

Written Answers.

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

Questions Nos. 1 to 12, inclusive, answered orally.

Questions Nos. 13 to 32, inclusive, resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 33 to 42, inclusive, answered orally.

Airlines Charges

43. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation her views on the recent increase in baggage fees by Irish airlines; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15820/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): I understand that the increase in baggage fees applied by one of the Irish airlines is not a new price rise as such but rather an increase in baggage fees that applies annually during the peak summer holiday period. The other Irish airline announced an increase in baggage fees on 1 June in line with its previous practice in peak travel periods, but on 2 June introduced a revised baggage fee structure that will apply all year round. While the airline has claimed that the new fee structure will lead to lower baggage charges for most passengers, it would appear that passengers flying in off-peak periods will face higher fees in many cases.

As the Deputy will be aware, no Government in recent decades has pursued a policy of price control other than for a very small number of regulated sectors where normal competitive conditions do not obtain. According to the most recent Consumer Price Index figures released by the Central Statistics Office, air fares fell by 8.4 per cent in the year to April 2016. While increases in baggage charges will clearly affect some passengers, they should also be viewed in the light of the overall reduction in air fares over the past year.

Employment Rights

44. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if she will bring forward legislation to outlaw bogus self-employment in the construction sector; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15835/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen): The Deputy will be aware that the Department of Finance and Department of Social Protection have conducted a joint public consultation on the Use of Intermediary-Type Structures and Self-Employment Arrangements.

Clearly there is a convergence of interests between my Department and the Departments of Finance and Social Protection in addressing this issue. Apart from the significant losses to the Exchequer arising from cases of so called bogus self-employment, the practice has serious implications from an employment rights perspective. In this respect it is important that individuals are correctly designated as regards employment status, so that those who ought to be designated as employees are not deprived of employment rights. This is particularly the case for vulnerable workers who may not feel in a position to object to certain arrangements.

Ireland has a well-resourced and proactive labour inspectorate, which now forms part of the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) and there are already existing mechanisms in place to tackle this issue. Inspections are undertaken on the basis of risk analysis which identifies certain sectors, as a result of complaints received and on a routine basis. Where the WRC inspection service receive complaints in relation to bogus self-employment or bogus sub-contracting, they are forwarded to the Revenue Commissioners and/or the Department of Social Protection (Scope Section) for investigation either solely by the recipient, or jointly with the Workplace Relations Commission.

In most cases it will be clear whether an individual is employed or self-employed. Where there is doubt in relation to the employment status of an individual the relevant Departments and Agencies will have regard to the Code of Practice for Determining Employment or Self-Employment Status of Individuals. This Code was drawn up and agreed in 2007 by the Office of the Revenue Commissioners, the Department of Social and Family Affairs, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions and the Irish Business and Employers Confederation.

Questions Nos. 45 to 47, inclusive, answered orally.

Foreign Direct Investment

48. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if she expects this economy to compete effectively for foreign direct investment in the next five years; if this jurisdiction is an attractive location for such investment; if she has identified any potential challenge; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15824/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): IDA Ireland is working hard to meet ambitious targets set out in its five-year strategy, *Winning: Foreign Direct Investment 2015-2019*, that was launched in February last year. The strategy's goals include, among others, the creation of 80,000 jobs, 900 new investments, and securing an additional €3 billion of commitments for new R&D projects in the country.

To achieve these targets, in a period of ever-increasing global competition for foreign direct investment (FDI), Ireland will need to continue to attract new foreign investors. I am confident, however, that we are strongly positioned to do that. That is because the country remains attractive to foreign investors on account of our talented and highly-educated workforce, our membership of the EU and the Eurozone and our business-friendly environment. We also have an established track record when it comes to FDI, with over 1,200 overseas companies already based in Ireland. These are all key factors when it comes to helping to convince companies to invest here.

The Government is equally conscious of the need for Ireland to remain as competitive as possible when it comes to winning FDI. This means sustaining and improving our internationally recognised pro-enterprise policy environment, as well as investing further in education so

that the skills of our workforce best match the needs of 21st century companies.

Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership

49. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if she shares the concerns of those who fear that the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership will weaken consumer protection and environmental legislation; if the negotiations should take place in a more transparent manner; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15838/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The EU-US free trade negotiations are the most open and transparent trade negotiations to date. Reports of rounds together with all information in relation to EU positions in the negotiations are published on the European Commission's website.

Unlike the EU, the US does not publish its negotiating texts. This is why special reading rooms have been created in capitals around Europe to allow parliamentarians to review the consolidated EU-US versions of the negotiating texts.

I recently wrote to the Ceann Comhairle and to the Office of the Cathaoirleach of the Seanad, drawing attention to the Irish reading room in my Department and invited Oireachtas Members to visit and consult the documents.

An EU-US trade deal will stand to benefit business, large and small, and consumers. The negotiation in respect of regulatory co-operation will ensure that economic gains do not lower our high standards in the field of labour rights, the environment or consumer's health and safety. This principle is built into the negotiating mandate which guides the Commission in these negotiations.

The aim of the negotiations is closer cooperation by making present and future rules more compatible, while ensuring food, animal and plant imports are safe. Making the trading landscape easier and more predictable is particularly important to SMEs, given that trade barriers tend to disproportionately burden smaller firms.

Ireland's enterprises are particularly well placed to take up opportunities to trade more easily with the US. This will build on our already rewarding economic relationship. It will also generate new opportunities to create employment and continue to grow our economy.

Job Creation

50. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if County Donegal has fallen behind other parts of the country in terms of job creation; if poor road and broadband infrastructure is a contributing factor to the lack of new inward investment there over the years 2011 to 2016 to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15629/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): Official employment figures maintained by the Central Statistics Office show that the border region, including Donegal, has seen an increase in employment of 8,300 from the start of 2011 to end of quarter 1 2016.

Donegal has also performed strongly in terms of IDA Ireland supported inward investment since 2011.

In the past 5 years employment in the Agency's client companies in the county has grown to 2,530 from a base of 1,877 – an increase of 35%.

The announcement last summer by Pramerica Systems Ireland of its intention to expand its operations in Donegal, with the creation of an additional 330 jobs and the construction of a new business campus, is further evidence of the progress that is being made in the county.

This all shows that significant strides have already been made when it comes to securing new employment and investment projects for Donegal and the region.

Both the IDA and the Government remain focused, however, on uncovering new opportunities for the wider area in the time ahead.

With respect to infrastructure in the north-west, IDA Ireland continues to work closely with the local authorities, where appropriate, to ensure the region continues to improve its offering and increase its attractiveness to potential investors.

Wage-setting Mechanisms

51. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation to examine the sub-minimum wage rate for young persons and bring it up to the standard minimum wage rate in the interests of ensuring that young persons are not discriminated against; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15839/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen): The Low Pay Commission which is independent in the performance of its functions was established on a statutory basis in July 2015. Its principal function is to annually examine and make recommendations, which are evidence based, on the national minimum hourly rate of pay.

The Commission's first Report recommended an hourly rate of €9.15 for experienced adult workers. This increase from €8.65 per hour came into effect on January 1st 2016. The sub-minima rates were also automatically increased then too.

As well as making recommendations on the national minimum wage, the Commission has been asked to examine the appropriateness of the lower sub-minima rates that currently exist. Their report was due by the end of February 2016, but an extension to the end of October 2016 was sought and has been granted to the Commission. This is to allow the Commission avail of new data due to come on stream over the coming months as a result of an additional question added to the Q2 2016 Quarterly National Household Survey on a pilot basis.

Trade Agreements

52. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the status of discussions on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership and the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement at the European Union Foreign Affairs Council in May 2016; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11891/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership and the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement were discussed at the last EU Council of Trade Ministers on 13th May 2016, which I attended.

The Council had an exchange of views on the EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) and the process towards signature and provisional application of the agreement. The European Commission and Member States highlighted the high quality of the agreement reached with Canada and expressed the desire to work towards signature of the agreement at the October EU-Canada Summit. The Commission advised the Council of its intention to submit a proposal for a decision on signature of CETA before the Summer.

The Council was also informed about the latest developments regarding the EU-US Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership negotiations. These included prospects for conclusion of the negotiations under the Obama administration. Member States considered that maintaining a high level of ambition in these negotiations was just as important as the ambitious timetable. They urged the Commission to advance the negotiations, while fully respecting its negotiating mandate and the EU interests.

It is in Ireland's interest to see strong progress on both these negotiations as they will provide opportunities for Irish based firms and make the trading environment more predictable.

Question No. 53 answered orally.

Industrial Disputes

54. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation her views on the dispute involving vital 999 emergency workers whom BT Ireland has subcontracted to a service centre (details supplied), and if she should recommend to other Departments that they insist on higher standards of workplace relations where private companies are operating State contracts. [15830/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen): I understand this dispute involves several issues, including pay and work practices. I would like to assure the Deputy that the State's industrial relations machinery remains available and engaged to assist.

Even what often appears to be the most intractable of disputes is capable of resolution where both sides engage constructively and in good faith in this voluntary process. The principle of good faith implies that both sides in a dispute make every effort to reach an agreement and endeavour, through genuine and constructive negotiations, to resolve their differences.

Ireland's system of industrial relations is, essentially, voluntary in nature and responsibility for the resolution of industrial disputes between employers and workers, whether in redundancy or other collective disputes, rests with the employer, the workers and their representatives. The State provides the industrial relations dispute settlement to support parties in their efforts to resolve their differences.

The obligations that are provided for in Ireland's robust suite of labour law apply equally to employers engaged in private and public sector work.

Low Pay

55. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if she is concerned at a recent report that shows that young persons and women are hardest hit by the growth of low wages; and if the phenomenal increase in the low wage sector undermines any claim this or the previous Government made regarding economic success. [15832/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen): The Low Pay Commission which is independent in the performance of its functions was established on a statutory basis in July 2015. Its principal function is to annually examine and make recommendations, which are evidence based, on the national minimum hourly rate of pay.

The Commission's structure is designed to ensure a balanced statutory minimum pay rate that is fair and will assist low-paid and vulnerable workers.

The Commission's first Report submitted in July 2015 recommended an increase in the national minimum hourly rate of pay from €8.65 to €9.15. This rate came into effect on January 1st 2016.

The next report of the Low Pay Commission regarding the national minimum wage is due on the 19th July this year.

I look forward to responding to any recommendation of the Low Pay Commission in relation to the national minimum wage as part of Budget 2017.

As well as making recommendations in relation to the national minimum wage, the Commission has also been asked to examine the appropriateness of the lower sub-minima rates that currently exist.

The Commission has also been asked to examine why almost 65% of those on the minimum wage are women.

Both reports are due by end October 2016.

Industrial Disputes

56. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation for views on the unresolved dispute at a company (details supplied) and specifically her position on employers unilaterally changing the contracts of employees. [15829/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen): I understand the dispute at issue relates to proposed changes to employee contracts that set out their terms and conditions of employment. I also understand that the parties have engaged with the State's industrial relations machinery and would like to assure the Deputy that the Workplace Relations Commission and the Labour Court if required remain available to assist in this dispute. I welcomed the suspension of the industrial action that was proposed for mid-May. This allowed further talks to take place. Those talks have now adjourned. The parties are considering their positions.

Even what often appears to be the most intractable of disputes is capable of resolution where both sides engage constructively and in good faith in this voluntary process. The principle of good faith implies that both sides in a dispute make every effort to reach an agreement and endeavour, through genuine and constructive negotiations, to resolve their differences.

Joint Labour Committees

57. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the action she proposes to take to encourage the joint labour committees to sit, formulate and impose em-

ployment regulation orders where the JLCs have not met; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15831/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): A Joint Labour Committee (JLC) is composed of equal numbers of representatives of employers and workers in a sector and they meet regularly, under an independent chairman to discuss proposals for terms and conditions to apply to specified grades or categories of workers in the sector. If agreement is reached the JLC publishes details and invites submissions from interested parties. If, after consideration of any submissions received, the Committee adopts the proposals it will submit them to the Labour Court for consideration. The Labour Court will then make a decision on the adoption of the proposals. If the Court decides to adopt the proposals, a copy is presented to the Minister. If the Minister considers it appropriate to do so an Order giving effect to the proposals will be made by the Minister. Such Orders are known as Employment Regulation Orders.

For vulnerable workers, JLCs can agree fair terms and conditions such as wage rates, sick pay and so which are given effect by Employment Regulation Order, while for employers the plus side is that they can agree and set minimum pay and conditions, agree on work practices which are custom-made to their industry – a flexibility which cannot be achieved by primary legislation. Where both parties to a JLC see commonality of purpose and outcome then an agreement may emerge.

The JLC system is only a framework and engagement in it is voluntary on the part of the stakeholders concerned.

Joint Labour Committees

58. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the action she will take to ensure the joint labour committees sit, formulate and impose employment regulation orders where the joint labour committees have not met; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15840/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): A Joint Labour Committee (JLC) is composed of equal numbers of representatives of employers and workers in a sector and they meet regularly, under an independent chairman to discuss proposals for terms and conditions to apply to specified grades or categories of workers in the sector. If agreement is reached the JLC publishes details and invites submissions from interested parties. If, after consideration of any submissions received, the Committee adopts the proposals it will submit them to the Labour Court for consideration. The Labour Court will then make a decision on the adoption of the proposals. If the Court decides to adopt the proposals, a copy is presented to the Minister. If the Minister considers it appropriate to do so an Order giving effect to the proposals will be made by the Minister. Such Orders are known as Employment Regulation Orders.

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The JLC system is an important framework and engagement in it is voluntary on the part of

the stakeholders concerned.

Job Creation

59. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the extent to which she will encourage, facilitate and incentivise job creation and replacement and new job opportunities in the manufacturing and services sectors over the next five years; if she expects the job market to grow in line with demographics during this period; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15823/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The Programme for a Partnership Government sets an ambitious target to have an additional 200,000 at work by 2020, with an unemployment rate of 6 per cent. Achieving this ambitious target is premised on a recovery in employment growth by enterprises across all sectors of the economy and in particular will be dependent on our success in driving export led growth and growing the additional indirect jobs stimulated by the activities of exporting enterprises in the wider economy.

A key objective of the Action Plan for Jobs process, which Government commenced in 2012, was to rebuild our economy based on enterprise and entrepreneurship, talent, innovation and exports and provide a solid foundation for future growth. We have 155,000 more people at work than when we launched the first Action Plan for Jobs in 2012, with a strong contribution from both manufacturing and services sectors across the economy to employment growth. Our export performance of manufactured goods and value-added services has been exceptional, with exports by Enterprise Ireland clients estimated at over €20 billion last year. Employment in EI and IDA supported firms has grown by over 60,687 since 2012.

Enterprise 2025, the Government's long-term enterprise policy was launched in 2015. It is an ambitious strategy, with the objective of delivering growth over the next decade that is sustainable, led by strong export performance, builds on our sectoral strengths, and that is underpinned by innovation, productivity, cost effectiveness and competitiveness. The strategy sets out the key actions needed across government to build resilience into our economy so that we do not suffer again as we have done in the past number of years and has the commitment across government. Enterprise 2025 envisages the creation of a range of employment and career opportunities across a broad spectrum of skills and across manufacturing and services activities. Our policies will continue to facilitate the creation of quality employment, taking into account the multi-dimensional aspects that define quality including: ensuring opportunities for advancement that involves workplace learning and development; ensuring that people are educated and trained to meet the needs of industry; recognising the opportunities presented by entrepreneurship as an alternative career path; and ensuring a system that facilitates flexibility without exploitation.

In terms of future demographics, research conducted in 2013 by the Central Statistics Office offers a number of projections of future working-age population based on various different assumptions. Projected fertility rates remain low and so, based on this factor alone, population growth will occur at modest rates over the next five years. The most significant factor to determine the future size of working-age population will be the level of net immigration and the Government has set a target to attract back 70,000 emigrants over the period to 2020. Our success in achieving this target will be determined to a great extent by the country's future economic performance.

Enterprise 2025 sets out the manufacturing and services sectors in which Ireland has com-

parative advantage and that contribute the greater proportion toward exports. These sectors account for a significant proportion of the enterprise agency client portfolio and include ICT (hardware and software), Health Lifesciences (that includes pharma, biopharma and medical technologies), International Financial Services, Internationally Traded Services, Engineering/Industrial Products and Agri-Food. New areas of opportunity and untapped potential are highlighted in Enterprise 2025.

The agencies of my Department, Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, Science Foundation Ireland and the Local Enterprise Offices will contribute significantly to achieving the ambition for employment creation set out in Enterprise 2025. We know that sectors themselves are constantly evolving and that both manufacturing and services activities will continue to play a part in realising our ambition for sustainable full employment across Ireland.

EU Membership

60. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Taoiseach her plans to protect Irish jobs in the event of the United Kingdom voting to exit the European Union; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16108/16]

61. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach if he and the bodies under his aegis promote Ireland as an attractive location for foreign direct investment, with particular reference to the situation in the event of Britain exiting the European Union; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16308/16]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 60 and 61 together.

Our Government's position on the EU-UK question is clear: We want the UK, as our closest neighbour and trading partner and EU ally, to remain a member of a reformed EU.

Our relationship with the UK is closer than with any other Member State. We believe Ireland has a unique perspective and interest in the outcome of the referendum: as a neighbour sharing a land border; as a partner with the UK in transforming British-Irish relations in recent years; and as a facilitator and co-guarantor, with the UK, of successive agreements aimed at securing peace and prosperity in Northern Ireland.

However, Ireland will have a clear plan in place to deal with the implications of a UK vote to Leave.

A unit in the Department of the Taoiseach, established in April 2015, has been coordinating work on this issue and is in the process of fine tuning cross-Departmental inputs on contingency management and key communication issues with senior Departmental representatives.

Government Departments have scoped the range of risks and opportunities that would fall to be addressed in the two year period following a Leave vote. This analysis will continue to be deepened in advance of the referendum.

A framework has been developed on a whole of government basis to identify contingencies that may arise in the days, weeks and months that follow.

This will be the framework within which each Minister, Department and agency will manage the policy, operational and programmatic implications that could arise from a UK leave vote. It will be capable of adapting to changing circumstances, depending on developments in the context of ongoing negotiations on new arrangements between the EU and the UK and

bilateral discussions between the UK and Irish Governments.

The plan will clearly identify the Government's priorities and set out a detailed plan of action for communications and diplomatic contact. It will also take account of how the EU landscape might change in the event of a UK departure and the consequent loss of a key ally with which we share so many priorities including in relation to jobs, growth and investment. It will consider the possible re-balancing of relationships and priorities within the EU in this context.

Work in this area is being progressed by all Departments in conjunction with key agencies and will cover all areas of Government business. Dialogue with wider stakeholders including business groups, trade unions and NGOs across all relevant sectors will continue. Official and diplomatic contact with the UK, other EU Member States and the EU Institutions will be intensified in the event of a leave vote.

The key priority for Government will be to protect and promote Ireland's key interests in the event that the UK votes to leave, including in relation to jobs and Foreign Direct Investment.

Some have suggested that a UK exit could give Ireland a marketing advantage in terms of Foreign Direct Investment. We compete strongly all the time for global FDI and will continue to do so whether or not the UK is in the EU.

Job Creation Data

62. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach the number of jobs lost and created in County Kildare in each of the years 2010 to 2016 to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16320/16]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Regina Doherty): 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 Q1 2016.

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 below shows the number of persons aged 15 years and over in employment classified by NUTS 3 Mid-East region in Q1 of each year from 2009 to 2016.

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 Q1 of each year from 2010 to 2016.

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, Q1 2009- Q1 2016.

-	Q1 09	Q1 10	Q1 11	Q1 12	Q1 13	Q1 14	Q1 15	Q1 16
In employment	232.2	228.6	222.7	228.8	220.6	225.1	234.6	231.4

Table 1b Persons aged 15 years and over in employment (ILO) classified by Mid-East region, Q1 2010- Q1 2016 - Annual change

	Q1 10	Q1 11	Q1 12	Q1 13	Q1 14	Q1 15	Q1 16
In employment	-3.7	-5.9	6.1	-8.3	4.6	9.5	-3.2

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

Source: Quarterly National Household Survey, Central Statistics Office.

Reference period: Q1=Jan-Mar

Garda Training

63. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the cost of training a member of An Garda Síochána. [16089/16]

64. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the cost of training a member of the Garda Síochána Reserve. [16090/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 63 and 64 together.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that payroll costs for new Garda recruits include a basic allowance of €184 per week plus a living allowance of €77.92. After 32 weeks of training, Garda recruits are attested and move on to the first point of the Garda pay scale €23,750 rising to a maximum of €45,793 per annum after 19 years. They may also qualify for other allowances depending on their assignments.

Members of the Garda Reserve as part of their training programme spend 15 days in attendance at the Garda College, including the graduation ceremony, and 40 hours assigned to a Garda Station. Following attestation, the annual allowance payable to Reserve members as a contribution towards their expenses is set at €1,000 per annum. In addition, the uniform cost per Reserve member is in the region of €1,300.

I am further advised that the cost of training both recruits and members of the Reserve is subsumed into the overall training costs of the Garda College and is not easily identifiable. However, the total cost of running the Garda College in 2015 was approximately €19m, which includes the salary costs of all College personnel.

Garda Recruitment

65. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she has considered reviewing the age requirements for entry to An Garda Síochána. [16091/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The age at which any candidate may apply to join An Garda Síochána as a full time member is set by Regulation 4 (a) of the Garda Síochána (Admissions and Appointments) Regulations 2013 under which the maximum recruitment age at which candidates may apply to join An Garda

Síochána as a full time member is set at not more than 35 years.

