

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 13, inclusive, answered orally.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

14. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Education and Skills why persons who participate in level 5 Quality and Qualifications Ireland courses through the National Learning Network cannot avail of the grant from Student Universal Support Ireland but persons who complete the post-leaving certificate system can; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18146/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): The Student Grant Scheme supported approximately 81,500 students in the academic year 2015/16 at a cost of circa €380 million.

Under the student grant scheme, eligible candidates may receive funding, provided they are attending an approved course at an approved institution and meet the prescribed conditions of funding, including those which relate to nationality, residency, previous academic attainment and means.

To avail of funding an applicant must be entering an approved full-time course in an approved institution as defined in Sections 7 and 8 the Student Support Act 2011 and Regulations 3 and 4 of the Student Support Regulations 2016. The centres providing Level 5 courses under the remit of the National Learning Network are not listed as approved institutions for student grant purposes.

My Department, through SOLAS and the Education and Training Boards, funds the Specialist Training Provider (STP) programme. The National Learning Network delivers the majority of STP courses. In general, participants on STP courses are in receipt of income support in the form of a disability payment from the Department of Social Protection or a training allowance equivalent to their jobseeker payment entitlement. These payments are generally at a level significantly above that available through the student grant scheme. The principle of student grants not being awarded to students who are receipt of separate income support from public funds is well established. A similar restriction applies to BTEA recipients who no longer qualify for SUSI maintenance grants.

The current system of student supports is underpinned by the Student Support Act, 2011. It is my intention to initiate a review of this legislation later this year.

School Accommodation

15. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the programme of replacing prefabricated classrooms in primary schools with permanent structures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18218/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware, it is my intention in accordance with the Programme for Government to replace school pre-fabs with permanent accommodation over the lifetime of my Department's capital programme 2016-2021.

To enable this development, my Department will be carrying out an assessment of the number of prefabs being used in schools to deliver the curriculum and to determine whether or not individual prefabs need to be replaced in the context of the long-term accommodation needs of each school involved. When completed, this assessment will quantify the number of prefabs to be replaced. It is intended that this assessment when finalised will enable the replacement of such prefabs to commence in 2019.

School Admissions

16. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his response to the advice by constitutional law experts commissioned by an organisation (details supplied) which found that no constitutional impediment exists to changing the Equal Status Act as a way to ensure that children have equal access to State-funded schools regardless of their religion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18263/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I have received the legal opinion that the Deputy has referred to and I can assure the Deputy that I will give it careful consideration.

It is acknowledged that any change to the Equal Status Act would be extremely difficult as this is a hugely complex area legally, constitutionally, and in other ways.

I note that the previous Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education and Social Protection, when conducting pre-legislative scrutiny of the previously published Admissions Bill, acknowledged the potential tension between Articles 42 (Education) and 44 (Religion) of Bunreacht na hÉireann and concluded that the provisions of the constitution "poses a particular difficulty when legislating in this policy area."

As the Deputy may be aware, a Private Members Bill proposing an amendment to section 7(3)(c) of the Equal Status Act has been initiated and is due to be discussed later today. As previously indicated, my preference is to discuss this complex issue with the Oireachtas Committee at the earliest opportunity and I am open to hearing views on the best way to proceed within our existing constitutional framework.

The Programme for Government 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.

I have commenced a process of consultation with opposition parties to discuss my proposals to introduce a new Admissions Bill. Following these consultations, it is my intention to publish a new Admissions Bill during the current Dáil session. The new Admissions Bill will bring

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

It is my view that an effective way of providing diversity and choice for parents is by providing additional multid denominational schools for parents, and in this regard, I have committed to increasing the number of non-denominational and multi-denominational schools with a view to reaching 400 by 2030 as set out in the Programme for Government. One of the aims to offer wider choice is so that parents can get access to a school that offers their choice of ethos.

School Enrolments

17. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he is aware that the consequences of the policy of the patron of a school (details supplied) in refusing to enrol new children is having a detrimental effect on class sizes in adjacent schools; his plans to open a community national school in an area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18290/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that the enrolment policy in individual schools is the responsibility of the managerial authority of the school, subject to the approval of the Patron. It is the responsibility of the managerial authorities of all schools to implement an enrolment policy in accordance with the Education Act, 1998.

