOE	2	2	1	0	0	1	6
LOUGHREA	4	3	2	0	0	0	9
TUAM	4	2	1	2	0	1	10
Total	10	7	4	2	0	2	25

Vehicles assigned on 01/01/2013							
	CARS						
	MARKED	UN-MARKED	VANS	MBIKES	4X4	Others	Total
BALL- INASLOE	1	2	0	0	0	1	4
LOUGHREA	5	3	1	0	0	0	9
TUAM	5	2	1	2	0	0	10
Total	11	7	2	2	0	1	23
Vehicles assigned on 01/01/2012							
	CARS						
	MARKED	UN-MARKED	VANS	MBIKES	4X4	Others	Total
BALL- INASLOE	3	2	0	0	0	1	6
GORT	3	1	0	0	0	0	4
LOUGHREA	4	1	0	0	1	0	6
TUAM	7	3	0	2	0	0	12
Total	17	7	0	2	1	1	28

Vehicles assigned on 01/01/2011							
	CARS						
	MARKED	UN-MARKED	VANS	MBIKES	4X4	Others	Total
BALL- INASLOE	5	2	1	0	0	1	9
GORT	2	1	1	0	0	0	4
LOUGHREA	4	0	0	0	0	0	4
TUAM	6	4	0	2	0	0	12
Total	17	7	2	2	0	1	29

I am also advised that the Deputy's request for the year each type of vehicle came into service in the specified area would involve a disproportionate amount of Garda time and resources. However, the following table sets out the number of vehicles assigned to the area in question and the year they were commissioned.

Year Vehicle Commissioned	No. of Vehicles
2005	1
2006	2
2007	2
2012	2
2013	5
2014	7
2015	5
2016	1
Total	25

Immigration Status

229. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will grant permission to remain here to persons (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7461/16]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that INIS has been in touch with the persons mentioned and a letter issued to one of these persons on 18 April 2016 granting an immigration permission.

I understand that INIS is still considering the application made by the other party and will be in touch with them shortly.

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

Appointments to State Boards

230. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the regional breakdown of all members appointed by the Government or her to State boards, agencies and bodies in 2015 and to date in 2016 broken down by agency and by regions (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7482/16]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I wish to inform the Deputy that it has not been possible to provide the information requested in the time available. I will write to the Deputy directly when this information is to hand.

Garda Divisional Headquarters

231. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the new information technology system in Garda capital headquarters is up-to-date to allow tax clearance certificates to be issued in the case of public service vehicles licence renewals; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7515/16]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I have requested the information sought by the Deputy from the Garda authorities. I will be in contact with the Deputy when this information is to hand.

Sex Offenders Notification Requirements

232. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons on the sex offenders list at a Garda Síochána station (details supplied) in Dublin 22; and when each person on the list was last seen by a member of An Garda Síochána. [7536/16]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Garda authorities that, for operational reasons, An Garda Síochána does not release specific details of the number of persons subject to the notification requirements of the Sex Offenders Act, 2001 residing in any particular District or Division, and does not divulge details of the management and assessment of such persons.

I am, however, informed by the Garda authorities that there are currently 1,471 persons nationwide subject to the provisions of the Sex Offender Act 2001. All offenders who are subject to the notification requirements are monitored by the Sex Offender Management and Intelligence Unit (SOMIU) at the Garda National Bureau of Criminal Investigation. The Unit is supported by Garda Inspectors nominated in each Garda Division throughout the State. I am further informed that the nominated Inspector in each Division has access to all necessary resources within his/her Division to assist him/her in carrying out his/her duties.

Where An Garda Síochána becomes aware that an offender subject to the notification requirements has breached those requirements, appropriate action is taken, including circulation through PULSE of their information, as well as inquiries to identify their current whereabouts. I am advised that the appropriate level of monitoring is carried out by An Garda Síochána and that all breaches of the requirements which come to notice are pursued.

I am also informed that when the Garda authorities become aware that a convicted sex offender has left or is intending to leave the State, the Sex Offender Management and Intelligence Unit ensures that the relevant law enforcement agency in the country of destination is advised via Interpol.

Garda Equipment

234. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she has been made aware of ongoing threats to members of An Garda Síochána, on and off duty; if she expects to be in a position to address this issue and the matter of ballistic protection, as has been set out in recent times; if steps are anticipated in the short term to address these issues; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7555/16]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am, of course, concerned about any instances of threats being made against members of the Garda Síochána, on or off duty, and I utterly condemn such cowardly behaviour.

The Deputy will appreciate that the allocation of resources for An Garda Síochána, including in relation to specialist clothing and equipment is a matter for the Garda Commissioner and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. In this regard the Deputy is aware of the extensive provisions for investments in policing resources which have been put in place since Budget Day 2015.

The Deputy will also appreciate that it would also not be appropriate for me to detail the operational measures that the Garda authorities may take, or would take generally in relation to threats against members of An Garda Síochána. However, I can assure the Deputy that whatever protective and detection measures are deemed appropriate by the Garda authorities are of course taken. More generally, tackling serious and organised crime and addressing the harms it gives rise to at all levels in our community is a central policing priority, and An Garda Síochána has my full support for the strategies it has in place to give effect to this commitment.

In conclusion I should also say that while the criminal law in this area is kept under ongoing review, there is a range of robust legislative provisions available to the Garda authorities in circumstances where threats or assaults are made against Gardaí.

Cumas Gaeilge sa Gharda Síochána

235. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den an Aire Dlí agus Cirt agus Comhionannais cad é an líon comhaltaí nua a bhfuil Gaeilge acu agus a tugadh isteach i ngach babhta earcaíochta go dáta sa Gharda Síochána faoin socrú go mbeadh sruth ar leith earcaíochta ann do dhaoine le líofacht i nGaeilge agus a bheadh le cur ar dualgas i stáisiúin Ghaeltachta; cad é an líon comhaltaí acusan atá curtha ar dualgas faoin tráth seo sa Ghaeltacht agus cé na stáisiúin ina bhfuil siad lonnaithe; céard iad na céimeanna atá á nglacadh le gach duine de na hearcaigh sin a chur ar dualgas sa Ghaeltacht; cén uair a bheidh sé sin curtha i gcrích; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [7558/16]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Tuigfidh an Teachta gur ábhar do Choimisinéir an Gharda Síochána é pearsanra an Gharda Síochána, lena n-áirítear Gardaí nua-fhianaithe, a leithroinnt go ceantair ar leith, agus nach bhfuil aon ról díreach agamsa, mar Aire, sa scéal. Tá dearbhaithe dom go gcoinníonn lucht bainistíochta an Gharda Síochána an dáileadh acmhainní seo faoi shíor-athbhreithniú, i gcomhthéacs treochtaí coireachta agus tosaíochtaí póilínithe, chun a chinntiú go mbaintear an leas is fearr is féidir as na hacmhainní sin.

Tá an Garda Síochána lántiomnaithe dá dhualgais faoi Acht na dTeangacha Oifigiúla a chomhlíonadh. I dtaca leis sin de, is féidir le hiarrthóirí ar phost Garda faoi oiliúint, ar cainteoirí líofa Gaeilge iad agus a chomhlíonann na critéir incháilitheachta eile go léir freisin, iarratas a dhéanamh go ndéanfaí measúnú orthu faoi shainsruth Gaeilge. Is féidir iarrthóirí ón sruth sin

a n-éiríonn leo a leithroinnt go ceantair Ghaeltachta ar feadh tréimhse ama arna cinneadh ag Coimisinéir an Gharda Síochána.

I dtaca leis an bhfaisnéis shonrach faoin líon daoine a earcaíodh faoin sainsruth Gaeilge agus na háiteanna ina bhfuil siad imscartha, táim tar éis an fhaisnéis sin a lorg ón gCoimisinéir agus scríobhfaidh mé go díreach chuig an Teachta nuair a gheobhaidh mé í.

Garda Equipment

236. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the amount invested in personal protective equipment for An Garda Síochána for each of the years 2012 to 2016 to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7659/16]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The provision and allocation of resources for An Garda Síochána is a matter for the Garda Commissioner and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter.

I am advised by the Garda Commissioner that expenditure on individual items of personal protective equipment is not recorded under separate cost-headings. To identify these amounts would involve a disproportionate amount of Garda time and resources. However, the following table shows the expenditure for the period 2012 to 2016 (up to 18 April) on clothing, accessories and specialist and other equipment which include the items of personal protective equipment to which the Deputy refers.

Subhead	Description	2016(to 18/4/16)	2015	2014	2013	2012
A3	Clothing and Accessories	€537,095	€4,356,577	€4,013,984	€3,888,783	€2,499,303
A6	Specialist + Other Equipment	€445,312	€2,890,005	€2,150,800	€2,031,859	€3,163,225
Total		€982,407	€7,246,582	€6,164,784	€5,920,642	€5,662,528

Garda Equipment

237. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her strategy for enhancing the technological tools available to An Garda Síochána; how she will implement and upgrade the utilities available in assisting front-line staff in their day-to-day duties; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7660/16]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Garda Commissioner is responsible for the day to day management of An Garda Síochána and the distribution of available resources and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter.

The 2016 Budget allocation of €1.5 billion for An Garda Síochána includes over €67 million in additional funding which, in addition to the recruitment of new trainee Gardaí, also provides additional funding for Garda Surveillance, special operations and targeted, intelligence-led policing. This additional recruitment and budget allocation builds on the current high level of investment in Garda vehicles. We have invested over €34 million in new Garda vehicles since

2012 with over 640 new vehicles coming on stream since the start of 2015. The Government's Capital Plan 2016-2021 provides for a further €46 million of investment in vehicles as well as an additional €205 million for Information and Communications Technology which will allow An Garda Síochána to deploy the latest cutting edge technologies in the fight against crime. Taken together, this step-change in investment in policing demonstrates this Government's commitment to investing in 21st Century policing and will ensure that the Gardaí can be mobile, visible and responsive on the roads and in the community to prevent and tackle crime.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that they are continually looking to ensure that the latest information, communications and forensic technologies are sourced and deployed to ensure that An Garda Síochána will be properly resourced to meet the evolving needs of a modern effective police force and to take advantage of proven up to date technological developments in crime detection and prevention as they occur.

In terms of existing technology, the Deputy will be aware that a considerable amount of new Garda ICT solutions has been delivered over the past number of years. These include the deployment of a secure national digital radio system (NDRS), the deployment and support of Garda and Community CCTV systems, an automated number plate recognition (ANPR) system and the addition of many new functions to the PULSE system, which itself is further supported by a dedicated Garda data entry service in Castlebar. The substantial additional investment of €205 million in new technology and systems for An Garda Síochána provided under the Capital Plan 2016-2021 will facilitate progress on further important reforms arising from the Garda Inspectorate's report on Crime Investigation. Examples of the new systems to be developed through this investment include:

- new computer-aided dispatch to ensure responsive and coordinated deployment of Gardaí in the community;
- mobile technology to give the Gardaí secure mobile access to critical information when and where they need it;
- investigations management systems to ensure enhanced management of crime investigations; and
- upgrading the ANPR to enhance policing of road safety and compliance.

In the area of forensics, the Garda authorities currently employ highly sophisticated ICT-based fingerprint and ballistics identification systems which I am informed measure up to those used by police forces in other EU jurisdictions. An Garda Síochána are also supported by Forensic Science Ireland who provide state of the art services in the area of drug analysis and trace evidence. In addition, the recent launch of the national DNA database will greatly enhance the investigation of crime in Ireland.

These and other new technological solutions, as well as the investment in resources, will ensure that An Garda Síochána has the capacity to provide effective policing services in responding to the evolving challenges of modern day criminal activity.

Garda Resources

238. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if, given the recent upsurge in gang-related violence in the Dublin area and the comments by the Association of Garda Sergeants and Inspectors on inadequate Garda Síochána resources, she plans to specifically target gang crime; if additional resources will be made available to gardaí in Dublin; if she

accepts the role that funding cuts have played in the ability of gardaí to tackle this type of crime in County Dublin; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7668/16]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The 2016 Budget allocation of €1.5 billion for An Garda Síochána includes over €67 million in additional funding which, in addition to the recruitment of new trainee Gardaí, also provides 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.

Earlier this year the Government moved decisively to strengthen the resources available to An Garda Síochána to deal with gang-related crime in the Dublin area through an additional allocation of €5 million, as well as steps to establish a dedicated Armed Support Unit in Dublin. These measures are supporting concentrated policing measures in Dublin City and I remain in close contact with the Garda Commissioner who has outlined the substantial efforts being made by An Garda Síochána to identify and target those involved.

Over €34 million has been invested in new Garda vehicles since 2012 with over 640 new vehicles coming on stream since the start of 2015. This significant investment provides the Gardaí with additional high-powered vehicles, marked and unmarked patrol cars, and motorcycles for high-visibility road policing which will support important anti-crime strategies such as Operation Thor. Investment in a modern, effective and fit-for-purpose Garda fleet will continue under the Government's Capital Plan 2016-2021 which provides €46 million for new Garda vehicles, ensuring that Gardaí can be mobile, visible and responsive, on the roads and in the community.

The Government is also investing in Garda airborne surveillance and enhanced technology and ICT systems. In fact, the Capital Plan 2016-2021 provides an additional €205 million for Garda ICT over the lifetime of the Plan which will allow An Garda Síochána to deploy the latest cutting edge technologies in the fight against crime. Taken together, this step-change in investment in policing demonstrates this Government's commitment to investing in 21st Century policing and will ensure the Gardaí can be mobile, visible and responsive, on the roads and in the community to prevent and tackle crime.

I am informed by the Garda Authorities that An Garda Síochána continues to develop and implement operations and strategies to target, dismantle and disrupt organised criminal networks, utilising advanced analytical and intelligence methodologies. Multi-disciplinary approaches are utilised to ensure that the activities of individuals and groups involved in criminal enterprise are effectively targeted, including through the use of the Proceeds of Crimes legislation, money-laundering legislation and the powers of the Criminal Assets Bureau, as well as co-operation with Customs, other police forces, Europol and Interpol. Furthermore, An Garda Síochána proactively participate in international exchange of information on emerging crime trends and training facilitated by CEPOL, Europol and Interpol.

In addition to the range of Garda enforcement measures outlined above, An Garda Síochána also engages extensively with communities in various fora to address local concerns relating to crime and community safety, including the impact that organised crime can have at a community level.

I might add that heavy penalties are provided for weapons offences in our criminal law and mandatory minimum penalties have been introduced for certain firearms offences. The considerable powers already available to Gardaí have been supplemented further by the newly established DNA Database which will have the capacity to link suspects to unsolved crimes using forensic evidence, and will greatly assist Gardaí in investigating serious gun crimes and a whole range of other serious offences.

20 April 2016

Garda Deployment

239. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of members of An Garda Síochána stationed in County Waterford; the number who retired in each of the past five years; their rank on leaving the force; and the number of officers of each rank of garda, detective garda, sergeant, detective sergeant, inspector and superintendent currently deployed in the Waterford division compared to five years ago. [7672/16]

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

I have been informed by the Garda Commissioner that the number of members stationed in the Waterford Garda Division on the 29 February 2016, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was 280. This compares with 302 on 28 February 2011. The following table sets out the breakdown by rank. The information supplied by the Garda Commissioner does not distinguish between Sergeant and Detective Sergeant.

Waterford Garda Division

Date	Garda	Sgt.	Insp.	Supt.	C/Supt.	Total
28 Feb 2011	249	43	5	4	1	302
29 Feb 2016	231	39	6	3	1	280

With regard to the number of members and their ranks who have retired from this Division, the information is not at hand in the Department and I have asked the Commissioner to supply this information which will be forwarded to the Deputy on receipt.

Employment Rights

240. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to improve regulation for au pairs who are brought by families here as part of a cultural exchange programme and wish to be recognised as such; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7683/16]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): My remit in this area is limited to the immigration status of non-EEA nationals and ultimately this issue is not about immigration but rather the employment rights of au pairs. The question of employment rights is the responsibility of my colleague, the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation and indeed I understand that many au pairs are EU nationals, who would not need immigration permission to be in Ireland in any event.

I refer the Deputy to my answer to Parliamentary Question No. 337 of Thursday, 14 April 2016, which I am providing for ease of reference:

My remit in this area is limited to the immigration status of non-EEA nationals and ultimately this issue is not about immigration but rather the rights of employees. The question of employment rights is the responsibility of my colleague, the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise

and Innovation and indeed I understand that the person the subject of the recent ruling referred to by the Deputy was an EU national, who would not need immigration permission to be in Ireland in any event.

In the recent case before the Workplace Relations Commission, the position, as I understand it, an individual working as an au pair was deemed to be an employee, with the entitlements that go with that status, including payment of the minimum wage. While there has traditionally been a social and cultural dimension to work as an au pair, which presumably can continue into the future, this cannot alter the entitlements of individuals deemed to be employees. This applies irrespective of the immigration arrangements under which they are resident in Ireland.

As far as the immigration aspects of this issue are concerned, a non-EEA national would not be granted immigration permission for the primary purpose of being an au pair and I understand that such employment would not be eligible for an employment permit. Persons on student permission with an Immigration Stamp 2 are entitled to engage in casual work for 40 hours per week during the months May to August and for a 4 week period from Mid December to Mid January. Outside that time the limit is 20 hours per week. Working as an au pair during that time is not forbidden but, as stated above, such work is subject to the various entitlements that employees have.

Garda Strength

241. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the extent to which she expects the strength of An Garda Síochána to increase over the next three years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7708/16]

243. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the total strength of An Garda Síochána at present; the extent to which it is expected to increase Garda numbers over the next 12 months; if particular attention will be paid to areas experiencing an increase in crime when numbers are deployed in the future; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7710/16]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 241 and 243 together.

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 continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure the best possible use is made of resources. I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that the overall number of personnel available to An Garda Síochána on the 29 February 2016 was close to 16,000, comprising 12,785 Gardaí, 932 Garda Reserve members and over 2,000 civilians.

As the Deputy will appreciate, it is vital that An Garda Síochána is renewed to ensure it has the capacity to provide effective and visible policing throughout the country. With this objective in mind, there have been seven intakes of Garda Trainees to the Garda College since it was reopened in September 2014, giving a total intake of 700. A further 450 recruits will be taken in this year. So far, 395 of the new Garda Trainees have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream uniform duties in communities nationwide.

It is expected that a further 300 Garda Trainees will attest by the end of this year which, taking account of projected retirements, will bring Garda numbers to around the 13,000 mark. The Government is committed to ongoing seamless recruitment to the force and I expect that the number of Gardaí will approach 14,000 within the next three years.

Organised Crime

242. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the extent to which her Department and the Garda authorities have identified the total membership of criminal gangs operating in all parts of the country; if continued action is planned to combat them; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7709/16]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I assure the Deputy that tackling organised crime activity is a key ongoing priority for both the Government and An Garda Síochána.

An Garda Síochána's Policing Plan sets out the priorities of An Garda Síochána in tackling organised crime activity including its continued commitment to pro-actively target groups and individuals engaged in criminal activity, including organised criminal activities.

In tackling such activity, An Garda Síochána continues to develop and implement operations and strategies aimed at targeting, dismantling and disrupting criminal networks, utilising advanced analytical and intelligence methodologies. Multi-disciplinary approaches are also utilised to ensure the activities of individuals and groups involved in criminal enterprise are effectively targeted, including through the use of the proceeds of crimes legislation, money-laundering legislation, the provisions of the Criminal Justice (Amendment) Act 2009 relating to organised crime and the powers of the Criminal Assets Bureau.

While we should not underestimate the difficulties which the Garda authorities face in tackling organised crime activity, we continue to see the significant results of their efforts in the arrests made and persons being brought before the Courts, as well as the ongoing drugs and firearms seizures made.

With regard to the question of membership, I am advised that membership of criminal groups tends to be fluid with groups merging and splitting on an ongoing basis. In addition, many modern groupings are transnational in nature. With this in mind, the Deputy will appreciate the difficulty in attributing precise figures to membership at any particular point in time.

In support of the efforts of An Garda Síochána, the Government is committed to ensuring that An Garda Síochána has the resources to deliver highly-mobile and responsive Garda patrols in both rural and urban communities. Since 2012, almost €34 million has been invested in renewing the Garda fleet to support front line Garda responses. Over 640 new vehicles are coming on stream since the start of 2015 including new specialised vehicles. This investment will provide the Gardaí with additional high powered vehicles, marked and unmarked patrol cars, cars for surveillance and covert operations, motor cycles for high visibility road policing and vehicles for public order policing. This investment in a modern, effective and fit-for-purpose Garda fleet will continue under the Government's Capital Plan 2016 - 2021 which provides an additional €46 million for new Garda vehicles over the life time of the Plan. The Government is also investing in airborne surveillance and enhanced technology and ICT systems. The increased budget allocation for 2016 will also facilitate additional funding for Garda surveillance, special operations and targeted, intelligence-led policing.

Question No. 243 answered with Question No. 241.

Crime Data

244. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the total num-

ber of burglaries and other crimes reported in each Garda district or division throughout County Kildare in the past five years to date; the extent to which the number of reported criminal incidents has fluctuated in the period in question; the actions proposed to combat any increase in such incidents of crime; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7711/16]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will be aware, the Central Statistics Office (CSO) as the national statistical agency, is responsible for the publication of recorded crime statistics.

To be of assistance, I have asked the CSO to contact the Deputy directly in relation to the specific information requested.

As the Deputy is aware there have been very significant investments in Garda resources which underline the ongoing commitment to supporting An Garda Síochána in opposing crime in all its forms. In particular, during 2016 we will see a further 600 new Gardaí taking up duty, bringing to 1,150 the number of new Gardaí recruited since the reopening of the Garda College in Templemore in September 2014. There will also be ongoing support for anti-crime measures due to the very significant resources committed in the Capital Plan 2016-2021. These include an allocation of €46 million for new Garda vehicles to ensure that Gardaí can be mobile, visible and responsive on the roads and in the community as well as an additional €205 million allocated for Garda technology and ICT systems over the lifetime of the Plan. These investments are making possible targeted Garda operations, including a concentrated drive against burglary and related crimes under Operation Thor, which has to date involved more than 16,000 anti-crime patrols and in the order of 20,000 targeted checkpoints nationwide.

I can also assure the Deputy that the legislation to tackle crime has been strengthened, and would mention in particular the enactment of the Criminal Justice (Burglary of Dwellings) Act 2015 which is targeted at repeat burglars who have previous convictions and who are charged with multiple offences of residential burglary. I am very pleased that this new legislation is now available to support prosecutions arising from the carefully considered Garda strategy to disrupt and oppose criminal activity under Operation Thor.

Court Procedures

245. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if court appellants are being charged to acquire digital audio recordings of their original court hearings; if so, the reason, as such costs could potentially make it prohibitive for some persons; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7765/16]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will be aware, the courts are subject only to the Constitution and the law, independent in the exercise of their judicial functions, and the conduct of any case is a matter entirely for the presiding judge.

All court records, including recordings of court proceedings, are under the control of the presiding Judge, as provided for in section 65(3) of the Court Officers Act, 1926. The procedures whereby parties or other persons wishing to have access to records of court proceedings, including audio recordings, are set out in the relevant Rules of the District Court, Circuit Court and Superior Courts (S.I. Numbers 99/2013, 100/2013 and 101/2013) that came into effect on 8 April 2013. The instruments also set out the terms on which such access may be granted. A party to a case may apply to the court to access the recording. However, the granting of access and the terms under which such access is granted is a matter for the court. In common with all court rules these instruments are available on the Courts Service website.

Where the presiding Judge authorises the release of the audio record, there is no cost to the applicant but if the Judge authorises the release of a transcript of the record the applicant is required to pay the service provider for the transcript and the charge for that is based on the word count of the transcript.

Taxi Data

246. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the Carriage Office received any reports regarding the cloning of taxi plates in the Dublin area between 2003 and 2006; if an investigation was carried out in this regard; the outcome of any such investigation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7772/16]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am informed by the Garda authorities that Carriage Office records indicate that no reports referencing the cloning of taxi plates were received for the period 1 January 2003 to 31 December 2006. The Deputy will appreciate that any person with information relating to any type of criminal offence should bring it to the attention of An Garda Síochána.

Visa Applications

247. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of an application for a visa extension for persons (details supplied). [7795/16]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I have been informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that these persons arrived in the State in May 2007 and September 2007 respectively and were registered as students. Their permission to remain in the State as students expired on 3 November 2013.

On 13 November 2013, both persons made applications for an Extension of Student conditions. These applications are ongoing and will be considered in due course.

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

Unaccompanied Minors and Separated Children

248. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the position regarding unaccompanied minors who on entering the State were placed in State care; the numbers of such children placed in care for each of the past five years; if concerns have been expressed by persons or agencies regarding their care; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7393/16]

252. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he has received or requested any reports from Tusla - the Child and Family Agency or from any other agency on the care of minors who were unaccompanied when they entered into the State system of care; if any incidents of abuse of any kind of these young persons while in State care have

been reported to him; if all persons including interpreters working full-time or part-time with these minors have been vetted by An Garda Síochána, the actions he has taken as a result of such reports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7623/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 248 and 252 together.

The Child and Family Agency, Tusla, has a role in providing care and protection for any unaccompanied minors who present seeking asylum. These children are, by definition, without parents or family in this jurisdiction and Tusla receives them into care on this basis while their applications for asylum are being processed and are referred to as separated children seeking asylum.

Separated children seeking asylum are placed in the care of the State, with Tusla. Following a residential assessment, the majority of the children are placed with foster families and Tusla has a dedicated social work team to work with this vulnerable cohort. A social worker is allocated to each separated child seeking asylum and the social worker has responsibility for the development and implementation of an individualised statutory care plan for the child. If the social work assessment indicates that making a protection application is in the child's best interest, the social worker assists with the application.

The State is duty bound by international and domestic law to protect and provide for separated children in the same way as it does for children normally resident in the State. In order to provide the same standard of care provision for separated children seeking asylum as any other child in State care, an Equity of Care Principle was introduced in 2010 by the HSE. Tusla maintains the equity and equality of services to separated children vis-à-vis other children in State care and ensures there is no differentiation of standard care provision, care practices, care priorities, standards or protocols. All foster care organisations and statutory residential centres are inspected by the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA), and private and voluntary residential centres are inspected by Tusla, against national standards. The inspection reports are published on the respective websites.

My Department has a range of systems in place to ensure it is informed of risk to children and families. Tusla, within its national office, has a dedicated Quality Assurance Team. This team produces monthly, quarterly and annual reports in respect of Tusla's functions, and includes detailed reporting on key performance indicators. Tusla also provides me with information on children in care, their placement type, care status and allocation of social workers. All HIQA and Tusla inspection reports are reviewed and analysed by my Department. The overview from these reports provides me with a level of assurance on the overall standard of care and protection capacity of Tusla. Additional information is gleaned from the National Review Panel reports on individual cases, and also from investigations conducted by the Ombudsman for Children.

Children First (2011) applies to separated children seeking asylum. Tusla has informed me that it is not aware of any reports of abuse in respect of separated children or young persons seeking asylum while in State care.

Tusla has also advised that all persons employed full-time or part-time by Tusla are vetted by An Garda Síochána as a matter of standard practice, as are those employed by the appointed interpretation service.

The following table shows information on the numbers of separated children seeking asylum and from 2010 to 2015.

SCSA Re-ferrals	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Placed in Care	70	66	48	62	86	82
Total No. of Refer-rals	96	99	71	120	97	109

Appointments to State Boards

249. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the regional breakdown of all members appointed by the Government or him to State boards, agencies and bodies in 2015 and to date in 2016 broken down by agency and by regions (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7473/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): I am responsible for the appointment of members to the boards of the Adoption Authority of Ireland, Tusla (the Child and Family Agency), the Board of Management for the Children Detention Schools and Gaisce (the President's Award). All the aforementioned agencies are located in Dublin.

The following tables set out the appointments to the respective boards during 2015 and to date in 2016. The heading of 'Region' refers to the address of the appointee at the time of appointment.

Adoption Authority of Ireland

Board Member	Appointed	Region
Dr. Imelda Ryan	2015	Rest of Leinster
Anne O'Flaherty	2015	Dublin
Dr. Geoffrey Shannon	2015	Dublin
Orlaith Traynor	2015	Rest of Leinster
Paul Harrison	2015	Dublin
Dr. Helen Buckley	2015	Dublin
Patrick McMahon	2015	Dublin

Tusla (the Child and Family Agency)

Board Member	Appointed	Region
Paul A. White	2016	Dublin

Children Detention Schools (Board of Management)

Board Member	Appointed	Region
Professor Ursula Kilkelly	2015 (Acting Chair)	Munster

Gaisce (the President's Award)

Board Member	Appointed	Region
John Concannon	2015	Connacht
Donal Óg Cusack	2015	Munster
Martin O'Rourke	2015	Dublin
Caroline McCamley	2015	Rest of Leinster
Norma Smurfit	2015	Dublin
Andrew Madden	2015	Dublin
Aongus Sammin	2015	Connacht
Ellen O'Malley-Dunlop	2015	Dublin
Sharon Finnegan	2015	Dublin
Carmel Nic Airt	2015	Munster
Justin McAleese	2015	Dublin

Child and Family Agency Data

250. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the family support centres and family resource centres funded by the Child and Family Agency in 2015 by centre; by county; by the funding provided; by the purpose of the funding, such as core funding or special project funding and so on, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7490/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): I refer the Deputy to my previous reply on 6 April 2016 regarding this matter. The position remains the same. The information sought by the Deputy has been requested from the Child and Family Agency. I will respond directly to the Deputy when the information is received.

Foster Care Supports

251. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs to support all children in foster care as a matter of urgency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7578/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): It is vital that all children in care and their carers receive adequate support to ensure a successful placement. Foster care is the main form of alternative care for children in need of care and protection and is the preferred option for children who cannot live with their parent(s)/guardian(s). At the end of December 2015, there were 6,388 children in care in Ireland. Some 93% (5,932) of these children were cared for in foster placements. The majority of children are in the care of general foster carers. At the end of December 2015, some 64% (4,100) of children in care were in a general foster care placement and 29% (1,832) were in foster care with relatives.

Key elements of the support to be provided to children in care include: access to a Link Social Worker for supervision and support to the foster carers; allocation of a dedicated Social Worker for children in care; onward referral and advocacy for access to specialist services to meet the child's identified needs, such as speech and language therapy, counselling and psychology services.

The link worker is a professionally qualified social worker and meets regularly with foster

carers to supervise the capacity of the foster carers to adequately meet the needs of the child and to provide training, information and whatever other support that may be required. At the end of December 2015, 79% (3,277/4,151) of foster carers had a link social worker and 93% (5,492/5,932) of children in foster care had an allocated social worker. I would also note that Tusla provides funding to the Irish Foster Care Association which provides additional supports to carers, including training and advice services.