This upper age limit of 35 was set having regard to equality legislation and also took into account the following criteria:

(1) the cost of training and the need for recruits to serve for a sufficient period of time as full members of the service to recoup this cost,

(2) the operational requirements of the service in terms of having an age profile appropriate to the physical demands placed on members in the course of their duty.

This Regulation applies without discrimination and no concessions are available to any person. There are currently no plans to change this situation.

Equality Tribunal Cases

66. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she has taken action to prevent the Equality Tribunal from investigating discrimination claims being brought against the Garda Commissioner and the status of this action. [16092/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I have not taken any such action and there is no question of me seeking to do so. As the Workplace Relations Commission, into which the Equality Tribunal has been merged, is an independent body, it would not be appropriate for me, as Minister for Justice and Equality, to intervene in any way in relation to any matter being dealt with by that Commission.

Bail Law

67. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons who breached bail in 2015 and in 2016 to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16132/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Central Statistics Office (CSO), as the national statistical agency, is responsible for the compilation and publication of the official recorded crime statistics, and the CSO has established a dedicated unit for this purpose.

I have asked the CSO to forward relevant statistics directly to the Deputy.

Witness Protection Programme

68. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the budget allocation for the Garda Síochána's witness protection programme in 2015 and 2016 to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16133/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Garda Síochána has operated a Witness Security Programme since 1997 to respond to attempts by criminal and other groups to prevent the normal functioning of the criminal justice system, including threats of violence and systematic intimidation of witnesses. The budget allocation for the Witness Security Programme in 2015 and 2016 is set out in the following table.

Year	Estimate Provision
2015	€1.198m
2016	€1.198m

The Witness Security Programme is operated by the Garda authorities, overseen by the Crime and Security Section at Garda Headquarters supported by the Special Detective Unit and other Garda resources as necessary. The operation of the programme and the resources required for it are kept under continuous review by the Garda authorities. The Deputy will appreciate that by virtue of the highly confidential nature of the Witness Security Programme and the need to maintain the protection of persons who receive support from it, it has not been the practice of successive Ministers to detail the specifics of its operation.

Garda Divisional Headquarters

69. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the construction of a new Garda Síochána divisional headquarters in Kevin Street, Dublin 8; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16134/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Deputy will be aware that the programme of replacement and refurbishment of Garda accommodation is progressed by the Garda authorities working in close cooperation with the Office of Public Works (OPW), which has the responsibility for the provision and maintenance of Garda accommodation.

I am advised by the Garda authorities that work is progressing on the construction of the new Divisional HQ in Kevin Street and is expected to be completed in early 2017.

Property Registration

70. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality to expedite an application by a person (details supplied). [16143/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I can inform the Deputy that under the Registration of Deeds and Title Act 2006, the Property Registration Authority (PRA) was established as and from 4 November 2006. The PRA replaces the Registrar of Deeds and Titles as the registering authority in relation to property registration in Ireland and, subject to the above Act, is independent in the performance of its functions.

The Deputy will be aware of the service to T.D.s and Senators which provides information on the current status of applications, such as the subject of this question, which was introduced in May 2006. The service provides a speedier, more efficient and more cost effective alternative to submitting Parliamentary Questions. It is operated by the PRA and is available all year round.

I can further inform the Deputy that his query has been forwarded to the PRA for attention and direct reply via the above mentioned service.

Garda Vetting of Personnel

71. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the

number of staff vacancies in the Garda Síochána vetting unit in Thurles, County Tipperary, by grade; her proposals to fill these; if she will initiate a specific recruitment campaign; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16269/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for the distribution of resources, including both sworn and civilian personnel, among the various Garda Divisions and Units and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter.

I am assured by the Garda Commissioner that personnel assignments throughout the country, together with overall policing arrangements and operational strategy, are continually monitored and reviewed and are determined by a number of factors including population, crime trends and the policing needs of each individual Division and Unit. Such monitoring ensures that optimum use is made of Garda resources, and the best possible Garda service is provided to the general public.

I have been informed by the Garda Commissioner that the Garda Síochána Vetting Unit has a complement of 156 civilian staff and 4 sworn members.

Garda Misconduct Allegations

72. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality to release the recommendation of the independent review panel and relevant documents to the family of a person (details supplied). [16276/16]

73. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality to consider establishing a commission of investigation or sworn independent public inquiry into the circumstances of the death of a person (details supplied). [16277/16]

74. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality to meet with the family of a person (details supplied) to discuss its concerns about the circumstances surrounding the death of the person. [16278/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 72 to 74, inclusive, together.

The matter to which the Deputy refers has been the subject of a review carried out by counsel from the panel of the Independent Review Mechanism set up by the Government to consider complaints of Garda misconduct received by the Taoiseach and myself. The role of the Mechanism was to advise me as to what further action, if any it was appropriate for me to take in respect of each complaint. Counsel were free to make any recommendation which they saw fit.

In this particular case counsel recommended that an inquiry be set up to consider this complaint. I accepted counsel's recommendation and a letter issued to the family notifying them accordingly. The reports provided by counsel and containing their recommendations in each case constitute legal advice to me and they are, accordingly, subject to legal professional privilege. While the report and recommendations from counsel were not provided to complainants, I have sought to ensure that letters to complainants should not only set out the recommendation of counsel, but also outline, as far as possible, the reasons for the recommendation. To that end I appointed a retired judge, Mr Justice Roderick Murphy, to advise on the preparation of the letters and independently vouch for the fact that the summaries of conclusions and the reasoning behind them are a fair reflection of counsel's advice.

I have recently written further to the family to advise them that I have decided that the inquiry will be conducted as a statutory inquiry according to the terms of section 42 of the Garda Síochána Act 2005, as amended. Officials in my Department are currently in consultation with the Office of the Attorney General with regard to matters concerning the establishment of this and a number of other inquiries arising out of the Independent Review Mechanism. These matters include the setting of appropriate terms of reference for each inquiry. I will be in further contact with the complainants when these matters have been settled.

In the circumstances as outlined above the question of a meeting with the family does not arise at this time.

Independent Review Mechanism

75. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality to meet with the family of a person (details supplied) to discuss its concerns in relation to the circumstances surrounding the death of the person. [16279/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The matter to which the Deputy refers has been the subject of a review carried out by counsel from the panel of the Independent Review Mechanism set up by the Government to consider complaints of Garda misconduct received by the Taoiseach and myself. The role of the Mechanism was to advise me as to what further action, if any, it was appropriate for me to take in respect of each complaint. Counsel were free to make any recommendation which they saw fit.

In this particular case counsel recommended that I seek a report from the Garda Commissioner. I accepted counsel's recommendation and a letter issued to the family notifying them accordingly. I should point out that the obtaining of this report from the Garda Commissioner was the extent to which counsel advised that I could proceed in this matter. On receipt of that report, I wrote to the family again and I sought to address the particular issues that concerned them based on the information provided to me by the Garda Commissioner.

In the circumstances, I do not believe that a meeting with the family would serve any useful purpose.

Personal Insolvency Act

76. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 209 of 31 May 2016, if she is considering widening the circumstances whereby an insolvency court can overrule a bank veto and, in particular, to situations where a family home is no longer involved because it has been sold under pressure or instruction from the bank; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16295/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Deputy will be aware that the new court review introduced in the Personal Insolvency (Amendment) Act 2015 became effective from 20 November 2015.

Under the new provisions an insolvent borrower who has proposed a Personal Insolvency Arrangement under the 2012 Act, can apply for a court review if the proposal:

- has been refused by his or her creditors,
- includes a mortgage (or other debt) secured on their home - their principal private resi-

dence,

- and the borrower was in arrears on that debt on 1 January 2015 (or having been in arrears before that date, has entered a restructure with their lender, but the borrower remains insolvent).

This represents a major change for the borrower in arrears, in providing for independent review by the courts where creditors reject the borrower's proposal for a Personal Insolvency Arrangement. Previously, such a rejection was final.

The review criteria were carefully designed, following legal advice, to ensure that the review process takes full and fair account of the situation and rights of both the borrower and the creditors, while also taking account of the public interest in restoring insolvent borrowers to solvency, enabling creditors to recover debts to the extent that the debtor's financial situation reasonably allows, and keeping people in their homes where that is reasonably practicable.

The review provisions reflected the Government priority to help people in serious mortgage arrears on their home and particularly those at risk of losing their home. That was also the strongest public policy justification for the new court review.

The courts are currently deciding the first review applications and the initial outcomes are encouraging. I have also introduced changes to the Civil Legal Aid rules, to ensure that insolvent borrowers can access legal aid where needed to bring the new court review (Civil Legal Aid Regulations 2016, S.I. no. 272 of 2016, taking effect from 23 May).

I can confirm to the Deputy that in this early stage of implementation, I am not considering widening the scope of the legislation. However, as the Deputy will be aware, a number of commitments in relation to the mortgage arrears situation are made in the new Programme for Government, and the Government will be announcing actions in relation to these in the coming weeks.

Courts Staff Recruitment

77. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality when she will fill the position of county registrar in County Westmeath; and the interim procedures she has put in place to ensure that the normal duties of county registrar in the county are not neglected. [16323/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Courts Service has informed me that, since the retirement of the County Registrar for Westmeath in April 2016, the duties have been exercised by the County Registrar for Cavan with assistance from other County Registrars. My Department is currently reviewing issues relating to County Registrar capacity in conjunction with the Courts Service and the filling of the County Registrar vacancy in Westmeath is being considered in this context.

Garda Station Refurbishment

78. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality her progress in refurbishing Fitzgibbon Street Garda Síochána station in Dublin 1; her plans to re-open the station; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16328/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Deputy will be aware that the programme of replacement and refurbishment of Garda accommoda-

tion around the country is progressed by the Garda authorities working in close co-operation with the Office of Public Works, who have the responsibility for the provision and maintenance of Garda accommodation.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that, following the advice of the Office of Public Works regarding the condition of the station, it was deemed necessary to vacate Fitzgibbon Street Garda Station on a temporary basis to facilitate refurbishment works. The Office of Public Works subsequently refurbished the former Prison Officers Quarters at Mountjoy Prison and the adjacent Mountjoy Garda Station so that Gardaí attached to both Mountjoy and Fitzgibbon Street could operate efficiently and effectively on a temporary basis from this location. In addition, a building adjacent to Fitzgibbon Street Garda Station was identified as suitable for a Garda Office and following some refurbishment now operates as a temporary public office to provide for an ongoing Garda presence in Fitzgibbon Street.

I am further informed by the Garda authorities that it is the intention of An Garda Síochána to locate a District Headquarters Station at Fitzgibbon Street. This matter will be progressed by An Garda Síochána, in collaboration with the Office of Public Works, in the context of the national accommodation priorities of An Garda Síochána and the level of capital funding available.

Garda Equipment

79. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the specifications, name, make and model of the new hand-held devices she will provide to An Garda Síochána; the number she will allocate, by district; if she will link these to the Police Using Leading Systems Effectively, PULSE, system; if they will provide roadside access on the status of licences; if she will report on their operation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16342/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Deputy will appreciate that 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.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Commissioner recently launched the Garda Síochána Modernisation and Renewal Programme 2016-2021 which is intended to professionalise, modernise and renew An Garda Síochána to ensure that the organisation can meet present and future challenges.

As part of the Programme, it is planned to introduce mobile technology solutions to enable operational Gardaí to access core information systems while on duty and away from the Garda station. In this context, I am advised by the Garda authorities that device specifications will be settled following appropriate trials and evaluations of relevant devices.

Disabled Drivers Grant Eligibility

80. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Minister for Finance to amend the regulations on eligibility under the primary medical certificate scheme, given that they are excessively prohibitive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16139/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Scheme provides relief from VAT and VRT (up to a certain limit)

on the purchase of an adapted car for transport of a person with specific severe and permanent physical disabilities, payment of a fuel grant, and an exemption from Motor Tax.

To qualify for the Scheme an applicant must be in possession of a Primary Medical Certificate. To qualify for a Primary Medical Certificate, an applicant must be permanently and severely disabled within the terms of the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Regulations 1994 and satisfy one of the following conditions:

- be wholly or almost wholly without the use of both legs;
- be wholly without the use of one leg and almost wholly without the use of the other leg such that the applicant is severely restricted as to movement of the lower limbs;
- be without both hands or without both arms;
- be without one or both legs;
- be wholly or almost wholly without the use of both hands or arms and wholly or almost wholly without the use of one leg;
- have the medical condition of dwarfism and have serious difficulties of movement of the lower limbs.

The Senior Medical Officer for the relevant local Health Service Executive administrative area makes a professional clinical determination as to whether an individual applicant satisfies the medical criteria. A successful applicant is provided with a Primary Medical Certificate, which is required under the Regulations to claim the reliefs provided for in the Scheme. An unsuccessful applicant can appeal the decision of the Senior Medical Officer to the Disabled Drivers Medical Board of Appeal, which makes a new clinical determination in respect of the individual. The Regulations mandate that the Medical Board of Appeal is independent in the exercise of its functions to ensure the integrity of its clinical determinations. After six months a citizen can reapply if there is a deterioration in their condition.

The Scheme represents a significant tax expenditure. Between the Vehicle Registration Tax and VAT foregone, and the repayment of excise on fuel used by members of the Scheme, the Scheme represented a cost of €50.3 million to the Exchequer in 2015, an increase from €48.6 million in 2014. These figures do not include the revenue forgone to the Local Government Fund in the respect of the relief from Motor Tax provided to members of the Scheme.

I understand that there are sympathetic cases of individuals that do not come within the remit of the Scheme. Furthermore I recognise the important role that the Scheme plays in expanding the mobility of citizens with disabilities. I have managed to maintain the relief at current levels throughout the crisis despite the requirement for significant fiscal consolidation. Unfortunately, the current context is still one of constrained resources. I have no plans to expand the medical criteria beyond the six currently provided for in the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Regulations 1994.

Knowledge Development Box

81. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance if Irish interests in the manufacturing and services sectors are adequately safeguarded through the mechanism of the Irish knowledge development box; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16318/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The purpose of the Knowledge Devel-

opment Box is to encourage companies to develop intellectual property and thereby engage in substantive R&D operations that have a positive impact on the Irish economy.

It is recognised internationally that investment and growth in OECD economies is increasingly driven by knowledge-based investment, which is related to research and development and intellectual property. Putting in place an attractive tax offering for developing and commercially exploiting intellectual property is therefore important to encourage companies to develop their knowledge-based capital in Ireland, and for our continued success in attracting foreign direct investment into Ireland.

The Knowledge Development Box is the first incentive of its kind in the world to meet the OECD's 'modified nexus' standard. These rules were agreed as part of the BEPS (or Base Erosion and Profit Shifting) Project and were subsequently approved by the EU. They seek to align taxing rights with the location of substantive operations which is consistent with the overall approach to corporation tax in Ireland, as we seek to attract both foreign direct investment, and also support indigenous Irish companies.

I am confident that the Knowledge Development Box legislation strikes the appropriate balance between ensuring Ireland's corporation tax policy remains competitive while complying with accepted international principles, and that this puts Ireland in a unique position to offer long-term certainty to innovative industries who are planning their research and development investments.

I therefore view the Knowledge Development Box as a potentially positive measure for all sectors in Ireland.

Corporation Tax

82. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to ensure the protection of jobs and job opportunities through a 12.5% corporation profit tax or equivalent; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16319/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): At 12.5%, Ireland has one of the most competitive headline corporate tax rates in the OECD. This rate is applied to a broad base, a policy which is endorsed by the likes of the OECD as it is good for growth in our economy.

Our competitive rate of corporation tax has been an important part of our industrial policy since the 1950s, and has attracted real and substantive operations to Ireland since then. Ireland has not been and will never be a brass-plate location. We only have and want real substantive FDI, the kind that brings real jobs and investment into Ireland.

In 2014 the Department of Finance published the Economic Impact Assessment of Ireland's Corporation Tax Policy. This contained the results of extensive research which was carried out and commissioned by the Department of Finance which sought to quantify the effect of corporation tax policy on the Irish economy.

As part of this project, the Economic and Social Research Institute ('ESRI') were commissioned to carry out a study into the impact that the corporation tax rate has on the decision of firms to invest in Ireland. This independent research found if the rate had been higher over the period of their sample then the number of new foreign investments into Ireland would have been lower.

Another paper, titled Literature Review of the Economic impacts of Corporation Tax high-

lighted research by the OECD and others that point to the importance of low corporate tax rates to encourage economic growth.

The maintenance of the standard 12.5% rate of corporation tax is therefore extremely important for Ireland's economy. Ireland, like other smaller member states, is geographically and historically a peripheral country in Europe. A competitive corporate tax rate is a tool to address the economic limitations that come with being a peripheral country, as compared to larger core countries. Ireland's 12.5% corporation tax rate plays an important role in attracting FDI to Ireland and thereby increasing employment here.

This evidence underpins the Government's continued commitment to the 12.5% rate.

VAT Rate Application

83. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if there is flexibility in terms of the value added tax charged to the end consumer in the case where a retailer is selling age appropriate clothes for children but of a size that is beyond the threshold for zero rating; the clothes size thresholds that apply for zero rating; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16161/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The VAT rating of goods and services is subject to the requirements of EU VAT law with which Irish VAT law must comply. The zero rate of VAT applies to the supply of articles of children's personal clothing not exceeding the size appropriate to children of average build of 10 years of age. Certain items of children's clothing are excluded from the application of the zero rate and remain taxable at the standard rate of VAT.

In the practical administration of the measure, the zero rating applies to children's clothing of sizes up to and including 32" chest or 26" waist. Where the size thresholds are exceeded, the zero rating cannot be applied to the clothes. These sizes were determined in 1984 after consultation with clothing and footwear trade interests at both manufacturing and distribution levels.

Ireland's application of the zero rate of VAT to children's clothing derives from the derogation under Article 110 of the EU VAT Directive. Under that provision Ireland may retain the zero rate on goods and services which were in place on 1 January 1991. EU VAT law precludes Ireland from extending the zero rate to new goods or services as this would increase the divergence of VAT rates among the Member States. It is not therefore possible to extend the application of the zero rate by raising the age limit of children to whom the zero rate could apply in respect of articles of clothing.

However, if there were satisfactory evidence that average clothing sizes for 10 year olds has changed since 1984, then Revenue could review the matter and adjust them if warranted.

Revenue Commissioners Staff

84. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Finance the number of vacancies in the Office of the Revenue Commissioners in Nenagh, County Tipperary, by grade; his plans to fill these vacancies; if he will engage in a recruitment programme; when he will provide the details; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16268/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The deployment of Revenue staff is a matter for the Revenue Commissioners.

Revenue reviews its business and staff resource requirements in all locations on an on-going basis as part of its workforce planning. This is an iterative process that looks to identify and address critical posts that may require to be filled in the future.

I am advised by Revenue that the range of duties and responsibilities carried out in the Nenagh office have undergone some changes in the last six months. One of the purposes of the changes is to increase the range of job types to increase the opportunities for overall staff development across the range of tax and customs duties.

There are currently 255 whole time equivalents representing 282 staff serving in the Nenagh office. This is in line with the numbers serving over the last number of years.

The overall numbers in any Revenue location are subject to on-going fluctuations due to retirements, promotions and transfers. I am informed that there are no significant levels of vacancies in Nenagh other than those that arise in the normal way and there are no plans to run a Nenagh specific recruitment campaign.

Property Tax

85. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Finance to clarify an issue (details supplied) on the late payment of the local property tax; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16284/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Section 38 of the Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 (as amended) provides for a 10% surcharge (penalty) on self-assessed Income Tax/Capital Gains Tax liabilities where there is non-compliance with LPT filing and payment obligations. The surcharge is in addition to the actual LPT liability but will be reduced to equal the LPT liability where the property owner files the return and pays the amount due. The surcharge does not apply to employees or pension recipients as any arrears of LPT are automatically deducted from their payments over the course of the year in question.

Having regard to the particular circumstances of the case in question, including the relatively small amount involved and the fact that the person is now fully compliant with his LPT obligations, Revenue has confirmed that the surcharge in question will be removed.

Revenue Commissioners Enforcement Activity

86. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Finance the discretion afforded by law to the Revenue Commissioners to forgo the collection of interest charges applied to persons who make a late tax return of less than one year due to illness and who are certified by a medical report as being incapacitated at the time, noting the person has discharged all sums due; the amount of interest charges the Revenue Commissioners waived in each of the years 2006 to 2016 to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16291/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I previously advised the Deputy in my reply to Question 8541-16 that interest on late payment of tax is a statutory charge which Revenue is obliged to apply and that it is always a component of tax settlements, of tax enforcement activity and of phased payment arrangements.

Revenue confirmed that statistics on the amount of interest foregone on foot of the primary charge to tax being written out are not maintained. However for the years 2006 to 2016 (year to date), Revenue wrote out tax amounts of €120m, €118m, €129m, €222m, €300m, €321m,

€287m, €263m, €228m, €170m and €102m respectively.

In regard to the specific case outlined by the Deputy, the person in question should contact the Collector-General's office at 061 488202 so that an appointment with the appropriate official can be arranged.

Tax Reliefs Availability

87. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Finance to consider financial assistance for the purchase of gluten-free products by way of tax relief or tax credit for persons who do not have a taxable income, given that where this is required for medical grounds persons on a taxable income can receive a tax benefit rebate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16367/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by Revenue that Section 469 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 provides for income tax relief for individuals who defray qualifying expenses incurred in the provision of health care in a tax year of assessment. Health care is defined as the prevention, diagnosis, alleviation or treatment of an ailment, injury, infirmity, defect or disability.

Revenue accepts that expenses incurred in the purchase of purpose-made products for the use of persons suffering from coeliac disease is a qualifying expense incurred in the provision of health care. A person may claim tax relief at the standard rate in relation to amounts spent on gluten-free foods which have been manufactured specifically for persons with coeliac disease and where the products are used in the treatment or alleviation of that condition on the advice of a medical practitioner. Evidence of such advice should be retained.