The Patron has advised the Department that there has been no change in the enrolment policy of the school referred to and that no pupil has been refused a place.

As the Deputy will also be aware, since 2011 new schools are generally only established in areas of demographic growth. My Department uses a Geographical Information System to identify the areas under increased demographic pressure nationwide. The system uses data from the Central Statistics Office, Ordnance Survey Ireland, the Department of Social Protection and information from my own Department's databases. With this information, nationwide demographic exercises are carried out to determine where additional school accommodation is needed at primary and post-primary levels. My Department will continue to analyse demographic trends and monitor enrolments, to determine where new schools will be required. My Department has no plans currently to open a new school in this area.

Apprenticeship Programmes

18. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans for the promotion of apprenticeships as a further education option; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17914/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): As the Deputy will be aware, the route to an apprenticeship is through gaining employment with an approved employer. A campaign to promote apprenticeship is currently being developed by SOLAS in consultation with key partners including the Apprenticeship Council. The campaign will raise awareness and promote the value of apprenticeship for individual apprentices and for employers and it will cover both existing apprenticeships and the new apprenticeships now coming on stream.

This Government has committed to doubling the number of apprenticeship places. In addition to rising numbers entering apprenticeships in the existing trades, the Apprenticeship Coun-

cil is overseeing the expansion of the apprenticeship system into a range of new areas, following a call for proposals from employers and education and training providers. 25 proposals have been prioritised by the Council for development, with employers on a number of these new apprenticeships planning to recruit in 2016. The Council is working with partners to ensure that information on these new opportunities across a range of sectors and at a range of levels of the National Framework of Qualifications is made available as widely as possible.

Literacy Programmes

19. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to reform the literacy and numeracy strategy; his views on the gap that exists in literacy and in numeracy between advantaged and disadvantaged schools; his plans for new standardised testing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18282/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department will complete an Interim Review of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy by September 2016. The review was scheduled to begin in 2016 but was brought forward to 2015 as many of the targets set in the Strategy have already been achieved. For example:

- The 2020 target to reduce by at least 5% the cohort of primary children performing at the lowest levels of English Reading has already been achieved. In second class primary the percentage of pupils performing at the lowest reading level fell by 13%, while In sixth class the reduction was 10%;

- Similar improvements were recorded in percentage increases for pupils performing at the highest reading levels;

- Similar results were also recorded for primary pupils' performance in mathematics:

- At post-primary level one target was to increase by at least 5% the cohort of 15-year olds performing at the highest levels in international reading, literacy and numeracy tests by 2020. This target has been achieved for mathematics and exceeded for overall reading literacy. Progress has also been made towards the 2020 targets for pupils performing at the lowest levels.

The interim review will contain actions to embed the success of the first five years and prioritise our efforts in key areas. It will involve a partnership approach between schools, parents, national and local agencies, from early years through to further education and training. Supports for students in DEIS schools will require particular consideration, while improving supports for adults, to increase their awareness and involvement in their children's learning, will be important.

One of the challenges remaining, however, is reducing the gap in literacy and numeracy outcomes for disadvantaged (DEIS) schools, compared to non-DEIS schools.

International research argues that schools with high concentrations of disadvantaged students do not perform at the same level academically as schools with a more advantaged intake. Social gaps in achievement reflect the broader societal processes influencing educational inequality. One of the objectives of the New Action Plan for Educational Inclusion, which I have committed to publish by the end of this year, is to reduce this gap, in the context of reducing inequalities by individual background. The plan will also be key in tackling literary and numeracy problems experienced by pupils in disadvantaged communities. I recently announced my initial proposals for the new plan, which I expect will include a series of pilot schemes to introduce measures which have been shown to work well in improving results for disadvan-

tagged children. I also expect it to include measures in the areas of school leadership, literacy teaching methodologies, and ways in which supports to schools can be better integrated. The Programme for a Partnership Government commits to establishing a new Schools Excellence Fund under which applications to tackle educational disadvantage will be prioritised.