As the majority of children in care are in foster care family settings in the community, indicators of stability of the placement and participation in education are useful in monitoring the performance of Tusla in relation to overall welfare. I am happy to say that Tusla has reported that the results for these indicators are positive and show that overall placement stability is very high and participation in education is on a par with the national participation rates. In addition there are regulations and standards in place for foster and residential placements and there is a regime of regular monitoring and inspections by the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA). These inspection reports are available on www.hiqa.ie. All 17 areas have been inspected at least once by HIQA, as well as a number of private foster care services.

All children in care should have an allocated social worker but it is important to note that if a child has not been allocated a social worker, the cases are reviewed regularly by the principal social worker and are managed by duty social work teams to support the child's needs. Currently, 93% of children in care have an allocated social worker (5,937/6,388).

In the 2016 Performance Statement, I requested that Tusla make it a priority to strengthen the capacity of its foster care panels, and to ensure sufficient diversity in the numbers of foster carers to provide appropriate matching of carers with children in need of care. Tusla has committed to increasing the number of approved foster carers over 2016 in its business plan. The additional funding of €38 million which the Government has allocated to Tusla for 2016, will give the Agency greater capacity to respond to identified demand and to alleviate pressures being faced in areas such as unallocated cases and private residential and foster care.

Question No. 252 answered with Question No. 248.

Early Childhood Care and Education

253. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs to address concerns that there is insufficient capacity in the early education sector to accommodate the roll-out of the second preschool year under the early childhood care and education scheme; the capacity reviews which have been undertaken by his Department or Pobal to assess the level of capacity within the sector; and the detail of the findings of such reviews. [7669/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The expansion of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme on foot of the allocation of additional funding in Budget 2016 will see the number of children benefitting from the Programme rise from around 67,000 to around 127,000 in a given programme year. For the 2016/17 programme year, it is estimated that 89,500 children will be eligible to enrol in the Programme from September 2016, an additional 22,000 from January 2017 and a further 15,500 from April 2017.

The budgetary announcement in Oct 2015 gave services that wished to expand 11 months notice to plan for the first additional entrants and 18 months to plan for the peak demand in April 2017. My Department made detailed information available to the City and County Childcare Committees at the beginning of this year indicating the number of children, by every electoral division across the country, who would be eligible for an ECCE place in Sept 2016, January

2017 and April 2017. My Department continues to work closely with the City and County Childcare Committees to match this data against their reported capacity in the sector to meet the increase in demand. This exercise is almost complete with the City and County Childcare Committees currently producing a national summary and more local data for me on capacity. Where any capacity issues are found, I will be asking the relevant City/County Childcare Committee to work intensively with my Department to resolve the issue.

I have launched several initiatives to support capacity building for the ECCE programme, including the Learner Fund 4 which supports staff to upskill and services to have qualified pre-school leaders in their setting. I have also reformed the rules applying to payment of “Higher Capitation”. The amended rules will allow Higher Capitation to be paid per room, rather than the traditional rule that all pre-school rooms must be led by a graduate to be eligible. This will allow services who have been in receipt of Higher Capitation to retain this payment for some of their rooms, even if they do not have a graduate for their additional rooms.

I have ensured support for capacity building through the Early Years Capital Programme 2016, under which capital funding of €4 million is being made available for pre-school services, including not-for-profit community childcare services, that are making alterations to their services to accommodate the increased numbers resulting from the expansion of the ECCE programme. The maximum grant available under this programme is €10,000. The closing date for applications was 8 April 2016.

In addition, the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government has, following consultation with officials in my Department, written to all Local Authorities requesting that they assist with the planning process for childcare facilities in order to facilitate the expansion of required capacity.

Child Care Services Data

254. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of new recipients of the community child care subvention scheme since the expansion announced in budget 2016 and since the expansion of the scheme announced earlier in 2015. [7670/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): Prior to Budget 2016, the Community Childcare Subvention (CCS) Programme supported disadvantaged parents, parents in low-paid employment and parents in training or education by enabling those who qualify to avail of reduced childcare costs at participating community or not-for-profit childcare services.

Due to economic constraints, Budget 2012 closed the CCS Programme to new applications from community/not-for-profit childcare services wishing to enter the CCS Programme and to the expansion of services by existing CCS providers. Using savings from 2015, I was able to announce additional CCS places in late 2015. Under Budget 2016, I lifted the previous restrictions as part of a major package of strategic investment in affordable, quality and accessible childcare. The Budget 2016 package included a further €16m investment in the expansion of the CCS Programme, to include its roll-out to private childcare providers, in a targeted manner.

Delivery of these changes and improvements required significant administrative activity by Pobal and my Department. Phase 1 of this roll-out, which took effect in October 2015, lifted the expansion restriction within existing CCS services. Phase 2, announced on 10th November 2015, expanded the CCS Programme to other community/not-for-profit childcare providers not currently under contract to deliver the CCS Programme. Phase 3, which came into effect

recently, saw €16 million in funding for further CCS places made available to private childcare providers (CCS Private).

Pobal has advised me that 1,657 additional CCS places have been registered as part of Phase 1 and 2 of the expansion as of March 18th, 2016, and that registrations have continued since then.

The CCS Private programme opened to registrations on Thursday, 14 April last. To date, some 354 children have registered for CCS funded childcare places with contracted private childcare providers.

The Department has been working with the City and County Childcare Committees to help promote uptake of the CCS Community and Private expansions across the country. The CCCs have in turn been working with services within their areas, in particular where they have identified additional need, to communicate the availability of the CCS Programme to parents whose children may be attending their childcare services.

Child Care Services Provision

255. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the capital funding he provided in his Estimates for 2016 towards the provision of new and upgraded child care facilities; if he will provide specific funding on a county basis; the level of funding he will provide for counties Cavan and Monaghan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7695/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): Capital funding of €4 million is being made available through the Early Years Capital Programme in 2016 for early years pre-school services, both private and not-for-profit/community, that are intending to expand their service to provide for more capacity in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme. The maximum grant available under this programme is €10,000. The closing date for applications was 8 April 2016.

Pobal is responsible for the administration of this funding scheme on behalf of my Department. I have been advised by Pobal that an appraisal process is under way and that recommendations for approval of funding, in line with the published criteria, will be with my Department by early June. The award of funding will be based partially on evidence of current need and/or projected future demand for additional ECCE places in 2016-17 in the catchment area of each applying service. The relevant City or County Childcare Committee will assist Pobal with demand versus supply data. Value for money is also an awarding criteria and the costs/grant requested relative to the number of ECCE places being created will be taken into account when evaluating grant applications.

When this process is completed and grant funding is awarded, we will be in a position to announce the funding being made available on a county-by-county basis.

Child and Family Agency

256. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will authorise an investigation into Tusla, the Child and Family Agency and the Health Service Executive's handling of a case (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7817/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): Thank you for bringing this to my attention. I will write to the Deputy separately on the specific issues raised by him in the e-mail. I have also forwarded the information supplied by the Deputy to Tusla and requested a report on the matter. I will revert to the Deputy on issues raised in the correspondence as a priority when the report is received.

Departmental Contracts Data

257. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the frequency with which the contract for taxis for the Health Service Executive is put to tender; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7254/16]

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.

Community Care Provision

258. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons due to be discharged from congregated care settings over the next three years on a county basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7557/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The HSE's report "*Time to Move on from Congregated Settings - A Strategy for Community Inclusion*", (2011) proposes a new model of support in the community by moving people from institutional settings to the community, over a seven year time frame. The plan is being rolled out at a regional and local level and involves full consultation with stakeholders.

The HSE has established a subgroup, under '*Transforming Lives*', the Programme to implement the recommendations of the Value for Money and Policy Review of Disability Services, which is developing an implementation plan for moving people from institutions. I welcome the fact that the needs of people moving from congregated settings will be fully taken into account during this process as the model of care for individuals will be based on a person centred plan.

In terms of housing, the Department of Health and the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government are working in collaboration to support the transition of people with a disability from institutions to social housing in the community under the Government's *National Housing Strategy for People with Disability 2011 to 2016*.

The HSE's 2016 National Service Plan has set a target of 165 people to move from institutions in 2016 into suitable accommodation. This is being supported by €20 million in capital funding from the Department of Health in respect of acquiring and renovating properties in priority institutions identified by the HSE. In addition I am pleased to note that the Department of the Environment will provide €10 million under the Capital Assistance Scheme to provide suitable accommodation for people transitioning from institutions in 2016. The HSE estimate that a further 100 people could benefit from this initiative. Some €1 million in ring-fenced leasing funding is also being made available by the Department of the Environment in 2016 to support people moving from institutions into suitable social housing in the community. This demonstrates the joined up commitment of both Departments to support the de-congregation programme.

20 April 2016

The HSE has developed a three strand approach to accelerate transitions from institutions in the period 2016-2021, with a target of 900 people to move to more suitable accommodation in this period.

Strand 1 - is focused on large institutional settings at high risk of not meeting HIQA Standards;

Strand 2 - is focused on moving people into suitable social housing in the community through the Department of Environment schemes; and

Strand 3 - is focused on remaining service users in congregated settings who could move to suitable accommodation.

As the specific information requested in 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.

Medical Card Applications

259. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Health the reason a medical card was not granted to a person (detailed supplied) in County Louth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7248/16]

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 recently 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 Accommodation Provision

260. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health when the additional beds at Kenmare hospital, County Kerry, will be opened; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7249/16]

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.

Hospitals Data

261. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the number of cataract operations

at South Infirmery Victoria Hospital in 2015 which were for private patients and for public patients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7252/16]

262. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the number of cataract operations which were carried out on public patients in Cork University Hospital and the South Infirmery Victoria University Hospital in 2015; the percentage of these from County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7256/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 261 and 262 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.

Motorised Transport Grant Closure

263. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health when he will introduce a replacement scheme for the motorised transport grant and the mobility allowance scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7268/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): Conscious of the reports of the Ombudsman regarding the legal status of both the Mobility Allowance and Motorised Transport Grant Schemes in the context of the Equal Status Acts, the Government decided to close both schemes. Both schemes remain closed.

However, the Government also decided that monthly payments will continue to be made by the Health Service Executive to 4,700 people who were in receipt of the Mobility Allowance at the time the scheme closed, on the basis that this would prevent hardship and, on an interim basis, alleviate stress, anxiety and uncertainty among a vulnerable group in society.

The Government decided that the detailed preparatory work required for a new Transport Support Scheme and associated statutory provisions should be progressed by the Minister for Health. The Department is seeking a solution which would best meet the aim of supporting people with severe disabilities who require additional income to contribute towards the cost of their mobility needs, while remaining within the available budget and satisfying all legal and equality concerns.

Work is ongoing on the policy proposals to be brought to Government for the drafting of primary legislation for a new scheme. The proposals seek to ensure that:

- There is a firm statutory basis to the Scheme's operation;
- There is transparency and equity in the eligibility criteria attaching to the Scheme;
- Resources are targeted at those with the greatest needs; and
- The Scheme is capable of being costed and it is affordable on its introduction and on an ongoing basis.

Hospital Admissions

264. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health when an operation will be pro-

vided for a person (details supplied) in County Galway; the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7283/16]

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 HSE, 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.

Pharmaceutical Sector

265. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if, in relation to the draft Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (Regulation of Temporary Absence Cover by Pharmaceutical Assistants) Rules 2016, which attempts to provide a legal definition to temporary absence of a pharmacist, his attention has been drawn to the concerns of qualified pharmaceutical assistants who assert that the proposed changes undermine the profession and the holders ability to perform certain duties, which for years have become strongly identifiable with the profession itself; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7289/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Pharmaceutical Assistants (PAs) are registered with the pharmacy regulator, the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (PSI), and may perform the same functions as a pharmacist, in the temporary absence of a pharmacist, with the exception of functions that are restricted to pharmacists under specific medicines legislation, such as vaccination services.

Since 1994, the provisions of “temporary absence” have been understood with reference to a Code of Practice agreed that year between the PSI and the Pharmaceutical Assistants’ Association (PAA). Section 30(2) of the Pharmacy Act 2007 provides that the PSI Council may make Rules, with the consent of the Minister, to provide further as to what constitutes the temporary absence of a registered pharmacist and what may or may not be done by a PA when acting on behalf of a pharmacist. In 2013, the PSI Council directed that a policy position be developed to enable and facilitate the drafting of rules in line with the requirements of Section 30(2) of the Act and was included in the PSI Service Plan 2014.

The draft PSI (Regulation of Temporary Absence Cover by Pharmaceutical Assistants) Rules 2016 were developed following debate and engagement with interested parties including the PAA.

The draft Rules were issued for consultation on 8 February 2016, ending on 7 March 2016. The PSI Council considered the matter, including themes arising from the consultation process, at a policy session on the 14 April 2016. The consideration by the PSI Council is on-going and the PSI will continue to engage with the PAA and other interested parties in doing so.

Minister Lynch and I are aware of the concerns of PAs regarding any perceived changes to their employment status and conditions, and Minister Lynch met with a delegation from the PAA in September 2015 to discuss these concerns.

These draft Rules have yet to be formally submitted to me. If the PSI Council decides to submit them I will then give consideration to the Rules.

Hospital Appointments Status

266. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health to expedite an ophthalmologist appointment for a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7293/16]

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.

Ambulance Service Staff

267. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 297 of 22 March 2016, his views on correspondence regarding non-rostered paramedics with the National Ambulance Service (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7302/16]

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

HSE Data

268. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if payments due to a person (details supplied) in County Carlow will be made in full to the person directly; if there is an outstanding sum due; and if he will expedite the matter [7318/16]

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

and they will follow the matter up with the HSE.

Home Care Packages Provision

269. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if the hours of home care granted in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny will be operated in line with the old system rather than under a pilot scheme; and if he will expedite the matter [7321/16]

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 Appeals

270. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if a medical card will be reinstated in the case of persons (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7323/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information has recently 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.

Cross-Border Health Services Provision

271. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on hospital waiting lists who are eligible to avail of the cross-border treatment scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7325/16]

272. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on waiting lists from the Fingal area who are eligible to avail of the cross-border treatment scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7326/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I propose to take Questions Nos. 271 and 272 together.

The EU Directive 2011/24/EU on Patients' Rights in Cross Border Healthcare aims to ensure EU citizens may access safe and good quality healthcare services across EU borders. The Directive establishes a framework for cross border healthcare between EU/EEA states to facilitate patients to access care in another Member State in accordance with their entitlements in their own country. Under the Directive, known as the Cross Border Healthcare Directive (CBD), insured patients are entitled to have the costs of cross-border healthcare services reim-

bursed if the healthcare service in question is among the benefits to which they are entitled in their Member State of affiliation. As such, it allows Irish residents to avail of healthcare in other EU or EEA (excluding Switzerland) Member States that they would be entitled to within the public health system in Ireland, which is not contrary to Irish legislation.

Public patients may access the healthcare they require in either the public or private health-care system of the country abroad under CBD. Access to healthcare abroad is based on patients following public patient pathways - i.e. patients must demonstrate they have followed the equivalent public patient pathways that a patient would follow if accessing public healthcare in Ireland. Referral for care under the CBD may be made by a GP, a hospital consultant and certain other HSE clinicians. The CBD excludes certain health services, e.g. services of public health, long term care, organ transplantation, etc. All persons on public waiting lists, other than for such exempt health services, are eligible for the Scheme.

Cross-Border Health Services Provision

273. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the reason those availing of the cross-border treatment scheme have to pay for their treatment abroad up-front; if he is aware that this is not a requirement; if he will consider facilitating access to this scheme without up-front payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7327/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The EU Directive 2011/24/EU on Patients' Rights in Cross Border Healthcare aims to ensure EU citizens may access safe and good quality healthcare services across EU borders. Under the Directive, known as the Cross Border Healthcare Directive (CBD), insured patients are entitled to have costs of cross-border healthcare services reimbursed if the healthcare service in question is among the benefits to which they are entitled in their Member State of affiliation. The HSE endeavours to reimburse the cost of treatment incurred or the cost of providing such healthcare in the State, whichever is the lesser, to the applicant within 30 days of receipt of a claim for reimbursement, in line with Prompt Payment legislation.

Each Member State is free to set its own payment policy for cross-border healthcare services, by means of reimbursement to the patient or by direct payment to the healthcare provider. That policy decision is a matter for each Member State under the Directive and, similar to the majority of Member States, Ireland has no plan to introduce a policy of direct payment to each healthcare service provider, both public and private, in all EU/EEA Member States for healthcare services provided by them.

Health Services Staff

274. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Health when the gratuity payment due to certain home help workers will be made in lieu of pension payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7329/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I understand the Deputy is referring to those Home Help workers who are employed by voluntary providers of home help services which are funded under section 39 of the Health Act 2004. As these home help workers are not employed by the HSE, the HSE and the Department has no role in determining the salaries or other terms and conditions applying to these staff including any pension arrangements.

As the Deputy is aware a joint working group has been established, as agreed as part of the

Lansdowne Road talks, to consider a number issues in relation to section 39 organisations. It is expected that the work of the group should conclude by 31 May 2016.

Medical Card Applications

275. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when a medical card will be granted in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare who has submitted all documentation required in their case; the grounds the documentation submitted was deemed not sufficient; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7336/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch) (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 recently issued to Oireachtas members. If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, he should contact my Private Office who will follow up the matter.

Medical Card Eligibility

276. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if and when determination of eligibility for a medical card will be complete in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; the documentation still outstanding in this case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7341/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch) (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 recently issued to Oireachtas members. If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, he should contact my Private Office who will follow up the matter.

Hospital Appointments Status

277. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person with (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7347/16]

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.

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 HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

Health Services

278. **Deputy Shane Ross** asked the Minister for Health if efforts have been made to move a person (details supplied) in County Dublin or alter the continued residential treatment for the person as per the person's and family's request; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7348/16]

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

Medical Card Reviews

279. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Health the status of the review of an application for a medical card by a person (details supplied) in County Louth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7352/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch) (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 recently issued to Oireachtas members. If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, he can contact my Private Office who will follow up the matter.

Health Services Staff

280. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the criteria a person must meet in order to become a home carer through either the Health Service Executive or the commercial sector; if, apart from Garda vetting, there are regulations in place to ensure that the successful candidate is suitable and qualified for such an important post, including the specific placement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7364/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch) (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The HSE requires that new directly-employed home help staff have Fetac/QQI level 5 in health-care modules 'Care Skills' and 'Care of the Older Person' or equivalent

qualifications and a minimum of one year's relevant experience providing care.

The HSE uses private and voluntary providers where direct HSE services are not available. In 2012, the HSE introduced a procurement framework for external providers. This included quality standards for governance and accountability; person-centred care; complaints management; and that personnel involved in the provision of services receive appropriate orientation and induction, and proper and sufficient training and instruction in the execution of their duties.

The HSE is currently running a new tender for externally-provided home-care which requires staff working on HSE contracts to have the following:

home care workers with less than 1 year experience must have a minimum of 2 QQI level 5 modules completed, specifically Care Skills and Care of Older People, and have received appropriate induction prior to working on HSE contracts;

unqualified staff with more than 1 year's experience in the last 3 years must commit to obtaining the above modules within 11 months of commencing work on HSE contracts; and

existing staff working on HSE contracts, with more than one year experience in the last 3 years must have a minimum of 2 QQI level 5 modules specifically Care Skills and Care of Older People.

In addition, all of the above staff employed by external providers must have an assessment of their competency on file, a plan to address any identified training needs, an up to date Patient Handling Certificate including hoist training, and Garda clearance.

These requirements relate to publicly funded care and are not applicable to care funded by clients' own resources.

Hospital Appointments Status

281. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when required surgery will take place in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7365/16]

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

Patient Transport Provision

282. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Sligo will receive a decision on an application for transport from the Brothers of Charity. [7367/16]

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

Health Services Funding

283. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health if school leaver Camphill funding for full-time residential care will be made available to a person (details supplied) in County Offaly through the Health Service Executive, as day care services do not meet the person's needs at this time. [7368/16]

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

Speech and Language Therapy

284. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health the number of children currently on the waiting list for speech and language therapy in County Wexford; the number of these who have been on the waiting list for over a year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7369/16]

285. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health the number of children currently on the waiting list for speech and language therapy across the country; the number of these who have been on the waiting list for over a year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7370/16]

368. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health the funding currently allocated and the additional funding allocated in budget 2016 to speech and language therapy; the expenditure on speech and language therapy in 2014 and in 2015, by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7808/16]

369. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on the waiting list for speech and language therapy in primary care by age category, by area, and by time waiting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7809/16]

371. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health the number of children on the urgent waiting list for speech and language therapy; the length of time they are waiting in County Wexford and nationally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7811/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch) (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I propose to take Questions Nos. 284, 285, 368, 369 and 371 together.

As the information requested by the Deputy relates to service issues and is not routinely provided to my Department, I have asked the Health Service Executive to reply directly to the Deputy on these matters. If he has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, he should please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter.

Hospital Appointments Administration

286. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health to schedule a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied) in County Longford. [7375/16]

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 HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

Treatment Abroad Scheme

287. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health if financial assistance will be provided to a person (details supplied) in Dublin 8 to travel to the United Kingdom to receive treatment which is not available here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7380/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch) (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Treatment Abroad Scheme (TAS) as provided for in EU Regulations and Department of Health Guidelines, does not include a provision for travel and subsistence expenses for patients or their relatives travelling abroad to avail of approved treatments. However the HSE, subject to available funding, under the Treatment Abroad Scheme Travel Policy, may provide assistance towards reasonable economic air or sea travel fares for patients, and a travelling companion where appropriate or where the referring consultant identifies a necessity. The HSE Treatment Abroad Scheme National Travel Policy was implemented in November 2009 to standardise and provide equity to the provision of entitlements relating to travel expenses. Expenses other than air/sea fares are not admissible. However, patients who experience difficulty funding any additional costs may apply to the Department of Social Protection for assistance as an exceptional needs payment. It should be noted that, in general, patients do not incur subsistence costs when undergoing treatment abroad as such costs are included in the cost of the care that the patient is receiving.

Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual. As regards the issues with the welfare officer and bus pass, these are a matter for the Department of Social Protection.

Home Help Service Data

288. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the number of home help hours budgeted for in 2016 by county, in tabular form; the number of home help hours budgeted for in 2015 by county; the number of actual home help hours provided in 2015; the number of home help hours provided in 2016, per month for the first three months of the year; the number of home help hours provided in 2015, per month, for the first three months months; and if he will

make a statement on the matter. [7381/16]

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

Medical Aids and Appliances Applications

289. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an application for a hearing aid by a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7385/16]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

290. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health when a person (detail supplied) in County Roscommon will receive a hospital appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7389/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy. If he has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days he should contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter.

Hospital Beds Data

291. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health the total number of public hospital beds in operation. [7390/16]

292. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health the number of public hospital beds broken down by hospital and by category of bed, in tabular form. [7391/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 291 and 292 together.

As these are service matters, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly. If he has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days he should contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Hospital Appointments Status

293. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary will receive a hospital appointment. [7398/16]

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 Centres Provision

294. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Health when works will commence at a care centre (details supplied) in Dublin 4; and the estimated time for their completion. [7401/16]

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 Waiting Lists

295. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied) in County Louth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7405/16]

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 HSE, 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.

Medicinal Products Availability

296. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health to investigate the possibility of including the medication Frampya for the treatment of multiple sclerosis on the medical card and long-term illness schemes; the reason this is not already included in such schemes; when a decision will be made on this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7411/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): Fampridine (brand name Fampyra) has been reimbursed under the Long Term Illness Scheme on a conditional, responder-only basis since 1 October 2015.

The HSE has provided all Neurology Centres with details of the protocol which must be satisfied to enable a patient to qualify for reimbursement.

Reimbursement will be extended where a demonstration of clinical response (based on objective criteria agreed with clinical experts) is recorded and where that clinical response is shown to persist, based on objective measurement at six-monthly intervals. The HSE extends reimbursement in all cases where the criteria meet the requirements of reimbursement protocol.

Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland

297. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding an issue with registering a personal identification number; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7414/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I wish to thank the Deputy for the matter raised.

Given that this is an operational matter, it is appropriate that it should be dealt with by the NMBI. I have referred the Deputy's question to the NMBI for attention and direct reply.

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

298. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital procedure for a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7415/16]

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 HSE, 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.

Home Help Service Data

299. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons nationally who are currently listed as waiting for home help hours; the number of hours included in the waiting list; the cost of providing funding to eliminate the waiting list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7427/16]

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.

Medicinal Products Availability

300. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if he has had consultations with the Health Service Executive regarding the possible funding of a drug, eculizumab, for a person (details supplied); the outcome of those consultations, if they have taken place. [7428/16]

335. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health his views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding Degos disease; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7577/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I propose to take Questions Nos. 300 and 335 together.

Eculizumab is an ultra-orphan medicine licensed for the treatment of paroxysmal nocturnal haemoglobinuria (PNH) and atypical haemolytic uraemic syndrome (aHUS). Eculizumab is reimbursable for the treatment of these two conditions, for which the European Medicines Agency has completed assessments in relation to safety and efficacy.

The drug is not licensed for the treatment of Degos disease by either the European Medicines Agency or the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

It is not in the Minister for Health's power to sanction the unlicensed use of any drug or medicine. Decisions on the use of unlicensed medicines for an individual patient are a matter for the prescribing clinician and the treating hospital. Under the HSE Governance Act 2013, I am barred from making any directions in respect of an individual patient.

Hospital Procedures

301. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health if he is aware of the case of persons (details supplied) in County Louth who are scheduled to undergo bariatric surgeries later in 2016; how many bariatric surgeries were performed in 2015 and to date in 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7430/16]

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 be-

half, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

In relation to the particular queries 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 Facilities

302. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of facilities (details supplied) in University Hospital Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7431/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): In relation to the specific query raised by the Deputy, 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

303. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of the waiting list for cataract operations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7432/16]

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 HSE, 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 Expenditure

304. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Health if he will address concerns on behalf of the Donegal Centre for Independent Living in respect of pay cuts and the rise in employers' pay-related social insurance resulting in the loss of €218,000 per year for operation and development costs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7440/16]

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.

Medicinal Products Availability

305. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health if he will consider allowing the use of cannabidiol oil to treat a person diagnosed with Dravet syndrome (details supplied) who otherwise faces the prospect of having to travel to the United States to access this treatment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7442/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Cannabidiol (CBD) oil is not authorised as a medicinal product in Ireland. Under European and Irish legislation, before a medicine can be placed on the Irish market, the manufacturer must seek an authorisation from the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) or, in the case of certain medicinal products, the European Medicines Agency. A determination on an application for authorisation of a medicine is based on a rigorous scientific assessment of the application against the criteria of safety, quality, efficacy, legal and regulatory requirements.

Where a medicine is not authorised in Ireland, a licensed wholesaler may import it if it has been prescribed by a doctor for a patient under his/her care, on his/her direct responsibility and in order to meet the special needs of a patient. The process for this is described in the 'Guide to the Notification System for Exempt Medicinal Products' which is available on the HPRA website. For this notification scheme, there are a number of specialist wholesalers which deal with the importation of 'exempt medicines' into Ireland, via pharmacies and subject to a prescription.

CBD is derived from cannabis which is a controlled drug. If a CBD oil product does not contain an ingredient which is a controlled substance, it may be feasible to have that product imported and used in Ireland, in accordance with specific conditions, should a patient's doctor be of the opinion that this is an appropriate treatment.

Hospital Appointments Status

306. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal will receive a hospital appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7459/16]

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 HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

Hospital Appointments Status

307. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal will receive a hospital appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7460/16]

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 Appointments Status

308. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal will receive a hospital appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7465/16]

309. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal will receive the results of a scan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7466/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 308 and 309 together.

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

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

Hospital Appointments Status

310. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal will receive a hospital appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7467/16]

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 HSE, 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.

Appointments to State Boards

311. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health the regional breakdown of all members appointed by the Government or him to State boards, agencies and bodies in 2015 and to date in 2016 broken down by agency and by regions (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7480/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The nomination and appointment process for boards of bodies under the aegis of my Department is set out in legislation. In line with Government Decision S180/20/10/1617 of 2014 and Guidelines set out by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform relating to the advertising for expressions of interest in vacancies on State Boards, my Department in conjunction with the Public Appointments Service currently advertises for board vacancies as they arise, where I, as Minister for Health, have nominating rights under relevant legislation. I also appoint members on the nomination of various bodies, again in accordance with the relevant legislation.

The detailed information requested by the Deputy regarding the breakdown of Board appointments by region is not readily available, but is currently being collated and will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as it is available.

Vaccination Programme

312. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health his views on concerns raised regarding the adverse effects on some recipients of the human papillomavirus vaccine; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7494/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The immunisation programme in Ireland is based on the advice of the National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC). NIAC is a committee of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland comprising of experts in a number of specialties including infectious diseases, paediatrics and public health. The committee's recommendations are informed by public health advice and international best practice. The HPV vaccine protects girls from developing cervical cancer when they are adults. It is available free of charge from the HSE for all girls in 1st year of secondary school and over 200,000 girls have received the vaccine since its introduction in 2010.

In Ireland, the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) is the regulatory authority for medicines in Ireland. 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. On 12 January 2016 the European Commission endorsed the conclusion of the European Medicines Agency stating that there is no need to change the way HPV vaccines are used or to amend the product information. This final outcome by the Commission is now binding in all member states.

I am aware of claims of an association between HPV vaccination and a number of conditions experienced by a group of young women. It appears that some girls first suffered symptoms around the time they received the HPV vaccine, and understandably some parents have connected the vaccine to their daughter's condition. Anyone who is suffering ill health is eligible to seek medical attention, and to access appropriate health and social care services, irrespective of the cause of their symptoms. The individual nature of the needs of some children may require access to specialist services.

Hospital Waiting Lists

313. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the details of how long the current waiting list for cataract consultations with specialists and cataract operations in South Infirmity Victoria University Hospital is, as the elective surgical component of the ophthalmology service has been transferred from Cork University Hospital (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7499/16]

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 Charges

314. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal was referred to Altnagelvin Area Hospital for follow-up treatment subsequent to having undergone surgery at North West Independent Hospital, Ballykelly via the cross-border health care directive; the reason this follow-up treatment incurred charges of in excess of £20,000stg for which the patient is now supposedly liable; if this person is liable for these charges and, if so, the assistance that will be provided to this person from authorities here considering the person's inability to reasonably meet these costs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7500/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The EU Directive 2011/24/EU on Patients' Rights in Cross Border Healthcare aims to ensure EU citizens may access safe and good quality healthcare services across EU borders. In line with the terms of the Directive where a patient has received cross-border healthcare and where medical

follow-up proves necessary, the HSE will ensure that the same medical follow-up is available as would have been if that healthcare had been provided here. In this case the follow-up care was provided in Northern Ireland.

The matter of the charges raised for the follow-up care provided in Northern Ireland is not within the remit of the Minister for Health in this State. Nonetheless, the National Contact Point (in respect of cross-border healthcare under the Directive) of the HSE is aware of this case and has had contact with the patient's family. The HSE is assisting the family in resolving this matter including writing to the private facility in question in relation to this patient.

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.

Hospital Appointments Status

315. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied) in County Louth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7501/16]

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.