As is the case with all claims to income tax relief, this relief is dependent on the claimant having a liability to income tax against which to offset it. Tax policy has focused on removing low income individuals from liability to income tax, and as a result low-income individuals have no income tax liability against which to offset a relief. I would also point out that a number of gluten-free foods such as gluten-free bread and gluten-free cornflakes qualify for the zero percent rate of VAT, so no VAT is charged on these items.

The Deputy may also be aware that in cases of exceptional financial difficulty supports may be available via the Social Welfare system and this is a matter for the Minister for Social Protection.

School Transport Provision

88. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a secondary school bus will be provided from Johnstown Bridge in County Kildare to a school (details supplied) due to the volume of students travelling and given that there is no bus from there; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16300/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): Under the terms of my Department's Post Primary School Transport Scheme children are eligible for transport where they reside not less than 4.8 kilometres from and are attending their nearest education centre as determined by my Department/Bus Éireann, having regard to ethos and language.

Bus Éireann has advised that children residing in the Johnstown Bridge area are not eligible

for school transport to school referred to by the Deputy in the details supplied. These children may only avail of school transport on a concessionary basis.

Under the terms of the Scheme, school transport on a concessionary basis is subject to a number of terms and conditions including that there are spare seats available on an existing school bus service and on payment of the annual charge. Routes will not be extended or altered, additional vehicles will not be introduced, nor will larger vehicles or extra trips using existing vehicles be provided to cater for children travelling on a concessionary basis.

The terms of the Post Primary School Transport Scheme are applied equitably on a national basis.

School Admissions

89. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills why he allows schools in receipt of State funding to exclude children on religious grounds (details supplied). [16098/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Schools are not permitted to discriminate against an applicant for admission on any of the grounds set out in the Equal Status Act, 2000. However, Section 7 (3)(c) of the Equal Status Act 2000 provides that an educational establishment does not discriminate where the establishment is a school providing primary or post-primary education to students and the objective of the school is to provide education in an environment which promotes certain religious values, it admits persons of a particular religious denomination in preference to others or it refuses to admit as a student a person who is not of that denomination and, in the case of a refusal, it is proved that the refusal is essential to maintain the ethos of the school. Schools that comply with the requirements of the equality legislation do not therefore discriminate on religious grounds.

It is my view that the desire of parents for diversity in education choice can be provided effectively by focussing on the delivery of the ambition to treble the number of multi-denominational and non-denominational schools as set out in the Programme for Government. This commitment is to deliver a total of 400 non-denominational and multi-denominational schools by 2030.

The Programme for Government also contains a commitment to publish new School Admissions legislation taking account of current draft proposals and addressing issues including publication of school enrolment policies, an end to waiting lists, introduction of annual enrolment structures, and transparency and fairness in admissions for pupils and their parents.

The Education (Admission to Schools) Bill was published in April 2015. This Bill did not propose to amend the Equal Status Act. The Bill did not progress through the Houses of the Oireachtas and was not reinstated for the current Dáil session. However, I have commenced a process of consultation with opposition parties to discuss my proposals to introduce a new Admissions Bill to make the process of enrolling children in school easier for parents.

Following these consultations, it is my intention to publish a new Admissions Bill during the current Dáil session.

It is important to note that 80% of schools are not oversubscribed. The new Bill will oblige all schools to admit pupils where there are available places.

School Staff

90. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the situation where staff who are working in primary schools and are paid under the ancillary grant such as secretaries, caretakers or other staff have not received a pay increase for a number of years, in some cases up to 15 years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16100/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department provides capitation funding to all recognised primary schools.

Where a school uses the grant funding to employ a secretary or caretaker, such staff are employees of individual schools. My Department therefore does not have any role in determining the pay and conditions under which they are engaged. These are matters to be agreed between the staff concerned and the school authorities.

Notwithstanding this, my Department accepted the findings of an arbitration process in relation to the pay of grant-funded school secretaries and caretakers. The detailed arrangements are set out in Circular 0076/2015 that was published in December 2015 on the Department's website. In 2016 the ancillary grant is being increased by €6 from €147 to €153 per pupil to provide additional funding to primary schools .

Schools Building Projects Status

91. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Education and Skills why he has not released funds to facilitate a seven classroom extension for a school (details supplied) going ahead, given a previous commitment to do so; the amount of money allocated to allow the project to move ahead; when he will make this allocation available and when construction can begin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16128/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The building project for the school to which the Deputy refers is at an advanced stage of architectural planning. All statutory approvals have been obtained and the Stage 2b submission has been approved by my Department.

However, on 1st January 2016 there were 66 major projects under construction. Since the start of this year 14 more major projects have been progressed to construction and there are currently 36 projects authorised to progress through the tender process with a view to starting on site in the coming months. That represents a total of 116 major projects either under construction or progressing to commence construction in 2016. The existing contractual commitments for 2016 now fully account for the funding allocation available in 2016.

My officials will continue to closely monitor expenditure on existing contractual commitments over the coming months and, as funding allows, other projects, including the project for the school in question, will be considered for progression through the tender process with a view to starting on site as soon as possible.

Summer Works Scheme Applications

92. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when he will issue a decision on an application by a school (details supplied) under the summer works scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16140/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that under the Summer Works Scheme (2016-2017), valid applications from schools that were not reached for funding reasons from within the funding made available in 2016 will qualify to be assessed for purposes of the funding available in 2017, subject to the overall availability of funding. If this arises, the terms and conditions of the scheme as outlined in Circular Letter (0055/2015) which may be accessed on my Department's website, will continue to apply when allocating funding to such projects. The SWS (2016-2017) application from the school, referred to by the Deputy, is available to be considered in this context.

Teacher Retirements

93. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the details of a person's retirement pension (details supplied), in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16158/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The person to whom the Deputy refers has been in direct contact with officials of my Department concerning her retirement options. In this connection she sought and was provided with a statement of the estimated benefits she would receive were she to retire voluntarily with cost neutral early retirement benefits. This category of pension is actuarially reduced to reflect its coming in payment early and the longer period over which it may fall to be paid.

More recently a statement has issued to the person of the estimated benefits that would be payable if she were to be successful in an application for retirement on medical grounds.

Entitlement to retire with a pension on grounds of permanent ill-health is not automatic. When a person makes application for retirement on medical grounds s/he must submit medical evidence from the person's treating medical advisor for consideration by the Occupational Health Service. The Occupational Health Service provider makes a recommendation as to whether or not the teacher is incapable by reason of infirmity of mind or body of discharging his/her duties as a teacher where that infirmity is likely to be permanent. The Occupational Health Service Provider (as contracted by the Department) is the sole recognised provider of independent medical advice for teachers and employers. The OHS provider, is staffed by Occupational Health Specialist Physicians with post-graduate qualifications in occupational health. Following receipt of the recommendation of the Occupational Health Physician, the Department makes a decision to approve or reject the application. Where an applicant is unsuccessful there is provision for an appeal and details regarding the appeal process are advised to an applicant when an applicant is notified that his/her application has not been successful.

The staff of the Pension Unit of my Department will address any further follow-up enquires directly with the person on these issues. If a formal application for retirement is received it will be progressed as promptly as possible.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

94. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he provides grant-aid to persons (details supplied) to study abroad; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16251/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Under the terms of the student grant scheme, grant assistance is awarded to students who meet the prescribed conditions

of funding, including those relating to nationality, residency, previous academic attainment and means.

The Deputy will appreciate that, in the absence of all of the relevant details that would be contained in an individual's application form and supporting documentation, it is not possible to say whether or not a particular student(s) would qualify for a grant.

The eligibility of the individual to which the Deputy refers is a matter for SUSI (Student Universal Support Ireland) to determine; upon receipt of the relevant application form and supporting documentation.

The SUSI online application process for 2016/17 is now open. Perspective students are advised to apply before the priority closing date of the 8th of July.

Schools Building Projects Applications

95. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 232 of 8 June 2016, if he will expedite the release of funding as a matter of urgency in order for the refurbishment at the school (details supplied) to be completed by September 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16264/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm that the school referred to by the Deputy has submitted an application for additional accommodation.

The application concerned is currently being assessed and a decision will be conveyed to the school authority as soon as this process has been finalised.

School Accommodation Provision

96. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will approve an application by a school (details supplied) for a new learning support room and a general practitioner room; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16265/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department's records indicate that the school has sufficient resource rooms to accommodate its current resource teacher allocation. My Department will however liaise with the school relating to this matter.

With regard to a general purpose room, my Department has indicated to the school that due to the competing demands on my Department's capital budget imposed by the need to prioritise available funding for the provision of essential classroom accommodation, it is not possible to consider the school's application for this facility at this time. The school's application will however be kept on file for consideration in the context of future funding becoming available.

State Examinations Exemptions

97. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of students sitting the leaving certificate for the first time in 2016 who are exempt from the examination fee due to their parents or guardians being in possession of a medical card; the number of these students who are 18 years of age and over; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16280/16]

15 June 2016

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): For 2016 the predicted Leaving Certificate candidates is approximately 56,600.

Of these, it is predicted that some 36,600 will be aged between 18 and 20.

The State Examinations Commission has statutory responsibility for operational matters relating to the certificate examinations.

In view of this I have forwarded your query to the State Examinations Commission for direct reply to you on issues related to exemption.

School Accommodation

98. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has reached agreement with the Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board and its design team on the additional accommodation required to facilitate the additional intake of students to Maynooth post-primary school and Maynooth Community College in County Kildare for the years commencing September 2016 and September 2017; the additional accommodation he will provide; and if the funding is in place. [16289/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I understand that discussions are on-going between the Principals of the two schools and Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board (KWETB) as to the level of additional accommodations required for September 2016 and 2017. KWETB are to revert to my Department as soon as the accommodation needs are finalised. I have already informed KWETB and the school principals that the necessary funding will be made available.

Education and Training Boards Administration

99. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has met with the project design team for the Maynooth education campus to address outstanding technical issues in relation to the retendering of the contract; if he has resolved these issues; and when he will retender the contract. [16290/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm that officials have met with Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board (KWETB) and its Design Team in relation to the Maynooth Education campus project. The technical issues to be resolved were fully discussed and these are in the process of being resolved by the Design team. The other issues of concern with the previous tender related to certain planning conditions and the KWETB is addressing these with the local authority. The intention is to resolve both the technical issues and the planning condition issues in tandem with the pre-qualification of contractors for the project which is envisaged will be advertised in mid-June.

School Accommodation Provision

100. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will review the accommodation of a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16304/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): 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 was announced last November. My Department's main responsibility is to ensure that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all pupils seeking places. In this regard, my Department is currently reviewing the demographic demand in the area serviced by the school referred to. This review will advise on the appropriate level of accommodation required for the proposed building project.

School Placement

101. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 171 of 2 June 2016, when the review mentioned will take place; the provision he will make for children who have no school place for the 2016-17 year; if he is aware that his Department has noted the strong demand for Irish-language education in Drumcondra and Marino, Dublin, and that it has been recommended that this should be kept under review in the context of future demographic changes; that the demographic information in the assessment report for the area specifies an additional 102 junior infants in addition to those enrolled for the 2015-16 year and states that all existing schools are at capacity; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16351/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy may be aware, my Department uses a Geographical Information System to identify the areas under increased demographic pressure nationwide. My Department is focused on ensuring that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all pupils living in that area. Some children may not obtain a place in the school of their first choice, where this school is oversubscribed. The GIS uses data from the Central Statistics Office, Ordnance Survey Ireland, the Department of Social Protection and information from my Department's own databases. With this information, my Department carries out nationwide demographic exercises to determine where additional school accommodation is needed at primary and post-primary level. When it is decided that a new school is required to meet demographic needs in an area, my Department runs a separate patronage process to decide who will operate the school. It is open to all patrons and prospective patrons to apply for patronage of the school under this process and the level of parental preference for each patron is key to decisions in relation to the outcome of the process. With regard to the decision on the patronage of the new school which will open this coming September to serve the Drumcondra/Marino/Dublin 1 area, my Department assessed the applications received from the prospective patrons, including examining the parental preferences received in the applications to ensure they represented children living within the school planning area which will be served by this school, and prepared a report for the consideration of the New Schools Establishment Group (NSEG). The NSEG then submitted their report with recommendations to me for consideration and final decision. The patronage assessment report which is published on my Department website, while indicating substantial support for an Irish medium school, reflects nearly twice as many valid preferences for an Educate Together school as a Gaelscoil in this area. I accepted the recommendation of the NSEG and Educate Together, providing multi-denominational education, is the patron of this new school. The NSEG noted the strong level of demand for Irish medium education in the area referred to by the Deputy and recommended that this should be kept under review in the context of ongoing demographic exercises. My officials are keeping the changing demographics in the Drumcondra/Marino/Dublin 1 area under review to take into account updated child benefit data and to take into account the impact of ongoing and planned capacity increases in this and adjacent school planning areas. The demographic data for the 2015/2016 school year showed that there are 712 junior infant children enrolled in the 24 primary schools in the Drumcondra/Marino/Dublin 1 school planning area. For the coming 2016/2017 school year, my Department's demographic projections indicate that this number

will increase to 814 junior infant children seeking places, which represents an increase of 102 junior infant children above those enrolled for 2015/2016. My Department has contacted the primary schools in the area seeking confirmation of their September 2016 enrolment numbers and the number of children on any waiting lists they may have. While the 24 schools in the area are generally at capacity in terms of the numbers of classes being accommodated, many of these schools have indicated that they could take additional children into their junior infant class(es) for the coming school year and some have indicated that they are willing to enrol an additional class of junior infant children subject to securing additional accommodation. The Department is continuing to liaise with these schools to ensure that sufficient places are available for the coming school year.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

102. **Deputy Michael D'Arcy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills why his Department has declined a special needs assistant for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16341/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) is responsible for processing applications from schools for special educational needs supports. The NCSE operates within my Department's criteria in making recommendations for 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 also continued to accept applications after that date in recognition that enrolments may not have been completed or where assessments were not completed. I announced yesterday, 14th June, 2016, that 860 additional Special Needs Assistants which will be available for allocation to schools from September 2016, which is a 7% increase on the existing availability. This will bring the total number of Special Needs Assistants to 12,900. This increase reflects the growing participation of children with Special Needs in education and will support their full participation and progression within the educational system. The NCSE advised all schools of their allocations for SNA support for the coming 2016/17 school year on 14th June, 2016. Details of the allocations which have been made to schools have now been published on www.ncse.ie. It should also be noted that SNA allocations are not made to individual children, but are made to schools to support the care needs of children with assessed special educational needs in the school. All schools have the contact details of their local SENO, while Parents may also contact their local SENO directly to discuss their child's special educational needs, using the contact details available the NCSE website. As the Deputy's question relates to the allocation of SNA support by the NCSE to an individual child, I have referred this question to the NCSE for their consideration and direct reply to the Deputy.

Community Development Projects

103. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to offer financial support to the Irish Men's Sheds Association, for its important social and community work; the grant schemes his Department operates under which the individual men's shed groups can apply for assistance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16266/16]

109. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the schemes he provides under which the Irish Men's Sheds Association can apply

to for assistance in its important social and community work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16267/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 103 and 109 together.

The Irish men's sheds association is currently funded through the Scheme to Support National Organisations (SSNO) which aims to provide multi-annual funding to national organisations towards core costs associated with the provision of services.

The current round of funding commenced on 1 July 2014, for a two year period. The organisation in question was allocated €175,950 for the 24 month period to 30 June 2016.

A new round of funding was advertised in January 2016, with applications due for submission in February. I recently announced the results of this process. It is my understanding that no application for funding under the scheme was received from the Irish Men's Sheds Association.

Social and Affordable Housing

104. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government to report on the forthcoming national housing needs assessment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16096/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Social Housing Strategy 2020 – Support, Supply and Reform, published in November 2014, included a commitment to undertake summaries of social housing assessments on an annual basis from 2016. Arrangements to carry out the 2016 summary, which will provide updated figures of national housing need later this year, are well advanced.

A suite of supporting documents was issued by my Department to housing authorities on 9 June 2016 which included a Direction to each housing authority to prepare a summary of the social housing assessments in its administrative area on 21 September 2016, with electronic data to be submitted to the Local Government Management Agency on or before 12 October 2016. Detailed guidance has been prepared by the Housing Agency and provided to all authorities to support the Social Housing Assessment 2016 and my Department will be hosting two information sessions for authorities on 30 June and 6 July next. Following the submission of data by housing authorities by 12 October, the Housing Agency will prepare a final report setting out a Summary of the Social Housing Assessment 2016.

Shared Ownership Scheme

105. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if persons who acquired houses under the shared ownership scheme will be eligible to purchase houses under the new tenant incremental purchase scheme 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16104/16]

106. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if persons who were allocated social housing under the Part V arrangements will be eligible to buy out their houses under the tenant incremental purchase scheme 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16105/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 105 and 106 together.

The new Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme came into operation on 1 January 2016. The Scheme is open to eligible tenants, including joint tenants, of local authority houses that are available for sale under the Scheme. To be eligible, tenants must meet certain criteria, including having a minimum reckonable income of €15,000 per annum, have been in receipt of social housing support for at least 1 year and have been allocated a house under a local authority allocation scheme.

There is no provision under the 2016 Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme to allow Shared Ownership borrowers to purchase their house at a discounted price. The Shared Ownership Schemes were designed to enable borrowers to achieve full home ownership over the duration of their Shared Ownership agreement.

The provisions of Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, are designed to enable the development of mixed tenure sustainable communities. Part V units are excluded from the Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme to ensure that units delivered under this mechanism will remain available for people in need of social housing support and that the original policy goals of the legislation are not eroded over time. The continued development of mixed tenure communities remains very important in promoting social integration.

The new Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme is in the early stages of implementation and the Department is monitoring the operation of the scheme in consultation with housing authorities. In line with the commitment in the new Programme for a Partnership Government to make the scheme more attractive for social housing tenants and to raise new funds for housing development, it is intended to undertake a review of the scheme following the first 12 months of operation and to bring forward any changes to the terms and conditions of the scheme which are considered necessary based on the evidence gathered at that stage.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

107. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of social houses allocated under Part V agreements, by county; the number of social houses in existence under this scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16106/16]

108. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of houses that were included under the affordable housing scheme through Part V agreements since Part V was introduced, by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16107/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 107 and 108 together.

The table sets out the affordable and social housing outputs under Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000, since 2000, based on information supplied by local authorities to my Department.

Further statistics on Part V are available on my Department's website at: <http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/StatisticsandRegularPublications/HousingStatistics/FileDownload,15291,en.xls>.

PART V, PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT ACT 2000 - 2010				
-	Affordable Housing	-	Social Housing:-	Total Output under Part V
-	-	Local Authority	Voluntary & Co-operative	-
-	No. of units:-	No. of units:-	No. of units:-	No. of units:-
-	acquired	acquired	acquired	acquired
2002	46	-	-	46
2003	88	75	0	163
2004	374	135	82	591
2005	962	203	206	1,371
2006	1,600	508	90	2,198
2007	2,063	790	393	3,246
2008	3,081	1,075	362	4,518
2009	827	535	552	1,914
2010	254	311	107	672
2011	98	92	172	362
2012	99	117	4	220
2013	10	52	32	94
2014	32	35	0	67
Total	9,534	3,928	2,000	15,462

Question No. 109 answered with Question No. 103.

Commercial Rates Valuation Process

110. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the local authorities due to be revalued in 2016 as a result of the Valuation Office's global revaluation for commercial rates; and the net effect on local authority revenue of each revaluation that has been carried out or which he expects to be carried out in 2016, by local authority, in tabular form. [16287/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Local authorities are under a statutory obligation to levy rates on any property used for commercial purposes in accordance with the details entered in the valuation lists prepared by the independent Commissioner of Valuation under the Valuation Act 2001. The Commissioner for Valuation has sole responsibility for all valuation matters except appeals of valuation procedures set out under the Valuation Act 2001, as amended, which comes under the remit of an independent Valuation Tribunal. The Valuation Act 2001 comes under the aegis of the Minister for Justice and Equality.

Under Part 5 of the Valuation Act 2001, as amended, the Commissioner of Valuation is conducting a revaluation of all commercial and industrial properties throughout the State. The purpose of a revaluation is to achieve more consistent and up-to-date valuations for rating purposes. It is not the purpose of a revaluation to increase or decrease the total amount of commercial rates collected by local authorities. To date, revaluations have been completed in South Dublin County Council, Fingal County Council, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council, Dublin City Council, Waterford City and County Council and Limerick City and County Council. I understand that revaluations in Kildare, Leitrim, Longford, Offaly, Roscommon, Sligo and Westmeath County Councils are due to be completed in 2017.

Section 8 of the Local Government (Business Improvement Districts) Act 2006 provides that I, as Minister, can make an order directing a rating authority to limit the overall amount of income it could raise through rates in the year following a revaluation to the total amount of rates liable to be paid to it in the previous year, adjusted for inflation. Rate limitation orders have been made in each of the local authorities that have undergone a revaluation to date. While this generally serves to ensure that rates income levels are not affected by revaluations, impacts may arise from the determination of subsequent appeals against revaluation; however, information in relation to such incidences is not collated by my Department.

Noise Pollution Legislation

111. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government for advice on dealing with nuisance noise caused by a dog; the provisions available in law; the remedies available if the relevant local authority is not acting on the case; his plans to strengthen the by-laws and legislation in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16359/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): 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 that 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. 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>.

In relation to noise nuisance from dogs, section 25 of the Control of Dogs Act 1986 deals with nuisance by barking dogs. A person may be able to solve such problems in the first instance by talking to the dog owner. However, if that person doesn't get a satisfactory response from the dog owner, they may complain to the District Court, using the form prescribed under the Control of Dogs Act. These forms are available from local authorities.