Standardised tests were included as part of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy so that schools could track and report the progress of pupils to parents and plan the next steps in children's learning. They are also used by schools to improve their practice in school self-evaluation and aggregated data is reported to my Department for monitoring purposes. I envisage that schools will continue to use and report data from the tests in these ways. Primary schools have implemented the use of standardised tests in reading and mathematics consistently, and have reported this information to parents and, in aggregate form, to the Department. They have also used it to improve their teaching and learning practices through school self-evaluation. One issue emerging from the Review is the need for schools to have available to them new sets of tests that are consistent with the revised primary languages curriculum and that take account of the improvements in standards that have been achieved. There is also evidence from other sources, that teachers require greater support in interpreting the data to best effect. These will be priorities for my Department.

Schools Establishment

20. Deputy Ruth Coppinger asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will facilitate the establishment of a gaelcholáiste with a multi-denominational and inclusive ethos and with a catchment area covering west County Dublin and east County Meath, and if he will meet with the Coiste Bunaithe of a school (details supplied) to discuss the matter. [18285/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The decision on when a new school is warranted in a School Planning area is based on objective demographic analysis and where a school is warranted, the selection of a patron is an independent process which places a particular emphasis on parental preferences.

My Department is focused on ensuring that all schools in an area can between them cater for all students seeking a school place. To this end, my Department uses a Geographical Information System to identify the areas under increased demographic pressure nationwide. The system uses a range of data sources in carrying out nationwide demographic exercises to determine where additional school accommodation is needed at primary and post-primary level.

On foot of the latest demographic exercises, four new primary schools and nine new post-primary schools were announced to open in 2017 and 2018 to cater for increased demographic needs. This includes a new post-primary school which will open in 2017 to serve the Carpenterstown/Castleknock, Dublin 15 area, which will provide an additional 1,000 pupil places, supplementing provision in the wider area. Prospective school patrons were invited to apply for the patronage of each of the nine new post-primary schools, including the school to serve the Carpenterstown/Castleknock, Dublin 15 area, with a closing date of 8th June last.

The criteria used in relation to patronage of new schools places particular emphasis on parental demand for plurality and diversity, with parental preferences at the centre of the process. Prospective patrons must submit with their application a parental preference template in which parents have been requested to declare their preference for their child(ren) to be educated through that patron's school model and also their preference with regard to education through the medium of English or Irish.

My Department is currently in the process of assessing the applications received as part of the patronage process for the nine new post-primary schools. Following completion of this analysis, my Department will prepare detailed assessment reports in relation to each of these new schools based on the applications received, for the consideration of the New Schools Establishment Group (NSEG), which will then submit a report with recommendations to me for consideration and final decision.

The group referred to by the Deputy has had a number of meetings with my Department concerning different proposals for the provision of Irish-medium education at second level to serve the Dublin West/East Meath area. My Department has indicated that the issues raised by the group will be examined in the context of the assessment of parental demand for Irish-medium education emerging from the current patronage process, together with analysis of potential demand in the broader area. Detailed information on the post-primary patronage process is available on my Department's website.

Teachers' Remuneration

21. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will end the position whereby new teachers are on lesser pay rates and conditions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18266/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Government has committed to establishing a Public Service Pay Commission to examine pay levels across the Public Service, including entry pay levels. The terms of reference and timescale for the Commission's work are a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

The Government recognises the importance of being able to attract quality new entrants to the Public Service, particularly so in important professional areas like education.

The restrictions in entry pay levels were introduced in 2011 and 2012 across the public service at a time when the pressure in public finances was severe and the scope for new recruitment was very restricted.

Under the Lansdowne Road Agreement the process of restoring public service pay is commencing. An important feature of this is the flat rate increase which is being implemented. This is proportionately more valuable to those early in their careers. Restoration of the supervision and substitution payment is provided for subject to co-operation with the Lansdowne Road Agreement. The Lansdowne Road Agreement did not address the issue of pay of new entrants.

My Department continues to seek to engage with teacher unions on issues of mutual concern and has recently reached agreement with INTO and TUI in respect of:

- discussions to improve the position of teachers on fixed-term and part-time teaching
- a robust review of in-school management structures
- an increase in the quantum of the extra Croke Park hours which do not have to be worked on a "whole school" basis

The Government has also indicated that it will support the gradual negotiated unwinding of FEMPI measures having due regard to the priority to improve public services and in recognition of the essential role played by public servants.

School Enrolments

22. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will legislate to protect families from religious discrimination in the enrolment process to all schools, by amending section 7(3)(c) of the Equal Status Act as a first step towards providing equal school access for all, with the option of teaching religion at the end of the school day. [17913/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Programme for Government 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.