Medicinal Products Supply

316. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Health to fast-track the approval of the new drug Orkambi for the treatment of cystic fibrosis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7502/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I am aware that there is a lot of concern and worry among cystic fibrosis (CF) sufferers, and families of children who have CF, about the current debate on the cost and availability of this medicine.

Orkambi (lumacaftor/ivacaftor) is a combination drug for the treatment of CF in patients with two copies of a specific CF gene mutation. The drug was licensed by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration in July 2015 and by the European Medicines Agency in November 2015. To date, it has not been approved for reimbursement by any public health service in Europe.

Each country has its own process for approval. The Irish process is laid down in law in the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013. Under this law, the HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicinal products under the com-

munity drug schemes in accordance with the provisions of the law. It is appropriate that these should not be political decisions and that a scientific and evidence based approach is taken to determine the extent to which patients would benefit from treatment with expensive new drugs.

Prior to reimbursing any medicine, the HSE considers a range of statutory criteria, including clinical need, cost-effectiveness, and the resources available to the HSE. The process for approval of high-tech new drugs in Ireland involves three steps. The first step involves a Rapid Review, which has been completed. The second involves a full Health Technology Assessment by the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE). This expert assessment is scientific and objective and will evaluate whether the claims being made about the benefits of a new drug are valid, and to what extent, in terms of its impact on life expectancy, quality of life, reducing hospital admissions, reduced need for transplants etc. The NCPE will also consider which patient groups might benefit, how the drug compares with existing treatments and if it is cost-effective at the price being sought by the manufacturer. The Minister for Health has requested that the NCPE expedite this part of the process. The Centre hopes to be in a position to issue its recommendation to the HSE in early June, and the HSE may then engage in price negotiations with the manufacturer.

The process being followed is the same as that for other CF drugs like Kalydeco (ivacaftor), new drugs to treat cancer and other rare diseases. Orkambi will be treated in the same way as these were, and has to be, under the law. This process is designed to secure the best value for the HSE, and the savings that accrue from this process can be used to fund other health service developments, for example isolation rooms for CF and cancer patients, better ambulance services, home supports for the elderly and safer maternity services.

I hope that it will be possible for Orkambi to be approved for patients who will benefit from it, and at a fair price, but it must go through the normal approval procedure first, like all other high-tech medicines.

Hospital Appointments Delays

317. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a hospital appointment in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 7 and the reason for the delay in this person receiving an appointment. [7510/16]

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.

Health Services Provision

318. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details sup-

plied) in County Kerry will receive Health Service Executive footwear; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7514/16]

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 Appointments Status

319. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7520/16]

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 HSE, 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 Data

320. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of full and partial lower limb amputations that were carried out in 2015; the number of these patients who had diabetes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7526/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): In relation to the specific query raised by the Deputy, 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 Data

321. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of patients, by county, treated for foot ulcerations which did not require a full or partial limb amputation in 2015; the number of those patients who had diabetes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7527/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): In relation to the specific query raised by the

Deputy, 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 Data

322. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of patients under the age of 65, by county, treated for foot ulcerations which did not require a full or partial limb amputation in 2015; the number of those patients who had diabetes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7528/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): In relation to the specific query raised by the Deputy, 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 Data

323. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of full and partial lower limb amputations that were carried out in 2015, by county, on persons under 65 years of age; the number of these patients who had diabetes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7529/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): In relation to the specific query raised by the Deputy, 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 Data

324. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of bed days required by patients treated for foot ulcerations which did not require a full or partial limb amputation in the years 2013 to 2015; the number of those patients who had diabetes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7530/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): In relation to the specific query raised by the Deputy, 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 Data

325. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of hospital bed days required by patients, by county, treated for foot ulcerations which did not require a full or partial limb amputation in the years 2013 to 2015; the number of those patients who had diabetes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7531/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): In relation to the specific query raised by the Deputy, 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 Data

326. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of hospital bed days required by patients undergoing full and partial lower limb amputation procedures in the years 2013 to 2015, by county, on persons under 65 years of age; the number of these patients who had diabetes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7532/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): In relation to the specific query raised by the Deputy, 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 Data

327. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of hospital bed days required by patients, by county, on persons under 65 years of age; treated for foot ulcerations, which did not require a full or partial limb amputation in the years 2013 to 2015; the number of those patients who had diabetes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7533/16]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

328. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Roscommon will receive a hospital appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7543/16]

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 HSE, 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.

Home Help Service Provision

329. **Deputy Colm Brophy** asked the Minister for Health the status of an application for additional home help service for a person (details supplied) in Dublin 24; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7549/16]

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.

Home Help Service Data

330. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if the number of home help hours is being reduced in 2016; if media reports of a cut of 50,000 hours are accurate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7552/16]

331. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide for each of the 34 local health areas the number of home help hours provided for the first three months in 2016 and for the first three months of 2015, in tabular form. [7553/16]

337. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if the projected 10.4 million home help hours for 2016 will still be delivered; if the Health Service Executive has reductions in the provision of these hours in 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7582/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I propose to take Questions Nos. 330, 331 and 337 together.

As these are service matters they have been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Hospital Appointments Status

332. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in Dublin 7 will receive a hospital appointment. [7566/16]

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 HSE, 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 Transfers

333. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a hospital transfer for a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7571/16]

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.

Nursing Staff

334. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the way he proposes to stop our exceptionally qualified nurses from leaving the profession due to low pay and inadequate working conditions, particularly newly qualified nurses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7576/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): There is an international nursing and medical manpower shortage, leading to difficulties in recruiting nurses, doctors and consultants. This difficulty is being experienced by other English speaking countries including the UK, Australia, and Canada. Notwithstanding this, recruitment of additional nurses to support service delivery has been a priority for the HSE in the past two years as it has been possible to increase health funding. Consequently, the total number of nurses employed in the public service has increased by over 1,200 from 34,617 in February 2014 to 35,846 in February 2016 (WTEs).

Following engagement between the relevant parties under the terms of a 'Chairman's Note' to the Lansdowne Road Agreement, a joint document was agreed by the HSE, the nursing unions and my Department that provided for consideration of an increase in the pay rates for fourth year student nurses undertaking the 36 week clinical placement. I am pleased that it has been possible with effect from 1 March 2016 to significantly improve the rate of pay for fourth year student nurses during their clinical placement to 70% of the first point of the staff nurse scale. Recognition for the duration of the placement as public service for incremental credit purposes has also been restored for future graduates.

Question No. 335 answered with Question No. 300.

Home Care Packages Provision

336. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if the projected 15,450 home care packages for 2016 will still be delivered; if the Health Service Executive has made any reduction in the provision of these packages to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7581/16]

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.

Question No. 337 answered with Question No. 330.

Services for People with Disabilities

338. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health when the €8 million allocated for therapy services for young people will be drawn down; if he expects the full €8 million to be spent in 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7583/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The HSE has been notified that the approved level of net non-capital expenditure for 2016 is €12,931 million. In addition, the HSE has been advised that a further sum of €58.5 million is being held back by the Department for specific initiatives as outlined in the 2016 National Service Plan. This includes €8 million for initiatives in therapy services for young people. The two initiatives are the continued implementation of the Progressing Disabilities Services Programme, including development of early intervention services to facilitate the integration of children with disabilities in mainstream preschool settings (€4 million), and a primary care speech and language waiting-list initiative (€4million).

Detailed plans for both of these initiatives have been received by my Department and are under active consideration. Once these plans are agreed, it is expected that my Department will fund the costs as required. As noted in the HSE service plan, the HSE anticipates generating €20m in time related saving on a once off basis from the initiatives totalling €58.5m.

Mental Health Services Funding

339. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health when the €35 million allocated for mental health services will be drawn down; if he expects the full €35 million to be spent in 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7584/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): In line with the provisions of the Service Plan, additional funding for specific initiatives in mental health, and in the areas of primary care, therapy services for young people and the nursing task force pilot implementation, will be allocated as specific implementation plans are agreed. The Department of Health is currently examining proposals from the HSE relating to the development of mental health services, including early intervention and counselling, children's mental health services and the enhancement of a range of existing and new specialist mental health services. It is expected that a decision on these proposals will be made shortly. Some of these proposals for the €35m allocation for mental health involve the recruitment of extra staff for new service developments.

As staff recruitment takes time, the Service Plan provides that time related savings from these and other planned initiatives in the areas set out above, on a once-off basis, would be used to maintain services in home care and transitional care beds, and for vaccine procurement, but not for hospitals, acute services, or to address waiting lists. As the initiatives planned for mental health are approved, arrangements will be made for the release of funding, having regard to the overall Service Plan provisions outlined above.

Services for People with Disabilities

340. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Health if funding to organisations providing

services to persons with a disability are subject to ongoing review so as to facilitate the provision of services across seven days, including weekends; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7596/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): In addition to the services provided directly by the HSE, the HSE's Social Care Directorate also enters into arrangements with non-statutory agencies for the provision of social care services, including services to persons with a disability, on its behalf. The contractual mechanism for this funding is through a standardised national Service Arrangements framework. Service Arrangements contain a formal specification of services to be provided in return for funding and set out clearly defined service levels, outcomes and performance indicators, enabling effective monitoring of performance.

Service Arrangements are multi-annual while the Schedules to the Service Arrangement, which set out specific details such as the quantum of services and funding, must be reviewed and agreed annually between the HSE and the agency to reflect changes in levels of service, funding and so on, for the each calendar year. The HSE monitors the operation of the Service Arrangements at local level and holds performance review meetings with agencies on a regular basis.

Hospital Services

341. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health if there are proposals to provide additional services or new facilities at Cavan General Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7600/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The establishment of acute hospitals into a small number of groups, each with its own governance and management, will provide an optimum configuration for hospital services to deliver high quality, safe patient care in a cost effective manner. It will allow integration and improve patient flow across the continuum of care. The reconfiguration of services across acute hospitals will facilitate the safe management of the majority of patients, who require only a routine, straightforward level of urgent or planned care, locally and the minority of patients, who require major emergency or more complex planned care, to be treated safely in acute regional or national centres where all the relevant specialist clinical expertise is available.

Any future investment in respect of Cavan/Monaghan Hospital will be considered within the overall acute hospital infrastructure programme and establishment of hospital groups. Each hospital group, including the RCSI Hospital Group of which Cavan/Monaghan Hospital is a member, will be required to develop a strategic plan to describe how it will provide more efficient and effective patient services and reorganise its services to provide optimal care to the populations it serves.

Home Help Service Data

342. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health the total number of home help and home support hours provided for counties Cavan and Monaghan in 2016; if this will be the minimum provision for 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7601/16]

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.

Disability Diagnoses

343. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Health to arrange a medical assessment for a person (details supplied) in County Meath; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7616/16]

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 Staff Data

344. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Minister for Health the number of radiographers who are supposed to be employed at University Hospital Waterford; the number currently employed; when the exodus from the hospital began; if he will make the exit interview transcripts relating to these vacant posts available; when the recruitment process to fill these positions commenced and its progress; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7620/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): In relation to the specific queries raised by the Deputy, 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 Staff Data

345. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Minister for Health the complement of staff by Department, and by the number of persons employed, and the number of patients waiting to be called for appointment in tabular form, by Department, in University Hospital Waterford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7621/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): In relation to the specific queries raised by the Deputy, 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.

General Practitioner Services

346. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the number of patients referred by their general practitioners who have been refused entry onto a waiting list, by age group, and by county, in 2014 and 2015; if these reports are available for 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7661/16]

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

347. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health if he is aware of a situation (details supplied); the steps and resources he will put in place to avoid this ongoing situation in the cardiothoracic unit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7664/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I am sorry to hear about this patient's experience and want to wish them well. One of the key challenges for our health system is ensuring timely access to health services. Both my Department and the HSE recognise that there are resource availability and structural challenges which impact on individual specialties and hospital sites. Therefore, it is vital to effectively manage waiting lists so that those patients longest waiting are scheduled within the available capacity, once emergency and urgent cases have been dealt with. The HSE National Service Plan sets target key performance indicators for waiting lists so that adults and children receive necessary scheduled care within a timely fashion.

This year, the HSE will focus on a number of activities to manage patient waiting times, including:

- ensuring that chronological scheduling is adhered to;
- putting in place administrative and clinical validation procedures to ensure that patients are available for treatment;
- relocating high-volume low complexity surgeries to smaller hospitals;
- outsourcing a percentage of patients where there is limited capacity to treat them in the public system; and
- designating an improvement lead for each hospital group, to provide support in meeting national targets for appointments and treatment.

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 Waiting Lists

348. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Kerry will receive an operation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7674/16]

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 HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

Hospital Appointments Administration

349. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health to provide a date for an appointment for services to a person (details supplied) in County Louth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7678/16]

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.

Home Care Packages Data

350. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of home care packages that have been approved but have not commenced due to lack of funding, by community health organisation, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7689/16]

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 Appointments Delays

351. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health when he will provide an operation for a person (details supplied) in County Galway; the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7705/16]

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.

20 April 2016

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 HSE, 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.

Home Help Service Provision

352. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health why a person (details supplied) in County Cork whose home help is on sick leave has not had it replaced; if he will immediately reinstate the home help; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7706/16]

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.

Home Care Packages

353. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the changes to the home care package, particularly in counties Roscommon and Galway. [7707/16]

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 Accommodation Provision

354. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the steps he continues to take to alleviate the problem of overcrowding at various general hospitals throughout the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7712/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Emergency Department Taskforce Implementation Group has met on a regular basis during 2015 and into 2016, and has recently met on the 18th April 2016. The Group has been overseeing initiatives to address ED overcrowding and ED performance, particularly over this peak winter period.

During 2015, additional funding of €117 million was provided to the HSE to relieve ED overcrowding pressures. This funding has supported initiatives to expand hospital capacity with 362 additional beds opened or reopened, reduce the number of hospital attendances by expanding community intervention team services and increasing the availability of community hospitals, and support timely patient discharge from hospital by reducing the wait time for Fair Deal funding to no more than 4 weeks, providing additional transitional care places, public community beds and home care packages.

Since the beginning of 2016, the HSE has reported an increase in emergency department (ED) activity in comparison with the same period last year. Overall, there has been an increase of 6.9% in patient attendances. Despite sustained increase in attendances, the total year to date number of patients waiting on trolleys at 8am each morning shows a marginal increase of 1%.

In preparation for the expected surge in demand for emergency care, which usually arises around the Easter period, Hospital Groups in conjunction with Community Healthcare Organisations put in place preparedness plans for the holiday period. Measures implemented included optimising discharges in advance of the weekends, strengthening the senior decision making presence at wards and in Emergency Departments, increased diagnostics at the weekends and securing staff to open overflow areas. As a result of these measures, the ED performance over the Easter period was favourable compared with 2015.

Hospital Waiting Lists

355. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the degree to which waiting times can be reduced for elective procedures in hospitals throughout the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7713/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Improving waiting times for scheduled care for patients is a key priority. In January 2015, I put in place maximum permissible waiting times for inpatient and day case treatment and outpatient appointments of 18 months by 30 Jun 2015 and 15 months by year end. The HSE was provided with additional funding of €51m to ensure that these maximum waiting times would be achieved by maximising capacity across public and voluntary hospitals as well as outsourcing activity where the capacity is not available to meet patient needs. HSE figures for end December 2015 show positive progress against the 15 months maximum wait time. For in-patient and day case waiting lists, overall performance equates to 95% achievement of the 15 month maximum permissible wait time and for outpatient waiting lists, overall performance equates to 93% achievement of the 15 month maximum permissible wait time.

This year, the HSE will focus on a number of activities to manage patient waiting times, including:

- ensuring that chronological scheduling is adhered to;
- putting in place administrative and clinical validation procedures to ensure that patients are available for treatment;
- relocating high-volume low complexity surgeries to smaller hospitals;
- outsourcing a percentage of patients where there is limited capacity to treat them in the public system; and
- designating an improvement lead for each hospital group, to provide support in meeting national targets for appointments and treatment.

Hospital Accommodation Provision

356. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which step-down public or private nursing home beds are available or are being made available throughout the country with particular reference to general hospitals that have experienced overcrowding at

accident and emergency departments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7714/16]

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 Waiting Lists

357. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons currently awaiting attention in respect of various elective procedures at various public hospitals throughout the country; the number of those who have already been seen by a consultant and those still awaiting consultation; the number identified as being in need of surgical procedures but still on waiting lists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7715/16]

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.

Home Help Service Eligibility

358. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health why a person (details supplied) in County Dublin has been refused home help despite being severely disabled. [7759/16]

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.

Home Help Service Provision

359. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health why the home help hours of a person (details supplied) in County Dublin have been cut. [7760/16]

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.

Mental Health Services Provision

360. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health if there is a formal or informal policy operating within the health and emergency services of refusing care to mental health and suicidal cases if the individual is under the influence of alcohol or drugs. [7764/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The standard practice for patients presenting to Emergency Departments with mental health issues who have also misused substances is that the mental health assessment is postponed until the individual is

no longer intoxicated and is medically fit to engage in the assessment process. In the interim, the patient remains under the care of the Hospital Emergency Department Team.

As part of the Self Harm Clinical Programme in operation since 2014, 33.5 Clinical Nurse Specialists have been allocated to Emergency Departments to provide a rapid response (assessment and follow up) to people presenting with self-harm and suicidal tendencies.

Service users presenting with co-morbid mental health and addiction problems are mostly seen by general adult Community Mental Health Teams, who offer both addiction counselling expertise and mental health intervention as part of an integrated care plan. These teams are also responsible for linking these service users to community-based recovery and support programmes as part of facilitating full community re-integration.

Additionally, the HSE Mental Health Directorate has plans to implement a new 'Dual Diagnosis' clinical programme in 2016 which aims to address those service users with co-morbid mental health and addiction problems. The overarching aim of this national programme is to standardise quality evidence based practice across the Mental Health Services, bringing together clinical disciplines and enabling them to share innovative solutions to deliver greater benefits to every user of HSE services.

Mental Health Services Provision

361. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the opening of the 40-bed mental health unit at the Cherryfield site in Killarney, County Kerry; the timeframe for the opening; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7780/16]

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

Hospital Appointments Administration

362. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) in County Longford will be immediately admitted for an appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7782/16]

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.

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.

Health Services

363. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health why cancer patients

20 April 2016

have to pay €1,400 for genetic testing; if he offers financial assistance to patients for this payment; if he will examine the case of a person (details supplied) in County Donegal. [7786/16]

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.

Patient Transport

364. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Health the financial supports or subsidies available to outpatients who are in receipt of social protection benefit and are unable to access bus, train or other public transport services to attend hospital appointments and are therefore forced to use taxi services and incur considerable expenses; if there was a support system in place in the past; if that system was deferred and if and when there are plans to reinstate a system of financial support; and if patients can claim back payment for taxis to outpatients appointments. [7790/16]

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

365. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the waiting time for a procedure for a person (details supplied) in Dublin 24; the waiting times for spinal and orthopaedic surgery and treatment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7803/16]

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 HSE, 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.

Speech and Language Therapy

366. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health the number and the cost of new speech and language therapists he will recruit in 2016; the number who were recruited in 2015,

by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7806/16]

367. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health the number of speech and language therapists the Health Service Executive employed on a full-time equivalent basis in County Wexford and nationally in each of the years 2007 to 2016 to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7807/16]

370. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health the number and cost of employing speech and language therapists to work specifically in special schools in County Wexford, and nationally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7810/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 366, 367 and 370 together.

I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Questions Nos. 368 and 369 answered with Question No. 284.

Question No. 370 answered with Question No. 366.

Question No. 371 answered with Question No. 284.

Hospital Appointments Status

372. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Kerry will be scheduled for an operation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7812/16]

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 HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

Hospital Services

373. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Health if he will confirm that the pigmented lesions clinic at St. Vincent's University Hospital is closing to new referrals between May and September 2016 due to a manpower crisis; the locations to which patients with suspected skin

cancers, especially malignant melanoma, will be referred during this period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7813/16]

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 Waiting Lists

374. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the details of patients on waiting lists for the Mater Misericordiae University Hospital for outpatient appointments, inpatient procedures and other lists who have been waiting for six months, 12 months, one year, two years and more than two years, broken down by speciality, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7818/16]

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.

Consular Services Provision

375. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status of a person (details supplied) including the person's condition and health. [7791/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): My Department has been providing consular assistance to this Irish citizen and his family since his detention. The focus in such cases is to ensure that the Irish citizen has access to legal representation and is not discriminated against in any way in terms of the legal processes or treatment in the prisons system, as well as addressing any specific welfare concerns that arise.

In all of our interactions with our Philippines counterparts, we have consistently raised this case and have sought an early appeal date for the individual concerned on humanitarian grounds.

Officials in my department raised this case most recently with the Ambassador of the Philippines, Enrique Manalo, during the Ambassador's visit to Dublin last month. Our Embassy in Singapore, which is accredited to the Philippines, avails of every appropriate opportunity to register our concerns about this case with the authorities in that country.

Our Embassy in Singapore has consistently encouraged the Irish citizen concerned to continue to engage in the legal process and to keep the Embassy advised of developments. The Embassy provided the citizen with a list of medical professionals, and he has been advised to seek medical attention if required. Our Embassy and our Honorary Consul in Manila stand ready to assist as required.

The Embassy in Singapore will continue to monitor the case closely and will continue to offer consular assistance.

Passport Services

376. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade to consider making available the equipment necessary to make the passport rapid renewal service available in County Cork; the cost of such specialised equipment, as is available in the Dublin office; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7257/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Passport printing and personalisation requires highly specialised machinery, auxiliary equipment and a temperature-controlled environment. The production equipment and suites need continual engineering support and trained staff to manage the sites. The purchase cost of a new passport printing machine alone is in excess of €1.5m.

The printing capacity of production equipment currently employed by the Passport Service is sufficient to meet current and anticipated future demand for passports. There are no plans at this time to commission additional passport production equipment or sites.

While the rapid renewal service is not available through the Passport Office in Cork every effort is made by the Passport Service to meet a travel date in cases of genuine urgency.

UK Referendum on EU Membership

377. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the efforts his Department and the Government are making to highlight the importance of Britain remaining in the European Union to those eligible to vote in the upcoming referendum who are of Irish extraction and connection; and his views on the matter. [7354/16]

378. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of persons here who have a right to vote in the upcoming British referendum on remaining within the European Union; the action being taken to encourage these persons to register to vote; and his views on the matter. [7355/16]

387. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has had discussions with the parties in the Northern Ireland Executive on the forthcoming referendum on British membership of the European Union; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7603/16]

388. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has had discussions with civic society groups in Northern Ireland on the forthcoming referendum on British membership of the European Union; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7604/16]

391. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the contingencies, if any, that are being put in place by the Government in the event of a British exit from the European Union; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7648/16]

397. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which he and his European colleagues continue to engage with their colleagues in the United Kingdom with a view to addressing any concerns that might exist in the event of a British exit from the European Union; if the full implications for Britain, Ireland, Northern Ireland and the European Union have been fully examined and steps taken to address any issues emerging; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7724/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 377, 378, 387, 388, 391 and 397 together.

20 April 2016

While respecting that the question of the UK's membership of the EU is for its electorate to decide, I continue to set out the Irish Government's view on this matter during my contacts with political, business and community contacts here on the island of Ireland, in Britain and in the EU.

Ireland offers a unique perspective as a neighbour, as a fellow EU member state, as a €62 billion-a-year trading partner and as a co-guarantor of successive agreements aimed at securing peace and prosperity in Northern Ireland. The Government's core view – which I believe enjoys wide consensus in Ireland – is that we want the UK to remain a member of the EU.

Within the context of the Government's ongoing work on this issue, I travelled to London on 5 April for a visit that encompassed a meeting with UK Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond, contacts with the opposition Labour Party, meetings with leading members of the Irish Community and engagement with the Irish community media in the UK. I also met last week with a cross-section of Irish employers and business groups to hear their views on the referendum and to hear what actions they were taking.

My Department, through its diplomatic staff in Dublin, across Britain and Northern Ireland, in Brussels and further afield, continues to work actively on this issue and to contribute to wider Government efforts coordinated by the Department of the Taoiseach.

An important focus of my visit to London on 5 April was to meet members of the Irish community and to engage with Irish community media in the UK. I met with over 30 Irish community and business organisations and encouraged them to inform and involve their members, most of whom as Irish citizens resident in the UK are eligible to vote in this referendum. According to the 2011 Census for England and Wales and the 2011 Census for Scotland, there are 601,917 people born on the island of Ireland resident in Britain, while it is also estimated that up to one in four people in Britain may have Irish heritage.

Some leading individuals in the Irish community have also come together to form an independent campaign group, Irish4Europe, and I met with them to hear of their plans for the coming weeks in the run-up to the referendum on 23 June.

During my meeting with the Foreign Secretary, I recalled that the Irish Government had been very active in helping to secure a settlement on the UK's EU membership at the February European Council. I also reiterated Ireland's clear view in support of the UK Government's wish for the UK to remain in the EU.

I meet regularly with my EU counterparts at meetings of the Foreign Affairs Council and use every opportunity to raise the issue of the EU-UK relationship with them, and to outline Ireland's perspective and the need to work together with a view to helping to keep the UK in the EU. This all contributed to the work of EU Heads of State and Government at the European Council, and by Ministers at the General Affairs Council.

I and my officials also discuss the matter with the Northern Ireland Parties and with civic society groups, in particular underlining our view that EU has made – and continues to make – a significant contribution to the promotion of peace and prosperity in Northern Ireland.

The British Embassy has estimated that approximately 120,000 British citizens living in Ireland will be eligible to vote and I welcome and support the active outreach efforts undertaken by the Embassy in encouraging their citizens living here to register and vote in this referendum. It is hoped that the regular statements by government and by other political, civil society, media and economic commentators will help to inform their vote.

Determining the full implications for Ireland of a British withdrawal from the EU – should it

occur - is not possible without knowing the terms and conditions of its future relationship with the EU, which would take a number of years to negotiate.

Nonetheless, the Government is of course evaluating the potential impacts of a possible British exit from the EU and the steps which may be necessary to mitigate against the risks arising from this. The ESRI has also conducted research on this issue, as have others including the Central Bank, the NTMA, Teagasc and IBEC.

Passport Applications Data

379. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade to report on the meeting of target issue dates in the processing of passports and passport cards in 2016; his plans to meet the increased summer demand in 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7426/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The processing time for a passport varies, depending on the service the customer chooses. An application may take longer to process for a number of reasons. For example if the application form is completed incorrectly, the required supporting documentation is not provided or if the level of demand is exceptionally high.

Throughout this year the demand for passports has been exceptionally high. From 1 January to 18 April the Passport Service has received a total of 257,598 applications for passport books and 7,408 for passport cards. This represents a significant increase of 14.3% in applications for passport books compared to the same period last year.

To address the anticipated increase over the summer season, the Passport Service has recruited additional Temporary Clerical Officers who will work a total of 5,122 weeks this year. In view of the sustained increase over last year's levels, application processing work has been redistributed across passport offices in recent weeks and staff re-deployed from other areas of the Department as needed to respond to the increased workload.

It should be noted that the turnaround times which are advised, including those for the An Post Passport Express service, are not a stated guarantee.

I strongly recommend therefore that citizens apply for passports at least six weeks in advance of any planned travel and take special care to ensure that application forms are correctly completed before submission.

The Passport Service will continue to closely monitor the situation.

Appointments to State Boards

380. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the regional breakdown of all members appointed by the Government or him to State boards, agencies and bodies in 2015 and to date in 2016 broken down by agency and by regions (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7479/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): There are no State boards, agencies or bodies under the aegis of my Department.

Passport Applications

381. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade to outline the issue of the granting of a passport to a new-born child or the inclusion of the child on their mother's passport in the case of a person (details supplied). [7517/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): When the child is born a passport application should be submitted by the parents to the Embassy of Ireland in Bangkok. Children cannot be included on the passports of parents.

While issuing of a passport within days cannot be guaranteed, every effort will be made to ensure that the passport is issued within three weeks, providing all relevant documentation is submitted and in order. The applicant should keep in close touch with the Embassy throughout the process.

EU Migration Crisis

382. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the safeguards being taken to ensure that refugees who are returned to Turkey under the European Union-Turkey migration deal have their human rights upheld; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7539/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Turkey has a key role to play in resolving the Migration crisis, as most of the migrants and refugees who have entered the EU since early 2015 have travelled via Turkey. The EU and Turkey have engaged deeply on developing joint approaches and the EU's engagement with Turkey was the focus of the most recent European Council on 17 and 18 March 2016.

The core intention of the EU-Turkey agreement which emerged from the Council is to break the business model of the people smugglers who are profiting from the suffering of the vulnerable. Critically, it should stop people getting into unsafe boats and risking their lives.

The agreement complies with international law on the protection of human rights. All migrants will be protected in accordance with the relevant international standards and in respect of the principle of non-refoulement. This includes a guarantee that any migrants/refugees arriving in the Greek islands who wish to claim asylum will have their applications processed individually by the Greek authorities in accordance with the Asylum Procedures Directive, in cooperation with UNHCR.

The need to comply with international law was at the heart of the March European Council discussions. The legal advice of the EU institutions was that there is such compliance.

EU Migration Crisis

383. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the systems and structures put in place with regard to the European Union-Turkey migration deal to ensure that those who are seeking asylum have their applications assessed in a fair and legal manner; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7540/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The core intention of the EU-Turkey agreement which emerged from the March European Council is to break the

business model of the people smugglers who are profiting from the suffering of the vulnerable. Critically, it should stop people getting into unsafe boats and risking their lives.

Migrants arriving in the Greek islands will be registered and any application for asylum will be processed individually by the Greek authorities in accordance with the Asylum Procedures Directive, in cooperation with the European Asylum Support Office (EASO).

Ireland is playing its part in ensuring that all asylum seekers receive a fair hearing and that their applications are processed in full accordance with international law. We have deployed two experts to the Greek island of Lesbos to support the EASO and we have nominated Liaison Officers to both Italy and Greece to support the work of the 'hotspots'. In addition, my colleague the Minister for Justice and Equality has agreed to send three international protection case work experts to the Greek Islands. Ireland will also be offering the services of two members of the Refugee Appeals' Tribunal to support the establishment of Appeals Committees.

EU Migration Crisis

384. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade to provide an update on the impact of the European Union-Turkey migration deal on the number of refugees entering the Greek islands; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7541/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Migration to the European Union via the Western Balkans Route has been slowing for some time. Determining the precise factors leading to this decline is complex. It may be that weather and the progressive closing of border crossings along the migratory route north, are contributory factors.

According to the UN High Commission for Refugees, the figure for average daily arrivals of refugees in Greece for March 2016 was 870. That figure had declined to 134 per day by mid-April.

The core intention of the EU-Turkey agreement which emerged from the March European Council is to break the business model of the people smugglers who are profiting from the suffering of the vulnerable. Critically, it should stop people getting into unsafe boats and risking their lives.