The Court may make an order, requiring the occupier of the premises in which the dog is kept to abate the nuisance by exercising due control over the dog. The Court may also limit the number of dogs that can be kept on a premises or may direct that the dog be delivered to a dog warden to be dealt with as an unwanted dog.

Local Authority Staff Recruitment

112. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of staff that have been recruited in the county councils' road main-

tenance division in 2015, in tabular form. [16365/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department works closely with all local authorities to ensure the continued delivery of key services in the context of staffing and budgetary constraints. In considering sanction requests public safety, maintaining key front line services, and economic issues are given precedence.

However, under section 159 of the Local Government Act 2001, each Chief Executive is responsible for the staffing and organisational arrangements necessary for carrying out the functions of the local authorities for which he or she is responsible. In this regard, it is a matter for each individual Chief Executive to recruit and assign staff to specific divisions.

Local Authority Staff Recruitment

113. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he has or when he will approve an application by Galway City Council for additional funding for additional technical staff in its housing department, given the urgency to recruit additional technical staff and to progress construction of extension works to local authority houses in 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16326/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Under section 159 of the Local Government Act 2001, each Chief Executive is responsible for the staffing and organisational 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 in relation to their overall resource requirements, including staffing, to ensure their capacity and preparedness for delivery of the ambitious targets set under the Social Housing Strategy 2020.*

My Department has received 18 housing-related staffing applications from Galway City Council since 2014. All of these posts have been sanctioned except for 1 which was received on 10 June last and is under consideration.

To support the early ramping up by local authorities of their social housing programmes as envisaged in the Strategy, Circular Housing 35/2015, of 29 October 2015, advised local authorities of new arrangements in relation to the recoupment of administration and other costs associated with new build social housing projects.

All funding due to Galway City Council under the Housing Capital Programme is being paid as soon as it is claimed by the Council.

Library Services Provision

114. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the rationale for the amalgamation of library services in counties Leitrim, Sligo and Roscommon, which implies a drastic reduction in library services for those counties; the cost savings of this amalgamation; and the cost of necessary new builds to compensate for the closure of small local libraries. [16332/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The introduction of a shared library management model for the library authorities in Sligo, Leitrim and Roscommon, as outlined in the report *Managing the Delivery of Effective*

Library Services, will not involve the closure of libraries nor will there be a reduction in the library services available in those areas.

Rather than a requirement to drive greater cost efficiency, the proposed model seeks to put in place planning and implementation arrangements that will deliver more effective and efficient public libraries with a view to securing the delivery of an enhanced quality and range of services. This will ensure the long-term sustainability of the library service in these areas.

To this end, front-line services will continue to be locally focused and people-centred, with opportunities for enhanced individual and community support services and engagement. It will secure a stronger senior management structure and increase capacity across the relevant library authorities, thus increasing the scope for developing and enhancing services to the public, and providing a broader range of services to the same high standard across the country.

Traveller Accommodation

115. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the assistance his Department is offering to local authorities to upgrade halting sites (details supplied). [16373/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): In accordance with the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998, housing authorities have statutory responsibility for the assessment of the accommodation needs of Travellers and the preparation, adoption and implementation of multi-annual Traveller Accommodation Programmes (TAPs) in their areas. My Department's role is to ensure that there are adequate structures and supports in place to assist the authorities in providing such accommodation, including a national framework of policy, legislation and funding.

In 2014, local authorities adopted the fourth round of Traveller Accommodation Programmes, with the five-year rolling accommodation programmes running from 2014 to 2018. These programmes provide a road map for local authority investment priorities over the period. They also form the basis for the allocation of funding from my Department for traveller accommodation, on foot of proposals received from local authorities and subject to approval from my Department.

Proposals for upgrading works to a temporary halting site at Capira, County Galway, were received by my Department on 13 June 2016 and are currently under consideration. I understand from Galway County Council that a proposal for a group housing scheme at Craughwell, County Galway, is currently at pre-design stage and will be submitted to my Department for consideration in due course.

Housing Adaptation Grant Applications

116. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government why a person (details supplied) with a child diagnosed with Crohn's disease has to wait so long for funding to be made available for necessary home adaptations. [16374/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department provides funding to local authorities for various social housing supports, including 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. Funding provided

by my Department meets 90% of the cost of the works, with the local authority providing the remaining 10%.

My Department has no role in relation to individual applications and the administration of the available funding is a matter for the local authority based on their assessment of priority and need at the time. In relation to the Deputy's specific query, I am advised that the local authority in question has only recently received an application in relation to this case, which is now being advanced by them.

Question No. 117 withdrawn.

Social Welfare Schemes

118. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Social Protection why persons (details supplied) enrolled through the Swords Intreo service are not receiving a grant towards the cost of essential training tools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16250/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): There is no provision within the existing funding streams of the Department of Social Protection to cover tools or other similar accoutrements that can assist a trainee in their work. The only support grant of such a nature within the Department provides for the direct cost of a training programme i.e. the technical support grant. In this instance the cost of training is being already covered and it is not possible to provide an additional subsidy. I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Delays

119. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Social Protection when he will issue a decision on an application by a person (details supplied) under the carer's allowance scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16302/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I confirm that my department received an application for carer's allowance (CA) from the person concerned on 24 February 2016. Unfortunately, there are currently delays in the processing of new applications. 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.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Payments

120. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Social Protection when he will issue a decision on an application by a person (details supplied) under the carer's allowance scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16303/16]

15 June 2016

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The application for carer's allowance in respect of the person concerned was awarded on 13 June 2016 and the first payment is due to issue to the person's nominated post office on 23 June 2016.

Arrears of allowance due from 24 March 2016 have issued to the post office for payment on 23 June 2016. The person concerned was notified of these details on 13 June 2016.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Question No. 121 withdrawn.

Carer's Allowance Delays

122. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a decision will issue on an application by a person (details supplied) under the carer's allowance scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16085/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I confirm that my Department received an application for carer's allowance (CA) from the person concerned on 17 May 2016. Unfortunately, there are currently delays in the processing of new applications. 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 her needs she should apply for a means-tested supplementary welfare allowance from her local community welfare service.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Delays

123. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a decision will issue on an application by a person (details supplied) under the carer's allowance scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16086/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I confirm that my Department received an application for carer's allowance (CA) from the person concerned on 13 May 2016. Unfortunately, there are currently delays in the processing of new applications. 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.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Invalidity Pension Applications

124. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a decision will issue on an application by a person (details supplied) under the invalidity pension scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16087/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The person concerned has been awarded invalidity pension with effect from the 17 March 2016. Payment will issue to his nominated post office on the 30 June 2016. Any arrears due from 17 March 2016 to 29 June 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 14 June 2016.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Mortgage Interest Supplement Scheme Data

125. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Social Protection the amount his Department paid out and the number of persons who received a payment under the mortgage interest supplement scheme since its introduction, by year, and the amount that will be paid out in 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16101/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): There are currently approximately 2,700 people in receipt of the mortgage interest supplement (MIS) scheme for which the Government has provided over €7 million for in 2016. Statistics in relation to recipient numbers and expenditure for the scheme from 1999 to date are provided in the following tabular statement. Statistics are not readily available prior to this date.

The MIS scheme was discontinued for new applicants from 1 January 2014, with customers availing of this support prior to 1 January 2014 retaining entitlement until the closure of the scheme on 1 January 2018. The continued payment of mortgage interest supplement does little to assist families in improving the long term difficulty in addressing their mortgage problem. 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.

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 Housing, Planning and Local Government, such as the Mortgage to Rent Scheme. My Department is also considering referral of cases to the Dedicated Mortgage Arrears MABS (DMA MABS) service. This service is focused on post-MARP cases and has been established across 26 locations 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 repossession 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.

Guidance has recently issued to the Department's staff in the Community Welfare Service to inform persons experiencing financial difficulty of these additional supports.

Mortgage Interest Supplement- Recipient Numbers & Expenditure: 1999 to date

Period	Recipients	Cost €000
1999	5,108	8,187
2000	4,233	5,878
2001	4,064	6,343
2002	4,359	7,658
2003	3,933	7,663
2004	3,318	6,333
2005	3,220	6,339
2006	3,424	7,873
2007	4,111	12,198
2008	8,091	27,675
2009	15,101	60,885
2010	17,974	65,615
2011	18,988	67,849
2012	14,597	55,082
2013	9,768	35,063
2014	5,878	20,878
2015	3,482	11,919 ¹
2016	2,717 ²	7,000 ³

1 Provisional Outturn Exp

2 Figure as of end May 2016

3 Estimated Expenditure

Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility

126. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Social Protection his plans to introduce a system whereby self-employed persons can be included in a new scheme so that they can be eligible for support if the need arises; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16102/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The new partnership Government aims to create an additional 200,000 jobs by 2020, including 135,000 outside of Dublin. This will be achieved by continuing and enhancing a supportive environment for enterprise and employment. In particular, the role of entrepreneurs and the self-employed will be central to this ambition. The new programme agreed with our partners in Government contains a commitment to introduce an improved PRSI scheme for the self-employed.

In addition, we will ensure that the Earned Income Tax Credit available to the self-employed will match that available to employees, over a number of budgets. This process commenced in Budget 2016 with the introduction of a €550 tax credit for the self-employed.

I want to ensure that appropriate sustainable supports are available to the self-employed in the event of certain contingencies arising. The self-employed already have access to State pension (contributory), widow's, widower's or surviving civil partner's pension (contributory),

guardians payment (contributory), maternity benefit and adoptive benefit on the same basis as employees. They will also gain access to the new paternity benefit which will be introduced later this year.

However, unlike the position with employees, they are not covered for certain contingencies such as long-term illnesses or disability and may not avail of treatment benefit. The former Advisory Group on Tax and Social Welfare published a report in 2013 which examined the options for extension of cover to the self-employed.

This is a valuable contribution to the issue and my Department will be examining all of the available options in the coming months. This examination will have to include the level of appropriate additional contribution the self-employed should make for more benefits.

I look forward to making progress on this issue later this year.

Carer's Allowance Data

127. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question Number 204 of 2 June 2016, the average waiting time for processing payments under the carer's allowance scheme and for benefits in each of the years 2011 to 2016 to date, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16144/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The information requested by the Deputy, insofar as it is available, is contained in the following table.

Processing Information	Average weeks to award a new carer's allowance application	Number of carer's benefit claims awaiting decision as at 31 December (*)
2011	Not available (**)	449
2012	Not available (**)	255
2013	9 weeks	363
2014	12 weeks	477
2015	15 weeks	Not Available (**)
2016 (April)	20 weeks	63

(*) A processing time was not published in relation to carer's benefit for the period in question as the processing system did not support it. The number of claims pending decision is given as an alternative indicative measure.

(**) Processing time/number pending statistics not available as the claims were being processed on two separate systems due to service delivery modernisation work.

The Department is committed to ensuring that claims are processed as expeditiously as possible. Processing times vary across schemes, depending on the differing qualification criteria. Schemes that require a high level of documentary evidence from the customer, particularly in the case of disability and caring schemes, can take longer to process. Similarly, means-tested payments can also require more detailed investigation and interaction with the applicant, thereby lengthening the decision making process. Delays can also arise when the application form is not completed fully or supporting documentation is not provided at claim stage or where additional information has been requested from the applicant but remains outstanding.

Carer's allowance, which is a means-tested scheme, is experiencing delays presently, averaging 20 weeks in April 2016. Delays are also occurring in the processing of carer's benefit, where claims are processed in an approx. average of 11 weeks at present. This primarily is

due to an ongoing increase in new claim intake over the past few years to these schemes and the complexity attached to processing of these applications. In addition, there is sometimes a reluctance on the part of applicants to give full information at application stage thereby slowing down the processing of their application and in some cases necessitating a visit by a Departmental investigative officer.

Reducing these waiting times is a priority for my Department. As part of its programme of service delivery modernisation, a range of initiatives aimed at streamlining the processing of claims, supported by modern technology, have been implemented by my Department in recent years. Operational processes, procedures and the organisation of work are continually reviewed to ensure that processing capability is maximised.

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

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Community Employment Schemes Eligibility

128. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Social Protection if an exemption exists to allow a person (details supplied) who has completed three years on a community employment scheme to apply and access a further community employment scheme before turning 55 years of age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16162/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): In general, cumulative maximum participation on community employment (CE) by an individual is 3 years for persons under 55 years of age and 6 years for persons of 55 years of age up to State Pension age. Participation on CE prior to 3 April 2000 is not counted.

There is no exemption from these rules for a person in the fire service who has completed 3 years on a community employment scheme to allow the person to access a further community employment scheme before turning 55 years of age.

However, there are a range of options open to those who do not qualify for CE. In this context the Department's Intreo staff will be happy to advise the individual of other options that might best suit their needs.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility

129. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Social Protection the short-term, medium-term and long-term social protection implications for a person who plans to leave full-time employment to upskill through a three year full-time course in an institute of technology; what this will mean for the person's future entitlements under the State pension (contributory) scheme, the jobseeker's allowance scheme and so on; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16249/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): While in employment, workers pay PRSI contributions based on their earnings. These contributions will assist them in establishing entitlement to long-term benefits such as State pension (contributory) and short-term benefits such as jobseekers' benefit. If they leave employment to pursue a full-time course of

education and will no longer be paying PRSI, they can protect their social insurance record by paying voluntary contributions or they may, subject to certain conditions, qualify for credited contributions (credits). Voluntary contributions assist in maintaining entitlement to long-term benefits such as the State pension contributory. To become a voluntary contributor a person must:

- have paid at least 520 weeks PRSI in either employment or self-employment;
- apply within 12 months of the end of the tax year during which he/she last paid compulsory insurance or were last awarded a credited contribution;
- agree to pay voluntary contributions from the start of the contribution week that follows the week in which he/she leaves compulsory insurance.

A former worker who becomes a full time student may qualify for credits if they have paid at least 1 PRSI contribution while working and begin their course of study before the age of 23. Student credits are awarded when the insured person returns to work.

Credits protect social insurance entitlements by bridging gaps in an employee's social insurance record, where they are not in a position to pay PRSI, such as during periods spent in full-time education. In combination with paid PRSI contributions, credits assist employees in qualifying for short-term schemes and enhance the level of benefit for long-term schemes.

Further information can be found on www.welfare.ie or www.citizensinformation.ie.

Exceptional Needs Payments

130. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if and when he will issue a payment to a person (details supplied) under the exceptional needs payments scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16258/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): PQ 12464 refers. The person concerned made an application towards payment for a gas central heating system installation in April 2016. Upon assessment of the application and supporting documentation the deciding officer deemed that the person concerned was in a position to provide for the cost of this installation from her own resources and the application was refused.

This case was reviewed and the person concerned has been advised by letter that the review of the decision to refuse her application for an ENP upheld the original decision on the basis that the heating works required were foreseen.

The original decision and review took into consideration that the person concerned is living in the house concerned rent and mortgage free for a number of years; that her weekly income is above the Supplementary Welfare Allowance (SWA) rate for her family size and includes a weekly maintenance payment of €100 which was not declared on her application form. In addition, it transpires that the house is owned by her and two siblings who would each have a liability for repairs to the house.

The person concerned was further advised to make an application for repair work on her current heating system which would be considered as an unforeseen expense. An application form was issued on 01/06/2016. When received, the application will be examined and a decision issued as soon as possible.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Payments

131. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Social Protection when he will issue a decision to a person (details supplied) under the carer's allowance scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16261/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The application for carer's allowance in respect of the person concerned was awarded on 8 June 2016 and the first payment is due to issue to the person's nominated post office on 16 June 2016.

Arrears of allowance due from 14 January 2016 have issued by cheque. The person concerned was notified of these details on 8 June 2016.

I hope this clarified the matter for the Deputy

State Pension (Contributory) Applications

132. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an appeal by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16262/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The person concerned was awarded state pension (contributory) at a reduced rate with effect from 11 January 2015, based on his available insurance record. The person concerned subsequently requested a review, based on information regarding additional employment that was not included in the social insurance record relied upon by the Deciding Officer.

The new information was forwarded to the Department's Client Eligibility Services (CES) section for consideration. The matter was referred to a social welfare inspector for further investigation. Following receipt of the inspector's report earlier this week and a review of the evidence available, a decision has been made to include an additional 50 ordinary rate contributions, in respect of 1975, on the person's social insurance record.

The person's entitlement to state pension (contributory) will now be reviewed by a Deciding Officer based on the revised social insurance record and the person concerned will be notified of the outcome without delay.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

133. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Social Protection when he will issue a decision to a person (details supplied) for carer's allowance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16263/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I confirm that my department received an application for carer's allowance (CA) from the person concerned on 6 May 2016. Unfortunately, there are currently delays in the processing of new applications. 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.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

JobPath Implementation

134. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Social Protection the level of expertise and experience in the JobPath programme that will enable payment-by-results providers to identify issues around illness, injury, mental ill health or disability that might require additional support of the kind traditionally provided by EmployAbility Services nationwide for jobseekers; the level of provision in the programme to address the additional supports required; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16281/16]

135. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Social Protection the protocol in place and how he will operate referrals from JobPath to the EmployAbility Services where it transpires that a recipient under the jobseeker's allowance scheme and the JobPath scheme requires additional supports that are not available under the latter but are available under the EmployAbility Service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16283/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 134 and 135 together.

JobPath is a new approach to employment activation that supports people who are long-term unemployed and those most distant from the labour market to secure and sustain full-time paid employment. The EmployAbility Service is an employment and recruitment service to assist people with a disability to secure and maintain a job in the open labour market.

Only clients in receipt of a jobseeker payment are referred to JobPath. By contrast most clients assisted by the EmployAbility Service are people with disabilities on long term disability payments such as disability allowance or invalidity pension. It is unlikely therefore that many JobPath clients will have recourse to the EmployAbility service.

JobPath staff receive awareness training in relation to a range of conditions, including mental health and addictions. JobPath providers seek to direct clients to the most appropriate service to best support their needs and to complement the JobPath service. Where it transpires that a person on JobPath requires additional supports that are not available on JobPath but such supports are available under the EmployAbility Service then the JobPath provider will contact the Department so arrangements may be made for the person to avail of the EmployAbility Service either in addition, or as an alternative, to the JobPath service.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Family Income Supplement Appeals

136. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if the family income supplement appeals office is adequately staffed given that it is not uncommon for appeals to take a number of months (details supplied); if he will provide more resources to enable it to respond to applicants within a reasonable time given the importance of this payment to parents

trying to excel in employment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16352/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The person concerned applied for Family Income Supplement (FIS) on the 4th December 2015 and was awarded FIS with effect from 26th November 2015. They were awarded FIS at a weekly rate of €38.00 from 26 November 2015 and €41.00 from 7th January 2016 (increase due to budgetary changes in FIS income limits).

The person concerned had her employment contract terminated at the end of 2015 and she then transferred to jobseekers allowance (JA) in January 2016. In February 2016, she recommenced employment and re-claimed and was reinstated on FIS at the original weekly rate of €41.00. In accordance with the rules governing eligibility for FIS, where a person loses but then re-gains eligibility for FIS within the 52 week period from the awarding of the original claim, they requalify at the same rate of FIS for the remainder of the original 52 week period.

On 13 April 2016 the person in question, being dissatisfied, appealed this decision to the independent social welfare appeals office (SWAO). On the 1st June 2016 the claim and a submission from the deciding officer was sent to the SWAO. The SWAO will be in touch with the person in question in relation to the progress of the appeal in due course.

The delay in sending the file and submission to the SWAO in this case is regretted. There is, necessarily, some delay in processing a request for appeal in FIS section which may include a review of the decision by a FIS DO and/or a clarification letter to the claimant. Carrying out this review/clarification work often removes the need for an appeal to go ahead as the customer understands better the reason(s) for the decision.

The position regarding processing of FIS appeals is monitored on a regular basis to ensure that any delays are minimised.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

137. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Social Protection when he will return a file from an inspector regarding an application by a person (details supplied) under the carer's allowance scheme. [16321/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I confirm that my department received an application for carer's allowance (CA) from the person concerned on 3 December 2015.

The application was referred by a deciding officer (DO) to a local social welfare inspector (SWI) to assess the level of care being provided, assess means and confirm that all the conditions for receipt of carer's allowance are satisfied. I understand that the SWI is carrying out his/her enquiries at present. Once the SWI has reported, a DO will make a full decision and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Consular Services Staff

138. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the

additional personnel and resources he will deploy to the Irish Embassy and Consulate General office in Brazil during the Olympic and Paralympics Games; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16131/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Olympic and Paralympic Summer Games will take place in Rio de Janeiro between 5 August, and 18 September 2016.

Based on estimates from the Olympic Council of Ireland and elsewhere, we expect relatively modest numbers of Irish citizens to travel to Brazil for the Games – perhaps a few hundred in total. My Department’s current travel advice for Brazil advises Irish citizens to exercise normal precautions. Particular risks highlighted include high crime levels, road safety issues and mosquito-borne diseases.

The Embassy of Ireland in Brasilia and Consulate General in São Paulo have been actively engaging with the Brazilian authorities in relation to all aspects of planning for the tournament, including ensuring that visiting Irish citizens attending Rio 2016 stay safe. A full operational plan will be disclosed in due course, when all logistical issues have been taken into consideration, and a more accurate estimate of the numbers of Irish citizens travelling is available.

Consular Services Provision

139. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade to provide assistance to persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16248/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am aware of this tragic case, and wish to offer my heartfelt condolences to the family of this young man. I also wish to assure them of the continued support and assistance of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and our Embassy in Vietnam.