I have commenced a process of consultation with opposition parties to discuss my proposals to introduce a new Admissions Bill. Following these consultations, it is my intention to publish a new Admissions Bill during the current Dáil session.

As the Deputy may be aware, a Private Members Bill proposing an amendment to section 7(3)(c) of the Equal Status Act has been initiated and is due to be discussed later today. As previously indicated, my preference is to discuss this complex issue with the Oireachtas Committee at the earliest opportunity and I am open to hearing views on the best way to proceed within our existing constitutional framework.

It is my view that an effective way of providing diversity and choice for parents is by providing additional multi-denominational and non-denominational schools, and in this regard, I have committed to increasing the rate of delivery of these schools, to reach a total of 400 by 2030.

In relation to the teaching of religion in schools, a follow-up paper to Report of Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector was published in 2014. The paper outlines good practice and options for promoting diversity in all schools and encourages school authorities to engage in consultation with stakeholders and to review their policies and practices on an ongoing basis to ensure that they remain suitable for the school population that they serve. One of the areas to be examined by schools relates to the scheduling of religion classes, and the paper gives an overview of different types of arrangements that schools can put in place in this regard. This is an area I plan to keep under review.

Legislative Programme

23. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the Technological Universities Bill 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18258/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy will be aware, the new Programme for Government outlines that this new Government will continue to support the creation of Technological Universities.

The first Government Legislative Programme of this new Partnership Government was published on 8 June 2016, and the Technological Universities Bill has been restored to the Dáil Order Paper at Committee Stage.

I recognise that there were a significant number of matters raised in respect of the Bill at both Committee and Report Stage. It is my intention to now consult with all of the relevant stakeholders in relation to both the matters raised during the legislative process and the com-

mitments contained in the Programme for Government.

Following the finalisation of this consultation process I will then advance the legislation having determined a position in relation to any matters raised as part of this consultation process.

Ministerial Meetings

24. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he met teachers and their unions on the issue of post-2011 entrants to teaching having a different pay rate to pre-2011 entrants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18286/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Government has committed to establishing a Public Service Pay Commission to examine pay levels across the Public Service, including entry pay levels. The terms of reference and timescale for the Commission's work are a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform and would require broad consultation, including engagement with staff representatives as was committed to in the Lansdowne Road Agreement. The teacher unions have made it clear to my Department that this is an issue of major concern to them.

I am making arrangements to meet all education unions as part of consultations with key stakeholders in the education and training sector on a range of issues.

The Government recognises the importance of being able to attract quality new entrants to the Public Service, particularly so in important professional areas like education.

The restrictions in entry pay levels were introduced in 2011 and 2012 across the public service at a time when the pressure in public finances was severe and the scope for new recruitment was very restricted.

Under the Lansdowne Road Agreement the process of restoring public service pay is commencing. An important feature of this is the flat rate increase which is being implemented. This is proportionately more valuable to those early in their careers. Restoration of the supervision and substitution payment is provided for subject to co-operation with the Lansdowne Road Agreement. The Lansdowne Road Agreement did not address the issue of pay of new entrants.

The Government has also indicated that it will support the gradual negotiated unwinding of FEMPI measures having due regard to the priority to improve public services and in recognition of the essential role played by public servants.

Apart from the issue of new entrant pay, my Department continues to seek to engage with teacher unions on issues of mutual concern and has recently reached agreement with INTO and TUI in respect of:

- discussions to improve the position of teachers on fixed-term and part-time teaching
- a robust review of in-school management structures
- an increase in the quantum of the extra Croke Park hours which do not have to be worked on a "whole school" basis.

Teachers' Remuneration

25. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to restore full equality of pay for all teachers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17910/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Government has committed to establishing a Public Service Pay Commission to examine pay levels across the Public Service, including entry pay levels. The terms of reference and timescale for the Commission's work are a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. The Government recognises the importance of being able to attract quality new entrants to the Public Service, particularly so in important professional areas like education.