Irish Prisoners Abroad

385. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if the Egyptian authorities misled officials in the Irish Embassy in Cairo on the whereabouts of a person (details supplied) who is imprisoned there without trial for nearly three years; if the person was transferred between prisons in recent days without the knowledge of his family and Irish Embassy staff in Cairo; if he will challenge the Egyptian Government over this issue and the continued appalling treatment of this person; when will Irish Embassy officials next meet the person; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7585/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The case of this individual, who has been detained in Egypt for almost three years, continues to be of the highest priority for the Government and for my Department. We are providing ongoing consular assistance to the individual including through regular prison visits and the monitoring of all trial hearings.

I can confirm that the citizen was transferred between prisons last week without the prior

20 April 2016

knowledge of the Irish Embassy in Cairo or his family. On learning that the citizen's family had concerns about his whereabouts, officials from my Department immediately made contact with the Egyptian authorities, both in Dublin and in Cairo, to register our concern and to seek to establish the facts. After some temporary confusion on 12 April, my officials were able to confirm his place of detention.

The Egyptian authorities have advised that there are security issues pertaining to prisoner moves, and prison authorities do not release advance information on such moves in order not to prejudice the safety of both prisoners and security personnel.

I met with the Ambassador of Egypt, Ms Soha Gendi, on Thursday 14 April. During our meeting I once again underlined to her the Government's concerns about the welfare of this Irish citizen.

On Sunday, 17 April, our Ambassador in Egypt, Mr Damien Cole, accompanied by officials from the Embassy, visited the detained Irish citizen in the prison near Cairo, and had the opportunity for a discussion on the full range of consular issues arising in the case. This was the latest in a very regular and frequent series of such meetings.

The Government, and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, is continuing to work through all diplomatic and political channels to achieve our objective of seeing this citizen returned to Ireland as soon as possible.

Foreign Conflicts

386. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he raised the killing of a person (details supplied) and if he will make a statement on the inaction of the Turkish Government to bring the perpetrators to justice. [7586/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The murder, in the south-eastern Turkish city of Diyarbakır on 28 November, of the Kurdish human rights lawyer, Tahir Elçi, as well as that of two policemen killed nearby, was another tragic and very worrying development following the breakdown in the ceasefire between the Turkish Government and the Kurdistan Workers Party - the PKK - in July.

I condemned this brutal murder in the House on 17 December 2015. Mr Elçi was a strong and principled proponent of an end to the current violence and a return to the peace process and, as a human rights lawyer, he was critical of human rights abuses on all sides of the conflict.

The need for swift and transparent investigations into acts of terrorism has also been emphasised by the EU. I stated at that time of Mr Elçi's murder that a full investigation would be important. I understand investigations are continuing, but as yet no perpetrator has been apprehended.

A commemoration for Mr Elçi was held in Diyarbakır earlier this month, and is a reminder of the need to bring those responsible to justice.

Questions Nos. 387 and 388 answered with Question No. 377.

Human Rights Issues

389. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the position

regarding the ongoing efforts being made to secure the release of almost 300 school girls who were kidnapped by Boko Haram; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7646/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have consistently condemned the acts of violence being perpetrated by Boko Haram, which has resulted in thousands of deaths and the displacement of more than 2 million people. The brutal activities of Boko Haram continue to represent a serious threat to the peace and security of Nigeria, and to the wider region, including Cameroon, Chad and Niger.

The abduction in April 2014 of the schoolgirls from Chibok appalled the world. This attack was one of a number perpetrated on defenceless young people, seeking to destroy their education and their futures.

Ireland, together with our EU partners, continues to call on all parties to work for the release of the more than 200 schoolgirls from Chibok who remain in captivity. We are aware that a video has been released in recent days, from which family members and friends are said to have identified some of the girls.

It is the responsibility of the Nigerian Government to create a secure environment in which the human rights of civilians are promoted and protected, including in those areas affected by Boko Haram.

The Nigerian Government has seen some recent successes in tackling Boko Haram and regaining control of territory. At an EU-Nigeria Ministerial dialogue last month, the EU urged the Nigerian Government to continue these efforts and to ensure full operationalisation of the Multinational Joint Taskforce, to which Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon and Chad are contributing a total of 8,700 troops.

Ireland has provided humanitarian relief to those affected by Boko Haram attacks. In March 2015, we arranged for the airlift of 87 tonnes of humanitarian relief supplies for distribution by the NGO Plan to an estimated 13,000 Nigerian refugees in Cameroon. In October last year, we provided €500,000 to the International Committee of the Red Cross/Red Crescent (ICRC) for its humanitarian operations in Nigeria. In addition, one of Ireland's Rapid Responders is currently working with the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in northern Nigeria.

We are continuing to monitor the situation closely through our Embassy in Abuja and through the EU. Our Ambassador to Nigeria travelled to Borno State, the region in the North East particularly affected by Boko Haram activities, last December, where he met with the Governor.

The EU has pledged up to €50 million in support for the Multinational Joint Taskforce to tackle Boko Haram, and, in June 2015, announced €21 million in humanitarian funding to the four countries concerned. The EU has also funded technical assistance to the Office of the National Security Advisor of Nigeria to support the implementation of counter-terrorism legislation and capacity to tackle radicalisation.

Foreign Conflicts

390. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the discussions, if any, that have taken place at recent European Foreign Affairs Council meetings on the plight of the Kurdish people; the efforts being made at EU level to secure peace between the main organisations representing Kurdish people and the Turkish Government; and if he will

make a statement on the matter. [7647/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The domestic situation in Turkey remains a matter of concern, both for Ireland and our European partners. I would like to reiterate the serious concern I have expressed several times already in this House at the escalation of violence since the breakdown of the ceasefire between the Turkish Government and the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) last summer. This breakdown has been all the more regrettable given that there were positive signs in the peace process as recently as early 2015.

Ireland has been a strong supporter of the peace talks between the Turkish Government and the PKK. The current situation demonstrates clearly the critical importance for all sides to cease hostilities and return to dialogue. The most recent Progress Report on Turkey, published in November 2015, stated that ‘It is imperative to resume the Kurdish peace process as a matter of urgency.’

The Government also remains concerned at the broader situation of fundamental freedoms in Turkey, particularly with regard to freedom of expression and the media. The rule of law and human rights are, of course, an integral part of the Enlargement process and were highlighted in the most recent Progress Report on Turkey. Ireland, along with the EU, will continue its dialogue with Turkey on these important issues to address the ‘significant backsliding in the areas of freedom of expression and freedom of assembly’ identified in the 2015 Progress Report.

The issue of human rights in Turkey has been raised by the Taoiseach at the European Council. The situation of the Kurds, of course, arises not just in the context of their situation in Turkey, but also in the context of the war in Syria and the situation in Iraq, both of which are discussed at the Foreign Affairs Council.

Officials in my Department, both at headquarters in Dublin and in our Embassy in Ankara, will continue to follow developments in Turkey very closely.

Question No. 391 answered with Question No. 377.

Anti-Terrorism Measures

392. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the manner in which his Department plans to address the threat of religious fundamentalism to Ireland; the measures or discussions that have taken place at a European Union Foreign Affairs Council level with regard to this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7649/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): A number of terrorist groups are linked to a brand of religious fundamentalism and claim that their actions are in pursuit of their religious beliefs. However, religious leaders have condemned such actions as not in accordance with religious beliefs. We must continue to make this distinction: the threat is posed not by religious belief, but by terrorist groups.

The Minister for Justice and Equality takes the lead role in assessing and responding to the threat to national security posed by international terrorism. The Minister has stated that there is no specific information concerning any threat to Ireland, and that the level of threat is kept under constant review by An Garda Síochána.

Appalling attacks over the past year in France, Lebanon, Mali, Turkey and elsewhere have served to remind us that terrorism does not respect borders. The recent horrific attacks in Brussels have demonstrated once again that the potential for terrorist attacks is heightened by

European citizens returning from areas of conflict. Accordingly, while member states have the primary responsibility for addressing terrorism, an effective response requires international cooperation.

At EU level, external action to prevent and counter terrorism has been discussed regularly by the Foreign Affairs Council. An EU Counter Terrorism Strategy for Syria and Iraq, was approved by the FAC in October 2014 and an outline of this was subsequently made public.

Further discussions took place at the FAC in January and February 2015. At our 9 February meeting we reiterated the EU's support for swift implementation of relevant UN Security Council Resolutions in full compliance with international law, fundamental values and international human rights standards. We highlighted the need to step up EU external action and to that end, agreed to pursue initiatives in five broad areas. These concerned strengthening partnerships with key countries in the Middle East and North Africa and with regional bodies such as the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation; supporting capacity building in those countries; countering radicalisation and violent extremism; active engagement with international partners and organisations; and addressing underlying factors and crises.

Under the heading of countering radicalisation and violent extremism we welcomed initiatives to facilitate interfaith dialogue, we invited the EU Special Representative for Human Rights to continue efforts to defend and advocate freedom of expression, religion and belief particularly in the MENA region, and we agreed that the EU would continue to work with faith-based organisations.

Our discussions and conclusions fed into a meeting of the informal European Council on 12 February. This meeting also took account of work undertaken by EU Justice and Home Affairs Ministers to promote EU internal security. Heads of State and Government set out an agenda for action for 2015 on internal and external EU action. This detailed guidance included a focus on promotion of tolerance, non-discrimination, fundamental freedoms and solidarity, including stepping up inter-faith and other dialogue, and promoting narratives to counter terrorist ideologies.

Work on these various strands continued throughout 2015. The December Foreign Affairs Council reviewed progress in implementing the measures agreed at our February 2015 meeting. Progress was achieved in a wide range of areas, supported through the provision of substantially increased funding for counter terrorism activities in third countries. Some €142 million was allocated in 2015 compared to just €10 million four years previously. A comprehensive package of assistance has been put in place for Tunisia and it is hoped that this will lead to similar packages for other countries in 2016.

Counter terrorism experts were appointed in 2015 to a number of EU delegations in the MENA region, Turkey and Nigeria to work closely with the host countries to tackle the terrorist threat. We also strengthened cooperation with international partners including the UN, the League of Arab States and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation. We agreed on the need to step up our efforts in 2016 and that priority should continue to be given to counter terrorism cooperation in the MENA region, Turkey and the Western Balkans.

The FAC will keep the effectiveness of EU external action under review throughout 2016. I expect that there will be a continuing focus on the need to promote political solutions to the underlying crises; the importance of continuing the EU's support for work on counter-radicalisation; and stemming the flow of foreign terrorist fighters, funding and weapons in Syria, Iraq and more widely in the region in line with relevant UN Security Council Resolutions.

Overseas Development Aid Expenditure

393. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the expected percentage of overseas development aid that will be spent on climate justice or climate-related initiatives in 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7651/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As part of our response to the global challenge of climate change, Ireland is strongly committed to supporting developing countries to address its most serious and intense impact on some of the poorest communities in the world.

Our policy commitments are reflected in The Global Island: Ireland's Foreign Policy for a Changing World which recognises the impacts of climate change on weather and ecosystems and the adverse effects particularly on the poorest people in least developed countries. In addition, Ireland's Policy for International Development, One World, One Future includes climate change and development as one of the seven priority areas of action under the development programme.

At the 21st UN Framework C Convention on Climate Change held in Paris in December 2015, the Taoiseach committed Ireland to continuing our support to developing countries in areas such as climate justice and in supporting vulnerable communities to adapt to climate change. For 2016, the Government has provided a gross allocation to Official Development Assistance of €641 million. €486 million of this is managed by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade under the Irish Aid programme. During 2016, Ireland will continue to integrate climate change adaptation strategies into relevant development cooperation programmes. We estimate that some 7% of funding under the Irish Aid programme in 2016 will be devoted to climate-related initiatives in developing countries.

Religious Persecution

394. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which the European Union, in conjunction with the United Nations, continues to focus on the activities of ISIS, with particular reference to the persecution of Christians and others of different religious beliefs; if a co-ordinated effort is emerging in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7720/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Ireland condemns all forms of persecution on the basis of religion or belief, irrespective of where they occur or who the victims are. We attach great importance to combatting all forms of discrimination and incitement to religious hatred.

With our EU partners, we consistently press for effective action to counter the persecution of minorities in all relevant international fora, including at the United Nations General Assembly and the United Nations Human Rights Council. Our approach is informed by the EU Guidelines on Freedom of Religion adopted during Ireland's EU Presidency in 2013 and by the EU Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy 2015-19 which, at Ireland's instigation, includes a reference to the promotion of freedom of religion or belief.

External action to prevent and counter terrorism has been discussed regularly by the EU Foreign Affairs Council. An EU Counter Terrorism Strategy for Syria and Iraq, was approved by the FAC in October 2014 and an outline of this was subsequently made public.

Further discussions took place at the FAC in January and February 2015. At our 9 February meeting we reiterated the EU's support for swift implementation of relevant UN Security Council Resolutions in full compliance with international law, fundamental values and international human rights standards. We highlighted the need to step up EU external action and to that end, agreed to pursue initiatives in five broad areas. These concerned strengthening partnerships with key countries in the Middle East and North Africa and with regional bodies such as the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation; supporting capacity building in those countries; countering radicalisation and violent extremism; active engagement with international partners and organisations; and addressing underlying factors and crises. We must address these underlying causes and through diplomacy seek to resolve the crises that contribute to the terrorism threat. In the absence of comprehensive political solutions, our efforts to combat terrorism will be in vain.

EU Foreign Ministers have welcomed initiatives to facilitate interfaith dialogue, have invited the EU Special Representative for Human Rights to continue efforts to defend and advocate freedom of expression, religion and belief particularly in the MENA region, and we have agreed that the EU will continue to work with faith-based organisations.

During the past year, Ireland has reiterated its commitment to defending the right to freedom of religion or belief on many occasions. I highlighted the alarming rise in attacks on Christians when I addressed the UN General Assembly in New York in October 2015 and during my meeting with the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, in May 2015. At the UN Human Rights Council in September 2015, Ireland made a number of statements in which we condemned DA'ESH'S barbarous treatment of civilians, their campaign of violence against religious and ethnic minorities in Syria and Iraq, and their treatment of women and girls, including their being subjected to harrowing acts of sexual and physical violence and to sexual slavery. Ireland also delivered a statement addressing the importance of freedom of religion or belief during an interactive dialogue at the thirty-first session of the United Nations Human Rights Council in March 2016. Ireland will continue to raise the issue of the persecution of Christians through its engagement at the United Nations and as part of EU efforts to support and promote freedom of religion or belief.

EU Issues

395. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which particular emphasis is placed on efforts within the European Union to address the issue of euroscepticism; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7721/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The issue of euroscepticism is complex and multifaceted, but is by no means a majority position across the EU or its Member States. Governments and citizens across Europe continue to hold broadly positive views on the European union.

The EU, and Ireland as a Member State, engages with the big issues of the day, whether they relate to stability, jobs and growth, or to challenges external and internal, such as migration and international terrorism. It is important to continue to engage with these issues at the EU-level if we are serious about addressing them. Equally, our Union's positive image depends to a large degree on its ability to respond to these challenges in a way that commands public confidence.

We must work both to ensure that the EU does its own work better and that it is better communicated to the public. The Government has worked closely with the EU Institutions and our fellow Member States to put the citizen at the heart of the EU agenda for sustainable investment, growth and job creation.

The Juncker Commission has strengthened engagement with the public and is making good on its commitment to develop a Commission which is “more ambitious on big things and more modest on little things”, thus ensuring a focus on the areas where the EU can deliver value and allowing other matters to be regulated at the national level.

Foreign Conflicts

396. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which the international community continues to engage with the various parties in Syria with a view to bringing about a ceasefire and settlement and the elimination of human rights abuses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7722/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I welcome the resumption of the Geneva III talks on Friday 15 April, and in particular the focus by UN Special Envoy Steffan de Mistura on achieving a political transition. This remains the core issue in the conflict and no sustainable peace can be achieved without agreement on political change in Syria.

The cessation of hostilities remains critical to the negotiations. There can be no prospect of meaningful negotiations if the violence continues. The reports of Assad regime helicopters barrel bombing opposition held areas underline the urgent need for a comprehensive political solution. I note the concerns expressed by the opposition that the Assad regime is seeking to undermine the negotiations by its ceaseless campaign of violence against civilians.

I call on all parties, including all members of the International Syria Support Group, to support the UN’s efforts and to commit themselves to work sincerely and with urgency for a nationwide ceasefire, a negotiated peace agreement which will protect the rights of the Syrian people and preserve the pluralistic character, unity and sovereignty of a free and democratic Syria at peace.

Ireland strongly endorses the efforts of the United Nations to renew peace negotiations based on the 2012 Geneva communique principles and UN Security Council Resolution 2254, in particular the ending of violence, the formation of a transitional governing body with full executive powers and a constitutional reform process which would protect Syria’s multi-ethnic and multi-sectarian character.

I believe that there must also be legal accountability for victims of the Syrian conflict and in 2014 we co-sponsored a resolution called for referral of the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court.

I would also note that the UN Human Rights Council Commission of Inquiry has reported that the Assad regime is responsible for the majority of crimes against the Syrian people.

While recognising the need for a political transition and an end to the Assad regime, I want to make clear that it is the Syrian people’s right to decide on Syria’s future national leadership.

Question No. 397 answered with Question No. 377.

Schools Building Projects Status

398. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a written decision will issue to a school (details supplied) in County Donegal regarding the build-

ing of a new classroom; if she will permit this classroom to be built as part of the main school building rather than as a stand-alone building; if not, the reasons for same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7251/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I can confirm that the school referred to by the Deputy has made an application to my Department for significant capital funding for the provision of additional classroom and ancillary school accommodation.

As the Deputy will appreciate, due to the competing demands on my Department’s capital budget, my Department’s focus at this time is on the need to prioritise available funding towards the provision of essential school classroom accommodation where an additional teacher appointment has been made.

The application from the school in question is currently being considered in that context and a decision will be conveyed to the school shortly.

Schools Building Projects Applications

399. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the grant aid for major capital works for a school (details supplied) in County Cork; the developments from the schools appraisal unit; when a decision will be made; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7255/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I can confirm that the school referred to by the Deputy has made an application to my Department for funding for capital works.

Further details relevant to the application were requested from the school. On receipt of that information the application can be considered further with a decision conveyed to the school authority in due course.

School Transport Data

400. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if her Department, in conjunction with the National Transport Office, has carried out an analysis of the effects on traffic congestion if every school in the country, urban and rural, were provided with a school transport service; if it has not been carried out, whether she would in consultation with the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport consider carrying out such a study; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7272/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Damien English): My Department in conjunction with the National Transport Agency Office, has not carried out an analysis of the effect of traffic congestion on every school in the country as described by the Deputy.

Given that the purpose of my Department’s School Transport Scheme is, having regard to available resources, to support the transport to and from school of children who reside remote from their nearest school, it is not envisaged that such a study would be undertaken.

Under the terms of my Department’s Scheme children are eligible for school transport where they reside not less than 3.2 or 4.8 kilometres from and are attending their nearest national school or post primary centre as determined by my Department/Bus Éireann, having regard to

ethos and language.

School Furniture Provision

401. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if funding is available to a school (details supplied) in County Galway for the purchase of whiteboards at a cost of approximately €6,600; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7273/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): There is currently no specific programme funding that schools can draw down for ICT upgrades. Schools may however choose to spend Capitation funding on ICT equipment.

The new Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020 (Enhancing Teaching, Learning & Assessment), launched in October 2015, sets out a clear vision for the role of ICT in teaching, learning and assessment in primary and post primary schools.

The Strategy is focused on realising the potential of digital technologies to transform the learning experiences of students by helping them become engaged thinkers, active learners, knowledge constructors and global citizens who participate fully in society and the economy. The Strategy recognizes that schools require public investment in their ICT equipment and infrastructure and accordingly a fund of €210m to support the implementation of this Strategy is available beginning with an investment of €30m in the next school year (2016/2017) rising to €50m a year towards the end of the Strategy. Oversight and consultative structures for the implementation of the strategy are currently being finalized and my Department will be in communication shortly with schools on its progress.

Oibreacha Feabhsúcháin do Scoileanna

402. D’fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den an Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna cén uair a dhéanfar cinneadh ar an iarratas atá déanta ag scoil i gContae na Gaillimhe (sonraí leis seo) faoin scéim oibreacha samhraidh do 2016; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [7275/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I gcomhréir leis an leibhéal maoinithe atá ar fáil don Scéim Oibreacha Samhraidh, déantar iarratais a mheas ar bhonn ó bharr anuas de réir na gcritéar um beartú tosaíochta a leagtar amach i gCiorclán Rialaithe na Scéime. Tá an Ciorclán seo (0055/2015) ar fáil ar shuíomh gréasáin mo Roinne www.education.ie

Tá sé ar intinn agam liosta iarratasóirí a n-éireoidh leo a fhoilsiú in am trátha.

School Transport Administration

403. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 441 of 22 March 2016, if she will confirm that Bus Éireann inspectors charging criteria for school transport is not in accordance with the agreed 1975 summary of accounting arrangements; and if she will further confirm that her Department does not directly audit the Bus Éireann inspectors charges; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7286/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Damien English):

My Department does not directly audit the Bus Éireann inspector's charges.

Bus Éireann has advised that for 2014 and prior years the audit opinion provided by Bus Éireann's external auditors states that the financial information of Bus Éireann's School Transport Scheme, which includes a charge in respect of School Transport Inspectors, is prepared, in all material respects, in accordance with the Summary of Accounting Arrangements relating to the Transport Scheme for Primary and Post-Primary School Children dated 1 January 1975.

Departmental Properties

404. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will resolve the ongoing problem with the implementation of the pitch development proposals at a club (details supplied) in Dublin 24, due to a six-month delay; and to process a land swap with South Dublin County Council or agree to permit the construction of a boundary wall on her Department's land. [7287/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I can confirm that my Department has received correspondence from the club referred to by the Deputy. This correspondence is under consideration and a response will issue shortly.

School Staff

405. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the additional criteria and exceptions her Department applies to the determination of qualification for teacher numbers in a national school when the basic pupil number figure is met; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7294/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The criteria used for the allocation of teachers to primary schools is published annually. The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30 September. The staffing arrangements for the 2016/17 school year (Circular 0007/2016) is available on the Department website.

The staffing schedule operates in a clear and transparent manner and treats all similar types of schools equally. For the 2016/17 school year, the staffing schedule operates on the basis of a general average of 1 classroom teacher for every 27 pupils with lower thresholds for DEIS Band 1 schools.

The staffing schedule includes an appeals mechanism for schools to submit an appeal under certain criteria to an independent Appeals Board. Details of the criteria for appeal are contained in the staffing schedule, Circular 0007/2016. The Primary Staffing Appeals Board operates independently of the Department and its decision is final.

School Transport Administration

406. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 699 of 6 April 2016, if she will clarify if her Department conducts reviews of Bus Éireann maintenance charges. [7295/16]

407. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamen-

tary Question No. 699 of 6 April 2016, if she will clarify if all of the reviews referred to in her reply are conducted by members of the Bus Éireann board, employees of Bus Éireann or persons or organisations paid by Bus Éireann. [7296/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Damien English): I propose to take Questions Nos. 406 and 407 together.

My Department does not directly audit or review the Bus Éireann maintenance charge.

Reviews of Bus Éireann's maintenance systems and procedures are conducted by Pricewaterhousecoopers, CIE Group Internal Audit and the Bus Éireann Audit Review Group which includes members of the Board of Bus Éireann.

Youthreach Programme Staff

408. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason a person (details supplied) in County Limerick who is employed as a resource worker is not allowed incremental credit for teaching experience and is compelled to accept a salary at point one of the salary scale which is a fraction of the hourly rate the person was paid as a substitute secondary school teacher; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7305/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Damien English): Resource Persons are employed in Youthreach Centres and have their own separate salary scale and terms and conditions. There is no incremental credit scheme in place for Resource Persons.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

409. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Education and Skills why it is difficult for persons (details supplied) under 23 years of age to apply independently for a third level grant in their own right. [7346/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): For student grants purposes, students are categorised according to their circumstances either as students dependent on parents or a legal guardian, or as independent mature students.

A student may be assessed as an independent student if he/she has attained the age of 23 on the 1st of January of the year of first entry to an approved course or on re-entry to an approved course following a break in studies of at least three years, and is not ordinarily resident with his/her parents from the previous 1 October. Otherwise he/she would continue to be assessed on the basis of his/her parents' income.

When considering whether a student meets the conditions to be assessed independently of his or her parents, grant awarding authorities are obliged to satisfy themselves beyond doubt that an acceptable degree of proof of independent living in the relevant period has been submitted by the grant applicant. Confirmation that a student is living separately from his/her parents is, of itself, not sufficient to establish independent status.

If an individual applicant considers that she/he has been unjustly refused a student grant, she/he may appeal, in the first instance, to SUSI. Where an individual applicant has had an appeal turned down in writing by SUSI and remains of the view that the scheme has not been interpreted correctly in his/her case, an appeal form outlining the position may be submitted by the applicant to the independent Student Grants Appeals Board.

Emergency Works Scheme Applications

410. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if emergency works will be provided for a school (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7358/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The emergency works grant application from the school to which the Deputy refers is under consideration. As soon as a decision is taken the school authorities will be notified directly.

School Accommodation

411. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 437, 438 and 442 of 19 January 2016, when a reply will issue; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7363/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I wish to confirm that my Department is currently collating the information requested by the Deputy and this will be forwarded to him as soon as possible.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

412. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to approve a request for a person (details supplied) in Dublin 12 to be granted the assistance of a special needs assistant. [7384/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) for allocating a quantum of Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support for each school annually taking into account the assessed care needs of children qualifying for SNA support enrolled in the school. Where children have significant care needs whereby they may need additional support to be able to attend school, the NCSE may make an allocation of SNA support to the school to assist that child.

The NCSE operates within my Department’s criteria in allocating such support, which is set out in my Department’s Circular 0030/2014.

All schools were asked to apply for SNA support for the 2016/17 school year by 29th February 2016. The NCSE will consider all applications for SNA support which have been made by schools. SENOs will continue to process applications for access to SNA support which are received after this deadline. Such applications will be processed in the order in which the applications have been received.

Schools will be advised of their revised SNA allocations for the 2015/16 school year, prior to the end of the current school year.

All schools have the names and contact details of their local SENO. 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.

As the Deputy’s question relates to the consideration of an the SNA allocation by the NCSE to an individual, I have referred this question to the NCSE for their consideration and direct

reply to the Deputy.

Schools Building Projects Status

413. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the total amount of funding that has been secured, and expended, to date, for the construction of a proposed secondary school in the Limerick city east area; the total amount of funding that it is envisioned will be provided; the schedule of expending these funds; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7397/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): As the Deputy is aware, I announced details in November 2015, of the major school building projects that are scheduled to proceed to construction over the next six years, as part of the Government’s €2.8 billion capital investment programme.

A new post primary school for the area to which the Deputy refers was included in this announcement. My Department has commenced the process of identifying a suitable site for the proposed school development and the project is scheduled to proceed to tender and construction in 2018 as outlined in the programme. In that regard no funding has been expended to date. You will also appreciate that due to commercial sensitivities and so as not to invalidate the procurement process, it is not possible to provide details of the level of funding allocated to any major capital project until the procurement process has been completed.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

414. **Deputy Fiona O’Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills her views on correspondence concerning a person (details supplied) regarding autism unit places in schools in County Kildare. [7387/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I wish to advise the Deputy that the policy of my Department is that children with special educational needs, including children with autism, should be included where possible and appropriate in mainstream placements with additional supports provided. In circumstances where children with special educational needs require more specialised interventions, special school or special class places are also available.

The enrolment of a child to a school is a matter, in the first instance, for the parents of the child and the Board of Management of a school. My Department has no role in relation to processing applications for enrolment to schools and it does not maintain details of waiting lists in schools.

Parents can choose to enrol children with autism in an early intervention class from the age of three and where such a placement is not available home tuition may be approved. Children with autism over the age of four may also be eligible for home tuition if a school placement is not available for them.

The Deputy will be aware that the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOS), is responsible for processing applications from primary and post primary schools for special educational needs supports, including the establishment of special classes in various geographical areas as required. The NCSE operates within my Department’s criteria in allocating such support.

The NCSE continues to monitor and review the requirement for special class places in particular areas and has capacity to establish such new special classes where necessary subject to the willingness of schools to open classes.

I understand that the number of special classes for students with ASD in Co. Kildare is 57, 11 of which are at post primary level, 41 at primary level and 5 are early intervention classes.

Full details of all of the special classes currently provided is available at www.ncse.ie.

The NCSE has also advised that SENOs are currently liaising with schools regarding the establishment of further classes for 2016/17 school year.

Any queries related to the Domiciliary Care Allowance should be directed to The Department of Social Protection.

I have arranged for the Deputy's request for specific detail in relation to placement availability in the area referred to, to be forwarded to the NCSE for their attention and direct reply.

Broadband Service Provision

415. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when an upgrade to the broadband service at a primary school (details supplied) in County Cork will be completed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7399/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The overall policy of my Department is to offer the best quality connectivity to all schools in line with technical solutions available in the market and financial constraints. All post primary schools receive at least 100mbts connectivity. The need to improve broadband connectivity to primary schools is recognised in the new Digital Strategy for schools and the Department will collaborate with DCENR to provide enhanced broadband to all primary schools.

Under the Schools Broadband Access Programme the Department provides for the supply of internet connectivity for recognised primary and post primary schools. A framework involving 14 providers was put in place in 2012 which has ensured improved solutions are available to schools. The most recent drawdown of the framework last September had approximately 90% of school connections retendered, including the school referred to by the Deputy. These awards have seen over 1,100 schools awarded connections of 30Mbit/s or greater, approximately 400 of these connections have been installed to date and the remainder will be installed in the coming months.

In the case of the school referred to by the Deputy, the provider awarded has been unable to provide the broadband service as anticipated, and so the Department will re-award this school to the next most appropriate provider. However, as the Deputy will be aware, broadband capacity can vary due to geographical location and this is impacting the service that can be provided to this school.

Under the current programme the Department continually reviews the availability of services and upgrades schools where the opportunity arises.

Teacher Recruitment

416. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position

20 April 2016

regarding the recruitment of new secondary school teachers in the coming school year for qualified teachers who are subbing at various schools and have no job security. [7400/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The policy of my Department is to ensure, as far as possible, that the Managerial Authorities of Primary and Post Primary schools give priority to unemployed registered teachers who are fully qualified when filling vacant teaching posts. It is schools that employ teachers and not my Department.

Circular 31/2011 details a cascade of measures for the recruitment of teachers. Under this Circular School Principals must maintain a list of unemployed registered teachers who are available for substitute work at short notice and prioritise such teachers in making appointments.

School Staff

417. **Deputy Fiona O’Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to approve an additional classroom teacher for a school (details supplied) in County Kildare from September 2016 in accordance with the staffing schedule. [7420/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The criteria used for the allocation of teaching posts for the 2016/2017 school year is set out in Circular 0007/2016. The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the 30 September 2015.

The staffing arrangements at primary level also include an appeals mechanism for schools to submit an appeal under certain criteria to the Primary Staffing Appeals Board.

The school referred to by the Deputy submitted an application for consideration by the Appeals Board at its March meeting. The Appeals Board determined that the appeal did not satisfy all of the published criteria as set out in Circular 0007/2016. The Appeal Board operates independently of the Department and its decision is final.