My Department has been providing consular assistance to the family of the Irish citizen in question through our Embassy in Hanoi and the Consular Assistance Unit in Dublin, and is in ongoing contact with the family through the appointed Garda Liaison Officer.

My Department has assisted the family in a number of ways, mainly focused on liaison with the local Vietnamese authorities, including in relation to arrangements for the formal identification of the deceased; the carrying-out of the post-mortem and arrangements for the repatriation of the citizen’s remains. I can confirm that the autopsy report on the deceased was sent via the Consular Assistance Unit in Dublin to the family’s Garda Liaison Officer in March 2016 and has been received by the family. Continuing engagement between our Embassy and local authorities has also confirmed that the police report was sent by local police to Gardaí via Interpol in May 2016.

Let me assure the Deputy that my Department will continue to offer all possible consular assistance to the family and continue to keep them updated on developments, while also remaining engaged with the relevant local authorities on this matter.

Human Rights

140. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he is aware of the critical funding crisis facing the Inter-American Court on Human Rights; the implications

that this crisis might have on cases such as that of a person (details supplied); and if he has taken steps through the European Union and bilateral communications with funding countries to address this crisis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16288/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The promotion and protection of human rights is a priority theme of Ireland's foreign policy and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) has made an extremely valuable contribution to addressing impunity and raising awareness of human rights abuses across the Americas. Officials from my Department met the Executive Secretary of the IACHR, Mr. Emilio Álvarez Icaza, during his visit to Dublin in March 2016 and reiterated Ireland's support for and appreciation of the work of the IACHR. I am aware of the funding crisis currently faced by the organisation and officials from the Embassy of Ireland in Washington DC are following developments closely. Irish officials will also participate in a discussion on the issue at EU working group level in Brussels this week.

It is not clear at this stage what impact the funding crisis might have on petitions to the Inter-American court system. My officials will remain in close contact with the IACHR with a view to minimising any potential negative effects.

Ireland has in the past provided financial contributions to the IACHR for its work in supporting the work of human rights defenders in Latin America. However, the primary responsibility for ensuring the sustainable financing of the organisation and its activities lies with the States of the region. I echo the statement of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights who, in his address to the United Nations Human Rights Council on 13 June, called on the countries of the Americas to support their regional human rights system through regular financial contributions.

The specific case referred to by the Deputy remains a priority for the Government, and my Department is in ongoing contact with the family involved.

Northern Ireland

141. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the recent report of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland into the Loughinisland murders in County Down in June 1994; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16353/16]

142. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his proposals to discuss with members of the Northern Ireland Executive and with the British Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Ms Theresa Villiers, the recent report by the Police Ombudsman of Northern Ireland into the Loughinisland murders in County Down in June 1994; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16354/16]

143. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his proposals to discuss with the British Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Ms Theresa Villiers, the widespread concerns about collusion by the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the British Army with paramilitary organisations resulting in sectarian mass murder; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16355/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 141 to 143, inclusive, together.

The report by the Police Ombudsman of Northern Ireland into the events surrounding the tragic murder of six men in Loughinisland in 1994 causes deep concerns.

My thoughts are first and foremost with the families of these victims for whom this report will be a very difficult reminder of their loss and pain. The Ombudsman's report fundamentally vindicates the concerns the families have raised over many years and their continuing search for justice.

The Ombudsman's findings are deeply disturbing; in particular his determination that "collusion is a significant feature of the Loughinisland murders".

The report must now be carefully examined with a view to the question of further investigations and possible prosecutions. The Chief Constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland has made clear that the PSNI remains firmly committed to apprehending those responsible for these appalling sectarian murders.

Despite its disturbing findings, the report is an important reminder of the central importance of the Police Ombudsman in supporting public confidence in the new policing arrangements in Northern Ireland, as envisaged in the Patten Report. I welcome the full co-operation of the Police Service of Northern Ireland with the Police Ombudsman's investigation.

Cases involving collusion such as the Loughinisland Massacre, must be adequately addressed if we are to achieve a genuinely reconciled society. Successive Irish Governments, in our ongoing bilateral relations with the UK and through the European Court of Human Rights at Strasbourg, have consistently raised the issue of collusion with the British Government.

I intend on raising this issue again at my next meeting with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. Many families, including those bereaved by incidents in which collusion has been alleged, continue to deal not only with the awful pain of losing a loved one, but with the struggle for answers decades after these traumatic events. I understand and acknowledge the frustration of families who for too long have had to contend with inadequate mechanisms for addressing their cases.

The Police Ombudsman's report is yet another stark reminder of the need to agree mechanisms for dealing with the painful legacy of the past in Northern Ireland. The establishment of a new comprehensive framework for dealing with the past, as envisaged in the Stormont House Agreement, remains a priority for me in my engagement with the British Government and the political parties in Northern Ireland. I believe that these mechanisms offer the best hope of helping the thousands of families touched by loss of loved ones in the Troubles – including those affected by collusion.

Irish Aid

144. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade to provide a list of the non-government organisations funded by Irish Aid since 2000. [16325/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Government's development programme, Irish Aid, strongly supports a range of NGO partners in delivering long-term development assistance in the areas of health, education, governance, nutrition, livelihoods, agriculture, social protection and human rights. Irish Aid also supports NGOs' work in providing humanitarian assistance in emergency situations, and in promoting and delivering development education programmes. This support is based on the recognised role of civil society organisations in delivering assistance to those most in need, and the strong support for NGOs by the Irish public. Irish Aid funding to NGOs is provided directly from HQ and through our programmes in our Key Partner Countries.

Ireland consistently channels a higher proportion of our overall Official Development Assistance through NGOs than most major international donors. This has been acknowledged internationally, including in the OECD Development Assistance Committee's Peer Review in 2014 which commended Ireland for the scale of its investment in the NGO sector, and for the policy engagement with civil society.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, which manages the Irish Aid programme, is currently finalising the financial annexes for the 2015 Irish Aid Annual Report, which will be published shortly. The 2014 Report showed that 27% of Ireland's total Official Development Assistance - some €167,092 million - was channelled through development Non-Governmental Organisations.

Since 2012, the Department has published details of Irish Aid funding to all civil society organisations of more than € 50,000 annually in the Irish Aid Annual Report, which is available on the Irish Aid website at www.irishaid.ie. The Question covers funding back to 2000, information on which will take time to retrieve from the financial system. My officials are available to assist the Deputy on further inquiries in relation to the details of this funding.

As an indication of the extent of the partnerships involved, the table below sets out the full list of NGOs funded by Irish Aid in 2014, the most recent year for which the details are available. This includes NGOs receiving funding below €50,000 in 2014.

The list of NGOs funded by Irish Aid in 2014 is:

Concern Worldwide

Trócaire

Goal

Misean Cara

International Committee of the Red Cross

Self Help Africa

World Vision Ireland

Christian Aid Ireland

Plan Ireland

Oxfam Ireland

Halo Trust

International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent

Irish Council for International Students

Save the Children

Technoserve

Sight Savers Ireland

Concern Universal

Care International
Médicins Sans Frontières
International Medical Corps UK
International Rescue Committee
Sos Sahel Ethiopia
Action Aid
FAWE Uganda
Tilitonse
FHI Solutions
Clinton Health Access Initiative
Comprehensive Community Based Rehabilitation
VSO Ireland
Traidlinks
The Micronutrient Initiative
Helpage International
Childfund Ireland
Farm Radio International
Benjamin Mkapa Hiv/Aids Foundation (Bmaf)
Irish Fair Trade Network
Children In Crossfire
Aidlink
SNV Tanzania
Front Line
Comhlámh
Sonke Gender Justice Network
Helen Keller International
Save the Children
Tearfund Ireland
HIVOS
The Centre for Counselling Nutrition & Health Care
Sikika

Camfed International

Vita

Habitat for Humanity Ireland

Associacao Progresso

Uganda Women's Network

Transparency International

Mviwata

AMREF

The Alliance of Mayors and Municipal Leaders - Hiv

Aids Foundation Of South Africa

MAG - Vietnam

Serve in Solidarity Ireland

Dóchas

Centre For Domestic Violence

Evangelical Association of Malawi

National Smallholder Farmers - Malawi

Haki Elimu

Inst.Estu.Sociais E Economicos

St. Simon Peter Vocational Training Centre

Oxfam GB

Irish Development Education Association

Suas Educational Development

Gorta

Aids Consortium

Straight Talk Foundation

Kivulini Women's Rights Organisation

Misa Zambia

Farm Africa

The Minority Rights Group

Bóthar

CHOICE

International Crisis Group
Platform For Social Protection
The Carter Centre
We Effect (formerly Swedish Cooperation Centre)
Health Poverty Action
Raising Voices
Anti-Slavery International
A-Z Children's Charity
Ndeke Primary School
Apheda Vietnam
Irish Forum For Global Health
Gorongosa National Park
Water Aid
War on Want Northern Ireland
Ecpat International
Value Added In Africa
Friends Of Londiani
Aids Partnership With Africa
CDI Vietnam
International Service for Human Rights
ISEE Vietnam
Zambia Open Community Schools
CBOS Inhambane
International Relief Development in Mozambique
The Asia Foundation Vietnam
Msd Vietnam
Civicus
Camara Education Ltd.
Viet Health Vietnam
Hope Foundation
Agricultural Non State Actors

15 June 2016

Henry Dunant Centre For Humanitarian Dialogue

HAP International

Community Markets For Conservation

Irish Human Rights Commission

Glencree Centre For Reconciliation

Volunteers In Irish Veterinary Association

Christian Blind Mission Ireland

MRFCG

Orbis Ireland

Aidspan

Restless Development

Crisis Management Initiative

SA Hiv/Aids Information Dissemination Service

Yesh Din Volunteers For Human Rights

Gisha-Legal Centre For Freedom

Saferworld

John Paul II Justice And Peace Centre

Bimkom Planners For Planning Rights

80:20 Educating+Acting For A Better World

Community Led Total Sanitation Foundation

Safaids

Palestinian Centre For Human Rights

CRD Vietnam

National Youth Council Of Ireland

Al Haq, Law In The Service Of Man

Young Scientist & Technology Exhibition Tanzania

Comet ME

Addameer Prison Support And Human Rights

Jerusalem Legal Aid & Human Rights Centre

Miftah

The Haven Community Foundation

Eco-Unesco

IBEC

Irish Congress of Trade Unions

Lourdes Youth & Community Services

Skillshare International Ireland

Sierra Leone Local Aid

International Youth Foundation

Law Society of South Africa

Family Aids Caring Trust (Chiredzi)

Diocese of Mutare Community Care Programme

UPR Info

Friends in Ireland

Latin America Solidarity Centre

Foundation Nepal

Amnesty International Irish Section

Dialogue Advisory Group (Dag)

An Taisce - Green Schools

CRS Vietnam

Pvtawelthungerhilfe/Gaa Vietnam

Institute Human Rights & Business Vietnam

Interpeace

Centre For Global Education Northern Ireland

Crisis Action Ltd

Global Alliance Improved Nutrition

Inter-Religious Council of Uganda

Development Perspectives

Inishowen Development Partnership

Uganda Episcopal Conference

Global Schoolroom

Pamodzi - Promoting The Rule Of Law

Women Fund Tanzania

Tools For Solidarity
Dublin & Dún Laoghaire Etb
Afri
Eil Intercultural Learning
Dennis Hurley Peace Institute
Martin Ennals Foundation
Acholi Education Initiative
Waterford One World Centre
Csds Vietnam
Plan International
Ground Work Llc
Kerry Action Development Education (Kade)
Cork Omdurman Partnership
Uganda Radio Network
Rural Development Center
Prospectus Consultoria E Servicos, Lda
Church Of Ireland Bishops Appeal
Zambia National Education Coalition
Vnu Vietnam
Friends Of The Earth Ireland
National Council Of YMCA's In Ireland
Development Education Project Liam McCarton
St Bakhita School
Austrian Studycentre For Peace & Conflict Resolution
St Patricks Basic School
Monze Mission Hospital
Ner Clinic
The Irish Girl Guides
Show Racism The Red Card
Escola Prmaria Dom Luis Gonzaga
The Learning Project Asia

Mamas Club Uganda
Intelligent Solutions
Chisomo Children's Club
Pallotine Rehabilitation Centre
Csaga Vietnam
Giri Vietnam
Action For The City Development
Cheshire Homes Society Of Zambia
Bac Giang Social Protection Ctr Vietnam
Hospice Jinja Uganda
Renew Project Vietnam
Thanh Hoa Union Friendship Org Vietnam
Franciscan Missionary Sisters Of Africa
Dayspring Streetlife Project
St. Francis Naggalama Hospital
Uganda Law Society
Rugando College
Missionary Sisters Of Mary Mother Of The Church
Stella Maris Primary Sch. Nsube
Peter Phiri
Medical Missionaries Of Mary

Telecommunications Infrastructure

145. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the income generated from mobile telephone masts at Garda Síochána stations in the Dublin region in each of the years 2014 to 2016 to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16135/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán Canney): The income generated from licences granted to mobile phone operators in respect of telecommunication masts at Garda Stations in the Dublin Region from 2014 to date, inclusive of VAT is contained in the following table.

Year	Income Generated
2014	€1.7m
2015	€1.2m

Year	Income Generated
2016 to end May	€0.9m

Departmental Staff Allowances

146. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will review the rules PeoplePoint applies in limiting an optical allowance for work usage purposes only (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16296/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In relation to the Deputy's request for a review of the optical allowance, I am informed that PeoplePoint administers the allowances system on behalf of the employing Department, in line with Civil Service HR policies and indeed Government policy. PeoplePoint does not have any role in assessing eligibility for allowances. Eligibility is a matter for the employing Department. PeoplePoint is the HR and pensions administration shared service centre for the Civil Service, it provides administration services on behalf of its clients.

In relation to the individual concerned, I am informed that an email was sent to this person on 13 April informing her that the form she submitted, which was completed by her optician, did not indicate a refund was due. She was given the opportunity to resubmit her form. Once the correct information has been provided by her optician her application will then be considered in line with policy.

Leader Programmes

147. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht when she will provide Leader funding to groups and start-up businesses. [16331/16]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department is currently concluding the selection of LEADER local development strategies. I expect to issue the first contracts to Local Action Groups in the coming weeks as discussions on contract and implementation arrangements are concluded.

Funding will commence under the programme, including for the organisations referred to in the Question, as contracts are signed with the respective Local Action Groups. Any group or start-up business looking for support should liaise directly with the Local Action Group for their area.

Cultural Policy

148. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht to adopt a new all-party approach to national cultural policy; to submit the culture policy, Culture 2025, to the relevant Oireachtas committee as a matter of priority; to ensure that Culture 2025 is allocated appropriate time for debate in Dáil Éireann; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16146/16]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Significant progress has been made in drafting the first National Cultural Policy - *Culture 2025*. This followed a major public consultation process in 2015, including a national cultural workshop held in October at the Royal Hospital in Kilmainham. Work by my Department, the expert

steering group and a wider expert committee continued on the document in early 2016 and is currently on-going. This expert committee has broad representation across arts and cultural interests.

The *Programme for a Partnership Government* commits to the publication of *Culture 2025* as a priority and I intend to submit the draft policy to Government for consideration in the coming weeks. As I have stated previously, this first such policy will be a living document and will form the basis of an on-going dialogue with all who are interested in cultural policy. I look forward to consideration of *Culture 2025* by the Oireachtas and would very much welcome the adoption of an all-party approach in this matter.

Commemorative Events

149. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the date for the national famine memorial day 2016. [16147/16]

150. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht to designate a fixed Sunday in order to mark the national famine memorial day every year. [16148/16]

151. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will mark the famine victims' mass grave in Glasnevin Cemetery in Dublin 9, located between the O'Connell and Parnell monuments, at the 2016 commemoration. [16149/16]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 149 to 151, inclusive, together.

As Chair of the National Famine Commemoration Committee, I am responsible for ensuring on behalf of the Government that appropriate arrangements are in place to commemorate the Great Irish Famine, my main focus being that the victims of the famine are remembered appropriately and respectfully.

While the commemoration ceremony retains a degree of continuity in its format, the date and the cultural elements of the commemoration may change from year to year. I do not consider it desirable to fix the same date each year, given the factors that may need to be considered, such as the site selection process, the availability of the lead person to officiate at the ceremony and the general arrangements at community level. This flexibility facilitates the commemoration being held in the most appropriate context each year. In the circumstances, I have no plans to designate a fixed date for the National Famine Commemoration.

With regard to 2016, the National Famine Commemoration Committee has agreed that the National Famine Commemoration will take place this year at Glasnevin Cemetery, Dublin, on Sunday, 11 September. The precise arrangements have not yet been finalised but it has been agreed that a memorial will be put in place to mark the event and officials from my Department are in contact with Glasnevin Cemetery in this regard.

Special Areas of Conservation Designation

152. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will amend the conservation designation with respect to the River Blackwater special area of conservation in County Cork following her studies on the prevalence of the freshwater pearl mussel; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16256/16]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The River Blackwater Special Area of Conservation (SAC) includes the main river channel and many tributaries from the headwaters to the sea. The SAC has many habitats and species which are qualifying interests in the Annexes to the Habitats Directive. The full list of qualifying interests is available at <http://www.npws.ie/protected-sites/sac/002170>.

One of the species originally included as a qualifying interest is the freshwater pearl mussel, which occurs in relatively small numbers at a number of locations along much of the length of the river.

My Department prepared a Strategy for Conservation of the Freshwater Pearl Mussel in Ireland in 2011, with the objective of ensuring the long-term survival of the species in Ireland, while maintaining its broad geographic range. The strategy sets out a prioritised approach to the implementation of measures necessary to conserve the species. The strategy seeks to ensure that the most important pearl mussel populations in Ireland, and indeed in the EU, will return to favourable conservation status in the short to medium term.

In developing the strategy it was noted that measures, irrespective of cost, would be likely to be ineffective in the River Blackwater, owing to the very large catchment and the intensity of pressures therein. For that reason my Department is currently working to amend the conservation objectives for the Blackwater SAC, so that there would no longer be the objective of maintaining or restoring mussel populations in the main channel of the river. However the conservation objectives for protecting the mussel will continue to apply in the Lickey and Allow tributaries of the Blackwater, which are included in the SAC.

It is also intended to amend the European Communities Environmental Objectives (Freshwater Pearl Mussel) Regulations 2009. (S.I. 296 of 2009) to give further effect to the alteration of the conservation objectives for the River Blackwater SAC.

These changes do not alter the boundaries of the River Blackwater SAC, and do not affect the protection afforded to the other qualifying interests therein.

Special Areas of Conservation

153. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the status of persons who wish to register land in their own names (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16293/16]

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

Officials from my Department have recently been in contact with their solicitor in relation to this matter.

Special Areas of Conservation

154. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will permit turf cutters to cut turf on a bog (details supplied) following the redesignation of 46 natural and heritage areas in the first 100 days in Government, as per the programme for Government; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16324/16]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Review of Raised Bog Natural Heritage Area (NHA) Network, published in January 2014, has concluded that Ireland could more effectively achieve conservation of threatened raised bog habitat through focused protection and restoration of a reconfigured network. This will entail the phasing out of turf cutting on certain natural heritage areas by 1 January 2017 and the partial or complete de-designation of certain natural heritage areas.

The *Programme for a Partnership Government* includes a commitment to publish new legislation to de-designate the natural heritage areas in question within the first 100 days of Government.

The site referred to in the Deputy's Question is a raised bog special area of conservation. It is not a natural heritage area which is scheduled for de-designation. Therefore, the restrictions on turf cutting on raised bog special areas of conservation, including on the site referred to in the Deputy's Question, will not be affected by the proposed de-designation of certain natural heritage areas.

Services for People with Disabilities

155. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health his plans to introduce a direct payment system and personalised budgets for persons with disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16275/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The establishment of a Task Force on Personalised Budgets is a key element in the Programme for Government's commitment to give people with disabilities more control in accessing services, greater independence and choice. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

While the concept of personalised budgets is not limited to health and personal social services, my initial view is that the Task Force should concentrate on personalised budgets for services for people with disabilities funded by the HSE in the first instance. Some work has already commenced on scoping how to introduce individualised budgets in health-funded disability services as part of the reform programme Transforming Lives.

The Government is keen to set up the Task Force as soon as possible and as first step will identify a suitable person to act as Chair and drive the project forward. The next actions will be to address the detailed arrangements including:

- Membership of the Task Force and Secretariat;
- Define the scope of the project/Terms of reference; and
- Develop a project plan and associated timelines.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme

156. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health if he will reassess the assessment of a person (details supplied) under the nursing homes support scheme if the person's situation changes. [16372/16]

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Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Hospital Services

157. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health when he will schedule an operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16093/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): 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 Care Packages Data

158. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on a waiting list under the home care package in the Health Service Executive's greater Dublin regions (details supplied), by persons waiting one week or longer, one month or longer, by patients awaiting discharge from hospital; if there is a funding shortfall within the Health Service Executive for the provision of these vital supports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16094/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): 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 Status

159. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the status of an occupational therapy appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16103/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service issue, this question has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy. If you have not

received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Speech and Language Therapy

160. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be called for speech therapy. [16127/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service issue, this question has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Drug Treatment Programmes

161. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to increase the number of inpatient unit detoxification beds and adolescent residential detoxification beds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16129/16]

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

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

Home Help Service Provision

162. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the cost of providing an additional 250,000 hours under the home help scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16130/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): 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.

Defined Benefit Pension Schemes

163. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Health the steps he will take to ensure the Central Remedial Clinic's plan for employees is reinstated until such time as he has conducted a comprehensive investigation and assessment of all matters pertaining to the clinic up to its closure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16150/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Central Remedial Clinic (CRC) is funded by the Health Service Executive under Section 38 of the Health Act 2004 and employs in the region of 287 employees. It is understood that in the region of 45 employees are members of the funded pension scheme in question.