The restrictions in entry pay levels were introduced in 2011 and 2012 across the public service at a time when the pressure in public finances was severe and the scope for new recruitment was very restricted. Under the Lansdowne Road Agreement the process of restoring public service pay is commencing. An important feature of this is the flat rate increase which is being implemented. This is proportionately more valuable to those early in their careers. Restoration of the supervision and substitution payment is provided for subject to co-operation with the Lansdowne Road Agreement. The Lansdowne Road Agreement did not address the issue of pay of new entrants.

My Department continues to seek to engage with teacher unions on issues of mutual concern and has recently reached agreement with INTO and TUI in respect of:

- discussions to improve the position of teachers on fixed-term and part-time teaching;
- a robust review of in-school management structures;
- an increase in the quantum of the extra Croke Park hours which do not have to be worked on a "whole school" basis. The Government has also indicated that it will support the gradual negotiated unwinding of FEMPI measures having due regard to the priority to improve public services and in recognition of the essential role played by public servants.

EU Directives

26. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills how he is implementing European Union Directive 77/486 in education; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18255/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Department of Education and Skills seeks to improve the standard of language education and the language competency of migrant students in the primary and post primary sectors in several ways.

Firstly, the Department allocates teachers to teach English as an additional language. Some €100 million is provided to give such additional language support to schools in this academic year. The level of additional language support is determined by the numbers of eligible students enrolled and the associated assessed levels of those students' language proficiency. The challenge for schools is to ensure that this very significant resource is used to maximum effect.

Secondly, the Department provides a programme of continuing professional development (CPD) for EAL (English as an Additional Language) teachers, principals and mainstream class teachers. The range of supports offered includes: seminars/courses for teachers of EAL, staff and for principals. The Department also funds the English Language Support Teachers Association to encourage teachers to network, to share experience and to provide a forum for discussion.

Thirdly, the Department provides support materials through CPD and has also provided materials for schools including the primary and post-primary assessment kits and the intercultural guidelines issued by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). Web-based and multi-media supports have also been developed. These, together with a range of other material, are available through AIM, the web-based portal for Accessing Intercultural Material.

The Intercultural Education Strategy requires that due cognisance be given to the importance of mother tongue by encouraging migrant students to maintain a connection with their mother tongue and culture to assist in the development of their sense of identity, belonging and self-esteem, as well as their proficiency in the language of instruction.

<http://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/b899a4e4-96f0-4370-bc4f-78fb93d42027/language-en>.

School Textbooks

27. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to roll-out e-books in schools, given the weight of school bags and the cost of hard-copy books; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18264/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The decision to use tablet devices is a matter for the Board of Management of a school. Where the introduction of new technology is planned, consultation with members of the school community including parents is advised. The cost and other implications must be fully considered by the Boards of Managements before a decision is made.

An advice sheet on the adoption of tablets in schools is available on the PDST-Technology in Education website which covers areas such as what tablets can offer a school, educational considerations, purchasing considerations and software.

As part of the new Digital Strategy for Schools my Department will provide advice on ICT equipment and digital learning tools that are best-suited to support learning and teaching in schools. €210m will be allocated over the period of the Strategy commencing in the next school year to fund equipment investment by schools.

Work on the implementation of the Strategy is now underway.

There is a School Books Grant Scheme in place that provides assistance for books for students in all recognised primary and post-primary schools in the Free Education Scheme. Under this scheme, my Department provided approx. €16m in funding to all these schools in 2015.

I wish to advise the Deputy that Circulars issued to all primary and post-primary schools in 2005 to highlight the potential health hazard of overweight school bags and to outline a range of local measures that could be put in place to help manage the issue.

Physical Education Facilities

28. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if and when he will audit all second-level schools which do not have a physical education hall on site. [18186/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to assure the Deputy that I fully recognise the key role of physical education within the school experience. In our Programme for Partnership Government we have set out a commitment to introduce a new Leaving Certificate Physical Education syllabus. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment has advanced this work. It will be a priority of my Government to ensure its implementation. When introduced, it will be on a par with English and History, for example.

The provision of play space, where site conditions and circumstances allow, is one of the issues considered in the architectural design of new schools and major extensions. My Department's design guidelines for schools include guidance in the provision of P.E. Halls, general purpose rooms and outdoor hard play areas such as basketball courts.