The staffing arrangements at primary level also includes the provision whereby schools experiencing rapid increases in enrolment can apply for additional permanent mainstream posts on developing grounds, using projected enrolment for the following September, in this case September 2016. The school referred to by the Deputy submitted an application for an additional teacher on developing grounds but this was refused as it did not meet the criteria set out in Circular 0007/2016.

School Staff

418. **Deputy Fiona O’Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to approve an additional classroom teacher for a school (details supplied) in County Kildare from September 2016 in accordance with the staffing schedule. [7421/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The criteria used for the allocation of teaching posts for the 2016/2017 school year is set out in Circular 0007/2016. The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the 30 September 2015.

The staffing arrangements at primary level also include an appeals mechanism for schools to submit an appeal under certain criteria to the Primary Staffing Appeals Board.

The school referred to by the Deputy submitted an application for consideration by the Appeals Board at its March meeting. The Appeals Board determined that the appeal did not satisfy all of the published criteria as set out in Circular 0007/2016. The Appeal Board operates independently of the Department and its decision is final.

The Department has not received an application for a developing post from the school referred to by the Deputy.

Teachers' Remuneration

419. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps she will take to address the unequal pay developing in the teaching profession; her views on the recent Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development report, *Education at a Glance*, which found a direct correlation between teachers' pay and the quality of education; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7429/16]

433. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to review the pay equality issue for all teachers, particularly the recently qualified teachers; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7579/16]

437. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will consider the claims for pay parity from teachers as set out in correspondence (details supplied); the role her Department has in this issue; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7653/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 419, 433 and 437 together.

As a consequence of the financial crisis, there was a need to enact a number of measures to reduce public expenditure so as to stabilise the country's public finances. The previous Government decided to reduce the salaries and allowances payable to all new entrants to public service recruitment grades (including teachers) by 10% with effect from 1 January 2011. This decision also required that such new entrants would start on the first point of the applicable salary scale, which in the case of teachers had the effect of reducing their starting pay by a further 4-5%. Later in 2011, the Government placed a cap on the overall level of qualification allowances that could be earned by teachers.

Subsequently in 2012, following the public service-wide review of allowances, the Government withdrew qualification allowances for new teachers altogether.

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. Overall, the removal of qualification allowances had the effect of further reducing the pay of new entrant teachers by between 5 and 7 percent.

The measures above – which applied to new entrants only and which were in addition to the pay reductions imposed on public servants generally - were implemented at a time of extraordinarily difficult financial and budgetary circumstances for the State. It is estimated that some 6,700 teachers who entered the profession since 2011 have been affected by the measures.

Maintaining the high quality of our education system and the teaching profession is a key

concern of the Government.

The Haddington Road Agreement re-aligned the pay scale for teachers who entered teaching between 1 January 2011 and 31 January 2012 with that of pre-2011 entrants. An improved pay scale for post-1 February 2012 entrants was also agreed and implemented under the terms of that Agreement. The Lansdowne Road Agreement will begin the process of restoring the reductions to public service pay which were implemented over recent years. The flat-rate increases contained in the Agreement are proportionately more favourable to new entrants to teaching (who are lower on the pay scale) than to longer serving teachers.

School Funding

420. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of applications for school grants (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7443/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I wish to advise the Deputy that commensurate with the level of funding available for the Summer Works Scheme, applications are being 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 shortly.

Teachers’ Remuneration

421. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Education and Skills why a teacher who qualified in May 2015 would be denied the pay conditions laid out in her Department’s Circular 0040/2011 (details supplied) given that the teacher illustrated to her Department that the criteria have been fulfilled; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7468/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The position is outlined in my Department’s Circular 0008/2013 in that persons who are employed in a teaching position in an unqualified capacity and who become eligible for the qualified rate of pay on or after 1st February 2012 will be placed on the relevant pay scale from the date on which they become appropriately qualified and registered.

School Staff

422. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason teacher allocation Circular 2016/2017 has an exception made for the retention level of a second teacher of eight and on the other hand requires a school enrolment of 15 to regain the second teacher; her views that to ensure a safe and good quality education on island schools there is a need for a second teacher in all island schools with more than eight pupils; if it is intended to review the circular, taking into account the reservations of the Ombudsman for Children already made known to her Department; if it is intended to amend the circular to provide for a retain and reappointment level of eight in all island schools; the number of extra teachers that would be involved if such a decision were to be taken and the approximate cost of such a decision; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7470/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The criteria used for the al-

location of teachers to primary schools is published annually on the Department website. The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30 September.

Budget 2012 increased the appointment and retention ratios for small schools (i.e., schools with up to four classroom teachers). The appointment figure for a 2nd teacher increased over a three year period from 12 pupils to 20 pupils.

The retention rate for island schools was retained at 8 and consistently applied since.

In February 2015, the Government improved the position of small remote schools (defined as more than 8km from other schools) by bringing the point they could get a second teacher from 20 to 15. This measure applied also to stand alone schools on the islands.

Within limited resources, there was a limit to the overall number of teachers that could be funded in the recent budget; it was not possible to go beyond that point, but it is clearly open to a new Government within the next budget to apply the same measure to all other small remote schools.

For the 2015/16 school year there are 33 single teacher schools of which 5 are on the islands. If a second teacher was provided to all one teacher schools that annual additional cost would be approx. €1,980,000.

Appointments to State Boards

423. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the regional breakdown of all members appointed by the Government or her to State boards, agencies and bodies in 2015 and to date in 2016 broken down by agency and by region (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7476/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Comprehensive information in regard to the composition of the boards of non-commercial State bodies under the aegis of the Department of Education and Skills is available to be downloaded from the Department’s website at <http://www.education.ie/en/The-Department/Agencies/Details-of-Membership-of-State-Boards/>. It is also available on www.stateboards.ie.

Information on home addresses of candidates is not a necessary requirement on documentation provided by P.A.S. to the Department. Candidates may provide for example, email addresses, business addresses etc. Accordingly the Department does not have statistics on the regional breakdown of appointees to its Boards.

School Staff

424. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will amend the condition in the staffing appeals mechanism for schools larger than four teachers, where a school will still lose a teacher if it does not have a minimum number of infants despite the projected overall number of students enrolling rising above the threshold required; her views that this is a major disadvantage to rural schools; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7488/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The staffing arrangements

at primary level include an appeals mechanism for schools to submit an appeal under certain criteria to the Primary Staffing Appeals Board. There are seven criteria for appeal set out in Circular 0007/2016.

One of these criteria targets schools that are not eligible for a developing post but nevertheless make a significant contribution to the provision of school places which assists the response to demographic growth within their area and as a result are under significant pressure on their class sizes at infants level. A key indicator in relation to these schools is a significant increase in junior infants enrolments. It is envisaged that these schools will typically be in areas of significant population growth.

Schools appealing under this criterion must meet four requirements in order to be eligible to appeal. These are set out in Circular 0007/2016.

Summer Works Scheme Applications

425. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a decision will be made on a summer works application for a school (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7509/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I wish to confirm to the Deputy that my Department is in receipt of an application from the school in question under the Summer Works Scheme.

Commensurate with the level of funding available for the Scheme, applications including that from the school concerned 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 shortly.

Irish Language

426. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a decision on the language status of a school (details supplied) in County Donegal will be made; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7512/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I can confirm to the Deputy that the current classification status of the school in question is being reviewed and my Department expects to be in contact with the school in the matter shortly.

State Examinations Exemptions

427. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to examine the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare regarding Irish exemption for students with Asperger’s syndrome; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7542/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Under the current departmental circulars, 12/96 for primary and M10/94 for post-primary, students with Asperger’s Syndrome could be exempted from learning Irish if they meet the criteria for an exemption as specified. However, the learning profiles of students with Asperger’s Syndrome would not gen-

erally meet the criteria for general or specific learning disability as set out in the circulars, as a diagnosis of Asperger's Syndrome relates more to emotional and social communication needs. Many students with Asperger's Syndrome are high functioning and achieve well at school.

In respect of the case referred to by the Deputy the position is that the school wrote to my Department in November 2015 seeking advice from the Department. Following a review of this case by my Department it was advised that the student concerned did not meet the criteria for the granting of an exemption.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

428. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason that Student Universal Support Ireland grants, both fee and maintenance, are not paid to all Quality and Qualifications Ireland degree students at all approved institutions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7545/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): Under the student grant scheme, eligible candidates may receive funding provided they are attending an approved course at an approved institution, as defined in the scheme.

The definition of an approved institution is set out in Section 7 of the Student Support Act 2011 and Regulation 3 of the Student Support Regulations 2016.

Private colleges operating on a for-profit basis are not listed as approved institutions for student grant purposes. However, tax relief on tuition fees may be available for students attending courses in private colleges. Details in relation to this relief are available from the Revenue Commissioners on www.revenue.ie.

School Accommodation

429. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when additional accommodation will be approved for a school (details supplied) in County Carlow; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7548/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I wish to advise the Deputy that the school in question is currently based in temporary accommodation sourced by the school authorities and my Department is providing grant aid for its rental. I understand that the school is experiencing issues with the fabric of the building and in that regard has been liaising with the landlord in the matter.

School Accommodation

430. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she has received recent communication from the authorities at Maynooth post-primary school, Maynooth Community College and Maynooth Education Campus in County Kildare in regard to the urgently required commencement of works in respect of extra accommodation and facilities; if she accepts the urgency of the situation; if she expects to be in a position to authorise an early start on the project; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7554/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I can confirm that I recently

received correspondence from the Maynooth Education Campus PTA in relation to the proposed new post-primary school campus for Maynooth.

As the Deputy may be aware, the project in question has been tendered. An assessment of the Tender Report is at an advanced stage in the Department. The project has been devolved for delivery to the Kildare and Wicklow Education Training Board (KWETB). When the examination of the Tender Report has been completed, contact will be made directly with the KWETB with regard to the next steps.

Oideachas Gaeilge

431. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den an Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna an eol di go bhfuil folúntas d'ollamh le Gaeilge i roinn na Gaeilge in Ollscoil na hÉireann, Gaillimh ó 2014; an cúis inni í di go bhfuil an folúntas seo ann le nach mór dhá bhliain anuas agus gan é fógartha go fóill go bhfuiltear chun an folúntas a líonadh; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [7559/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): Is faoi gach aon Institiúid Ardoideachais, OÉ Gaillimh san áireamh, atá sé a cúrsaí oibriúcháin féin a bhainistiú ó lá go lá mar chomhlacht reachtúil féinrialaitheach, acmhainní foirne agus folúntais a thagann chun cinn san Ollscoil ina measc sin.

Ó tugadh isteach an moratóir ar earcú don earnáil phoiblí, tá Creat Rialála Fostaíochta (ECF) ar bun i gcomhair earnáil an ardoideachais, lena dtugtar solúbthacht shuntasach d'institiúidí maidir le folúntais a líonadh, trí earcú nó trí ardú céime, faoi réir ag síleáil fhoriomlán post.

I gCáinainéis 2015, d'fhógair an tAire Caiteachais Phoiblí agus Athchóirithe go gcuirfí deireadh leis na Creata Rialála Fostaíochta a bhí ann cheana, mar aon leis na moratóirí a bhí ag gabháil leo, agus go gcuirfí ina n-áit córas ceadaithe tharmligthe i gcomhair earcaithe agus ardaithe céime suas go dtí leibhéal Príomhoifigigh, ar an gcoinníoll go gcloífeadh Ranna le síleálacha pá ceangailteacha 3 bliana agus go gcomhlíonfaí na riachtanais Pleanála Fhórsa Oibre. I bhfianaise an fhógra seo, tá mo chuid oifigeach ag obair chun críche Creat nua a bheith ar bun acu d'earnáil an ardoideachais don bhliain acadúil 2016/2017.

State Examinations

432. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application for a reader for the leaving certificate for a person (details supplied) in County Kildare. [7567/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The State Examinations Commission has statutory responsibility for operational matters relating to the certificate examinations.

The State Examinations Commission operates a scheme of Reasonable Accommodations in the Certificate Examinations. Full details of the scheme are available from their website: www.examinations.ie/candidates/reasonableaccommodations.

In view of this I have forwarded your query to the State Examinations Commission for direct reply to you.

Question No. 433 answered with Question No. 418.

Schools Building Projects Status

434. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide a date for the commencement of work on a new school building for a school (details supplied) in County Westmeath. [7602/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The Deputy will be aware that a building project for the school to which he refers was included in my Department’s 6 Year Capital Programme which I announced last November. The acquisition of a site for the project is at an advanced stage. When the site has been acquired, the architectural planning process to deliver the building project will be initiated.

Schools Building Projects

435. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she has received an application for emergency funding under the emergency works scheme by a school (details supplied) in County Westmeath; and if same will now be progressed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7607/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): My Department’s Planning and Building Unit has no record of receiving any recent application for Emergency Funding from the school to which the Deputy refers.

Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools Scheme

436. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the primary schools in County Cork and Cork city that have delivering equality of opportunity in schools status; the extra supports and resources available as a result of this designation; the process by which a school can receive this status; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7625/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The list of the schools in question is available on my Department’s website at the following link:-<http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools/>.

The resources provided for DEIS Primary Schools are as follows:

Band 1 Schools -

- Reduced class sizes with pupil teacher ratios of 20:1 in junior schools, 22:1 in vertical schools and 24:1 in senior schools

Band 1 and Band 2 Schools -

- The appointment of an Administrative Principal in Band 1 schools is based on 116 pupils and in Band 2 schools is based on 145 pupils

- Access to Home/School/Community Liaison (HSCL) Scheme and School Completion Programme (SCP)

- Access to literacy/numeracy support service to specific literacy/numeracy measures

- Access to transfer programmes

Band 1, Band 2 and DEIS Rural schools (All primary DEIS schools):

- DEIS grants based on level of disadvantage
- Additional funding under School Books Grant Scheme
- Access to Schools Meals Programme
- Access to planning supports
- Access to a range of professional development supports.

As the Deputy is aware, a process for the review of the DEIS Programme which I announced in 2015, is currently underway in my Department. While this process is underway, I do not intend to make any changes to the current programme, including the addition of any further schools.

Question No. 437 answered with Question No. 419.

Schools Building Projects Status

438. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 732 of 6 April 2016, when the tender report was submitted to her; when the assessment will be completed; and when construction on the new school will begin given that a builder has been chosen and the current circumstances (details supplied), given the state of the existing school and that almost 16 years has elapsed since the first planning application was made to the county council. [7666/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The school to which the Deputy refers is at an advanced stage of the tender process. The revised Tender Report was received in my Department in February 2016. Earlier this week, my Department authorised the School Authority to issue the letter of intent to the preferred tenderer. When the completed supplementary tender report is received and considered my Department will revert directly to the school regarding progression of the project to construction stage.

Schools Building Projects Status

439. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the proposed works planned for a national school (details supplied) in County Westmeath; and the timeframe for same. [7671/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I can confirm that the school in question has submitted an application to my Department for capital funding for the provision of additional accommodation. My Department expects to be in a position to convey a decision on the application to the school in the coming weeks.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

440. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the grant assistance available to a student who intends to study for a masters degree in England; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7676/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Students who are attending undergraduate courses in an EU Member State can apply for a maintenance grant in respect of an approved course which is being pursued in an approved institution. The student grant scheme does not extend to postgraduate courses pursued outside of Ireland.

Tax relief at the standard rate of tax may be claimed in respect of tuition fees paid for approved courses at approved colleges of higher education including approved undergraduate and postgraduate courses in EU Member States and in non-EU countries. Further information on this tax relief is available from the Revenue Commissioners at www.revenue.ie.

Summer Works Scheme

441. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the summer works scheme results will be announced, given the delay is causing logistical problems for schools planning tenders, etc.; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7691/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I wish to advise the Deputy that commensurate with the level of funding available for the Summer Works Scheme, applications are being 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 shortly.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

442. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Education and Skills why she has refused an application for resource hours by a person (details supplied) in County Galway; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7769/16]

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 teaching hours to schools to support children with special educational needs.

The NCSE operates within my Department’s criteria in allocating such support, which is set out in Spec Ed Circular 02/05.

All schools were asked to apply for SNA or resource teaching support for the 2016/17 school year by 29th February 2016. The NCSE continues to accept applications after this date in recognition that enrolments may not have been completed or where assessments were not completed.

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 a resource teaching 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.

Schools Building Projects Applications

443. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will sanction a new and expanded permanent school building for a school (details supplied) in Dublin 17; if the site owned by her Department adjacent to the existing school can be used for this purpose; if she is aware of the expanding population in this area; her views on whether the existing Gaelscoil is already operating to full capacity; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7773/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department provided a purpose built building for the school in question in 2008. My Department, therefore, has no plans to replace or extend this building. The school is operating at the capacity for which the building was constructed.

I also wish to advise the Deputy that one of my Department’s key responsibilities is to ensure that schools, in an area can, between them, cater for all pupils seeking places. In this regard, my Department is aware that there is existing capacity in primary schools in the Coolock/Darndale/Artane/Edenmore areas.

My Department carries out nationwide demographic exercises at primary and post primary level to determine where additional school accommodation is needed. A new primary school will open in September 2016 to serve the Drumcondra/Marino/Dublin 1 feeder area (which is adjacent to the feeder area in which the school, referred to, is situated) to cater for the demographic growth in that area.

My Department will keep the demographic projections under ongoing review to take account of updated enrolment and child benefit data and also the impact of capacity increases to schools in these areas.

School Accommodation Provision

444. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will sanction two temporary classrooms for a school (details supplied) in Dublin 13 while the permanent structures are under construction; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7774/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I can confirm that the school referred to by the Deputy was approved devolved funding in 2015 to build two mainstream classrooms, to meet its 2015/16 accommodation needs.

The school subsequently contacted my Department to request provision of interim temporary accommodation until the devolved permanent accommodation project is complete. The school’s application for temporary accommodation was examined and the Department approved the rental of temporary accommodation for the school in question. This decision has been conveyed to the school.

Schools Building Projects Status

445. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the proposed building project at a school (details supplied) in Dublin 9 will be completed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7775/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The school referred to by the Deputy is included on the six year programme announced on 17th November 2015 and is listed to proceed to tender and construction in 2017.

A Project Manager and Design Team have been appointed for the project and it is currently at Stage 1 of Architectural Planning, which is the initial sketch design stage. My Department officials met recently with the Board of Management and their Design Team to review the Pre Stage 1 report.

Upon successful completion of Stage 1 and subject to no issues arising the project will be authorised to proceed to Stage 2a, which is the developed design stage.

School Staff

446. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills why there is only one category (details supplied) for a school to be considered for an administrative principal on reduced pupil numbers. [7789/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The criteria for the appointment of Administrative Principal and Administrative Deputy Principal posts are based on pupil numbers. Enrolment thresholds for the 2016/2017 school year are set out in Appendix B of Circular 0007/2016, which is available on my Department’s website.

My Department supports schools with more than one autism class by providing for the appointment of an Administrative Principal based on a lower enrolment than schools with no autism classes.

There are no plans to deviate from these arrangements for schools that do not meet the criteria set out in Circular 0007/2016.

I am aware of the workload and the pressures on Principal teachers. In this regard, my Department has provided release days for teaching principals to assist them in fulfilling their Principal duties. Circular 25/02 which is available on my Department’s website outlines the number of days that teaching principals may take as release time in a school year.

Under these arrangements my Department pays for a substitute teacher to be employed by a school to facilitate administrative functions to be undertaken by the teaching principal. Under the current arrangements the number of days that principal teachers may take as release time in each school year ranges between 14 and 22 days depending on the size of the school.

I have recently received the NCSE’s policy advice on supporting students with ASD. My officials will consider and report to me on any recommendations in the report which relate to the issues raised by the Deputy.

Schools Building Projects Status

447. **Deputy Darragh O’Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if stage 2B of the permanent school building project for a school (details supplied) in County Dublin will be completed without further delay and if the project will move to tender as a matter of priority; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7804/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): On 7th January 2016 the

major building project for the school in question was authorised to progress to an advanced stage of architectural planning - Stage 2(b), which includes the applications for the Fire Certificate and Disability Access Certificate and the preparation of Tender Documents.

Planning permission was secured following the rejection of a third party appeal by An Bord Pleanála.

The school building project for this school was included on the six year programme announced on 17th November 2015. The design team will submit the stage 2(b) report to my Department when it is completed and my Department will revert to the school with regard to the further progression of the project following consideration of that report.

School Enrolments

448. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the rules and criteria for entry to primary schools; whether the current rules can be outlined; whether there are rules or guidelines; whether she enforces or supervises them and if they are effective; whether the parish and catchment rules apply to all schools; to outline the appeal system against a school decision and the statistics available for past appeals; if a school (details supplied) in Dublin 5 is under the scheme and how children from areas some miles away are selected while locals are not given a place but put on a waiting list; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7815/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The Department’s Rules for National Schools provides that the compulsory school starting age in a National School is 6 years of age and that a child must be at least 4 years of age before she/he may be enrolled in a National School.

Although children are not obliged to attend school until the age of six, most children begin school in the September following their fourth birthday.

It is the responsibility of the managerial authorities of all schools to implement an enrolment policy in accordance with the Education Act, 1998. This enrolment policy must be non-discriminatory and must be applied fairly in respect of all applicants.

My Department’s main responsibility is to ensure that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all pupils seeking school places in the area. Parents can choose which school to apply to and where the school has places available the pupil should be admitted. However, in schools where there are more applicants than places available a selection process may be necessary and this may result in some pupils not obtaining a place in the school of their first choice.

Section 29 of the Education Act, 1998 provides for an appeal by a parent or guardian to the Secretary General of my Department, or in the case of an Educational Training Board (ETB) school to the ETB in the first instance, where a Board of Management of a school, or a person acting on behalf of the Board, refuses to enrol a student in a school, expels a student or suspends a student for 20 or more days in any school year. Further information on the Section 29 appeals process is available on the Department’s website www.education.ie.

I can advise the Deputy that during 2015 a total of 143 appeals against refusal to enrol decisions by primary schools were taken; 67 of which were withdrawn or resolved before the formal hearing; 29 of which were upheld and 47 of which were not upheld.

The Educational Welfare Service of the Child and Family Agency (EWS) is the statutory

agency which can assist parents who are experiencing difficulty in securing a school place for their child. The EWS can be contacted at 01-7718500.

The Education (Admission to Schools) Bill, which was published in April of last year, contained a number of important changes to make enrolment policies fairer and more transparent. It was not possible to bring this complex piece of legislation through both Houses of the Oireachtas in the timeframe available.

However, I have made it clear that a legislative framework for school admissions is required and that this needs to be a priority for the next government.

Mortgage to Rent Scheme Data

449. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of persons in mortgage arrears who have been given the option of the mortgage to rent scheme in counties Laois and Kildare. [7282/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): My Department has developed two Mortgage to Rent schemes - one which is available to borrowers of private commercial lending institutions and a separate scheme for local authority borrowers.

The Local Authority Mortgage to Rent (LAMTR) scheme has been developed specifically for local authority mortgage borrowers, as part of the Mortgage Arrears Resolution Process (MARP) arrangements which operates in local authorities. The scheme was piloted in Dublin City and Westmeath County Councils in 2013 and rolled out nationally in 2014. In total, 193 LAMTR cases have been completed to date, 7 of which were in Laois and 6 in Kildare, with a significant number of other cases being progressed by local authorities in the context of their operation of the MARP.

The LAMTR scheme is similar to the scheme for borrowers with mortgages from private commercial lending institutions, insofar as it also targets low income families whose mortgage situation is unsustainable and where there is little or no prospect of a significant change in circumstances in the foreseeable future. Further information on the LAMTR scheme is available on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.environ.ie/housing/home-ownership/schemeservice/local-authority-mortgage-rent-lamtr-scheme>.

Both schemes also ensure that the family remains in their home. In the case of LAMTR, ownership of the home is transferred to a local authority, rather than to an Approved Housing Body (AHB) as is the case under the MTR scheme in the private lending sector. Both schemes require the household to be eligible for social housing in order to access to the scheme.

My Department does not have access to information relating to the number of borrowers who have been offered the Mortgage to Rent Scheme by their specific private lending institution. The lender is the main point of contact for the borrower in terms of the operation of the scheme - only lenders can put an application forward for the scheme. The Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) can advise borrowers in mortgage distress how to access the Scheme, but it is up to the lender to offer the borrower access to it.

According to the latest figures available, at the end of February 2016, a total of 785 cases were either complete or being actively progressed under the Mortgage to Rent (MTR) Scheme for borrowers of private commercial lending institutions; 27 of these were in Laois, with 64 in Kildare. Of these, 150 cases had completed all stages of the process. In total, since the introduc-

tion of the Scheme in 2012, 3,256 cases had been submitted; 93 of these were in Laois, with 210 in Kildare. There are a variety of reasons why cases have not progressed including the householder's circumstances improving during the process, no social housing demand in the area, the householder's income being in excess of the statutory limits for eligibility for social housing, and poor condition of the property. My Department continues to work together with the agencies involved with the Scheme, including lenders, to streamline the administrative process and ensure that all potential cases are dealt with speedily and efficiently.

My Department continues to keep the operation of both Mortgage to Rent schemes under review.

Mortgage to Rent Scheme Applications

450. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the position regarding an urgent application for mortgage to rent by a family (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7267/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I refer to the reply to Question No. 533 of 22 March 2016. The up-to-date position in relation to the specific case raised is that the Housing Agency is continuing to engage with the local authority, several approved housing bodies and the lender in order to progress this case.

Local Authority Housing

451. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if there is an agreed limit within existing legislation to which a local authority can purchase houses in an existing residential estate for the purpose of housing local authority tenants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7277/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): There is no limit within existing legislation covering the extent to which a local authority can purchase houses in an existing residential estate for social housing purposes. However, my Department has issued guidelines on Quality Housing for Sustainable Communities (available at the following link: <http://www.environ.ie/sites/default/files/migrated-files/en/Publications/DevelopmentandHousing/Housing/FileDownload%2C1979%2Cen.pdf>) which covers issues such as tenure mix, estate composition and specific local needs.

When identifying acquisitions for social housing purposes, local authorities should ensure that all such issues are considered. The parameters under which my Department provides capital funding to local authorities for the acquisition of houses and apartments for social housing are set out in Circular Housing 24/2015, which is available at the following link: <http://www.environ.ie/housing/social-housing/social-housing-strategy/circular-housing-242015-social-housing-capital>.

Local Authority Housing Provision

452. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government when Sligo County Council's housing voids application to his Department, which aims to bring 38 empty local authority premises back into use, will be allocated to the local authority, considering the urgency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7278/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): My Department has allocated initial funding for 2016 to all local authorities, including Sligo County Council, in respect of continuing their work to deal with vacant social housing units. In the nature of social housing stock for which there is always a level of turnover in tenancies, I expect further proposals to be made by local authorities in respect of the refurbishment of vacant units over the course of 2016 and further allocations will issue over the course of the year.

Water Quality

453. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if Irish Water has carried out an analysis on the extent of asbestos water mains piping here; and if Irish Water has plans to upgrade this piping in the near future. [7280/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Since 1 January 2014, Irish Water has statutory responsibility for all aspects of water services planning, delivery and operation at national, regional and local levels.

Irish Water has established a dedicated team to deal with representations and queries from public representatives. The team can be contacted via email to oireachtasmembers@water.ie or by telephone on a dedicated number, 1890 578 578.

Water and Sewerage Schemes

454. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to identify the presence of lead water pipes in County Wicklow; and the programme of work in place to deal with any lead pipes found. [7290/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Neither I nor my Department have any responsibility for, or role in relation to, the identification, management, operation or maintenance of water services infrastructure. With effect from 1 January 2014, Irish Water is responsible for public water services and water services infrastructure including water supply pipes or drainage pipes extending from a waterworks or waste water works to the curtilage of a private property. The identification of lead in public water mains is therefore a matter for Irish Water. Irish Water has established a dedicated team to deal with representations and queries from public representatives. The team can be contacted via email to oireachtasmembers@water.ie or by telephone on a dedicated number, 1890 578 578.

The Water Services Act 2007 provides that the owner of a premises is responsible for the maintenance and renewal of the internal water distribution system to ensure that water intended for human consumption meets required quality standards. Responsibility for identifying and replacing lead pipes or fittings within the property boundary therefore rests with the property owner.

On 9 June 2015, I announced a Government-approved National Strategy to reduce exposure to lead in drinking water. The Strategy was prepared by my Department and the Department of Health in consultation with Irish Water, the HSE and the EPA. The roles and responsibilities of the various public and private stakeholders are set out in the Strategy, a copy of which is available in the Oireachtas library.

As part of the Strategy, I have established a new grant scheme to assist low income house-

20 April 2016

holds to replace lead pipes in their homes. Full details of the scheme, which is administered by the local authorities, is available on my Department's website at:

<http://www.environ.ie/water/water-quality/lead-drinking-water/lead-drinking-water>.

Local Authority Services

455. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he is aware that Wicklow County Council is requiring all elected representatives to provide a signed waiver form from constituents in order to make representations on their behalf in relation to housing and planning issues; the rationale for this practice; if he is aware of the massive difficulty this poses for local councillors and Teachtaí Dála in properly representing their constituents; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7291/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): While I as Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government have responsibility for policy and legislation in respect of the local government system, local authorities are independent corporate entities with responsibility under law for the performance of relevant functions and the discharge of their governance and other responsibilities. The detailed arrangements implemented by local authorities in respect of their dealings with public representatives when they are acting in a representational role on behalf of others are a matter for the authorities themselves. I have no function in this regard.

Homeless Accommodation Funding

456. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government to make an additional allocation for homeless services in the four midland counties, given only 1.5% of the total budget for the homeless goes to the region and the increased demands on services. [7307/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): My Department provides current funding, under Section 10 of the Housing Act 1988, to housing authorities towards the cost of providing accommodation and related services for homeless persons. Housing authorities also provide funding from their own resources and under Section 10 housing authorities must provide at least 10% of the cost of any service they are funding. Funding in respect of homeless services is made available on a regional basis. Westmeath County Council is the lead authority for the Midlands Region, which also encompasses Laois, Longford and Offaly.

In 2015, a formal allocation of €794,972 issued from my Department in respect of the Midlands Region. A further payment of €11,023 issued to the Midlands Region towards the end of 2015, in respect of previously unforeseen costs associated with the utilisation of emergency accommodation, bringing total Exchequer funding to the region to €805,995. While the 2016 allocations are currently being finalised, the funding needs of the various regions are kept under review on an on-going basis, taking account of known and emerging costs of services, and my Department has provided reassurance to Westmeath County Council in this regard.

Irish Water

457. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and

Local Government the measures in place to prevent incidents of pollution by Irish Water; how stringent are these measures; how often the implementation of these measures are inspected; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7342/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Irish Water has statutory responsibility for all aspects of water services planning, delivery and operation at national, regional and local levels for public water services including the delivery of water services capital infrastructure, including the management of urban waste water collection and treatment infrastructure. All discharges to the aquatic environment from sewerage systems owned, managed and operated by Irish Water require a waste water discharge licence or certificate of authorisation from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Irish Water is required to apply to the EPA for a licence or certificate of authorisation and the authorisation process provides for the EPA to place stringent conditions on the operation of such discharges to ensure that potential effects on the receiving water bodies are strictly limited and controlled.