It is regrettable that the CRC took a decision to cease contributions to the scheme without first consulting with the HSE in relation to scheme solvency and without seeking a viable alternative for the employees concerned. In particular, options for restructuring the scheme should have been explored with the HSE in advance of a decision to wind up the scheme.

Following receipt of information from the CRC in relation to the wind up of the scheme, the CRC was requested as a matter of urgency, to prepare viable alternative proposals in conjunction with the HSE. A detailed business case in relation to alternative options has not yet been submitted by the HSE in relation to this matter.

When a detailed business case is received from the HSE, my Department will, as a matter of urgency, consider the proposals in conjunction with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. The latter is responsible for Government policy in relation to public service pensions. Pension schemes and pension terms for public servants generally require the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

Services for People with Disabilities

164. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health why he has not provided an assessment of need to a person (details supplied) under the Disability Act 2005; why there is such a delay; the action he is taking to resolve the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16151/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

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

Hospital Appointments Status

165. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health to expedite surgery for a person (details supplied). [16152/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): 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 sched-

uled 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 Provision

166. **Deputy Colm Brophy** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive speech and language therapy; and the reason for the delayed referral. [16159/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service issue, this question has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Health Services

167. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health his views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding funding. [16163/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): As this is a service issue, this question has been referred to the HSE for direct reply. If you have not received a reply within 15 working days, please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Health Services

168. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health the grants and financial assistance available to a person (details supplied). [16166/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): 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.

Diabetes Strategy

169. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Health if he will fill, on schedule, the three posts comprising a mixture of community-based diabetes nurse specialists, senior dietitians and senior podiatrists, which were sanctioned to support the diabetes community in west Dublin and County Kildare as part of the 2016 Health Service Executive's plan, which sanctioned 36 posts nationally to support the implementation of the type 2 diabetes cycle of care

initiative; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16252/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy):

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Health Services Provision

170. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of medical treatment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16255/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under EU Regulations, all persons ordinarily resident in the EU are entitled to apply for a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC). The EHIC certifies that the holder has the right to receive emergency healthcare during a temporary stay in any EU country as well as Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Iceland. This right is guaranteed to all persons who are covered by the public healthcare system of these countries. The European Health Insurance Card holder has the right to receive necessary treatment in the host Member State's public healthcare system on the same terms and at the same cost as nationals of the State concerned. Renal units in this State normally accommodate dialysis for those presenting an EHIC once contact has been made with them in advance of the patient travelling here and the patient's clinicians provide all relevant patient information to the consultants in the receiving renal unit here. Under bilateral arrangements, patients from the UK can bring evidence of UK residence instead of an EHIC.

The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible. If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, please contact my Private Office who will follow up the matter with them.

Medical Card Applications

171. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Health when he will process an application by a person (details supplied) under the medical card scheme; the outcome of the assessment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16259/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): 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.

Disability Services Provision

172. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health when he will provide a range of therapies, including occupational, speech and language therapies, to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16286/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

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

Hospital Appointments Status

173. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16294/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): 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.

Drug and Alcohol Task Forces

174. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide funding to an organisation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16299/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): The South West Regional Drug and Alcohol Task Force receives annual funding from the Health Service Executive to allocate to community based drugs initiatives at a local level. It is a matter for the Task Force concerned to ensure that its budget is effectively deployed based on locally identified needs and priorities, taking into account the changing nature of the drugs problem. Applications for funding by local organisations in the catchment area should be made directly to the Task Force.

As the Health Service Executive fund the Task Force, the matter has been referred to the Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

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

Hospital Appointments Administration

175. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive an appointment at a hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16301/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): 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 Staff Recruitment

176. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health his views on the lack of occupational therapists and early intervention teams in County Cork (details supplied); his plans to recruit more staff to assist families; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16306/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

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 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

177. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a person (details supplied) who is attending private physiotherapy in County Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16356/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service issue, this question has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Disability Support Services Provision

178. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the status of the piloting of an information technology programme through Ability West in County Galway. [16357/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the Deputy directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 days, please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Hospital Staff Recruitment

179. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the extensive recruitment plans he is putting in place to ensure the immediate employment of theatre staff at University College Hospital Galway, given that the hospital is finding it difficult to recruit theatre staff. [16358/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): 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.

Home Care Packages Provision

180. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if and when he will approve an application by a person (details supplied) under the home care package; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16330/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): 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.

HSE Staff Remuneration

181. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health further to previous parliamentary questions (details supplied), why staff in Midland Regional Hospital, Mullingar in County Westmeath, whom the Health Service Executive employs under different panels, receive different pay increments despite having identical practical experience; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16334/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Deputy has noted in a response to a similar PQ asked on 9 June 2016, the Public Service Agreement (PSA) 2013 to 2016 provided for the introduction of an Intern Scheme for Health Support Staff during the moratorium on recruitment and promotion within the public service as an exceptional recruitment measure. Under the terms of this Scheme, Interns were given a 2 year contract with a starting salary of 85% of the first point of Band 3 salary in year 1, progressing to 90% of same in year 2.

As the Deputy is aware, later discussions during the Lansdowne Road Agreement provided that where Interns had completed 18 months of satisfactory service, they would be regularised into permanent positions. HSE HR Circular 025/2015 on the Intern Scheme advised Hospital Groups that support grades should not be recruited to positions in services where there are existing Interns *in situ* unless those positions have been made available to those interns in the first

instance.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Eligibility

182. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Health to examine the inconsistencies and inequitable situation whereby the value of a person's house is assessed for three years only, but a farmer's land value is continued beyond three years under the fair deal scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16336/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): The Nursing Homes Support Scheme (NHSS) is a system of financial support for those assessed as needing long-term nursing home care. Participants contribute to the cost of their care according to their means while the State pays the balance of the cost. Participants' means are assessed on the basis of both their income and assets and in this context the principal private residence is assessed for a maximum of three years. There is no inequity or inconsistency here as this provision applies to all such residences, including those owned by farmers. In calculating contributions due, the Scheme does not differentiate between farms and other businesses. However, it is important to note that in specific circumstances, the farm or relevant business will, along with the principal private residence, be subject to the three year cap. These circumstances are as follows:

- a. The applicant has suffered a sudden illness or disability which caused them to require care services; and
- b. A substantial part of the working day of the applicant or their partner was regularly and consistently applied to the farming of the farm or carrying on of the relevant business until the onset of sudden illness or disability; and
- c. A family successor certifies in writing that he or she will on a consistent and regular basis apply a substantial part of his or her working day to the farming of the farm or carrying on of the relevant business.

When the Nursing Homes Support Scheme commenced in 2009, a commitment was made that it would be reviewed after three years. The Report of the Review was published in July 2015. A number of key issues have been identified for more detailed consideration across Departments and Agencies, including the treatment of business and farm assets for the purposes of the financial assessment element of the Scheme. In advance of the Review, submissions were sought from groups or bodies who wished to make a contribution, and the Irish Farmers' Association made a submission in this context on which they expanded at a subsequent meeting with officials of the Department of Health.

An Interdepartmental/Agency Working Group has been established to progress the recommendations contained in the Review. This Group is chaired by the Department of Health and includes representatives from the Department of the Taoiseach, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, the HSE, the Revenue Commissioners, and when required, the National Treatment Purchase Fund. The Group will consider the submission already made by the Irish Farmers' Association.

The Programme for a Partnership Government has committed to reviewing the Nursing Homes Support Scheme to remove any discrimination against small business and family farms. Any significant changes ultimately deemed necessary to the Scheme will require legislation and will accordingly be addressed together at the conclusion of the Review implementation process.

Primary Care Centres Provision

183. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Health the status of the much-needed primary care centre in Finglas, Dublin 11; and if he still has funding earmarked for it (details supplied). [16337/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service issue, this question has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments

184. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when he will issue payment to a person (details supplied) under the agri-environment options scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16088/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named commenced their AEOS contract on 1 September 2010. Payment issued 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 issue as soon as possible.

Horse Racing Industry

185. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine His plans to amend the statutory instrument that deals with the foal levy whereby this is payable in respect of a valuation placed on it by the owner of the stallion and not on the actual fee payable in these cases; if this is an equitable arrangement, given that there is no relationship between the levy and the stud fee; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16099/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Horse Racing Ireland (HRI) is a commercial state body established under the Horse and Greyhound Racing Act, 2001 and is responsible for the overall administration, promotion and development of the horse racing industry.

The current Foal Levy, which was introduced in 2000 on a statutory basis, applies to all thoroughbred foals registered in Ireland. The Foal Levy is currently calculated, based on advertised value of the nomination fee of the stallion and with reference to SI 735 of 2011 which is the governing legislation.

The levy is collected by HRI, and I am advised that basing the levy on the actual amount paid in a private transaction between two parties would, at best, place a heavy administrative burden on collection system, and that there are significant questions as to the practicability of such an arrangement. Furthermore, I understand there is a significant volume of coverings for which no fee or a significantly reduced fee is paid. This is particularly the case at the top end of

the market where foal shares are common.

HRI's Foal Levy Committee reviews the rates, bands and structures of the levy on an annual basis and have also considered potential alternative methodologies to calculate the levy due. They have concluded that the current banded/tiered approach represents the most equitable and appropriate way of securing the vital funds needed for the breeding sector.

There is currently a very high compliance with the levy.

Basic Payment Scheme Payments

186. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of agricultural payments to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16153/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named submitted a 2015 Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) application on 31 March 2016. In 2015 the closing date for receipt of applications without penalty was 29 May. Under the Terms and Conditions of the BPS all applications received after 29 May were subject to a late penalty of 1% per working day with a 100% late penalty applied if received after 23 June.

On this basis the BPS application is the subject of a 100% penalty and accordingly not eligible for payment. However the application was accompanied by medical evidence requesting that the 100% late penalty be waived on medical grounds under force majeure. This appeal is currently being examined and an Official from my Department will shortly be in direct contact with the person named.

Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme

187. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when he will process and issue payments under the targeted agricultural modernisation scheme 2; if he is aware that the delay is causing financial hardship and difficulties for families; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16164/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The necessary IT development work is underway to enable applicants in the TAMS II Schemes who have completed works for which they were approved to make a payment claim.

I expect that payments will commence next month.

TAMS Applications

188. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason for the delay in processing grant applications under the targeted agricultural modernisation scheme 2; the measures he is putting in place to resolve this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16165/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): All of the grant applications received in Tranche One of the TAMS II Schemes have undergone administrative checks and over 860 full approvals have issued in addition to the 1,100 part approvals

that issued to applicants who needed urgent dairy equipment and Low Emission Slurry Spreading Equipment.

The remaining eligible applications in Tranche One continue to be processed as speedily as possible. A further 755 applications from Tranche Two are with the local offices for approval and the remaining applications received for Tranche Two are undergoing the administrative checks. Every effort is being made by my Department to ensure that all eligible applicants receive their approvals shortly.

Food Exports

189. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the discussions he had at European Union level on the lifting of the Russian ban on certain food imports from the European Union; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16253/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The adverse effects of the closure of the Russian market arise from the combined impact of the African Swine Fever (ASF)-related ban of February 2014 and the Presidential decree of August 2014, which imposed a ban on agricultural products and foodstuffs from countries that have adopted sanctions against Russia in the context of the situation in Ukraine. These effects are still being keenly felt by farmers. While this is a difficult issue, Ireland has continued to urge the Commission at every opportunity over recent months, both at official and political levels, to intensify its political, technical and diplomatic efforts to unlock the Russian market, particularly in relation to products outside the scope of the Presidential decree, such as pig lards, fats and offal. I have personally raised the issue with Commissioner Hogan and at Council of Ministers.

For its part, the Commission has been working to make progress on this issue. It has been in regular, direct communication with the Russian authorities in relation to the ASF ban, arguing that an EU-wide ban is totally disproportionate given the limited incidence of ASF in a small number of Member States. It has also taken a case against Russia to the WTO's dispute settlement panel. This recently found broadly in favour of the EU, although an appeal process is expected to follow. In the meantime, the pigmeat sector continues to be supported via the exceptional market support measures agreed by Member States in recent months.

Farm Improvement Scheme Applications

190. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will pay the remaining part of a grant to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16254/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named was an applicant under the Farm Improvement Scheme and received grant-aid under the Scheme in respect of certain investments in 2008. However, one invoice was excluded for grant aid purposes as the contractor concerned was unable to provide tax clearance as required under the conditions of the scheme. To date, the required tax clearance has not been received by my Department and I am not therefore in a position to progress the matter further.

The applicant has been advised of the circumstances of each case and the Department's requirements to enable the remaining grant to be paid.

GLAS Applications

191. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when he will issue payment to a person (details supplied) under the green low-carbon agri-environment scheme; the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16257/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): An application under Tranche 1 of GLAS was received in my Department on the 21 May 2015 and the person named was approved into the GLAS 1 with effect from 1 October 2015. There are a number of applications, including that of the person named, remaining which have not passed all of the Department's pre-payment validation checks for the 2015 part-year payment. The Department is continuing to investigate these issues including the correction of any IT or data issues with a view to all these remaining cases meeting the payment validation checks so that they will be paid the full amount of their 2015 part-year payment at the same time the 2015 GLAS balancing payment is due to issue.

Sheepmeat Sector

192. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of qualifying farmers for the €25 million fund; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16292/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Programme for Government provided for an allocation of €25 million to the sheep sector. The proposed scheme will be submitted to the European Commission for approval shortly as part of an amendment to the Rural Development Programme. Consultations are ongoing between my Department and the relevant stakeholders. I am conscious that the scheme will have to take into account the different challenges that exist within the sheep sector in Ireland with particular account to be taken of the differences in management between lowland flocks and hill flocks.

In the context of the Rural Development Programme any scheme will have to be drafted in accordance with the parameters allowable under the RDP. I thank the Deputy for his suggestion. All suggestions received from all stakeholders will be considered by my Department in the context of what is allowable under the RDP.

In relation to the status of qualifying farmers for the fund, it is my intention to make this scheme available to as many active sheep farmers as possible to allow this sector to avail of the opportunities identified for it in Food Wise 2025.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Applications

193. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when he will issue payment to a person (details supplied) under the agri-environment options scheme 3; the reason for the delay; why he applied a penalty and the monetary value of the penalty; if he requires the person to be a member of the Connemara Pony Breeders Society; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16298/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named commenced their AEOS contract on 1st May 2013. Payment issued in respect of the 2013 Scheme year.

The applicant chose Conservation of Genetic Resources option as part of their AEOS contract. This action, which is paid in arrears, requires the applicant to be a member of an approved breed society, and to submit a payment claim on a yearly basis along with copies of monthly records of all registered animals held by the applicant.

Delays in payment occurred when the applicant did not send in the required documentation. The applicant has now confirmed that they do not wish to continue with the Conservation of Genetic Resources action, and payment in respect of the 2014 and 2015 scheme years have now been processed. Full payment due in respect of the 2014 Scheme year and part payment in respect of 2015 has issued, with the remaining 15% of 2015 to follow shortly.

AEOS is a voluntary scheme where applicants agree to abide by the Terms and Conditions on joining the Scheme. The Terms and Conditions of AEOS 3 state that where an action is not delivered a penalty of 10% of a full year's payment will apply. In the case of the person named this amounts to some €78.00 which will be deducted from Department payments in due course.

Transfer of Entitlements Application

194. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide a person (details supplied) with additional entitlements. [16327/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The registration details of the above herd number were transferred to the person named on 12th May 2015, however he does not hold any Basic Payment Scheme entitlements. Also, the person named did not submit a 2016 Transfer of entitlements application form to transfer entitlements into his name. The closing date for receipt of Transfer of Entitlement applications has now passed, however given the extenuating circumstances pertaining to the case my Department is willing to accept a late application at this stage. An official from my Department has been in contact with the person named to discuss the position outlined above.

Energy Prices

195. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources to report on the impact of Corrib Gas on energy security and pricing in the energy market; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16095/16]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Denis Naughten): Up until late 2015, 95% of Ireland's gas requirement was imported from Great Britain. The Corrib gas field, which came on stream in the final days of 2015, will have a significant impact on Ireland's security of gas supply when at full production. As published in Gas Networks Ireland's "Network Development Plan 2015", Corrib is expected to meet 77% of demand when in its first full year of commercial production. Following peak production levels Corrib gas supplies will steadily decline year on year.

With regard to pricing, the two main parts of the price of gas to the end customer are the tariff charged for the transportation of gas through the gas network, and the cost of the gas itself.

On tariffs, I have no statutory function in relation to the regulation of the gas market, including the matter of tariffs. This is entirely a matter for the Commission for Energy Regulation (CER) under the electricity and gas regulatory framework as set out in the various regulatory Acts. The CER is completely independent in the performance of its functions and required to

be so under national and EU law. The CER aims to ensure that the gas network meets the needs of the Irish gas customer at a reasonable and efficient cost.

On retail pricing, gas prices in Ireland are set against prices on the international gas markets. Gas is imported to Ireland through the natural gas network, or specifically through interconnection with Britain. The price of this imported gas is determined by the UK National Balancing Point price plus the cost of transportation to Ireland. The price of Corrib gas is referenced to the price of imported gas. As a result, Irish customers are exposed to fluctuations in international gas price and neither the Commission nor the gas suppliers have direct control over this part of the value chain.

Alternative Energy Projects

196. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the grant support available for photovoltaic solar energy production; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16270/16]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Programme for Government contains a commitment to facilitate the development of solar energy projects, recognising that solar photovoltaic (PV) projects could potentially contribute to meeting Ireland's renewable energy objectives. This commitment builds on the Energy White Paper published in December 2015 and recognises that solar also has the potential to provide a community dividend, thereby enhancing citizen participation in Ireland's energy future.

It is widely recognised that the deployment of solar PV in Ireland has the potential to increase energy security, contribute to our renewable energy targets, and support economic growth and jobs. In addition, solar PV can be deployed in roof-mounted or ground-mounted installations, and in this way it can empower Irish citizens and communities to take control of the production and consumption of energy. It is also recognised that while the cost competitiveness of solar PV has improved, it would still require a subsidy in order to be developed on a commercial basis. The provision and design of any subsidy will be the subject of detailed economic appraisal.

The first public consultation on the design of a new renewable electricity support scheme was published in 2015, and a second public consultation will take place before any new scheme is introduced. Details of the next public consultation will be advertised on the Department's website *www.dcenr.gov.ie*. Before any such scheme could be introduced, it would have to secure Government approval and State aid clearance from the European Commission.

Wind Energy Generation

197. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his plans to conduct a cost-benefit analysis of the investment in wind energy and increased generation and of the savings in fossil fuels such as gas in each of the years 2012 to 2015, inclusive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16271/16]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Denis Naughten): According to the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI), Ireland had an energy import dependency of 85% in 2014, which was estimated to cost €5.7 billion. This represents a decrease from a peak of 91% in 2006 and reflects the expanding use of Ireland's indigenous renewable energy resources, particularly wind energy over the same period.

From 2012 to the end of 2014, the use of wind energy and other renewables in Ireland increased by 29%, while the total cost of fossil fuel imports avoided in the sector over the same period is estimated at circa €855 million. The represents avoided costs of fossil fuel imports of €300 million in 2012, €300 million in 2013 and €255 million in 2014.

While the information for fossil fuel costs savings in 2015 is not available yet, I will arrange for the Deputy to receive this information once it is produced.

While the inherent benefits of increased use of wind energy in Ireland are apparent in terms of displacement of fossil fuels, consequent emissions reductions, increased security of supply and reducing the potential impact of fossil fuel price volatility, it is equally important to understand the potential cost of this transition.

Quantifying this cost is a complex task due to the number of influencing components. For example, while renewable electricity generation introduces savings by reducing the need to burn fossil fuels, this is offset to a certain extent by increased costs of system operation, the need for additional network investment, and the capital and operational costs of the renewable generators. In the past a number of studies have been completed by various parties in the energy sector focusing on particular aspects of this issue. However, a broad based analysis is being finalised by my Department, the SEAI, EirGrid and the CER, which looks at the range of components contributing to the projected costs and the financial impact on the electricity customer. The report will be published this year once the work has been completed.

Renewable Energy Incentives

198. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources to consider diversifying Ireland's renewable energy portfolio by incentivising the take-up of solar and biomass energy to meet our 2020 renewables targets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16272/16]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Programme for Government contains a commitment to facilitate the development of solar energy projects and to support the development of a sustainable bio-energy sector in Ireland. This commitment builds on similar such commitments in the Energy White Paper published in December 2015 which set out a long-term vision to develop Ireland's diverse and indigenous renewable energy resources in a cost effective manner.

It is widely acknowledged that no single technology will enable Ireland to meet our renewable energy or climate change objectives. Provisional data from the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) indicate that Ireland had reached 9.2% of the overall 16% renewable energy target at the end of 2015. This renewable energy mix was made up of wind, biomass, solar thermal, hydro generation, biogas, landfill gas, and waste-to-energy.

Work is under way to examine the design and cost of introducing a new Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) that will encourage the continued diversification of our renewable energy portfolio in the electricity sector. This scheme will examine the viability of supporting a range of new renewable energy technologies in Ireland, including solar photovoltaic (PV) and biomass generation.

At the same time, detailed economic analysis is underway in my Department to develop a Renewable Heat Incentive in Ireland. This support scheme will examine the potential to diversify the use of renewable technologies in the heating sector, and the use of biomass is being considered as part of this process.