I also wish to advise the Deputy that the Physical Education curriculum has been designed on the basis that facilities in schools may vary. Many post primary schools have a PE hall and practically all schools have outdoor play areas which are used for teaching different aspects of the P.E. programme. In addition, many schools use adjacent local facilities, including Community Halls, public parks, playing fields and swimming pools. My Department continues to respond to the need to improve Physical Education facilities for all students attending schools within the constraints of the available funding. An audit of second-level schools is not planned at this time.

Languages Programme

29. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans for a new foreign languages strategy; how he proposes to accommodate the needs of new communities who are struggling to maintain their native languages; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18254/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department is working on a Foreign Language Strategy and intends to complete it by the autumn. The Strategy will consider foreign languages from the post-primary sector upwards.

The strategy will take into account the findings of a public consultative process with education stakeholders held in 2014. Following the analysis of the submissions received there were two further consultation events in 2015, one concentrating on schools and the second seeking input from stakeholders in the higher and further education sectors along with industry.

Over 10% of our population are immigrants from over 200 countries with their many languages. Our immigrants provide Ireland with a social, cultural and national resource that we welcome and want to nurture.

For Junior Cycle, students may study French, German, Spanish and Italian. A new specification for modern languages is being finalised by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) which includes these four languages and this framework could be used for other languages into the future.

With the introduction of the new Framework for Junior Cycle in 2014, schools may now also offer their students short courses (of 100 hours duration) in foreign languages. A short course in Chinese language and culture (as a foreign language) has been prepared by the NCCA. Short courses are also available in two other languages of our new communities, Polish (for heritage speakers) to stimulate and maintain students' interest in the Polish language and culture and to nurture their desire to maintain proficiency in their Polish. Russian (as a foreign language) is also available. It is the eighth most spoken language in the world. These latter two languages

courses have been developed by my Department's Post Primary Languages Initiative (PPLI). The PPLI is also in discussion with the Lithuanian, Latvian, and Romanian embassies in relation to developing short courses in these languages.

At Senior Cycle, in addition to French, German, Spanish and Italian, schools may also provide Leaving Certificate choices to their students which include Russian, Japanese and Arabic. In addition, the State Examinations Commission provides Leaving Certificate examinations in 'non-curricular EU languages'. Students who are from EU member states may present their home language as a non-curricular subject at Leaving Certificate, if they comply with certain criteria. For example, the non-curricular language must be their mother tongue.

The future of foreign languages, including the non-curricular languages, in the post-primary sector is currently under consideration as the Foreign Languages Strategy is being finalised.

It is also important that immigrant students gain proficiency in the language of instruction in the school they attend. Alleviation measures were put in place in the 2012/13 school year for schools with a high concentration of students requiring language support. These schools will continue to receive this allocation in 2016/17. Schools where a significant number of the total enrolment is made up of language support students with less than B1 (Level 3) proficiency can lodge an appeal for a review of their proposed allocation.

In the higher education sector, the different institutions provide courses in a number of the new communities languages. These can be taken as core subjects or in combination with a range of other disciplines such as business and the sciences.

Education Policy

30. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he is satisfied with the practice in schools where a child's parents or a young person over 18 years of age can opt out of religious instruction; if he will issue guidelines to ensure this right is vindicated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18287/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Under the Constitution and in accordance with Section 30 of the Education Act 1998, parents have a right to have their children opt out of religion classes if they so wish.

The manner in which any school ensures that the right to opt out of religion classes is upheld is a matter for the school concerned. Each individual school must determine the particular arrangements which are most appropriate in its individual circumstances having regard to local issues such as available space, supervision requirements and how the school concerned organises classes etc.

The follow-up paper to the Report of Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector which was published in 2014 outlines good practice and options for promoting diversity in all schools. The paper gives an overview of different types of arrangements that schools have put in place to facilitate those pupils who wish to opt-out of religious education.

The paper encourages school authorities to consider their policies and practices and to review whether they are taking the steps necessary to welcome all pupils and make them feel included.

I understand that in the case of Catholic schools, the Catholic Schools Partnership subsequently published guidelines for Catholic schools in relation to the inclusion of all pupils and

that this also contains suggestions on how such schools can manage the “opt-out” of religious education.