The EPA is also the statutory body for investigating complaints of pollution and for the enforcement of environmental legislation in Ireland. Details of all prosecutions taken by the Agency for pollution incidents and details of the Agency's enforcement activities are published on the Agency's website (www.epa.ie). Neither I, nor my Department, have any role in monitoring or supervising the delivery of water services or any pollution incidents arising therefrom.

Motor Tax Exemptions

458. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding commercial tax; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7343/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Motor tax is based on the construction and use of a vehicle. In order to qualify for the commercial rate of motor tax, a vehicle must be constructed or adapted for use as a goods vehicle and used solely for the conveyance of goods in the course of trade or business.

Licensing authorities have an obligation under Article 3 of the Road Vehicles (Registration and Licensing)(Amendment) Regulations 1992 to be satisfied that a vehicle is correctly taxed and it is thus open to a motor tax office to seek supporting documentation when commercial motor tax is being applied for. Such documentation may include a certificate of commercial insurance or evidence of registration for VAT purposes or, at the discretion of the licensing authority concerned, any other appropriate documentation that would indicate that the applicant is in trade or business. It is up to the individual concerned to provide whatever evidence is required by the licensing authority in order for it to be satisfied that the applicant is entitled to the commercial rate of motor tax, which is effectively a concessionary rate.

Local Authority Services

459. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the progress to date on the taking in charge of developments with stand alone treatment plants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7357/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I have made €10m available to be used in 2016 to fund a new National Taking in Charge Initiative that will assist local authorities in developing new approaches to addressing housing

estates, including those with developer-provided water services infrastructure that, for various reasons, have not been taken in charge to date.

The initiative will involve the following:

(1) Provision by my Department of an indicative level of funding for local authorities to assist in developing demonstration projects and new working methods in tackling legacy estates.

(2) Funding will reflect both (a) the scale of estates not taken in charge and (b) the extent of developer provided water services infrastructure to be addressed, on the understanding that the Exchequer support is for 2016 only and will not create Exchequer liabilities beyond 2016.

(3) Submission by the local authorities of implementation proposals for the approval of my Department, to utilise the funding, establish demonstration projects, identify longer term funding sources and address the backlog of applications for taking in charge on hand.

(4) Publication of a national database of residential estates not taken in charge as a baseline for future action.

(5) Taking account of the experience gained from the 2016 initiative, to issue guidance to authorities on their further development of prioritised plans for taking in charge of estates from 2017 onwards, taking account of resources available through the initiative in the short term as supplemented by other funding sources in the medium to longer term.

The experience gained through the initiative in 2016 and associated demonstration projects is intended to establish a co-ordinated taking in charge programme to progressively address the issue on a multi-annual basis, in the light of available local authority, Irish Water, bond and other funding sources and the general government financial position.

I intend to advise each local authority of the indicative level of funding proposed to be made available to them in the very near future, after which they will be invited to submit proposals to be assessed by an advisory steering group.

Consideration of the submissions put forward by the local authorities on the basis of the provisional funding levels available will be weighted towards those local authorities that demonstrate a high level of collaborative problem solving and leveraging of complementary funding from developer, bond provider, receiver or other sources.

Housing Provision

460. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of applicants awaiting housing assistance in each county here in January 2016, January 2015, January 2014 and January 2013, in tabular form; the average waiting time for the provision of social housing within each county in the case of single one-bed applicants, two-bed applicants, three-bed applicants and four-bed applicants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7376/16]

461. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the average waiting time for the provision of social housing within each county here for single one-bed applicants, two-bed applicants, three-bed applicants and four-bed applicants in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7377/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 460 and 461 together.

The oversight and management of housing waiting lists, including the allocation and transfer of tenancies, is a matter for the relevant housing authority in accordance with the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 and associated regulations.

My Department does not collate the data sought on an on-going basis. The numbers and household breakdown on housing waiting lists in individual local authorities are subject to on-going fluctuation as households are allocated housing and new households are added to the list.

The results of the statutory Summary of Social Housing Assessments carried out as at 7 May 2013 provided details on the number of households on waiting lists in each housing authority area, including the length of time spent by households on each housing authority list. Only those households which have been assessed as being eligible and in need of such support following the carrying out of the prescribed application process by the relevant housing authority are placed on the list. The results are available on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/DevelopmentandHousing/Housing/FileDownload,34857,en.pdf>.

The 2013 figures are the most up-to-date figures available on waiting list numbers. Further summaries of social housing assessments will be carried out on an annual basis from this year and will provide up-to-date and comprehensive data on the numbers of households qualified for social housing support on an on-going basis.

Housing Provision

462. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government regarding the provision of social housing in County Waterford, how many new properties were built or purchased in County Waterford in 2015; how many properties it is planned to build or purchase over the next five years and at what cost; his views on whether this is sufficient to meet the growing demand for social housing in County Waterford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7378/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): In April last year, as part of the Social Housing Strategy 2020, I announced over €1.5 billion in funding allocations in respect of social housing to be provided by all local authorities for the period out to 2017 via a combination of building, buying and leasing schemes. Those allocations and associated targets for each local authority, including Waterford, are available on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.environ.ie/housing/social-housing/ministers-kelly-coffey-announce-eu15-billion-social-housing-targets-local>.

Following this notification of targets, I made announcements for substantial new social housing projects in May 2015, in July 2015 and in January 2016. Between these three announcements, almost €680 million has been allocated for over 3,900 social housing new builds, turnkey developments and acquisitions. Details of these project approvals, including those for Waterford, 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>

<http://www.environ.ie/housing/social-housing/ministers-kelly-coffey-announce-further-1000-social-housing-units>.

I am keen that local authorities advance these projects as soon as possible and have assured them that funding is available to fully support their efforts in this regard.

In 2015, social housing construction projects were completed in Waterford at Chairman's Arch/Cathedral Square and St. John's College. While such construction projects are being advanced, acquisitions of new and second-hand houses and apartments remain an effective means of meeting immediate social housing need and information on the acquisitions undertaken last year by Waterford City & County Council is published on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.environ.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision>.

Under the Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme (SHCEP), my Department, together with local authorities, can support AHBs to construct, purchase or lease housing units and make them available for social housing. The housing units are secured under long-term leases/availability arrangements between local authorities, AHBs and private property owners. A total of 14 social housing units were delivered under the programme in the administrative area of Waterford City and County Council in 2015. To date, a total of 187 units have been delivered in Waterford since the SHCEP programme began including 36 AHB constructed units which recently became operational. In addition, a total of 41 units have received funding approval under the programme and will be delivered in Waterford over the course of the next two years. 21 of these are new units that will be purchased by AHBs with assistance from my Department's Capital Advance Leasing Facility (CALF) and made available to Waterford City and County Council under long-term lease arrangements funded by SHCEP.

Housing Provision

463. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government to provide an updated list of housing units that have been demolished by the implementation of the Limerick regeneration framework implementation plan; the number of units that have been constructed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7396/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The Limerick Regeneration Framework Implementation Plan was adopted in 2014 and provides a roadmap for the physical, social and economic regeneration of the four regeneration areas in Limerick over the coming years. The Plan identifies those strategic demolitions required to deliver appropriate housing in these areas, as well as construction projects to advance its goals. Since the adoption of the Plan, I understand that 144 houses have been demolished by Limerick City and County Council in the areas concerned. I understand also that 108 Units have been constructed, 94 units are currently under construction and construction is due to commence on a further 53 units shortly. The next two years will see a significant ramping up of build activity in the Limerick Regeneration areas.

Dog Licences

464. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if the Dog Breeding Establishments Act 2010 has been amended to remove the €400 per annum dog licence fee exemption for hunting groups and, if so, the steps being taken to ensure payment. [7417/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Section 46 of the Environment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2015 seeks to amend certain provisions of the Control of Dogs Acts, which inadvertently exempted certain bodies, including hunting groups, from the dog licensing requirements. Accordingly, once commenced, section

46 of the 2015 Act will reinstate the requirement for these bodies to hold a licence.

I have delayed commencing the relevant legislative provisions to date to ensure that those bodies that may be affected by the change have adequate notice of the reinstated legislative requirements.

Housing Assistance Payments Administration

465. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the additional resources being allocated for local authorities to assist the implementation of the housing assistance payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7419/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): There are now over 8,500 households in receipt of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) and the scheme has been rolled out to all categories of households in 19 local authority areas. The Dublin Region Homelessness Executive (DRHE) is also managing a HAP Homeless Pilot for the four Dublin local authorities.

Budget 2016 has increased the funding for the HAP scheme to €47.7 million in 2016, in order to meet the continuing costs of existing HAP households, and the costs of an additional 10,000 households to be supported by HAP in 2016. The majority of this funding is to support on-going rent payments to landlords in respect of existing HAP households and the cost of additional HAP tenancies as households find accommodation through the scheme during the year.

The primary administrative support to HAP local authorities is the central transactional shared service being provided by Limerick City and County Council to all local authorities operating the HAP scheme. This shared service is responsible for a range of functions including monthly payments to landlords and the collection of weekly differential rent from tenants and provides a range of efficiencies to the operation of the scheme.

Each Chief Executive of a local authority is responsible for staffing and organisation arrangements necessary for carrying out the functions of the local authorities for which he or she is responsible. My Department works closely with all local authorities and all have been invited to submit staffing sanction requests to facilitate the delivery of the Social Housing Strategy. Each staffing sanction request is examined on a case by case basis having due regard to the continued delivery of key services in the context of staffing and budgetary constraints. To date 55 HAP related posts have been sanctioned by my Department in response to staffing requests from HAP local authorities and the shared service centre provided by Limerick City and County Council.

In order to cover staffing and administrative costs arising due to the operation of the HAP scheme in their area, local authorities are provided with an administrative payment of €150 per household supported as they are set up under the HAP scheme. In 2015, some €993,000 was paid by my Department in such HAP administration costs to local authorities. Local authorities will be able to make claims on a similar basis for 2016.

The phased roll out of the HAP pilot scheme has proved to be an effective approach. In this context, my Department maintains regular contact with the pilot local authorities in order to learn from their experience of the scheme, and to address operational issues as they arise.

Noise Pollution

466. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his views on the case of persons (details supplied) in County Kerry who have reported an issue to the local authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7444/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Whenever a person considers a noise to be so loud, so continuous, so repeated, of such duration or pitch or occurring at such times that it gives reasonable cause for annoyance, he or she can initiate action to deal with it, for example, by engaging with the individual causing the noise to come to some mutually acceptable understanding, or by contacting their local authority, which may initiate proceedings on grounds of noise nuisance under the section 107 of the Environmental Protection Agency Act 1992.

Furthermore, section 108 of this Act also provides for any person, or group of persons, to seek an order in the District Court to have noise giving reasonable cause for annoyance abated. The task of the District Court is to hear both sides of the case. Where it finds in a complainant's favour, the Court can order the person or body making the noise to reduce it to a specified level, to limit it to specified times, or to cease altogether. The procedures involved have been simplified to allow action to be taken without legal representation.

A public information leaflet, A Guide to the Noise Regulations, outlining the procedural and legal avenues available to persons experiencing noise nuisance, is available on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.environ.ie/environment/noise/guide-noise-regulations>.

Housing Adaptation Grant

467. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he is aware that Kildare County Council has a process of only replacing windows in elderly persons homes if there is money left in the budget at the end of the year and, despite an increased allocation in the 2016 housing maintenance budget, if they will be operating the same process for this year; if this practice is supported by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7445/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): My Department provides funding to assist older people to have necessary repairs or improvement works carried out to private houses in order to facilitate the continued independent occupancy of their homes. At local level, the detailed administration and processing of these grants, including the assessment, prioritisation, approval and payment of individual grants to applicants, is the responsibility of the relevant local authority.

Of the grants available, the Mobility Aids Grant and the Housing Aid for Older People scheme are primarily aimed at older people. The latter scheme provides grants of up to €8,000 to assist older people living in poor housing conditions to have necessary repairs or improvements carried out. Grant eligible works include structural repairs or improvements, re-wiring, repairs to or replacement of windows and doors, provision of water supply and sanitary facilities, provision of heating, cleaning, painting, etc.

On 5 February 2016, I announced total funding of €56.25 million for the Housing Adaptation Grants for Older People and People with a Disability. I have increased the level of funding available for the grants by some 10% in 2016. This funding will see over 8,000 homes receiving grant aid this year.

My Department also provides funding to local authorities for adaptations and extensions to the social housing stock to meet the needs of local authority tenants with a disability or to address serious overcrowding. All local authorities, including Kildare County Council, have been notified of initial funding provisions to allow work on this area to continue while proposals are assessed for full year allocations. I expect the level of funding for this activity to increase for 2016.

Appointments to State Boards

468. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the regional breakdown of all members appointed by the Government or him to State boards, agencies and bodies in 2015 and to date in 2016, broken down by agency and by regions (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7477/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Details in relation to appointments made since 2015 to date are available on my Department's website at the following link:http://www.environ.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/state_boards_database_march_2011_to_1_april_2016.xlsx.

In the case of certain appointments to State Boards, statutory selection procedures must be followed or nominations must be sought from independent nominating panels before appointments are made by the Minister or the Government, as appropriate. In addition, in the case of a number of boards, not all of the appointments to the body concerned are made by the Minister, and in some situations appointments are made by the Minister with the consent of another Minister. Furthermore, appointments to An Bord Pleanála and to the Board of the Environmental Protection Agency are of a full-time executive nature and are governed by statutory processes.

The information requested in respect of appointments by region is not collated by my Department.

Housing Issues

469. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if a date has been set for a meeting between the expert panel and the affected homeowners in County Donegal and, if not, the reason; when the meeting will take place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7562/16]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): The Expert Panel on Concrete Blocks held its first meeting last week and, at that meeting, the panel agreed that it would arrange to meet with affected homeowners in Donegal in order to hear first-hand of the problems that have emerged in their homes. The panel would welcome all information that can be provided by affected homeowners which can assist them in their investigations in accordance with the terms of reference I announced late last year.

On behalf of the expert panel, my Department has recently written to the Mica Action Group, which represents many affected homeowners, to invite representatives to a meeting with the panel. It is proposed that the meeting will take place in Donegal in the second week of May subject to the agreement of the affected homeowners.

It is anticipated that the panel's investigations will take in the order of six months to com-

plete and will also require meetings with affected homeowners in Mayo as well as with public representatives, local authorities and a broad range of other parties in order to assist in establishing the nature of the problems in the affected dwellings in both counties.

Housing Provision

470. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the funding allocated to each local authority for the refurbishment or regeneration of vacant social housing in each of the years from 2014 to 2015 and to date in 2016. [7638/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The funding provided by my Department to local authorities in 2014 and 2015 to support their work in dealing with vacant social housing units is set out in the following table. This funding is in addition to the work and resources that local authorities deploy themselves to deal with this issue, which arises because the repair and re-letting of vacant social houses has always been part of the ongoing work that local authorities carry out on their social housing stock as part of their responsibilities as housing authorities under Section 58 of the Housing Act 1966. Funding is being provided by my Department as a continuation of the support for local authorities for this activity into 2016. However, full year allocations are awaiting the finalisation of lists of units by authorities. Once finalised, the funding position will be kept under review as the year progresses.

-			2014		2015
	Local Authority	Units returned	Funding	Units Returned	Funding
1	Carlow	42	€325,111	28	€300,650
2	Cavan	23	€349,137	28	€307,018
3	Clare	65	€995,829	96	€1,472,533
4	Cork City	212	€2,872,027	281	€4,522,819
5	Cork County	155	€1,539,364	199	€2,091,578
6	Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown	5	€89,896	24	€262,768
7	Donegal	167	€919,797	146	€1,003,576
8	Dublin City	467	€6,163,464	787	€10,858,088
9	Fingal	165	€1,938,780	139	€1,624,632
10	Galway City	24	€474,050	25	€222,025
11	Galway County	76	€958,263	59	€705,347
12	Kerry	79	€718,938	103	€884,736
13	Kildare	49	€503,463	20	€359,808
14	Kilkenny	25	€484,430	23	€381,639
15	Laois	43	€257,013	12	€61,228
16	Leitrim	15	€229,072	9	€177,474
17	Limerick	98	€915,969	52	€500,689
18	Longford	16	€313,250	22	€426,535
19	Louth	18	€113,620	21	€292,279
20	Mayo	80	€464,508	86*	€878,600

-			2014		2015
	Local Au- thority	Units re- turned	Funding	Units Re- turned	Funding
21	Meath	59	€1,037,501	54	€855,565
22	Monaghan	21	€92,751	13	€100,502
23	Offaly	35	€514,000	55	€551,532
24	Roscommon	34	€224,028	36	€258,773
25	Sligo	29	€311,648	39	€439,924
26	South Dublin	92	€627,408	27	€216,838
27	Tipperary	86	€935,801	115	€1,299,180
28	Waterford	42	€605,428	56	€488,724
29	Westmeath	56	€396,518	74	€650,813
30	Wexford	20	€316,307	24	€294,811
31	Wicklow	35	€650,204	43	€857,499
	TOTAL	2333	€26,337,575	2696	€33,348,183

Housing Provision

471. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the reason there is a cap of €30,000 for local authority applications for funding for refurbishment of vacant social housing programmes to his Department. [7639/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The repair and re-letting of vacant social houses has always been part of the ongoing work that local authorities carry out on their social housing stock as part of their responsibilities as housing authorities under Section 58 of the Housing Act 1966. However, in 2014, in recognition of the need to address a build-up of vacant social houses, my Department introduced the current programme to support local authorities to return vacant social houses to productive use, with exchequer funding provided since then for some 5,000 such housing units at a cost of almost €60 million. This funding is provided to compliment the efforts that local authorities make from within their own resources.

The funding provided by my Department under the current exchequer-funded programme for the return of vacant social houses to productive use is up to €30,000 per unit, which is a strong level of funding support for the repair of a social housing unit. In fact, the average amount claimed under this programme is €12,000 per unit.

Alongside this programme, my Department has also recently implemented a new exchequer funding programme to support local authorities in remediating more seriously derelict social houses. Allocations to local authorities in respect of their proposals under this programme will be made shortly and it is expected that the average cost of remediation per unit will be in the region of €50,000.

Social and Affordable Housing Data

472. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the recent changes that have been made to the approvals process for capital-funded

social housing projects undertaken by local authorities. [7640/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Social housing projects funded by my Department comply with the Government's Capital Works Management Framework (CWMF), the strategic objectives of which are to ensure greater cost certainty, better value for money at all stages during project delivery and more efficient end-user delivery.

Working within the scope and objectives of the CWMF, and with a view to supporting the earliest possible delivery of targets under the Social Housing Strategy 2020, my Department has streamlined the nine approval stages of the CWMF to four stages for capital-funded social housing construction projects. This facilitates local authorities to forward design proposals and costings to my Department sequentially, as they are advanced through the authorities' planning work. In addition, my Department also introduced a new procedure in January 2016 to facilitate a further streamlined mechanism of funding approvals on a pilot basis for social housing construction projects with a maximum all-in budget of less than €2m and up to 15 housing units.

Local authorities opting for this new process provide a more in-depth Capital Appraisal proposal than is ordinarily provided, to allow my Department issue an approved budget for the project. In line with the CWMF's objective of ensuring greater cost certainty in publicly-funded construction projects, this approved budget will represent my Department's full financial commitment to the project and it will be the local authority's responsibility to exercise appropriate cost control and deliver the project within the approved budget.

This new arrangement is optional and local authorities can submit project costings over the course of planning for a project and avail of the four-stage process if they so wish, which may be more appropriate for complex projects.

Homeless Persons Supports

473. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to establish a service to cater for homeless persons who present themselves, which would be more holistic than requesting that tenants self-source a private rented tenancy; his plans to implement a tenancy sustainment support service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7662/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): My Department's role in relation to homelessness involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of housing authorities in addressing homelessness at local level. Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of accommodation and related services for homeless persons rests with individual housing authorities.

Housing authorities oversee and fund a range of homelessness prevention and tenancy sustainment initiatives. In relation to accommodation provision, this can include accommodation both from within its own housing stock and also from the private rented market. In relation to the latter, this can be sourced by either the housing authority or the client so that the client can bring to the attention of the housing authority a property which is available for their purposes. Tenancy sustainment initiatives in place include the National Tenancy Sustainment Framework operated by the Department of Social Protection for Rent Supplement clients, the Tenancy Sustainment Protocol operated by Threshold in conjunction with the relevant housing authority and the Department of Social Protection (which is being extended to Kildare, Meath and Wicklow

with effect from 25 April) and the Family Support Service operated by Focus Ireland which has tenancy sustainment as its specific aim.

Illegal Dumping

474. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the situation in relation to Galway County Council and the number of fines issued by it for illegal dumping, in particular for the period 2014 to 2015 when 746 fines were imposed but only approximately 38% of this number of fines were actually paid; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7665/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Enforcement action against illegal waste activity, including littering offences, is a matter for the local authorities and the Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Environmental Enforcement, and my Department does not compile statistics in relation to fines imposed. Such statistics are publicly accessible through the Local Government Management Agency's series of annual reports on Service Indicators in Local Authorities, available from the publications section of the LGMA's website: www.lgma.ie.

My Department provides the legislative framework under which both local authority and EPA enforcement action is initiated and also continues to provide significant financial support to a network of local authority waste enforcement officers, as well as to the Office of Environmental Enforcement.

In October 2015, Cork County Council, Dublin City Council and Leitrim and Donegal County Councils (in a combined bid) were announced as the new Waste Enforcement Regional Lead Authorities (WERLAs). The WERLAs are tasked with driving further performance improvements by individual local authorities in carrying out their waste enforcement functions and with ensuring consistency between local authorities. Their work is overseen by a National Steering Committee that involves other regulatory bodies with a link to waste crime, including the Office of the Revenue Commissioners and An Garda Síochána. The national waste enforcement priorities for 2016 were set by the Steering Committee and include illegal dumping. These priorities will be the focus of the WERLAs' first full year in operation.

Local Authority Finances

475. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of civil cases for compensation arising from alleged accidental injury or damage that have been instigated against each local authority in the past five years; the number of such proceedings pending, by local authority; and the amount awarded, by plaintiff party and by court, against local authorities over the same period. [7673/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I have no function in the matter and the information requested is not held in my Department.

In accordance with section 153 of the Local Government Act 2001, the responsibility for legal proceedings rests with the individual local authority.

Library Projects

476. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the status of the proposal to provide a new library in Ballyjamesduff, County Cavan; the stage this project is at; the estimated timeline for the tendering process; the estimated costs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7696/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The provision of premises and facilities in the public library service is generally a matter for each local authority in its capacity as a library authority.

Notwithstanding this, my Department recently announced a new €22m Libraries Capital Investment Programme for the period 2016 - 2021 to support the development of priority projects submitted by local authorities. In this regard, the programme includes a priority proposal submitted by Cavan County Council in respect of Virginia library.

As the new library at Ballyjamesduff was not submitted as a priority by Cavan County Council, it could not be considered for funding as part of the capital programme.

Library Projects

477. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the status of the proposal to provide a new library in Virginia, County Cavan; the stage this project is at; the estimated timeline for the tendering process; the estimated costs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7697/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The development of Virginia Library will be supported by my Department under the new Libraries Capital Investment Programme 2016-2021. In this regard, my Department will provide a contribution of €850,000 towards the overall cost of the proposed development, which is estimated at €3.5m. The matching funding will be provided by Cavan County Council, which has responsibility generally for the provision of premises and facilities in the public library service in its capacity as a library authority.

Projects will be funded on a phased basis over the lifetime of the capital programme. Accordingly, while the development of Virginia library may proceed at any time at the discretion of Cavan County Council, Department funding for the proposal will be available for drawdown from 2021. The project will also be subject to a four-stage approval process, which has not commenced yet and which will be dictated largely by Cavan County Council's readiness to proceed through the various stages.

Fire Stations Provision

478. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the status of the proposal to provide a new fire station in Ballyjamesduff, County Cavan; the stage this project is at; the estimated timeline for the tendering process; the estimated costs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7698/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The provision of fire services in local authority areas, including the establishment and maintenance of fire brigades, the assessment of fire cover needs and the provision of premises, is a statutory function of the individual fire authorities under the provisions of the Fire Services Act 1981. My Department supports the fire authorities through setting general policy, provid-

ing a central training programme, issuing guidance on operational and other related matters and providing capital funding for priority infrastructural projects.

In February 2016, I announced a five-year Fire Services Capital Programme with an allocation of €40 million, based on the current annual €8 million allocation, to be used for the purchase of fire appliances and specialist equipment, building or upgrading of prioritised Fire Stations, an upgrade of the Communications and Mobilisation system and improvements to Training Centres.

A fire station project in Ballyjamesduff is included in this programme under the list of priority projects to be progressed for 2018. Original project documentation, including contract documents and a cost plan were received in my Department in 2011, indicating a total project cost of €864,000.

My Department is liaising with relevant local authorities to progress proposed projects in the programme within the indicated timescales. The projects in the capital programme will be reassessed on an annual basis and priority may be adjusted to bring forward projects offering best value-for-money and to take account of the state of readiness of individual projects.

Fire Stations Provision

479. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the status of the proposal to provide a new fire station in Virginia, County Cavan; the stage this project is at; the estimated timeline for the tendering process; the estimated costs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7699/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The provision of fire services in local authority areas, including the establishment and maintenance of fire brigades, the assessment of fire cover needs and the provision of premises, is a statutory function of the individual fire authorities under the provisions of the Fire Services Act 1981. My Department supports the fire authorities through setting general policy, providing a central training programme, issuing guidance on operational and other related matters and providing capital funding for priority infrastructural projects.

In February 2016, I announced a five-year Fire Services Capital Programme with an allocation of €40 million, based on the current annual €8 million allocation, to be used for the purchase of fire appliances and specialist equipment, building or upgrading of prioritised Fire Stations, an upgrade of the Communications and Mobilisation system and improvements to Training Centres.

A fire station project in Virginia is included in this programme under the list of priority projects to be progressed in 2016. Original project documentation including contract documents and a cost plan were received in my Department in 2011, indicating a total project cost of €864,000. My Department is liaising with relevant local authorities to progress proposed projects in the programme within the indicated timescales. An updated cost plan was requested in February 2016.

The projects in the capital programme will be reassessed on an annual basis and priority may be adjusted to bring forward projects offering best value-for-money and to take account of the state of readiness of individual projects.

Water and Sewerage Schemes Status

480. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government when an application for funding for a sewerage scheme (details supplies) in County Cavan will be approved, given the urgent need to have these necessary works undertaken at an early date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7700/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Cavan County Council has included Stradone Group Sewerage Scheme in its application to my Department for funding under the new Rural Water Multi-Annual Funding Programme for the period 2016 to 2018. My Department is currently considering local authorities' bids for funding and allocations to authorities for funding under the new programme will be provided shortly.

Fire Service Staff

481. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government why there is no facility for inter-transfer between counties for full-time employees of the fire services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7704/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): There is no formal transfer mechanism between authorities for full-time employees of Fire Services. The contract of employment for each employee is with the relevant local authority to which they are contracted.

Under section 159 of the Local Government Act 2001, each Chief Executive is responsible for staffing and organisational arrangements necessary for carrying out the functions of the local authority for which he or she is responsible.

Unfinished Housing Developments Data

482. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the extent to which his Department continues to monitor progress in regard to the completion of development works in unfinished housing estates, on a county by county basis; the extent of the works completed to date and that are remaining; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7752/16]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): Since 2010, an annual national housing survey of unfinished housing developments has been conducted during the summer months to monitor progress. In that period, the number of unfinished housing developments has decreased by approximately three-quarters, from nearly 3,000 in 2010 to 668 in 2015.

The detailed findings of the annual surveys, annual progress reports and other useful publications and information in relation to Unfinished Housing Developments are available on the Housing Agency's website at: <http://www.housing.ie/Our-Services/Unfinished-Housing-Developments.aspx>.

The 2015 National Housing Development Survey and the Annual Progress Report illustrate that good progress is continuing to be made in resolving unfinished developments and that the reactivation of sites is now evident throughout the country.

Housing Adaptation Grant Data

483. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the extent to which adequate resources remain available to the various local authorities to facilitate the provision of housing adaptation grants to meet the requirements of those with disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7753/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): On 5 February 2016, I announced total funding of €56.25 million for the Housing Adaptation Grants for Older People and People with a Disability. I have increased the level of funding available for the grants by some 10% in 2016. This funding will see over 8,000 homes receiving grant aid this year. Details of the allocations are available on my Department's website at the following link:<http://www.environ.ie/housing/grantsfinancial-assistance/ministers-kelly-coffey-announce-eu5625-million-improve-homes>.

Through careful management of my Department's housing budget in 2015, additional funds were made available to local authorities with high levels of grant activity and the same approach will be followed for 2016 in the event of savings arising.

Local Authority Housing Data

484. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the extent to which his Department continues to be made aware of new applicants applying for local authority housing arising from repossessions or notice to quit from landlords; the extent to which this is being monitored by the various local authorities with a view to taking steps to address the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7754/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The assessment of applications for social housing support is the responsibility of the relevant local authority in accordance with the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 and associated regulations. The prescribed application form for such support requires applicants to provide certain information on their current and previous accommodation, including whether they received a notice to quit or an eviction notice in respect of their current accommodation and the reasons for leaving previous accommodation. My Department does not collate day-to-day information on the number of applications made to each local authority nor the specific contents thereof.

Statutory Summaries of Social Housing Assessments are carried out at regular intervals and they provide information on the number of households on local authority housing waiting lists. Only those households which have been assessed as being eligible and in need of such support following the carrying out of the prescribed application process by the relevant housing authority are placed on the list.

The most recent summary, carried out as at 7 May 2013, provided details on the number of households categorised as having a housing need due to an unsustainable mortgage; details of the 2013 Housing Needs Assessment are available on my Department's website at the following link:

<http://www.housing.ie/News/Current-News/18-12-13-Summary-of-Social-Housing-Assessments-201.pdf>.

Further summaries of social housing assessments will be carried out on an annual basis from this year and will provide up-to-date and comprehensive data on the numbers of households qualified for social housing support on an ongoing basis, including the level of households which have a housing need arising from unsustainable mortgages.

Local Authority Housing Data

485. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the total number of persons currently on the various local authority housing lists throughout the country; the extent to which rent increases are making it impossible for such families to exist or remain in their homes; if urgent provision can be made to meet their requirements, thus preventing a rapid escalation in homelessness; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7755/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The latest summary of social housing assessments, which was carried out on 7 May 2013, showed that there were 89,872 households on local authority waiting lists at that date. The 2013 figures are the most up-to-date figures available on waiting list numbers, which are subject to on-going fluctuation as households are allocated housing and new households are added to the lists. The full 2013 results are available on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.environ.ie/sites/default/files/migrated-files/en/Publications/DevelopmentandHousing/Housing/FileDownload%2C34857%2Cen.pdf>.