Energy Prices

199. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his views that the Commission for Energy Regulation should introduce more regular reporting requirements to encourage wholesale gas and electricity providers to offer the most competitive prices to customers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16273/16]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Denis Naughten): I have no statutory function in the setting, review or reporting of electricity or gas prices. Responsibility for electricity and gas market regulation is a matter for the Commission for Energy Regulation (CER), which is an independent statutory body. However, for the information of the House, I can confirm that CER carries out statutory market monitoring functions, has the responsibility to ensure the market operates competitively for the benefit of the consumer, and accredits price comparison sites, such as www.bonkers.ie or www.switcher.ie, where energy consumers can assess prices and identify significant savings. A customer consuming the average amount of electricity could save over €150 by switching suppliers. The competitive energy market results in choice for consumers and businesses in terms of suppliers, products and prices, exerting downward pressure on prices.

Electricity and gas price statistics for Ireland and for both European Union (EU) and Eurozone Member States are publicly available. The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) publishes biannual reports presenting electricity and gas price statistics from Ireland and all European Union Member States. These reports analyse electricity and natural gas price statistics, as published and collected by EUROSTAT for Ireland and other European countries under the methodology for the EU Gas and Electricity Price Transparency Directive 90/377/EEC as amended by Council Decision 2007/394/EC. The latest EUROSTAT average electricity and gas price statistics as published by the SEAI on their website relate to the first half of 2015.

On 29 April of this year, Electric Ireland announced a 6% reduction off their unit rate for domestic electricity consumers and on May 18 Electric Ireland announced that their customers could avail of additional savings of up to 8.5%. On the 1st June SSE Airtricity announced a 5% reduction off their unit rate for both electricity and gas consumers as well as launching a new 8% reward discount. While I have no statutory role in the setting, review or reporting of energy prices I welcome these reductions by energy suppliers in domestic gas and electricity prices.

Broadcasting Authority of Ireland

200. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources when the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland will release its research project on media ownership. [16285/16]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Denis Naughten): Under section 28M(1) of the Competition and Consumer Protection Act 2014 the BAI are required to prepare a report which shall:

- Describe the ownership and control arrangements for undertakings carrying on a media business in the State;
- describe the changes to ownership and control arrangements of such undertakings over the past three years;
- and analyse the effects of such changes on plurality of the media in the State.

The BAI must then furnish this report to the relevant Minister.

In accordance with these requirements the BAI have submitted to me, as the relevant Minister, their Report on Ownership and Control of Media Businesses in Ireland 2012-2014. My department and I are currently considering the report and intend to publish it shortly.

Road Safety

201. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to mark EDWARD, the European Union Day Without a Road Death, and to promote and expand this concept through road safety campaigns and Government action; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16097/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): European Day Without a Road Death is an initiative of TISPOL- the European Traffic Police Network. This is an important initiative of which I am fully supportive of and I understand that the RSA will work closely with An Garda Síochána and other key partners to promote and raise awareness of this initiative in Ireland.

Under the Road Safety Authority Act 2006 (Conferral of Functions) Order 2006 (S.I. No. 477 of 2006) the Road Safety Authority (RSA) has responsibility for the promotion of public awareness of road safety and measures including the advancement of education, relating to the promotion of the safe use of roads, including co-operation with local authorities and other persons in this regard.

Regarding the Road Safety Authority's specific plans to promote and expand this concept, I have referred this Parliamentary Question to it. If he has not received a response within 10 working days, please contact my private office.

Noise Pollution

202. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the efforts he will make to address the concerns of residents in the Hollystown, Mulhuddart, Ladyswell and Tyrellstown areas of County Dublin at the impact of the north runway in Dublin Airport, specifically increased noise pollution; if he has discussed this directly with the Dublin Airport Authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16138/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware, daa has a statutory responsibility to manage, operate and develop Dublin Airport including the provision of infrastructure necessary to meet existing and future demand, such as the North Runway project.

I welcome daa's stated commitment to work closely with all stakeholders, including local residents and community groups, in relation to the North Runway project. I understand that daa has already met with local residents to discuss the project and that further engagement is planned.

Regarding the issue of noise, new EU legislation in this area enters into force this month. EU Regulation 598/14 concerns the introduction of noise-related operating restrictions at EU airports. This regulation sets out the process to be followed when deciding on noise-related operating restrictions and involves consideration of all potential aircraft noise mitigation measures. The regulation provides for consultation with interested parties, including local residents

living in the vicinity of the airport.

The new noise regulation presents an opportunity to establish a modern cohesive and measured approach to the management of noise at Irish airports which is capable of delivering the best outcome for all stakeholders, including the communities referred to by the Deputy at Dublin Airport.

My Department along with the Office of the Attorney General and the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government are now engaged in discussions on the technical details of the appropriate implementation of the Regulation.

Road Signage

203. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when he will erect signage along the N6 motorway showcasing the Lough Derg drive at the Kilbeggan exit in County Westmeath and at the Ballinasloe and Loughrea exits in County Galway. [16364/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual national road projects (including signage) is a matter for the Transport Infrastructure Ireland (formerly known as the NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the relevant local authority.

I have referred the Deputy's question to TII for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

Railway Stations

204. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of train stations that are and are not wheelchair accessible, by county and in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16340/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issue raised is a matter for Iarnród Éireann and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the company for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Dublin Bus Services

205. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the exact route of the new Dublin Bus radial route from Finglas to Dundrum; if this route will be publicly or privately operated under the new transport plan for Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16343/16]

206. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport why the 17A bus route is mentioned as being retained as an orbital route, but the orbital 220 route is not mentioned under the new transport plan for Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16344/16]

207. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will privatise bus routes 17A and 220; if he will consult residents; what will happen to route 40 if route 40D is to be a new core route under the new transport plan for Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16345/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 205 to 207, inclusive, together.

The issues raised are matters for the National Transport Authority (NTA) and I have forwarded the Deputy's questions to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

National Transport Authority

208. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport why the National Transport Authority overruled changes a Deloitte report recommended. [16346/16]

209. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will establish a new route to serve Cabra and Finglas in Dublin city, given that there is no link between these areas, persons are obliged to use their cars and whether the opening of the new bridge between Cabra and Finglas will facilitate this. [16347/16]

210. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he plans to conduct a feasibility survey to establish if bus route 330 can be extended to Dublin Airport as this would provide Finglas, Ballymun and Blanchardstown in Dublin city with an airport route as it would encourage employment in the airport for residents currently unable to access it. [16348/16]

211. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to ensure full public consultation prior to changes to the greater Finglas transport network in Dublin city; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16349/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 208 to 211, inclusive, together.

The issues raised are matters for the National Transport Authority (NTA) and I have forwarded the Deputy's questions to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

Light Rail Projects

212. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if plans to build social housing units on the greenfield site between Tolka Valley Road and St. Helen's Road will impact on plans to extend the Luas line through Finglas and onto the N2 road in Dublin city; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16350/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): 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.

Noting the NTA's responsibility in the matter, I have referred the Deputy's question to the

NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme

213. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation to report on the performance and plans of Pobal in supporting local development and social enterprise jobs; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16109/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): Pobal comes under the remit of my colleague, Mr. Simon Coveney TD, Minister of Housing, Planning and Local Government, so I am not in a position to report on Pobal's performance and plans.

Proposed Legislation

214. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if she will consider a proposal (details supplied) for dealing with creditors and employees of companies experiencing financial difficulties; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16362/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): Limited liability of companies, through its 150 year history in Irish law, has always been a concession to enterprise - a means of incentivising and encouraging entrepreneurs to overcome aversion to risk and to make investments in business ventures that might be beneficial to the economy at large. This concession can be open to abuse and companies can use the corporate form to evade debts that they are perfectly able to pay, for example, through tactical insolvency of subsidiaries within otherwise solvent corporate groups. As a result, the legislature has developed a number of safeguards that are aimed at reducing the opportunities for abuse.

The most important of these safeguards is the common law doctrine of piercing the corporate veil. This occurs where the veil of incorporation is used fraudulently to shield the owners of a company from liability, and where the subsidiary company is merely a "sham façade" of its parent company. In such circumstances, the owners of the company can be made liable by the courts for money owed by the company to its creditors, including employees. The courts are rightly hesitant to apply this doctrine liberally: much of the beneficial effect of the concession of limited liability would be compromised if veil-piercing occurred on a regular basis. However, it does give creditors recourse where they have been genuinely defrauded.

Since news of the Clerys insolvency broke, the position that we have maintained is that we must be careful not to take rushed steps to amend the law and to create unintended consequences. As part of the twin track process put in place by my predecessor, the Company Law Review Group has been asked to examine legislation with a view to recommending ways company law could be amended to better safeguard employees and creditors. That work is currently ongoing and any recommendations made by the Group will receive careful consideration, when received.

Low Pay Commission Remit

215. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if

she will introduce legislation to increase the remit of the Low Pay Commission from its limited focus on the minimum wage to empower it to look at low pay in general and to make recommendations accordingly; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16370/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The Low Pay Commission was established last year through the National Minimum Wage (Low Pay Commission) Act 2015. Its principal function is, once each year, to examine the national minimum hourly rate of pay and to make a recommendation to the Minister respecting the rate, ensuring that all decisions are evidence based, fair and sustainable, and do not create significant adverse consequences for employment or competitiveness.

The National Minimum Wage Act, was amended in 2015 and under a newly inserted Section 10 C (4) it allows the Minister to request the Commission to examine and report its views and recommendations on such matters, related generally to the functions of the Commission under the Act, as are specified in that request. Such request must be made to the Commission by the end of February each year. This new provision was invoked, in order to obtain a better understanding of the impact of the national minimum wage on younger people. The Commission has been asked to examine the appropriateness of the sub-minima rates as currently provided for in the National Minimum Wage Acts with regard in particular to their impact on youth unemployment rates and participation in education. This report is due by the end of October 2016. This new provision has also been used to ask the Commission to report on the preponderance of women on the national minimum wage. In order to obtain a better understanding of the composition and profile of this group and the underlying causality, the Commission was requested to examine this issue in more detail and report its views as to the underlying reason for this position and make any recommendations it considers appropriate. This report is also due by the 31st of October this year.

Following completion of these reports this new provision will again be utilised to set the work programme for the Commission for 2017 by the statutory deadline of end February.

Economic Competitiveness

216. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if she monitors the industrial cost base relative to other European Union and non-European Union states to ensure competitiveness in the manufacturing and services sectors; if she has identified issues requiring attention; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16307/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): Cost competitiveness is an important aspect of Ireland's overall competitiveness and we continue to monitor Ireland's cost competitiveness on a regular basis. The National Competitiveness Council's Costs of Doing Business in Ireland report published in April 2016 benchmarks key business costs across over 50 indicators and focuses on areas where Irish enterprise costs are out of line with key competitors, and on costs that are largely domestically determined.

Ireland's improving competitiveness performance has been central to securing the recovery in economic growth and employment. Improved competitiveness has made Irish firms more cost competitive internationally and made Ireland a more attractive location in which firms can locate and expand their operations.

As a result of our concerted efforts to improve competitiveness, Ireland's relative international competitiveness as measured by a range of international indices has improved since 2012.

In June this year we saw a significant improvement in Ireland's global IMD ranking, with

Ireland now ranked the 7th most competitive economy in the world.

The NCC report concludes that Ireland's industrial cost base has improved but pressure points have emerged in labour, property and business service costs. The report makes clear, despite good progress in recent years Ireland remains a relatively expensive location in which to do business. Improving cost competitiveness continues to be a significant challenge. We must therefore focus intensely on reducing costs that are out of line with those in competitor countries.

Addressing Ireland's international cost competitiveness is a key economic policy priority for Government and as set out in the Action Plan for Jobs, a range of initiatives are in train across Government Departments to support cost competitiveness. The policy implications of the Costs of Doing Business in Ireland 2016 report's analysis, and associated structural reforms required to address Ireland's cost base, will be included in the Council's annual Competitiveness Challenge report which will be brought to Government published later this year.

Job Creation

217. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if job opportunities will continue to become available during the next five years; the need to ensure an even distribution of economic opportunities; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16309/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The Programme for a Partnership Government sets an ambitious target to have an additional 200,000 at work by 2020, with an unemployment rate of 6 per cent. Achieving this ambitious target is premised on the creation of a range of employment and career opportunities across a broad spectrum of skills across all sectors of the economy, including manufacturing and services activities.

Enterprise 2025, the Government's long-term enterprise policy was launched in 2015. It is an ambitious strategy, with the objective of delivering growth over the next decade that is sustainable, led by strong export performance, builds on our sectoral strengths, and that is underpinned by innovation, productivity, cost effectiveness and competitiveness.

It is our aim to build resilience into our economy so that we do not suffer again as we have done in the past. As a small open economy Ireland's success will be dependent on driving export led growth and growing the additional indirect jobs stimulated by the activities of exporting enterprises in the wider economy. We will continuously monitor our employment growth patterns in terms of an export/non-export 'balance' to avoid the mistakes of the past.

The focus on job creation is a government wide agenda, and it involves:

- achieving a leap forward in the capacity and the performance of enterprises based here/and in attracting further investment. We will put in place an extra €500 million in capital funding to accelerate export led jobs growth across Ireland's regions;

- focusing investments in areas where Ireland can differentiate itself internationally - specifically education and skills, creating attractive places to live and work throughout the country and supporting enterprise innovation; and

- improving the environment for business and maintaining a focus on protecting our national competitiveness from unsustainable cost growth.

To deliver on this ambitious target, in the Programme for Partnership Government we commit to maintaining the OECD endorsed Action Plan for Jobs Process that will set out, on an annual basis, the best ideas for job creation within available resources.

Building on this process, we are focused on ensuring that we can support new job creation in every region in the country over the next five years, through the implementation of the Regional Action Plans for Jobs. A key objective of the plans is to have a further 10 to 15 per cent at work in each region by 2020.

The Regional Action Plans are being driven in each region by Regional Implementation Committees. Funding of up to €250 million to support the Regional Action Plan process is being provided. This includes a €150 million Regional Property Programme being delivered by IDA and a range of competitive regional funding calls rolled out by Enterprise Ireland on a phased basis. The first Progress Reports on the implementation of the Plans, covering the period to end-June 2016, will be completed and published in Q3 2016.

Job Creation

218. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if she has or will meet leaders in industry to maximise job opportunities through economic growth in the short to medium term; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16310/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): A key objective of the Action Plan for Jobs process is to rebuild our economy based on enterprise, talent, innovation and exports. It is enterprises that create jobs and every day I am meeting with business owners, promoters and entrepreneurs. I am convinced there is the ambition, skills and entrepreneurialism in our enterprise base to achieve the stretch targets for job creation set in the Programme for a Partnership Government. We have 155,000 more people at work than when we launched the first Action Plan in 2012, with a strong contribution from both manufacturing and services sectors across the economy to employment growth.

Specifically, private sector involvement is crucial to the development and implementation of both the Action Plan for Jobs and Regional Action Plan for Jobs initiatives. I will shortly be re-convening the Industry Partners Forum, which was established in 2013 to provide strategic advice on the development of each year's Action Plan for Jobs.

The Regional Implementation Committees, overseeing the implementation of the Regional Action Plans, are made up of key local public and private stakeholders. Enterprise Champions have been appointed in each region to maximise the impact of the plans by communicating the message and vision of the initiative to the local business community, driving the enterprise and jobs focus of the Plans, and securing industry engagement in generating new ideas and actions.

I have asked my Department to initiate the process to develop the 2017 Action Plan for Jobs. We will be consulting widely with external stakeholders, including industry, over the coming months to gather the best ideas to help deliver sustainable full employment.

Inflation Rate

219. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if she has identified indicators of inflationary tendencies which will affect economic growth; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16311/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): Costs, prices and inflation levels are a key element of Ireland's international competitiveness. The National Competitiveness Council recently published their annual Costs of Doing Business report which examines a range of enterprise costs that are largely domestically determined such as labour, property, transport, energy, water, waste, communications, credit, and business services.

The Council concluded that while Ireland's cost base has improved across a range of metrics over the last five years - making Ireland a more attractive location for firms to base their operations in - Ireland remains a relatively high cost location for a number of key business inputs. A range of upward cost pressures, however, are also evident, particularly in relation to property and business services.

More generally, the overall Consumer Prices Index (CPI) published by the Central Statistics Office shows that prices on average remained unchanged in May compared with May 2015. On a monthly basis, price increases were also muted - and the CPI increased by just 0.5 per cent in the month. Within the CPI, however, there are a number of developments worth noting.

Miscellaneous Goods & Service prices increased by 5.6 per cent in the year - primarily due to higher dwelling, motor and health insurance premiums. Within this, motor insurance increased by 35.2 per cent in the year. Not only did the "Miscellaneous" category have the highest rate of inflation, it also contributed most to the overall inflation rate due to its weighting in the consumer basket.

The price of education services increased by 3.8 per cent, mainly due to the extra costs associated with participating in third level education while Restaurants and Hotel prices rose by 2.1 per cent mainly due to an increase in the cost of hotel accommodation and higher prices for alcoholic drinks and food consumed in licensed premises, restaurants, and cafes.

Significant price decreases were recorded in Transport (-5.3%), Furnishings, Household Equipment & Routine Household Maintenance (-3.1%), Communications (-1.2%) and Food & Non-Alcoholic Beverages (-1.1%).

According to the CSO, Transport prices fell mainly due to lower petrol and diesel prices, a reduction in the price of motor cars and a fall in air fares. Prices for Food and Non-Alcoholic Beverages decreased mainly due to lower prices across a range of products such as meat, chocolate and confectionery, milk, cheese, eggs and bread and cereals.

The report of the National Competitiveness Council is a timely reminder of the risks of complacency regarding our cost competitiveness. To protect the gains achieved to date, to sustain the recovery, and to ultimately spread the benefits of economic growth to all, we must continue to enhance all aspects of our cost competitiveness. The policy implications of the Costs of Doing Business report and the associated reforms required to address Ireland's cost base, will be included in the Council's annual Competitiveness Challenge report which will be brought to Government and published later this year.

Small and Medium Enterprises Supports

220. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to develop the small and medium enterprise sector and to identify issues negatively impacting on it; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16312/16]

221. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation

her plans to facilitate job creation through the small and medium enterprise sector; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16313/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): I propose to take Questions Nos. 220 and 221 together.

Micro, small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) are the lifeblood of the Irish economy, accounting for 99.7% of all active enterprises in the State. Accordingly, SMEs are a central focus for my Department. In conjunction with its Agencies, my Department works to develop SMEs and to facilitate job creation, while bearing in mind the various issues that impact on SMEs. This work is driven by Government policies and plans, including: Enterprise 2025, the National Policy Statement on Entrepreneurship, the Action Plan for Jobs and the Regional Action Plans for Jobs.

The development of our SMEs is vital and I will ensure the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) continue to be the 'first-stop-shop' for providing advice and guidance, financial assistance and other supports to those wishing to start or grow their own business. LEOs also provide a 'sign-posting' service in relation to all relevant state supports available through agencies such as Revenue, the Department of Social Protection, Education and Training Boards, Credit Review Office, and Microfinance Ireland. The 'Supporting SMEs' Online Tool (www.localenterprise.ie/smeonlinetool) provides help start-ups to navigate the range of Government business supports for which they could be eligible.

Last week, I announced further capital funding investment in the LEOs under the LEO Competitive Fund this year. As part of this scheme, an initial allocation of €2 million is being made to support 16 collaborative job creation initiatives at local and regional level in support of the Regional Action Plans for Jobs. A further call for proposals later this year will aim to support more such initiatives to strengthen job creation in each region.

Enterprise Ireland ensures that all of its clients, from Entrepreneurs and Start-Ups, to exporting SMEs and scaling companies, can access the appropriate supports to help them to create and sustain jobs. These supports include advice for competing sustainably in international markets, sales and marketing; research and development; and start-up investment.

On identifying impacts, one of the primary tools I have as Minister to hear from SMEs is through the Advisory Group on Small Business (AGSB). The AGBS was set up to give a greater voice in the development of policy to SMEs. Issues negatively affecting the growth and development of SMEs are identified, and possible solutions are suggested by the Group. My colleague, Minister of State for Employment and Small Business, Pat Breen TD, will chair the group.

Another formal structure is the Retail Consultation Forum. Given the importance of this sector to the economy it was established to allow key issues of relevance to the retail sector to be discussed, with a view to identifying practical actions which could be taken by Government, or by industry itself, to support the sector with particular emphasis on achieving sustainable jobs growth in the sector.

As well as these formal structures, my Department regularly undertakes consultation exercises on various matters that are open to SMEs and their representative organisations to provide input.

The outlook for new job creation in 2016 is positive and the focus of the LEOs and Enterprise Ireland will remain on ensuring that their clients have access to all of the necessary supports required. This focus, coupled with their priority to support entrepreneurship across

the regions, and develop strong, export focussed, ambitious Irish companies that can win new business, will mean more jobs for Ireland over the next 12 months.

EU Funding

222. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if innovation and technology feature in the business sector; the reliability of grant-aid from the European Union; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16314/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): Innovation and Technology are critical elements of a successful Irish business sector. The future for Irish companies and the Irish economy will be determined by our ability to take advantage of global opportunities in order to deliver export-led growth. In essence; exports equals jobs. As such, high-quality, innovative and internationally competitive Irish companies are fundamental to Ireland's future prosperity. Research, development & innovation enable firms to develop products and services that are competitive and attractive on the global market, which enable these companies to win export sales, thus creating jobs and economic prosperity in Ireland.

This reality is well recognised within businesses with national Business Expenditure on Research & Development (BERD) increasing 15% to over €2bn between 2011 and 2013. Enterprise Ireland provides research, development and technological innovation support relevant at all stages of company development, enabling companies to progress from undertaking an initial research project on to higher level innovation and R and D activities. The number of companies receiving such support has grown substantially in recent years and now over 1,200 companies are supported to engage in research, development and innovation every year.