In order to ensure that the most up to date and comprehensive data are available, on an ongoing basis, relating to the numbers applying for social housing support, the Government's Social Housing Strategy 2020, includes a number of actions to standardise assessment and increase the regularity of assessments including undertaking the summary of social housing assessments on an annual basis from 2016 onwards.

Ultimately, a shortage of supply is at the heart of the challenges in the broader housing and residential sector. Where the estimated requirement is for 25,000 new units per annum the construction sector is currently delivering around half that. The supply issue is putting upward pressure on rents which in turn can push vulnerable households into emergency accommodation.

A number of important measures have been taken to improve housing viability and increase supply, through the actions set out in Construction 2020 and the Social Housing Strategy 2020. Laying the Foundations: Housing Actions Report, which was published on 14 April 2016, provides information on thirty-one major actions taken across the housing spectrum since mid-2014 to increase the supply of all forms of housing. The report is available on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.environ.ie/housing/activity/laying-foundations-housing-action-report>.

One of the key actions involved introducing measures to protect tenants' rights and the Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Act 2015, enacted on 4 December 2015, introduced a number of measures to address rent stability and significantly strengthen the rights of tenants.

Furthermore, the Department of Social Protection's Interim Tenancy Sustainment Protocol currently operates in Cork and Dublin in conjunction with a local authority funded tenancy protection service, provided through the non-governmental organisation Threshold. Under these arrangements, Threshold provides advice and advocacy for tenants who are at risk of losing their homes. When necessary, Threshold may refer the case directly to the Department of So-

cial Protection and that Department may apply a discretionary uplift to Rent Supplement rates, thereby securing the continuation of the tenancy.

While the protocol arrangements are currently only operational in Cork and Dublin, the Department of Social Protection continues to exercise discretion on a case-by-case basis for Rent Supplement clients nationwide under its National Tenancy Sustainment Framework. Under both Tenancy Sustainment arrangements, uplifts have been granted at the discretion of the Department of Social Protection's Welfare Officers to approximately 7,500 clients nationwide, with approximately 5,000 of these in the Dublin Region. Operational issues in this regard are a matter for the Department of Social Protection.

With regard to the supply of social housing in particular, the Social Housing Strategy 2020 includes targets and actions to increase the supply of social housing by 110,000 additional units. The report, Social Housing Output in 2015, which I published on 26 January 2016, is available on my Department's website at the following link: http://www.environ.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/social_housing_output_in_20150.pdf.

While I am satisfied that a solid foundation has been laid to ensure that the challenges in housing can be overcome, it will take an ongoing and increased commitment from all stakeholders to deal with the issues comprehensively.

Housing Provision

486. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of housing purchases or new housing starts approved by his Department in respect of County Kildare in the past 12 months, having regard to the rising extent of homelessness, rapidly increasing rents and the numbers on local authority housing waiting lists; if cognisance is being taken of the worsening situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7757/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): While my Department provides funding to local authorities in respect of various capital projects for the construction and acquisition of social housing, it does not approve individual house purchases or new housing starts. In relation to projects my Department has approved, these follow on from the announcement I made in April last year of over €1.5 billion in funding allocations in respect of social housing to be provided by all local authorities via a combination of building, buying and leasing schemes. Those allocations and associated targets for each local authority, including Kildare, are available on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.environ.ie/housing/social-housing/ministers-kelly-coffey-announce-eu15-billion-social-housing-targets-local>.

Following this notification of targets, I made announcements of substantial new social housing projects in May 2015, July 2015 and January 2016. Between these three announcements, almost €680 million has been allocated for over 3,900 social housing new builds, turnkey developments and acquisitions. Details of these project approvals, including those for Kildare, 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>

<http://www.environ.ie/housing/social-housing/ministers-kelly-coffey-announce-further-1000-social-housing-units>.

20 April 2016

I am keen that all local authorities, including Kildare County Council, advance these projects as soon as possible and I have assured them that funding is available to fully support their efforts in this regard. While social housing construction projects are being advanced, acquisitions of new and second-hand houses and apartments remain an effective means of meeting immediate social housing need. In 2015, Kildare County Council secured the purchase of 79 housing units and to date this year, have completed the purchases of a further 25 additional units for social housing purposes. Some of these acquisitions, as well as some of the approved construction projects, were under the Capital Assistance Scheme whereby approved housing bodies (AHBs) deliver social housing for those with specific needs such as elderly people, persons with intellectual or physical disability and homeless persons.

Under the Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme (SHCEP), my Department, together with local authorities, can support AHBs to construct, purchase or lease housing units and make them available for social housing. The housing units are secured under long-term leases/availability arrangements between local authorities, AHBs and private property owners. A total of 30 social housing units were delivered under the Programme in the administrative area of Kildare County Council in 2015. To date, a total of 157 units have received funding approval under the Programme and will be delivered in Kildare over the course of the next two years. 124 of these are new units that will be purchased by AHBs with assistance from the Department's Capital Advance Leasing Facility and made available to Kildare County Council under long-term lease arrangements funded by SHCEP.

Information on all social housing outputs is published on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.environ.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordble/overall-social-housing-provision>.

NAMA Portfolio

487. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the details of all the National Asset Management Agency's properties in Dún Laoghaire and Rathdown, by addresses, by occupancy status and by usage type; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7763/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) does not own or manage properties. NAMA's role in relation to properties is that of a secured lender. Properties securing NAMA's loans continue to be managed by their legal owners, or in the case of enforcement, on their behalf by duly appointed insolvency practitioners.

While my Department is working closely with NAMA to ensure that all opportunities to identify and secure housing units for social housing use are maximised, it does not have access to the information requested by the Deputy.

Information on social housing activity supported through engagement with NAMA is available on the website of the Housing Agency at www.housing.ie/NAMA.

Housing Assistance Payments Data

488. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government for a detailed report on the numbers of landlords and property owners who have signed up under the housing assistance payment scheme, by local authority, in 2015

and 2016, in tabular form. [7766/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme is being introduced incrementally on a pilot basis to all local authority areas. The HAP scheme has been rolled out to all categories of households in 19 local authority areas. The Dublin Region Homelessness Executive (DRHE) is also managing a HAP Homeless Pilot for the four Dublin local authorities. The table below provides details of the households currently supported by HAP broken down by local authority.

My Department does not hold a detailed breakdown, by local authority, of landlords who are receiving payments relating to properties being rented by HAP households. However, I understand that there are almost 5,600 separate landlords currently receiving HAP payments through the HAP transactional shared service centre that is being provided by Limerick City and County Council.

Households supported by HAP by Local Authority(18/4/2016)

Carlow County Council	204
Clare County Council	468
Cork City Council	362
Cork County Council	1144
Donegal County Council	852
Dublin City Council	140
Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council	1
Fingal County Council	12
Galway City Council	25
Galway County Council	86
Kildare County Council	205
Kilkenny County Council	569
Limerick City & County Council	1174
Louth County Council	766
Mayo County Council	103
Meath County Council	92
Monaghan County Council	212
Offaly County Council	151
Sligo County Council	68
South Dublin County Council	790
Tipperary County Council	364
Waterford City & County Council	731
Grand Total	8,519

Rural Development Programme

489. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if a rural development basic services programme fund will be established to run in parallel with the new Leader programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7783/16]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Ann Phelan): The LEADER element of the Rural Development Programme

2014–2020 will provide €250 million in financial resources to support the development of sustainable rural communities. Under the programme, funding will be distributed in rural communities by Local Action Groups in line with local development strategies which are currently being developed in respect of each of the 28 designated sub-regional areas in Ireland.

I have no plans to establish a Basic Services Programme fund to run in parallel with LEADER.

Homeless Accommodation Provision

490. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government for an explanation for the doubling of the cost of providing temporary homes, modular homes and rapid build homes for those in hotel accommodation. [7792/16]

491. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the strategy for moving families from rapid build housing to permanent accommodation, given that there are no plans to build any significant amount of social housing to allow families move on. [7793/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 490 and 491 together.

My Department's role in relation to homelessness involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of housing authorities in addressing homelessness at local level. Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of accommodation for homeless persons rests with individual housing authorities.

In October 2015, the Government approved a programme to deliver 500 units of rapid-delivery housing across the Dublin Region for homeless families currently in commercial hotels. An initial 22 units are being delivered in Poppintree, Ballymun. In November 2015, Dublin City Council entered into a contract for the delivery of the 22 units in Ballymun at a cost of €4.2m excluding VAT. This is the original tender cost and remains the approved cost, equating to approximately €191,000 excluding VAT per unit. While a wide range of possible costs were suggested by various parties outside the tender process, including at the time that a variety of modular-type units were demonstrated in September 2015, it is only through the tender process, on the basis of a clear specification for high quality units, that a definitive project cost is established. The average cost of these units must be considered in the context of their early delivery and the quality involved.

This programme of rapid-delivery housing provision is being implemented to mitigate the issues associated with an increasing volume of homeless households accommodated in inappropriate commercial hotel arrangements. The units will provide accommodation for those families currently in hotels in the first instance, offering a greater level of stability while move-on options to long-term independent living are identified and secured. Furthermore, such arrangements will facilitate more coordinated needs assessment and support planning for access to all required services, including welfare, health and housing services. The temporary assignment of these units to homeless households, and the duration of occupancy by them, is a matter for housing authorities.

Inland Fisheries

492. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources to consult with the fisheries board over plans to close Lough Sheelin near Finea, County Westmeath (details supplied) to course fishermen for a period leading up to trout season. [7597/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Joe McHugh): I have been advised that Inland Fisheries Ireland advertised a public consultation from 17 February to 16 March 2016 to seek views on the introduction of a local by-law on Lough Sheelin (Managed Wild Brown Trout Fishery) to close angling for any species by rod and line from 13 October each year to the end of February of the next following year. This by-law is being sought to regulate a historical fishery management rule that is in place on Lough Sheelin. The fishery management rule currently in place prohibits fishing for any species by rod and line from 13 October to the end of February. There is no change in practice regarding this and regulating this rule under legislation ensures that it can be enforced more effectively. Fishing for all species has always been allowed during the open season from 1 March to 12 October on Lough Sheelin. These regulations have been in place for twenty years during the tenure of the then Shannon Regional Fisheries Board. This has been a widely recognised status for the lake and promoted through the angling guide leaflets and signage erected at Lough Sheelin.

Inland Fisheries

493. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources to contact the chief executive officer of Inland Fisheries Ireland (details supplied) to discuss the damage being done by the Asian clams infestation with the angling club. [7599/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Joe McHugh): The latest invitation from the Club (Lough Ree Angling Hub) was received by Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) on 14 April last in relation to a meeting proposed for 25 April in Lanesborough, which the Club advised would be an update on their work. The club also advised that the meeting was proposed on foot of a site visit by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), who have statutory responsibility for invasive species, including Asian Clam. The invitation also confirms that NPWS discussed matters with the local group.

I am advised that IFI will be represented at the meeting, from a fisheries perspective, by the Shannon Region Fisheries Inspector who is most familiar with the area.

IFI's initial intervention in this issue primarily concentrated on its core statutory responsibilities as regards the protection conservation, development and promotion of the inland fisheries resource.

Upon notification, IFI promptly undertook work to reduce the threat of further spread from angling activity and equipment with appropriate bio-security measures put in place for anglers, and the fishery was re-opened. IFI contributed to the organisation of an international angling competition at Lanesborough aimed at showcasing the re-opened fishery. IFI also engaged, as a groundwork measure, in a scientific survey in the Lanesborough area which set out many of the physiognomies of the Asian Clam species.

While IFI has no statutory remit in relation to invasive species, I would be happy to facilitate a detailed briefing for the Deputy from IFI on interventions to date as they relate to matters within their remit.

Broadband Service Provision

494. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the amount to be invested in providing broadband under the Connecting Communities initiative, that is, to areas where it is not commercially viable to provide the service throughout the State; and the years in which the investments will be made. [7449/16]

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. On 29 September 2015, the Government agreed and published its 6 year Capital Plan, *Building on Recovery*, which included an allocation of €275m for the National Broadband Plan. This will provide the initial stimulus required to deliver the Government's intervention and it is expected that further funding will be available over the lifetime of any contract(s).

Funding of €75m is also committed through the European Regional Development Fund which can be drawn down after Exchequer expenditure is first incurred.

On 22 December 2015, I formally launched a major Government procurement process for the State intervention to deliver a high quality, high speed broadband infrastructure to over 750,000 premises in Ireland. The formal procurement process commenced with the publication of the Pre-qualification Questionnaire ('PQQ') and Project Information Memorandum. Five responses were received from prospective bidders to this stage of the competitive procurement process by the deadline of noon, 31 March 2016.

The five responses are now being assessed in line with the criteria set down by the Department with a view to short listed qualified bidders proceeding to the next stage of procurement.

The second stage in the procurement process will be a formal Invitation to Participate in Dialogue (ITPD) to shortlisted bidders. The third stage of the procurement process involves the issue of final tender documentation, which follows the ITPD process. Following the submission of final tenders by bidders, a winning bidder or bidders will be selected for the two lots-one lot as set out in the Intervention Strategy document. The Department will then enter into formal contract negotiations with the winning bidder(s).

The Department will engage with the winning bidder(s) on the optimum rollout strategy, and on the sequencing of the network deployment to maximise efficiencies during network build, having regard to business and consumer needs, and to areas of particularly poor service and areas of strong demand. All these factors will need to be balanced against the most efficient network rollout and will be agreed during the procurement process.

Engagement with industry stakeholders as part of the pre-procurement consultations has indicated that the rollout in the Amber area 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 all premises in Ireland (both commercial and intervention area) will have access to high speed broadband within two years of the contract award, with 100% of premises connected within 5 years.

Because a competitive procurement process is currently in train, it would be neither advisable nor appropriate to speculate about the potential overall cost of the NBP at this stage. Ultimately, the outcome of the procurement process will determine the final cost of the intervention and will influence the amount of Exchequer funding that will be required for the NBP.

Appointments to State Boards

495. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the regional breakdown of all members appointed by the Government or him to State boards, agencies and bodies in 2015 and to date in 2016, by agency and by region (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7474/16]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): There have been 61 appointments to State Boards under the aegis of my Department in the period 1 January 2015 to date. 16 of these were from among individuals who submitted Expressions of Interest or who applied under the revised arrangements set out in the Guidelines on Appointments to State Boards which were published in November 2014. It should be noted that some 72% of the appointments made were either ex-officio appointments, reappointments, the appointment of worker directors chosen by election or appointments made on foot of nominations made by an Oireachtas Committee. A complete list of all current members and vacancies is available to the Deputy and all members of the public on the Stateboards website at www.stateboards.ie.

The table below sets out the State Board and the names of the individuals appointed, the date of appointment and indicates those who submitted Expressions of Interest or who were appointed under the revised arrangements. The following three boards had no appointments made to them during the period – the Digital Hub Development Agency (DHDA), Ordnance Survey of Ireland (OSI) and the Mining Board. Responsibility for the OSI was transferred to the Department of Justice and Equality from January this year.

Board	Name of appointee	Date of appointment	Region – Head Office
An Post	Ms Lorraine Tormey(Elected post-master member)	01/01/2016 (reappointed)	Dublin
	*Mr Dermot Divilly (Chairman designate)	01/12/2015	Dublin
RTE	Mr Pádraig Ó Céidigh(on nomination of Joint Oireachtas Committee)	17/02/2015	Dublin
	Mr Shane Naughton(on nomination of Joint Oireachtas Committee)	17/02/2015	Dublin
	Ms Fionnuala Sheehan(on nomination of Joint Oireachtas Committee)	17/02/2015	Dublin
	*Ms Margaret Ward(on nomination of Joint Oireachtas Committee)	17/02/2015	Dublin
Broadcasting Authority of Ireland	Mr Séamus Martin	17/02/2015 (reappointed)	Dublin

Board	Name of appointee	Date of appointment	Region – Head Office
	Professor Maeve McDonagh(on the nomination of Joint Oireachtas Committee)	17/02/2015	Dublin
	*Dr Rosemary Day(on the nomination of Joint Oireachtas Committee)	17/02/2015	Dublin
	*Mr Denis Wolinski(on the nomination of Joint Oireachtas Committee)	17/02/2015	Dublin
	Mr Seán Ó Mórdha(on the nomination of Joint Oireachtas Committee)	17/02/2015	Dublin
Bord na Móna	Mr Philip Casey(Elected employee member)	01/01/2015	Leinster
	Mr Kevin Healy (Elected employee member)	01/01/2015	Leinster
	Mr Seamus Maguire (Elected employee member)	01/01/2015	Leinster
	Mr Colm Ó Gógáin(Elected employee member)	01/01/2015	Leinster
	Mr Mike Quinn(CEO, ex officio)	02/01/2015	Leinster
Ervia	Mr Sean Hogan	20/01/2015	Dublin
	Mr James Martin	20/01/2015 (resigned 27/03/2015)	Dublin
	Ms Celine Fitzgerald	20/01/2015	Dublin
	Mr Peter Cross	20/01/2015	Dublin
EirGrid	**Mr Gerry Walsh	22/07/2015	Dublin
	**Mr Michael Hand	22/07/2015	Dublin
ESB	Ms Noreen Wright	19/01/2016 with effect from 28/06/2016 (reappointment)	Dublin
	Mr Dave Byrne(Elected employee member)	01/01/2015	Dublin
	Mr Sean Kelly (Elected employee member)	01/01/2015	Dublin
	Mr Tony Merriman (Elected employee member)	01/01/2015	Dublin
	Mr Peter O'Sullivan(Elected employee member)	01/01/2015	Dublin

Questions - Written Answers

Board	Name of appointee	Date of appointment	Region – Head Office
	**Ms Ellvena Graham(Chairperson)	14/07/2015	Dublin
	**Mr Andrew Hastings	14/07/2015	Dublin
Irish National Petroleum Corporation (INPC)	Mr Aidan Donnelly(Chairperson)	01/08/2015 (reappointed)	Dublin
	Mr Pat Meehan(CEO, ex officio)	01/08/2015 (reappointed)	Dublin
	Ms Una Dixon(DCENR Rep)	01/01/2016 (reappointed for 9 months until 30/09/2016)	Dublin
National Oil Reserves Agency (NORA)	Mr Frank O’Flynn	14/05/2015	Dublin
Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI)	*Ms Julie O’Neill*(Chairperson)	01/05/2015 (appointed as Chairperson)	Dublin
	Dr Brian Motherway(CEO, ex officio)	01/05/2015 (reappointed)	Dublin
	Mr. Brian Carroll(DCENR rep)	06/05/2015 (reappointed)	Dublin
	Ms Anne Connolly	06/05/2015 (reappointed)	Dublin
	Mr Pat Gilroy	06/05/2015 (reappointed)	Dublin
	**Dr. Peter Brennan	06/05/2015	Dublin
	**Dr. Lisa Ryan	06/05/2015	Dublin
	**Mr Michael Wall	06/05/2015	Dublin
	**Mr Paddy Phelan	06/05/2015	Dublin
TG4	Mr Diarmuid Ó Ruiséal (staff representative)	03/03/2015	Connacht
	Ms Bríd Falconer(on nomination of Joint Oireachtas Committee)	31/03/2015	Connacht
	Mr Francis C Reidy(on nomination of Joint Oireachtas Committee)	29/09/2015	Connacht
Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI)	*Mr Fintan Gorman	01/07/2015(appointed as chairperson)	Dublin
	*Dr Frances Lucy(on nomination of the Joint Oireachtas Committee)	24/03/2015	Dublin
	Mr Sean Coady	17/11/2015 (Staff nomination)	Dublin

Board	Name of appointee	Date of appointment	Region – Head Office
	*Mr Patrick Gibbons (on nomination of the Joint Oireachtas Committee)	13/01/2016	Dublin
Loughs Agency	Mr Alan McCulla	13/12/2015 (reappointed)	Cross Border
	Mr Andrew Duncan	13/12/2015 (reappointed)	Cross Border
	Ms Phil Mahon	13/12/2015 (reappointed)	Cross Border
	Mr Michael McCormick	13/12/2015 (reappointed)	Cross Border
	Mr Seamus Rodgers	13/12/2015 (reappointed)	Cross Border
	Ms Theresa McLaverty	13/12/2015 (reappointed)	Cross Border
	Mr Winston Patterson	13/12/2015 (reappointed)	Cross Border
	Mr Mick Murphy	13/12/2015 (reappointed)	Cross Border
	Mr Laurence Ardbuckle	13/12/2015 (reappointed)	Cross Border
	Mr Donal Tipping	13/12/2015 (reappointed)	Cross Border
	Mr Joe Miller	13/12/2015 (reappointed)	Cross Border
	Mr Terry McWilliams	13/12/2015 (reappointed)	Cross Border

*Expression of Interest received

**Appointed under revised arrangements set out in November 2014 Guidelines on Appointments to State Boards

Broadband Service Provision

496. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources with regard to his broadband map, if he will confirm that blue areas that are due to receive 30 Mbps by end of 2016 via commercial operators will do so; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7572/16]

497. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources to measure broadband provision in rural Ireland within either the blue or amber areas of the national broadband plan; the measurement which would be provided; the areas in which this measurement will take place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7573/16]

498. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources with regard to the national broadband plan map, where there are infill areas of provision of less than 30 Mbps within a blue area, the timeframe for commercial operators to

provide 30 Mbps to the users; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7574/16]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): I propose to take Questions Nos. 496 to 498, inclusive, together.

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 has invested over €2 billion in network upgrades and enhanced services in the last four years, and is continuing to invest. These very significant investments represent a step change in the quality of broadband services available.

The EU State Aid Guidelines for Broadband require Member States to thoroughly evaluate any commercial plans so as to ensure that State Aid is confined to those areas where commercial investment in high speed broadband services is unlikely to occur in the foreseeable future.

The Department has had extensive engagement with operators to identify those areas where there are concrete plans to roll out high speed broadband on a commercial basis in line with EU State Aid Guidelines for broadband. In October 2015 the Department published the process used for assessing commercial high speed broadband investment plans. Plans received from commercial operators are assessed under technical, deployment and financial criteria, in line with the EU State Aid requirements. This resulted in the publication of the High Speed Broadband Map 2020 in December 2015. No additional commercial plans have been submitted since the 2020 map was launched in December 2015.

The Map shows, based on the plans of commercial operators, that there are some 1.6m premises in the BLUE area, representing 70% of the total premises in Ireland. The remaining 30%, which comprise some 757,000 premises are in the AMBER area and are expected to be served by the State Intervention. The Department is monitoring the commercial rollout plans of operators on an ongoing basis to ensure that all of the 1.6m premises will have access to High Speed Broadband of at least 30Mbps.

The Department has also published a process for managing the high speed broadband map which can be accessed at:

<http://www.dcenr.gov.ie/communications/SiteCollectionDocuments/Broadband/Updated%20Expert%20reports/Managing%20IA%20Map%20-%20Consultation%20Paper%20FINAL%2021-12-15.pdf>.

Broadband Service Provision

499. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the availability of broadband at Kilmore in Enfield in County Kildare and the projected availability over the next two years, given that a number of rural areas in the vicinity have been upgraded but appear to still be lacking in broadband supply; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7636/16]

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 is being 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 has invested over €2 billion in network upgrades and enhanced services in the last four years, and is continuing to invest. These very significant investments represent a step change in the quality of broadband services available.

On 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 process commenced with the publication of the Pre-qualification Questionnaire and Project Information Memorandum. Five responses were received from prospective bidders to this stage of the competitive procurement process by the deadline of 31 March. The responses are now being assessed in line with criteria set down by the Department with a view to selecting qualified provider(s) to proceed to the next stage of the procurement. This second stage in the process will be a formal Invitation to Participate in Dialogue (ITPD) to shortlisted bidders.

The High Speed Broadband Map 2020, which is available at www.broadband.gov.ie shows the extent of the State Intervention area. The areas marked BLUE represent those areas where commercial providers are either currently delivering or have plans to deliver high speed broadband services. The Map shows that 77% of premises in Kildare are in the BLUE area. The remaining 23% of premises in Kildare (20,536 premises), including the townland of Kilmore, are in the AMBER area and it is intended that these will be served through the State intervention. Consumers can see whether their individual premises is in the BLUE or AMBER area by entering their Eircode on the Map.

The intention is to build out the network in the AMBER area as quickly as possible. The procurement process is underway and it is proposed to engage with the winning bidder(s) in due course on the optimum rollout strategy, and on the sequencing of the network deployment to maximise efficiencies during network build, having regard to business and consumer needs, and to areas of particularly poor service and areas of strong demand. All these factors will need to be balanced against the most efficient network rollout and will be agreed during the procurement process.

The Department has engaged with a wide range of stakeholders and communities in developing the Intervention Strategy, conducting four formal consultations and over 100 meetings over the last 18 months in particular. Engagement with industry stakeholders as part of the pre-procurement consultations has indicated that the rollout in the Amber area 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 all premises in Ireland (both commercial and intervention area) will have access to high speed broadband within two years of the contract award, with 100% of premises connected within 5 years.

Local communities, and in particular, Local Authorities have an important role to play in facilitating the efficient rollout of infrastructure in their areas. The Department encourages Local Authorities to engage proactively with commercial operators, and the Department has also made several presentations to Local Authorities in relation to the National Broadband Plan., including Kildare County Council.

Broadband Service Provision

500. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the current position on the timing and rollout of the national broadband plan for an area in (details supplied) County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[7641/16]

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 is being 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 has invested over €2 billion in network upgrades and enhanced services in the last four years, and is continuing to invest. These very significant investments represent a step change in the quality of broadband services available.

On 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 process commenced with the publication of the Pre-qualification Questionnaire and Project Information Memorandum. Five responses were received from prospective bidders to this stage of the competitive procurement process by the deadline of 31 March. The responses are now being assessed in line with criteria set down by the Department with a view to selecting qualified provider(s) to proceed to the next stage of the procurement. This second stage in the process will be a formal Invitation to Participate in Dialogue (ITPD) to shortlisted bidders.

The High Speed Broadband Map 2020, which is available at www.broadband.gov.ie shows the extent of the State Intervention area. The areas marked BLUE represent those areas where commercial providers are either currently delivering or have plans to deliver high speed broadband services. The Map shows that 77% of premises in Kildare are in the BLUE area. The remaining 23% of premises in Kildare (20,536 premises), including the townlands of Narraghmore and Calverstown, are in the AMBER area and it is intended that these will be served through the State intervention. Consumers can see whether their individual premises is in the BLUE or AMBER area by entering their Eircode on the Map.

The intention is to build out the network in the AMBER area as quickly as possible. The procurement process is underway and it is proposed to engage with the winning bidder(s) in due course on the optimum rollout strategy, and on the sequencing of the network deployment to maximise efficiencies during network build, having regard to business and consumer needs, and to areas of particularly poor service and areas of strong demand. All these factors will need to be balanced against the most efficient network rollout and will be agreed during the procurement process.

The Department has engaged with a wide range of stakeholders and communities in developing the Intervention Strategy, conducting four formal consultations and over 100 meetings over the last 18 months in particular. Engagement with industry stakeholders as part of the pre-procurement consultations has indicated that the rollout in the Amber area 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 all premises in Ireland (both commercial and intervention area) will have access to high speed broadband within two years of the contract award, with 100% of premises connected within 5 years.

Broadband Service Provision

501. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the extent to which initiatives are planned to address deficiencies in the telecommunications sector with a view to ensuring that all segments of the sector are up to in-

ternational standards; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7738/16]

502. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the extent to which he expects broadband quality and service to improve on an annual basis over the next four years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7739/16]

503. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the extent to which improvements in quality and speed of broadband is envisaged over the next two years with particular reference to County Kildare and the need to meet the requirements of customers therein as a matter of urgency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7740/16]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): I propose to take Questions Nos. 501 to 503, inclusive, together.

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 is being 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 has invested over €2 billion in network upgrades and enhanced services in the last four years, and is continuing to invest. These very significant investments represent a step change in the quality of broadband services available.

On 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 process commenced with the publication of the Pre-qualification Questionnaire and Project Information Memorandum. Five responses were received from prospective bidders to this stage of the competitive procurement process by the deadline of 31 March. The responses are now being assessed in line with criteria set down by the Department with a view to selecting qualified provider(s) to proceed to the next stage of the procurement. This second stage in the process will be a formal Invitation to Participate in Dialogue (ITPD) to shortlisted bidders.

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. The areas marked AMBER represent the target areas for the proposed State intervention. Members of the public can view whether their premises is in the BLUE or AMBER area by accessing the High Speed Broadband Map and entering their Eircode.

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.

The intention is to build out the network in the AMBER area as quickly as possible. The Department will engage with the winning bidder(s) on the optimum rollout strategy, and on the sequencing of the network deployment to maximise efficiencies during network build, having regard to business and consumer needs, and to areas of particularly poor service and areas of strong demand. All these factors will need to be balanced against the most efficient network rollout and will be agreed during the procurement process.

Engagement with industry stakeholders as part of the pre-procurement consultations has indicated that the rollout in the Amber area 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 all premises in Ireland (both commercial and intervention area) will have access to high speed broadband within two years of the contract award, with 100% of premises connected within 5 years.

The Department will have a robust governance procedure in place which ensures that the winning bidder(s) deliver their obligations under the contract to the required standards and within the required timeframes. In addition, the Department continues to monitor the rollout of network deployment plans in the commercial areas to ensure that services are delivered in line with commitments made by operators.

I am confident that through the combination of existing commercial investment and the State intervention, that all our citizens will have the same, if not better, access to high speed broadband services available internationally.

In the mobile telephony market, market operators are currently investing in the rollout of 4G networks. These are providing a substantial level of improvement in performance and capabilities over previous 3G and 2G technologies. These 4G networks use the same technology as the most modern mobile networks providing public access internationally.

Renewable Energy Generation Targets

504. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the progress to date towards reaching targets arrived at by the previous administration in respect of renewable energy with a view to meeting international commitments within time and target; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7741/16]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): The 2009 EU Renewable Energy Directive sets Ireland a legally binding target of meeting 16% of our energy requirements from renewable sources by 2020. Ireland is committed to achieving this target through meeting 40% of electricity demand, 12% of heat and 10% of transport from renewable sources of energy. Figures provided by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) show that Ireland is just over halfway in meeting its 2020 targets, with 8.6% of Ireland's overall energy requirements being met from renewable sources in 2014. More specifically, the SEAI has calculated that 22.7% of electricity, 6.6% of heat and 5.2% of transport were met from renewable sources. While the progress to date is encouraging, significant challenges remain, particularly in the heat and transport sectors.

Energy Regulation

505. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he has considered introducing legislation to require all suppliers of domestic electricity to have the same schedule of charges, including standing charges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7768/16]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): I have no function in this matter. Responsibility for the regulation of the electricity market is a matter for the Commission for Energy Regulation (CER) which is an independent regulator. The CER was assigned responsibility for the regulation of the Irish electricity sector following the enactment of the Electricity Regulation Act, 1999 and subsequent legislation. It is therefore a function of the CER to regulate the electricity market. The way a supplier presents informa-

tion on a customer's bill is a matter for the CER under the regulatory framework.

The Standing charge is a combination of the fixed charges associated with providing electricity network services (e.g. meter reading and network operations/maintenance) and a share of the supply costs in servicing customers' electricity accounts. Standing charges vary from supplier to supplier and will be presented by the supplier under one of four classes of standing charges: Urban 24hr, Urban Nightsaver, Rural 24hr, Rural Nightsaver. Which class a customer falls under depends on meter type (whether 24hr or Nightsaver) and location, and for the latter, whether the urban or rural class applies depends on the location of the customer's property.

Local Improvement Scheme Funding

506. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to restore funding for local improvement schemes in the next budget; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7300/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of each local authority, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from the local authority's own resources supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is also a matter for the local authority. The Local Improvement Scheme (LIS) provides funding for road and laneways that local authorities have not taken in charge, that is, private roads and landways. The maintenance and improvement of these roads is, in the first instance, a matter for the relevant landowner. The LIS for regional and local roads remains in place but my Department does not provide a separate grant allocation towards this scheme. Instead Councils may use a proportion of State grant funding for LIS should they wish to do so. It is a matter for the Council to decide on allocations for LIS. Regarding Budget 2017, it will be a matter for the incoming Government when it is formed to determine the Exchequer provision for roads (including regional and local roads) in 2017.

Sports Organisations

507. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to provide Elite Martial Arts recognition as a governing body by the Irish Sports Council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7247/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Sport Ireland, which is funded by my Department, is the statutory body with responsibility for the promotion, development and co-ordination of sport in Ireland. This includes responsibility for the recognition of sporting organisations as National Governing Bodies. I have referred the Deputy's question to Sport Ireland for direct response. I would ask the Deputy to inform my office if a reply is not received within 10 days.

Cross-Border Projects

508. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if financial provision has been made in his Department's Estimate for 2016 to progress the proposed Narrow Water bridge project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7285/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The ‘A Fresh Start - Stormont Agreement and Implementation Plan’, concluded in November 2015 indicates that the Government remains committed to the concept of the Narrow Water Bridge. Under the Agreement, the Northern Ireland Executive and the Government have agreed to undertake a review of the project with a view to identifying options for its future development, for consideration by the North South Ministerial Council in June 2016.

There is no provision in my Department’s budget to progress the Narrow Water Bridge project in 2016.

Cross-Border Projects

509. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to provide an update on the proposed Narrow Water bridge project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7334/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The ‘A Fresh Start - Stormont Agreement and Implementation Plan’, concluded in November 2015 indicates that the Government remains committed to the concept of the Narrow Water Bridge. Under the Agreement, the Northern Ireland Executive and the Government have agreed to undertake a review of the project with a view to identifying options for its future development, for consideration by the North South Ministerial Council in June 2016.

Road Projects Status

510. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to provide an update on the proposed western bypass of Ardee, County Louth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7335/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Within its annual budget the planning, design and implementation of individual road projects, such as the Ardee Bypass is a matter for the Transport Infrastructure Ireland (formerly known as the NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

The Ardee Bypass was not included in the Capital Plan published in September 2015. As explained previously, decisions on the transport elements of the Capital Plan were framed by the conclusions reached in my Department’s Strategic Investment Framework for Land Transport. Based on the findings in that report it is envisaged that maintenance and renewal of the road network will continue to be the main priority over the period of the plan and the bulk of the roads capital, over €4 billion, is earmarked for such essential work with a further €600 million allocated for implementation of the PPP road programme which is already underway.

In this context the Ardee bypass was one of the projects that it was not possible to include given the overall funding envelope available. Over the period of the Capital Plan funding for land transport, including roads, will be built up towards the levels needed to support adequate maintenance and development.

Road Network

511. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when Louth County Council will receive a positive response to the request in November 2012 to retain the status of classification of the N51 and N52 road network in County Louth and whether he will re-assert the social and economic significance of this road network; and his views on the matter. [7356/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Section 10 of the Roads Act 1993 as amended by the Roads Act 2007 provides for the classification of national, regional and local roads.

Issues relating to the classification of the N51 and N52 are on file and will be dealt with as part of the next extensive review of roads classification which it is hoped to complete this year.

Public Transport Provision

512. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a proposed timeline for the extension of the Luas green line to Bray in County Wicklow is in place; if not, when this timeline is to be published; the route options which are currently under consideration; if a preferred route has been identified; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7412/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the implementation and development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA), including Luas light rail projects.

In this regard, I recently approved the NTA's Transport Strategy for the GDA (comprising the counties of Dublin, Meath, Kildare and Wicklow) for the period 2016-2035. The Strategy provides a framework for the planning and delivery of transport infrastructure and services in the GDA over the next two decades. It includes a proposal for an extension of the Luas Green Line to Bray. Following approval of the Strategy, and in accordance with its statutory mandate, the NTA has now commenced work on a six year Integrated Implementation Plan.

The Government's plans for transport investment for this period are set out in the new Capital Plan, *'Building on Recovery' Infrastructure & Capital Investment 2016-2021*. The Capital Plan does not include funding for this project so it will not be advanced during this period. The timeline for the project will be determined in the context of future Integrated Implementation Plans brought forward by the NTA for implementation of the Strategy and future Capital Funding Reviews.

The development of any Luas project would also be subject to appraisal and evaluation (including review of a detailed business case) under the Public Spending Code as well as the availability of funding.

Road Traffic Legislation

513. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport why rickshaws are not regulated as there are concerns for public safety and the loss of income for taxi drivers who are regulated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7439/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): 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 last year to allow An Garda Síochána to issue fixed charge notices to cyclists also apply to pedal powered rickshaws and 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.

I understand that, in response to some concerns - primarily of a health and safety nature - and having regard to legal advices, Dublin City Council is assessing the introduction of bye-laws to regulate rickshaws.

Appointments to State Boards

514. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to provide the regional breakdown of all members appointed by the Minister or the Government to State boards, agencies and bodies in 2015 and to date in 2016, set down by agency and by region (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7486/16]

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

State Board Appointments by Regional Breakdown:

Board	Total Ap- pointments	Dublin	Rest of Leinster	Munster	Connacht	Ulster
CIÉ	2	2				
Bus Átha Cliath	2	2				
Bus Éire- ann	2	2				
Iarnród Éireann	2*					1
Port of Waterford Company	2		1	1		
Sport Ire- land	11	5		4	2	
Taxi Advi- sory Com- mittee to the NTA	3	2		1		
Transport Infrastruc- ture Ire- land (TII)	2	1				1

Medical Bureau of Road Safety	2	1	1			
National Transport Authority	6	6				

*The other appointee is based in the UK

Taxi Regulations

515. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if holders of a hackney licence in rural areas must be available for any minimum number of hours per week or if they are free to operate only when it suits them; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7489/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The regulation of the small public service vehicle industry, including the requirements for Hackney Licences, is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the provisions of the Taxi Regulation Act 2013.

I have referred your question to the NTA for direct reply to you. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

Public Transport Provision

516. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport following the publication of the transport strategy for the greater Dublin area 2016-2035 to outline the plans to advance the metro west project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7534/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA), including metro and light rail projects.

Metro West was proposed under *Transport 21* as an orbital metro connecting Tallaght and Blanchardstown in the west of Dublin with the original Metro North proposal to Swords. The project was to be procured as a Public Private Partnership, however a significant Exchequer contribution would also have been required.

In October 2010 the then Railway Procurement Agency (RPA) submitted an application to An Bord Pleanála for a Railway Order for the metro project. In light of the financial crisis, it was decided that the Railway Order application for Metro West should be withdrawn in September 2011.

I recently approved the NTA's Transport Strategy for the GDA for the period 2016-2035. The Strategy does not include the original Metro West proposal but it includes proposals for the future development of an east-west Luas line, commencing in the residential areas of Lucan and connecting into Dublin City Centre. This will provide a high capacity radial service from this area to the City Centre, sufficient to cater for the high transport demand along this corridor, and

will serve Lucan, Liffey Valley and Ballyfermot along its route.

The Strategy also envisages the development of a Core Bus Network, which would include a range of radial and orbital routes serving Dublin West, and a Bus Rapid Transit scheme linking Blanchardstown with UCD.

Public Transport Provision

517. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport following the publication of the transport strategy for the greater Dublin area 2016-2035 to set out when the Lucan Luas line project will progress. [7535/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the implementation and development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA), including Luas light rail projects.

In this regard, I recently approved the NTA's Transport Strategy for the GDA (comprising the counties of Dublin, Meath, Kildare and Wicklow) for the period 2016-2035. The Strategy provides a framework for the planning and delivery of transport infrastructure and services in the GDA over the next two decades. It includes a proposal for an extension of the Luas to Lucan. Following approval of the Strategy, and in accordance with its statutory mandate, the NTA has now commenced work on a six year Integrated Implementation Plan.

The Government's plans for transport investment for this period are set out in the new Capital Plan, *'Building on Recovery' Infrastructure & Capital Investment 2016-2021*. The Capital Plan does not include funding for this project so it will not be advanced during this period. The timeline for the project will be determined in the context of future Integrated Implementation Plans brought forward by the NTA for implementation of the Strategy and future Capital Funding Reviews.

The development of any Luas project would also be subject to appraisal and evaluation (including review of a detailed business case) under the Public Spending Code as well as the availability of funding.

Dolaí Bóthair

518. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den an Aire Iompair, Turasóireachta agus Spóirt cén fáth go ngearrtar táillí dola ar fheithiclí príobháideacha atá in ann naonúr a iompar ag an ráta céanna le busanna poiblí den mhéid céanna; an nglacann sé leis gur mí-réasúnach an rud é táillí den sórt seo a ghearradh ar theaghlaigh ina bhfuil seachtar páistí agus níos mó; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [7580/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Mar Aire Iompair, Turasóireachta agus Spóirt, tá mé freagrach as polasaí agus maoiniú foriomlán maidir leis an gclár na mbóithre náisiúnta. Tá an phleanáil, a dhearadh agus a chur chun feidhme tionscadal bóthair aonair ceist don Bonneagar Iompair Éireann (TII) faoi Achtanna na mBóithre 1993 go 2015 i gcomhar leis na húdaráis áitiúla lena mbaineann.

Ina theannta sin, an chumhacht reachtúil chun dleachtanna do ghearra ar bhóithre náisiúnta, a dhéanamh dola fodhlíthe agus comhaontuithe a dola le infheisteoirí príobháideacha maidir le bóithre náisiúnta atá dílsithe Bonneagar Iompair Éireann (TII) faoi Chuid V d'Acht na

mBóithre 1993 (arna leasú leis an Acht Pleanáil agus Forbairt 2000 agus Achtanna na mBóithre 2007-2015).

Ag tabhairt dá haire an staid thuas, tá mé dtarchuirfear cheist an Teachta chun TII le haghaidh freagra díreach. Tabhair comhairle le m’oifig phríobháideach mura bhfaigheann tú freagra laistigh de 10 lá oibre.

Greenways Development

519. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to outline the current position regarding the grant application submitted to his Department in respect of the development of the Leitrim Cavan greenway; when it is likely that this application will be approved and funding allocated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7587/16]

520. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to outline the current position regarding the grant application submitted to his Department in respect of the development of the Sligo-Leitrim greenway; when it is likely that this application will be approved and funding allocated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7588/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 519 and 520 together.

Both Leitrim (with the support of Cavan) and Sligo County Councils submitted applications under the last tranche of the National Cycle Network (NCN) funding programme (2014-2016) for the construction of a greenway along the sections of the disused Sligo, Leitrim and Northern Counties (SLNCR) railway within their jurisdiction. Unfortunately, neither proposal was awarded funding at that time, due to the significant over-subscription for funding.

While all current funding from my Department for the purpose of greenway infrastructure is now fully committed to the end of 2016 I was pleased to see that Leitrim County Council (LCC) has submitted an application under the INTERREG VA Programme for funding to develop the Manorhamilton to Enniskillen section of the SLNCR. The specific objective under which this application will be considered is the promotion of cross-border intermodal and sustainable mobility in the cross-border region. Among the partners listed in this proposal is Cavan County Council (CCC) who, while not making any financial contribution, will bring to the project their extensive experience in delivering road schemes and “Smarter Travel” walking and cycling projects in county Cavan. A decision on this application is due in September of this year.

I understand that following on from the above mentioned initial unsuccessful NCN applications that all the authorities concerned came together to establish and address criteria which might impact on the delivery of the overall SLNCR project. This work is ongoing and progress is being made on the necessary planning and environmental assessments associated with this project. This should help the authorities in the event of their making future application(s) for support under any future programmes.

Sports Capital Programme Administration

521. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to outline the proposals to launch a new sports capital programme in 2016; if there is provision for same in his Department’s Estimate for 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7589/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Tourism, Culture and Sport (Deputy Michael

Ring): No decision has been made on the timing of any future rounds of the Sports Capital Programme. Any future rounds of the Programme will be advertised in the national press. Any interested group should register now on www.sportscapitalprogramme.ie as this will be the only way to apply under any future rounds of the Programme.

While there is no provision in the Department's Estimates for a new round of the Programme in 2016, grants allocated under the Programme do not generally fall due for payment in the year in which they are allocated.

Taxi Data

522. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to set out the overall county by county take-up there has been of the new rural hackney scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7637/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The regulation of the small public service vehicle industry, including the issuing of Local Area Hackney Licences, is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the provisions of the Taxi Regulation Act 2013.

I have referred your question to the NTA for direct reply to you. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

Aviation Policy

523. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to outline the degree to which regional airports are expected to continue to play a major part in the national transport network in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7729/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The new National Aviation Policy which I published last August acknowledges the role played by the regional airports of Donegal, Ireland West Airport Knock, Kerry and Waterford as being important in promoting connectivity to support the tourism and business sectors. The Policy confirms that these four regional airports are being given the opportunity to grow to a viable, self-sustaining position. For this reason, Exchequer support under our Regional Airports Programme 2015-2019 for safety and security projects and activities at these airports will be continued where appropriate. It is a matter for the airports themselves to exploit all potential opportunities to expand their air services.

Tourism Policy

524. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to indicate those areas in the tourism sector that have shown the greatest potential for future development and expansion, internally and externally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7730/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Tourism continues to contribute significantly to Ireland's economic recovery. CSO figures for 2015 show there were over 8.64 million overseas visits to Ireland, an increase of 13.7% on 2014.

This growth in overseas visits has been accompanied by strong growth in overseas tourism revenue. The CSO Tourism and Travel publication shows that spending in Ireland by overseas visitors (excluding air fares or ferry charges) for 2015 increased by 18.6%, compared to 2014.

Research carried out on behalf of the tourism agencies and tourism industry has found that certain market segments have a higher likelihood to select Ireland as a destination. Tourism Ireland's overseas marketing activity is weighted towards these segments in order to provide the best return on marketing investment.

In addition, the tourism brand experiences that have been developed by Fáilte Ireland, like the "Wild Atlantic Way", "Ireland's Ancient East", and "Dublin – A Breath of Fresh Air" – are all designed to meet the needs of the most promising consumer segments in overseas source markets.

The Government's Tourism Policy Statement "People, Place and Policy – Growing Tourism to 2025" was launched in March 2015. The main targets contained in the Tourism Policy Statement, to be achieved by 2025, are as follows:

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

In 2015, I appointed a Tourism Leadership Group to put in place a Tourism Action Plan containing key actions required in the period to 2018 in order to achieve the overall objectives in the Policy Statement. The Tourism Action Plan was published in January and contains actions across a range of key issues including skills in the tourism industry; supply of visitor accommodation; overseas tourism marketing, and the contribution of Local Authorities to tourism development. My Department is now working closely with the tourism agencies on the implementation of all of the 23 actions contained in the Plan.

Road Projects Status

525. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when necessary upgrade works are due to commence on the M7 Naas to Newbridge Osberstown interchange and Sallins bypass, County Kildare, as announced in the recent capital plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7731/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects (including the N7) is a matter for the Transport Infrastructure Ireland (formerly known as the NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with Kildare County Council. Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects is a matter in the first instance for TII in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act. As regards regional and local roads, responsibility for implementation of improvement projects rests with the relevant local authority which is Kildare County Council in this instance.

As you are aware the transport element of the Capital Plan provides that work will commence on several roads projects which are targeted at removing critical bottlenecks or upgrad-

ing inadequate sections of road, including the M7 widening and the Sallins Bypass. Kildare County Council is responsible for the construction of the Osberstown Interchange.

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

Tourism Promotion

526. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which he has examined the potential growth for business tourism here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7732/16]

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

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

Industrial Disputes

527. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has or will meet with officials of Transport Infrastructure Ireland, given the seriousness of the Luas dispute. [7796/16]

528. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport given that Transdev Ireland has repatriated almost €10 million in profits back to the parent company in France from the Luas operation since 2009, and considering that Transport Infrastructure Ireland and its predecessor, the Railway Procurement Agency, have boasted of the success of Luas and its role in helping the agencies post profits, if this does not highlight the need for Transport Infrastructure Ireland to immediately negotiate with Transdev Ireland with a view to insuring that Luas workers achieve a just settlement of their dispute. [7797/16]

529. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he is aware of plans by Transdev to issue protective notice to Luas workers, given the ongoing dispute, and that in a letter from the company, the employment of the workers was drawn into question if they continued to engage in strike action; his views that the right to strike and collective bargaining are effectively being challenged in this correspondence from Transdev. [7798/16]

530. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his role and that of Transport Infrastructure Ireland regarding Transdev's actions and if Transport Infrastructure Ireland was made aware of Transdev's stance with regard to workers prior to its public announcement. [7799/16]

531. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he is aware that one of main stumbling blocks to the acceptance of the Workplace Relations Commission

20 April 2016

proposals in the Transdev dispute was the clause to significantly worsen the pay and conditions for new drivers; his views regarding this proposal, given that current workers' starting salaries are below the average industrial wage and that such workers would have trouble renting homes or taking out mortgages in the Dublin area. [7800/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 527 to 531, inclusive, together.

I will also forward question number [7799] to TII for direct reply. Please contact my office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

I last met with TII on 11 January 2016. My Department receives regular updates and briefing from the National Transport Authority (NTA) and Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) on all relevant issues including the current Luas dispute.

As part of these updates and briefing that I have been receiving in relation to the dispute, I was aware of the possibility of Transdev, taking certain measures but I should stress that my consent was not required. I have no shareholder role in the case of Transdev. I have already indicated that I do not personally agree with measures to recover strike costs from workers.

As Minister, I have no function in relation to the employment, or terms and conditions of employment, of Transdev employees. Nor does NTA or TII have any employment relationship with Transdev employees. They are employees of Transdev, a private company. This dispute is between employees, as represented by SIPTU, and their employer, Transdev. It is up to those two parties to reach a resolution with each other.

I believe that any intervention by me, or indeed others without a legal function or role in this dispute, is not helpful. Resolution of the dispute lies with the employer and the employees. The State has well established industrial relations institutions which are ready to assist the relevant parties in reaching a mutually acceptable agreement. In that regard I welcome the news that bilateral talks are taking place this week between Transdev and its employees.

I have been clear however that whatever resolution is arrived at between Transdev and its employees must be delivered within the overall contractual framework Transdev has with the State. There cannot be, and there will not be, any change to that contract which runs until November 2019. I will not be opening the chequebook on behalf of the taxpayer in this matter. My focus is to protect the interests of the taxpayer and the travelling public, and to encourage the parties to work to resolve their differences in a manner that is fair, affordable, and sustainable.

Industrial Disputes

532. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport why the current contract between Transdev Ireland and Transport Infrastructure Ireland, previously Railway Procurement Agency, did not contain any provision for a new wage agreement with the Luas workforce; if he and Transport Infrastructure Ireland were aware at the time of the awarding of this contract that Luas workers like most of the country's workers had not had a wage increase in many years and had in fact been seeking negotiations with Transdev over pay and conditions. [7801/16]

533. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he is aware or concerned that while Transdev ignored the attempts of their workers to negotiate such a claim, that the State's agencies, both Transport Infrastructure Ireland and the National Transport Authority, were deciding to award the Luas contract to Transdev; given this, his views that

claims by him and the agencies that they have no role in this dispute are spurious and that the awarding of this contract was premised on effectively freezing out the workers who operate the system and excluding them for advancing legitimate attempts to improve their pay and conditions. [7802/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 532 and 533 together.

As Minister, I have no function in relation to either the employment of Transdev staff or their terms and conditions of employment. Nor does NTA or TII have any employment relationship with those workers. They are employees of Transdev, which is a private company. The current dispute is between employees, as represented by SIPTU, and their employer, Transdev. It is up to those two parties to reach a resolution with each other.

As the issues raised by the Deputy are relevant to the public procurement and contractual arrangements with Transdev, which are the responsibility of the National Transport Authority in conjunction with Transport Infrastructure Ireland, I have forwarded the Deputy's questions to the National Transport Authority for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Invasive Fish Species

534. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her views on the various proposals that have been made for remedial work to be carried out and a management plan to be put in place for the future removal of Asian clams from the site at Lanesborough, County Longford. [7598/16]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department is concerned about the possible impact of Asian Clam in the River Shannon and Lough Ree, but is also aware of the great practical difficulty in eradication and prevention of its spread once it has arrived in any river system.

By the time this species was recorded in the Shannon at Lanesborough, it was already present in huge numbers in the warm water stretch above the bridge. The clams are quite small, are capable of self-fertilisation and each can produce up to 70,000 larvae in a year. It is clear therefore that a programme of eradication by any of the methods considered could be very costly and, as it is impossible to ensure that all clams are removed, re-infestation is a high risk.

However, my Department has been in contact an EPA-funded project based in the Institute of Technology, Sligo, which is working on Invasive Species prevention, control and eradication and, subject to the necessary environmental permissions, it is now proposed to develop and carry out control trials, building on the work already done at Lanesborough and also using the results of trials in infested lakes in the United States.

Cuanta agus Céanna

535. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den an Aire Ealaíon, Oidhreachta agus Gaeltachta an raibh aon chomhráite idir a Roinn agus Comhairle Contae an Chláir maidir leis na táillí atá á mbeartú do Ché Dhúlainn sa gcontae sin agus maidir leis an drochthionchar a d'fhéadfadh a bheith acu ar eacnamaíocht na n-oileán [7274/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe

McHugh): Is ceist í seo don Chomhairle Chontae féin agus go dtí seo ní raibh siad i dteagmháil le mo Roinnse faoin ábhar.

Special Areas of Conservation Designation

536. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she has considered the scientific evidence regarding Coolrain bog in County Laois that a better outcome could be achieved by using compensatory habitat which is available. [7301/16]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The draft National Raised Bog SAC (Special Area of Conservation) 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 and, subject to the approval of the Government, will be published thereafter.

In the context of the finalisation of the Plan, my Department is considering the available options in terms of relocation of turf cutters to non-designated bogs and other alternatives and the invocation of certain provisions of the EU Habitats Directive. Under article 6.3 of the Directive consent could only be given to cut turf on a raised bog special area of conservation where it can be shown that such cutting will not have an adverse effect on the site. Under article 6.4 of the Directive consent could only be given to cut turf on a raised bog special area of conservation for imperative reasons of overriding public interest and where there are no suitable alternatives.

Given the clear scientific evidence of the negative impact of turf extraction on raised bogs, it will only be possible to utilise the provisions of article 6.3 in a small number of cases. Similarly, the proof of overriding public interest under article 6.4 is very challenging and at best, will only be applicable to a small number of sites. In addition, if an article 6.4 case can be and is successfully made, compensatory measures will be required to offset the negative effects of any losses to the habitat concerned and to ensure the overall coherence of the raised bog special area of conservation network.

The position in relation to Coolrain Bog special area of conservation, amongst other sites, is being considered in the finalisation of the National Raised Bog SAC Management Plan.

Waterways Ireland Staff

537. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht further to Parliamentary Question No. 850 of 6 April 2016, if she is aware of the difficulties this staff redeployment is currently having on the three full-time staff on this lock; the reason the person who has retired is only being replaced on a seasonal basis; if consideration will be given to appoint a full-time replacement of this position; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7374/16]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I have been informed by Waterways Ireland that staffing levels on this waterway were reviewed in late 2015 when the number of full-time Waterway Patrollers was reduced from four to three due to the retirement of a Patroller in November 2015.

Taking into consideration the levels of activity on the waterway during the shoulder seasons, Waterways Ireland decided to operate the waterway with three full-time Waterway Patrol-

lers during these periods. These Patrollers are now covering a larger area at these times while continuing to operate from their normal base. Waterways Ireland has informed me that this change is justified given the level of activity on the waterway during these periods. I am also advised by Waterways Ireland that it has consulted with the three full-time Waterway Patrollers and also with their trade union representative regarding this change.

The recruitment process for three seasonal Waterway Patrollers has commenced. During the 2016 high season, June–August, three seasonal Waterway Patrollers will be in place based at Lock 16, Kilclare and at Lock 1 and the three full-time Waterway Patrollers will revert to covering their normal areas. Waterways Ireland will continue to monitor the staffing arrangements on the Shannon – Erne Waterway and will review them before the commencement of the 2017 season.

State Bodies

538. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the regional breakdown of all members appointed by the Government or her to State boards, agencies and bodies in 2015 and to date in 2016 broken down by agency and by region (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7472/16]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Details regarding the number of appointments I made in 2015 and 2016 to State boards in bodies funded from my Department's Vote, broken down by body and by the region in which the appointee resided at the time of his/her appointment, are set out in the table.

Agency	Dublin	Rest of Leinster	Munster	Connacht	Ulster
National Library of Ireland	8	2	1	Nil	1
Irish Manuscripts Commission	8	2	3	1	3
Údarás na Gaeltachta	Nil	1	1	Nil	Nil
Irish Museum of Modern Art	7	1	1	Nil	Nil
Crawford Gallery	Nil	Nil	4	Nil	Nil

In relation to appointments during the period 1 January 2016 to date, I temporarily extended the term of office of the members of the Irish Manuscripts Commission on 28 February 2016, pending the appointment of a new Commission in due course. In addition, following a process carried out by the Public Appointments Service through www.stateboards.ie, I appointed a number of persons in October 2015 to the board of the Irish Museum of Modern Art. The terms of office of 5 of the appointees began on dates in January and February of this year in line with the vacancies arising.

For the purpose of completeness, I should also mention that new boards were appointed, with effect from 13 December 2015, for Foras na Gaeilge and the Ulster-Scots Agency, which are agencies of the North/South Implementation Body, An Foras Teanga. These appointments

were made by the North South Ministerial Council arising from nominations on a 50:50 basis.

Foireann Roinne

539. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den an Aire Ealaíon, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta céard iad na céimeanna atá tugtha go dtí seo leis an bhfolúntas do stiúrthóir na Gaeilge ina Roinn a líonadh; cén uair a bheidh duine ceaptha i mbun na hoibre sin; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [7560/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh): Táthar ag breathnú ar na roghanna sa chás seo faoi láthair agus déanfar cinneadh i gcomhairle leis an Roinn Caiteachais Phoiblí agus Athchóirithe.

Údarás na Gaeltachta

540. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den an Aire Ealaíon, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta cén t-eolas atá aici faoi aon atheagar atá beartaithe nó idir lámha ar struchtúr na bainistíochta nó na foirne in Údarás na Gaeltachta; cén cineál atheagair atá beartaithe; cén obair atá déanta go dtí seo leis an atheagar sin a chur i bhfeidhm; cén dáta a bheidh an struchtúr nua ag feidhmiú; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [7561/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh): Dírim aird an Teachta ar an bhfreagra a thug mé ar Cheist Dála Uimh. 44 ar 8 Nollaig 2015 i dtaca leis an ábhar seo. Mar a thug mé le fios sa fhreagra sin, rinneadh atbhreithniú neamhspleách ar struchtúr bainistíochta Údarás na Gaeltachta i rith na bliana 2015. Ba é príomhchuspóir an atbhreithnithe sin ná measúnú a dhéanamh ar an struchtúr agus an grádú ag leibhéal na bainistíochta sinsearaí in Údarás na Gaeltachta ag féachaint do ról, d'fheidhmeanna, do bhuiséad agus do fhreagrachtaí na heagraíochta, i gcomparáid le heagraíochtaí eile sa tseirbhís phoiblí. Cuireadh san áireamh na feidhmeanna breise a tugadh don Údarás faoi Acht na Gaeltachta 2012. Rinneadh an t-athbhreithniú i gcomhpháirtíocht leis an Údarás féin.

Tá cur i bhfeidhm mholtaí an atbhreithnithe pléite idir mo Roinnse agus an tÚdarás. Sa chomhthéacs sin, tuigim ón Údarás go bhfuil tús curtha acu le déanaí le cur i bhfeidhm na moltaí sin agus go bhfuil sé mar sprioc acu go mbeidh moltaí na tuarascála curtha i bhfeidhm go hiomlán roimh dheireadh na bliana seo. Ar ndóigh, tuigfidh an Teachta go bhfuil an príomhchúram maidir leis an bpróiseas seo ar Phríomhfheidhmeannach agus ar Bhord an Údaráis.

Ulster Canal Restoration Project

541. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the stage of the proposal to restore the Ulster Canal; the funding provided in her Department estimates in 2016 for this project; when this project will proceed to the next stage; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7592/16]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Government approval to restore a 2.5km stretch of the Ulster Canal from the Shannon-Erne Waterway to the International Scout Centre at Castle Saunderson, Co. Cavan, was granted on 24 February 2015. The project, which comprises three work phases, is being undertaken by Waterways Ireland.

Phase 1, the site investigation work, has been completed. Phase 2, dredging of the River Finn, is in progress. I have been informed by Waterways Ireland that completion of this phase has been delayed as a result of contractual issues but that efforts to resolve these matters are ongoing. It is intended that Phase 3 of the restoration work, the construction of a new bridge and canal section, will proceed following completion of phase 2.

Waterways Ireland has an allocation of €2.7m in its 2016 budget for the Ulster Canal project. This is comprised of €1m from my Department's capital allocation to Waterways Ireland of €2.689m for 2016, with the balance coming from the organisation's own resources.

Wildlife Protection

542. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if hares are a protected species; the steps she takes to protect this species and prevent poaching; to whom incidents of poaching should be reported; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7614/16]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Hares are a protected species under the Wildlife Acts. There is, however, an Open Season for hare species, which extends from 26 September to 28 February of the following year and allows for the hunting of hares.

My Department is aware of the existence of some illegal hare hunting around the country and there have been a number of successful prosecutions taken in recent years by the National Parks and Wildlife Service of my Department in this regard. Incidents of illegal hare hunting should be reported to An Garda Síochána or to the National Parks and Wildlife Service of my Department.

Arts Funding

543. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the public funding which was provided for the construction of the new Wall of Remembrance at Glasnevin Cemetery in Dublin 9; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7776/16]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Remembrance Walls are an initiative of Glasnevin Trust and were unveiled by the Taoiseach at the State Ceremonial Interfaith Service on 9 April. While my Department has not provided any funds towards the construction of the Wall, it is a project which I fully support.

20 April 2016