The current EU Framework Programme for research and innovation, which is part of the drive to create new growth and jobs in Europe, is Horizon 2020. Enterprise Ireland co-ordinate the implementation of Horizon 2020 through the National Support System and the National Director for Horizon 2020. Enterprise Ireland's team comprises of representatives across the research funding departments and agencies. Horizon 2020 has a budget of almost €75 billion and runs over the period 2014-2020. Through Enterprise Ireland, Irish academics and companies are continually supported in their engagement with the opportunities available by the Horizon 2020 National Support System. Irish companies who compete successfully for funding from Horizon 2020 will boost their innovative capability and competitiveness which in turn delivers strong national economic impacts.

In the first 23 months of Horizon 2020, 588 Irish applicants were successful in securing funding. For this period, Ireland's drawdown was €251 million, giving an overall Irish success rate of 14.62% (higher than the EU Member State average of 13.5%). Of this funding, over €72 million went to companies with €52 million of this figure going to SMEs.

Ireland has an ambitious target of winning €1.25 billion under Horizon 2020, which we are on target to meet. 80% of the Horizon 2020 budget (€61 billion) is to be allocated between 2016 and 2020, which gives Irish companies the opportunity to continue to availing of these supports. Our strategy to achieve these targets is being driven by the Horizon 2020 High Level Group, chaired by my Department. All Departments and Agencies engaged in research funding are represented on the High Level Group and particular attention is being given to maximising industry participation in Horizon 2020.

In addition to Horizon 2020, funding from European Regional Development Funds (ERDF) supports a number of Enterprise Ireland R&D programmes. Over the 2014 – 2020 period Ire-

land stands to drawdown in the region of €65m in such funding.

Departmental Funding

223. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if she provides adequate working capital to the small and medium business sector; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16315/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): Working capital is the lifeblood of SMEs and has been a central focus of Government for many years. Over the last five years the Government has worked tirelessly to ensure that the access of SMEs to an appropriate supply of financing from both bank and non-bank sources is improved and that all businesses have access to appropriate sources of finance to grow develop and expand. A number of key policy and legislative initiatives were developed and delivered since March 2011 with some being reviewed and amended as necessary, and these may be grouped as follows:

Credit Guarantees

- The Credit Guarantee Acts 2012 - 2016, and Schemes made thereunder, have resulted in encouragement of bank lending to Irish SMEs to both create new jobs and protect existing ones. To date approx. €50 million of loans have been sanctioned in more than 300 facilities, and some 2200 jobs were created/maintained;

- New Schemes are currently being drafted to extend the remit of credit guarantees (covering expanded forms of lending, and greater risk sharing), and introduce new counter guarantees to enhance the provision of both State and EU-sourced finance for Irish SMEs;

Microfinance Ireland (MFI)

- The Microenterprise Loan Fund Act, 2012 established MFI to provide loans of up to €25,000 to Irish micro-enterprises. To date approx. €13 million was been loaned to 870 firms, with more than 2000 jobs being created/maintained.

- The operation of MFI was reviewed in 2015, and a number of changes were made to ease access to loans primarily, via the removal of the previous prerequisite of a bank loan rejection. The legislative changes have resulted in a substantial increase in the activities both nationally and regionally in the last year and a half.

Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI)

- The Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland Act 2014 established the SBCI, and tasked it to provide up to €800m of funds for Irish SMEs previously over reliant on bank financing. This tranche of funding has now been fully committed to business.

Prompt Payments Code (PPC)

- In May 2015, the Government launched the PPC to encourage and promote best practice between businesses and suppliers and improve cash flow for businesses and, ultimately, drive a change in the payment culture in Ireland.

Credit Review Office

- The Credit Review Office continues to review applications for credit made by SMEs or

Farm borrowers with viable business propositions who have had an application for credit of up to €3 million declined or reduced by Bank of Ireland, Allied Irish Bank or Ulster Bank.

- The Credit Review Office also examines cases where borrowers feel that the terms and conditions of their existing loans, or a new loan offer, are unfairly onerous or have been unreasonably changed to their detriment.

My Department Officials continue to work with other Departmental and Agency officials through the State Bodies Group chaired by the Department of Finance to ensure appropriate financing options including working capital are available to SMEs, in line with commitments in the Action Plan for Jobs process.

The Government will continuously monitor the availability of working capital for our SMEs to ensure that our SMEs are well positioned to grow further and to create jobs.

Youth Unemployment Measures

224. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if job creation will focus on youth employment over the next three years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16316/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The Action Plan for Jobs is one of the Government's key instruments to support job creation. Since the launch of the first Plan in 2012, 155,000 more people are in employment. This surpasses the original target to have an extra 100,000 at work by the end of 2016.

Unemployment has declined significantly from its peak of 15.1% in 2012 to 7.8% in May 2016. Youth unemployment is also declining. In May 2016, the rate of youth unemployment was 15%, down from 20.8% in 2015.

We will continue to work with colleagues across Government to develop initiatives to help our young people to meet their full potential in a fast-changing world. The Action Plan for Jobs complements Pathways to Work, developed by the Department of Social Protection, which sets out specific measures for young people, under the Youth Guarantee and Youth Activation Charter, to help them access the labour market and new job opportunities. We will provide a diverse range of choices on leaving secondary education, which is regarded as a key success factor in countries with low levels of youth unemployment. The Programme for Government commits to double the number of apprenticeships to 31,000 places by 2020 and significantly increase the number of traineeship places.

We will continue to build on the progress to date through the Action Plan for Jobs and Pathways to Work to ensure that more employment opportunities are available to young people who are seeking work.

Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership

225. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if she has identified the positive and negative aspects of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership with a view to maximising economic opportunities; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16317/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The

EU-US Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership Agreement will be the world's largest bilateral trade and investment deal, and a successful pact is expected to benefit Ireland more than any other EU Member State. It is very important to Ireland as it will build on our already rewarding economic relationship with the US and create new opportunities to stimulate growth, create employment and continue to grow our economy. An independent study commissioned by my Department, carried out by Copenhagen Economics, found that almost half (49%) of Irish exports outside of the EU end up in the US, compared to the combined average of 16% for all Member States, and 25% of foreign direct investment (FDI) in Ireland comes from the US.

Given our historic economic and cultural ties, Ireland's enterprises are particularly well placed to take up opportunities to trade more easily with the US. The study estimates that the benefits in Ireland will be proportionally greater than in the EU as a whole. It suggests a boost to GDP of 1.1%, growth in Irish exports of almost 4%, increases in investment of 1.5%, and an increase in real wages of 1.5%. It estimates somewhere between 5,000 and 10,000 additional export related jobs. The study predicts new opportunities for many Irish industry sectors including pharmaceuticals and chemicals, Agri-food (notably dairy and processed food), insurance and machinery.

The findings are backed up in a recent comprehensive interim independent report contracted by the EU Commission, carried out by Ecorys Consultancy and published on 13th May 2016. The report estimates that a comprehensive EU-US trade agreement would boost Irish GDP by 1.4%.

The EU-US trade negotiations herald the start of a new style of trade agreement that not only covers tariffs, trade and investment but also includes regulatory coherence and cooperation. An EU-US trade agreement will tackle a whole range of issues to make business with the US easier. A comprehensive and ambitious agreement would remove customs duties, increase access to public contracts, open-up services market, and offer predictable conditions for investors.

I will continue to work at securing the best deal for Ireland by the end of these negotiations, bearing in mind our defensive interests, in sensitive areas such as the beef sector. This was identified in the Copenhagen Economic study. This trade and investment agreement will build on the deep economic and wider relationship we have with the US, and will create jobs by opening up further opportunities in the US market for Irish business.

Retail Sector

226. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the effect of the adjustment to the minimum wage and employers' pay related social insurance measures introduced in budget 2016 on employment creation in the retail sector in 2016; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [15795/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The national minimum hourly rate of pay increased to €9.15 per hour on January 1st this year following Government acceptance of the Low Pay Commission's recommendation of July 2015 to increase the rate from €8.65 per hour.

In Budget 2016 a number of measures were introduced to ensure that the benefit of the increase was not lost to taxation for the employee and that the effect of the increase to €9.25 per hour on employer's liability to PRSI was mitigated.

The Wholesale and Retail Sector is an important part of the domestic economy and accounts

for the largest share of employment in the economy. It employs almost 275,000 people in Ireland. This represents about 12.5% of the workforce. The sector provides employment in every community in the country and is an important part of every locality. The Sector also indirectly supports jobs in other areas, such as logistics and distribution.

A Retail Consultation Forum was established under the Action Plan for Jobs 2014 to provide a platform for structured engagement between the sector and relevant Government Departments.

The Forum meets on a quarterly basis and I am looking forward to Chairing the next meeting which takes place on June 24th.

Child Protection

227. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of children on the waiting list for a special care placement; the average waiting time for placements; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [16360/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The latest information available shows that on the 6th April 2016 there were 5 young people waiting for a placement in a Special Care unit. One new referral was being processed. The average waiting time is approximately 4 weeks. I have requested updated information from the Child and Family Agency, Tusla and will revert to the Deputy when this is to hand.

Special Care units differ from general residential care as the child is detained by an order of the High Court, for the child's own safety. The child is not detained as a result of criminal offences, but for their own safety and welfare. The units are secure, and offer high staff ratios. There is also on-site education and specialised input such as psychology services through the Assessment, Counselling and Therapeutic Service known as ACTS. Services provided include assessment and focused interventions for children and young people with complex clinical needs and high risk behaviours.

Children are admitted to Special Care following a successful application to the Child and Family Agency's Special Care Referrals Committee and then to the High Court for a special care order, in line with the provisions of the Child Care Act 1991, as amended. The criteria for admission to a special care unit are the age of the child, the concerns and risk assessment of the child, and a risk management plan. The age range for admission is 11 to 17 years.

Youth Services Funding

228. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to increase funding for youth workers. [16361/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I am committed to the principle of fairness, and would very much wish to allocate additional resources next year to the youth sector as the economy recovers. Any additional amount available will depend on the Budgetary process in 2017. I will be closely involved in the decisions to be taken by Government in this regard.

My Department administers a range of funding schemes and programmes to support the provision of youth services by the voluntary youth sector, to young people throughout the country. The funding schemes support national and local youth work provision to some 380,000

young people. The voluntary youth sector involves approximately 1,400 paid staff, including youth workers and 40,000 volunteers working in youth work services and communities throughout the country.

Budget 2016 provided an additional €1.1m in current youth funding to my Department bringing the total allocation for the youth services to €51m in 2016. This additional funding was a 2.5% increase over 2015. It will be used for programmes that target disadvantaged young people and to assist national youth organisations in their work to support local voluntary youth services.

This week, I expect to announce details of youth work projects that are to receive funding under the new €600,000 Youth Employment Initiative. This initiative and other supports for vulnerable young people are priorities in my plans for the further development of youth work services in line with the Programme for Government. It will target those young people aged 15- 24 yrs who are most at risk of unemployment and who are not in education, employment or training. It will be provided to voluntary youth services to support the provision of innovative programmes for their young people to enhance their employability skills and competencies. All of my decisions on funding for youth services will be informed by the National Youth Strategy 2015-2020.

Child Protection Services Provision

229. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of children in care without an allocated social worker; the reason for the high number; and the steps she is taking to address this, by age bracket and by county, in tabular form. [16368/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The latest figures I have to hand from the Child and Family Agency, Tusla, indicates that on 31st March 2016, there were 6,405 children in care. Almost 93% of children in care were in a foster care setting. Of all children in care, over 93% (5,941) had an allocated social worker. Tusla's policy is that all children coming into care and those in high risk placements have an allocated social worker. Subsequent gaps may be attributed to a number of factors including maternity leave, vacancies and competing priorities.

Where a child is awaiting the allocation of a social worker, his/her needs are responded to by a social work duty team on a risk management basis. During this time, work with the child and their family may be undertaken by the social work team leader or social workers in the duty system. Some of these children may have had an allocated social worker, but due to a social worker leaving, they are reclassified as awaiting a social worker. Tusla has been provided with additional funding of €38m in Budget 2016, including funding of over €6 million to reduce the number of cases awaiting allocation of a social worker. As part of its Business Plan for this year, Tusla has committed to a number of key targets to be achieved by the end of 2016. These targets include ensuring that all children in care have an allocated social worker. Tusla has made progress in its targets.

My officials have engaged with Tusla regarding local areas with a higher than average number of children in care without an allocated social worker, and steps are being taken, as a priority, to remedy this situation.

The following table represents the data available on the number of children in care with and without an allocated social worker broken down by Tusla administrative area, as at the 31st March 2016. This data is not available by age, or by county.

Area	No. of Children in Care on 31/03/2016	No. of Children in Care with an All. Social Worker	No. of Children in Care without an All. Social Worker	% of Children in Care without an All. Social Worker
Dublin South Central	401	383	18	4%
Dublin South East Wicklow	302	302	-	0%
Dublin South West Kildare West Wicklow	457	375	82	18%
The Midlands	377	354	23	6%
DUBLIN MID LEINSTER	1,537	1,414	123	8%
Dublin City North	627	577	50	8%
Dublin North	329	298	31	9%
Louth Meath	401	398	3	1%
Cavan Monaghan	164	164	-	0%
DUBLIN NORTH EAST	1,521	1,437	84	6%
Cork	908	864	44	5%
Kerry	149	149	-	0%
Carlow Kilkenny South Tipperary	378	365	13	3%
Waterford Wexford	438	390	48	11%
SOUTH	1,873	1,768	105	6%
Midwest (Clare, Limerick & North Tipperary)	599	503	96	16%
Galway Roscommon	413	402	11	3%
Mayo	141	141		0%
Donegal	213	168	45	21%
Sligo Leitrim West Cavan	108	108	-	0%
WEST	1,474	1,322	152	10%
NATIONAL	6,405	5,941	464	7%

Defence Forces Medicinal Products

230. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he is investigating an alternative drug to replace Lariam as the anti-malarial medication used by member of the Defence Forces when serving overseas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16136/16]

231. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of serving and retired members of the Defence Forces who have exhibited harmful side-effects from the use of the anti-malarial drug Lariam; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16137/16]

Taoiseach and Minister for Defence (Deputy Enda Kenny): I propose to take Questions Nos. 230 and 231 together.

There are three anti-malarial drugs in use by the Defence Forces, namely Lariam (mefloquine), Malarone and Doxycycline. The choice of medication for overseas deployment, including the use of Lariam, is a medical decision made by Medical Officers in the Defence Forces, having regard to the specific circumstances of the mission and the individual member of the Irish Defence Forces.

A Malaria Chemoprophylaxis working group was re-convened in August 2015. The purpose of the group is to review inter alia issues arising in relation to the use of Lariam, particularly in the context of the current and potential litigation; to review and confirm the Defence Forces approach in relation to the use of malaria chemoprophylaxis in the Defence Forces; and to ensure that the procedures in relation thereto continue to be appropriate and in accordance with best medical practice as promulgated by the relevant medical authorities. In addition, the Group was tasked with reviewing the use of the drug Primaquine as part of the overall medical treatment process for those deployed to malarious areas.

Information relating to side effects suffered by members of the Defence Forces following the use of any drug is maintained on individual's medical files. The Defence Forces' management systems are not designed to collate the information requested by the Deputy from individual files.

Malaria is a serious disease that killed approximately 438,000 people in 2015, with 90% of deaths occurring in sub-Saharan Africa. It is a serious threat to any military force operating in the area. Anti-malarial medications, including Lariam, remain in the formulary of medications prescribed by the Medical Corps for Defence Forces personnel on appropriate overseas missions, to ensure that our military personnel can have effective protection from the very serious risks posed by this highly dangerous disease.

Defence Forces Personnel Data

232. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of members of the Defence Forces, the number who retired, who were on extended sick leave, who were recruited and who did not complete training, by Army, by Naval Service, by Air Corps, for each of the years 2006 to 2016 to date. [16141/16]

Taoiseach and Minister for Defence (Deputy Enda Kenny): 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 Personnel

233. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the action he is taking to address the issue of suicide among members of the Defence Forces since the publication of a report a number of years ago; and if he maintains contact with and support for former members who may have been suffering with depression or other mental illnesses when in the Defence Forces or who may have been invalided out with another illness or disability. [16142/16]

Taoiseach and Minister for Defence (Deputy Enda Kenny): The Deputy refers to a report, published in 2005 and authored by the Department of Psychiatry and Mental Health Research, St. Vincent's University Hospital and University College Dublin, entitled "Suicide Among Regular-Duty Military Personnel: A Retrospective Case-Control Study of Occupation-Specific Risk Factors for Workplace Suicide". The study was not a study commissioned by the Defence Forces.

The Defence Forces is fully alert in relation to suicide awareness and prevention, issues of depression and other mental health issues among its personnel, particularly given the nature of

their role and personnel access to firearms and weapons, which could be a source of self-harm, or harm to other members of the Defence Forces or the wider public.

The Defence Forces, through their Personnel Support Services (PSS), and working closely with the HSE, have and continue to engage in extensive suicide awareness and education programmes for all members of the Defence Forces. These programmes include:-

- Issuing an “Information Guide on Mental Health and Well Being in the Defence Forces”;
- Issuing and giving presentations on “Defence Forces Guidelines on Suicide”;
- Running courses on “Suicide and Self Harm Awareness”;
- Providing access to “Mental Fitness” programmes through the Defence Forces Intranet;
- Providing WRAP (Wellness Recovery Action Plan) training to all PSS personnel;
- Conducting STORM (Skills Training on Risk Management in suicide and self harm mitigation) training with all overseas units;
- Providing ASIST (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training) training in conjunction with the HSE;
- Conducting Safe Talk training within the Defence Forces; and
- Providing CISM (Critical Incident Stress Management) training for all personnel.

There is a PSS office in every major military installation, with one or more qualified Barrack PSS Officers. The role of the Barrack PSS Office includes providing information, assistance and counselling on a range of matters including interpersonal problems, stress, bereavement, housing, education, taxation, social welfare and retirement. As part of the PSS office civilian social workers are also available to support Defence Forces personnel and their families. In addition an independent and strictly confidential 24 hour care-line, manned by trained counsellors, is available to all Defence Forces personnel.

In parallel with the work already underway in the Defence Forces, in June 2015, the Government launched *Connecting for Life*, Ireland’s National Strategy to Reduce Suicide 2015-2020. The strategy sets a target to reduce suicide and self-harm by 10% over the next five years. A National Cross-Sectoral Steering and Implementation Group has been set up to oversee its implementation and the Department of Defence is represented on the Steering Group. The Department of Defence has been tasked with lead responsibility for the following actions in the strategy:-

- Integrate suicide prevention principles into relevant national Department of Defence policies and programmes, which cover persons in the Defence Forces who are vulnerable/at risk of suicide.
- Continue to deliver suicide prevention training to personnel dealing with persons who are vulnerable/at risk of suicide within the Defence Forces.

The function of the Medical Corps of the Defence Forces is to provide medical services to serving members of the Defence Forces and where required, any serving member of the Defence Forces can be referred to psychiatry services, normally through a Medical Officer or contract General Practitioner. It is not the function of the Medical Corps of the Defence Forces, nor has it the capacity, to provide medical services, including counselling, psychology or psychiatric services, to former members of the Defence Forces. The White Paper on Defence, does

however include a commitment that, if a member of the Defence Forces is currently availing of the external independent counselling service at the date they leave the organisation, they will be entitled to finish out the counselling sessions (subject to the maximum of six (6) sessions).

Naval Service

234. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he is aware of the Department of Defence's grave concerns in relation to the impact of a planned incinerator at Ringaskiddy, County Cork on the operational use of Haulbowline naval base; the action he is taking to address these concerns; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16297/16]

Taoiseach and Minister for Defence (Deputy Enda Kenny): The Department of Defence, following consultation with the Air Corps and the Naval Service, recently made an oral submission to an Bord Pleanála regarding the proposed development of the waste to energy facility in Ringaskiddy. The submission identified two areas of concern, the proximity of the incinerator stack to Haulbowline and the difficulties in the evacuation of the island if necessitated by an incident at the incinerator facility.

The proximity of the stack of the waste-to-energy facility to the helicopter approach paths of Haulbowline Naval Base and Spike Island is a matter of concern due to the fact that this stack will be emitting significant amounts of exhaust gases and is seen by the Department as a potential hazard as it may in certain conditions render approaches by Air Corps helicopters into and out of Haulbowline Island as unsafe.

The second area of concern is due to the fact that Haulbowline Island is accessed by a bridge which is connected to the Ringaskiddy Road. The proposed incinerator is to be built adjacent to this road, before Haulbowline. Therefore, in the event of any accident at the incinerator, road access to and from Haulbowline is threatened. This could in some instances hinder the operation of the Naval Base or in the event of a major incident necessitating local area evacuation, the evacuation of Haulbowline would be denied.

The planning application on the building of an incinerator in Ringaskiddy is currently under consideration by An Bord Pleanála. Accordingly it would be inappropriate to comment further on the matter at this time.

Naval Service

235. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the contingencies he has in place for the Naval Service and Air Corps, given that Indaver Ireland is building a waste incinerator at Ringaskiddy in Cork Harbour close to the naval headquarters and operational base on Haulbowline Island, regarding which his Department informed a Bord Pleanála inquiry that this has strategic implications for joint operations between the Air Corps and the Naval Service. [16338/16]

Taoiseach and Minister for Defence (Deputy Enda Kenny): The Department of Defence, following consultation with the Air Corps and the Naval Service, recently made an oral submission to an Bord Pleanála regarding the proposed development of the waste to energy facility in Ringaskiddy. The submission identified two areas of concern, the proximity of the incinerator stack to Haulbowline and the difficulties in the evacuation of the island if necessitated by an incident at the incinerator facility.

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