I also believe that difficulties could be avoided if, from the outset, a school’s arrangements for those students who do not wish to attend religious instruction are made clear to parents. In that regard, the Programme for Government contains a commitment to publish new school admissions legislation taking into account current draft proposals. The previously published Admissions to School Bill included a specific requirement that school enrolment policies must include details of the school’s arrangements for any students who do not wish to attend religious instruction. I believe this is an important measure which will help ensure and transparency from the outset as to how a school will uphold the rights of parents in this regard. It is my intention to retain this measure in the new legislative proposals.

I have commenced a process of consultation with opposition parties to discuss my proposals to introduce a new Admissions Bill. Following these consultations, it is my intention to publish a new Admissions Bill during the current Dáil session.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

31. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to change the pupil-teacher ratio for island primary schools; if he is willing to revert to the previous policy, where all offshore island primary schools on islands with only one school with more than eight pupils had two classroom teachers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18276/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The criteria used for the allocation of teaching posts for the 2016/2017 school year is set out in Circular 0007/2016. The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the 30 September 2015.

There is a reduced enrolment requirement for the retention of the second and third teaching post in island schools where the school is the only school on the island. The total number of pupils must be at 8 or above for the retention of the second teaching post. This special provision has been in place since the 2006/07 school year. Prior to that, island schools were subject to the enrolment thresholds of schools on the mainland.

The staffing arrangements for the current school year provide an improvement to the staffing levels of small schools. Improved appointment and retention thresholds for isolated one teacher schools were introduced for the 2015/16 school year. Where previously an isolated one teacher school would have required an enrolment of 20 pupils in order to appoint a second teacher, this has now been reduced to 15 pupils.

The Programme for Government has a commitment to reduce class sizes at primary level and to commencing a review, within three months, of teacher appointment thresholds in small schools with four teachers or less.

Further Education and Training Programmes Provision

32. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the changes he will introduce in the provision of training and skills to assist unemployed young persons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16125/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Further Education and Training (FET) sector has undergone major structural and policy change over the last number of years. The purpose of this reform is to ensure that we have a FET sector that is flexible and responsive to the needs of learners and industry alike.

Within the FET sector there is a range of flexible high quality programmes on offer to meet the needs of young unemployed people to enable them to develop skills that are genuinely valued by employers. The successful completion of these programmes can lead to awards of levels 1 to 6 on the National Framework of Qualifications which will enhance the individual's chances of gaining employment.

Provision is made available in a wide range of venues including second level Community Schools, Further Education Colleges, Youthreach and adult education centres and training centres. Guidance services are on offer within the 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs) that can offer valuable assistance in choosing the right programmes to assist them in planning progression to higher education and/or employment.

The Apprenticeship Council is overseeing the expansion of the apprenticeship system into a range of new areas, following a call for proposals from employers and education and training providers. 25 proposals have been prioritised by the Council for development, with employers on a number of these new apprenticeships planning to recruit in 2016. Some of these apprenticeships will be suitable for young people entering the labour market for the first time and the Council is working with partners to ensure that information on these opportunities is made available as widely as possible.

The Momentum programme was created in 2012 as a new innovation in the provision of free education and training to address the needs of long term unemployed and young unemployed individuals. To-date there have been two rounds of the programme with the second due to complete in mid-2016. Under this round, funding of €20m has been made available to SOLAS, to provide up to 6,000 training and education places for the long-term unemployed. In line with our commitment to Ireland's Youth Guarantee Initiative, 33% of those places are ring fenced for those under the age of 25.

Schools Building Projects Status

33. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of funding for the building of a school (details supplied). [18241/16]

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 announced last November.

The delivery of a project necessitates the acquisition of a suitable site. Once a site is acquired, the project will be progressed with a view to proceeding to tender and construction in 2019-2021, as outlined in the programme.

Equality Legislation

34. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the advice his Department sought or received on the constitutional issues in relation to amending the Equal Status Act, to cease discrimination on school admission. [18289/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): It is acknowledged that any change to the Equal Status Act would be extremely difficult as this is a hugely complex area legally, constitutionally, and in other ways.

I note that the previous Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education and Social Protection, when conducting pre-legislative scrutiny of the previously published Admissions Bill, acknowledged the potential tension between Articles 42 (Education) and 44 (Religion) of Bunreacht na hÉireann and concluded that the provisions of the constitution “poses a particular difficulty when legislating in this policy area.”

The Programme for Government 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.

I have commenced a process of consultation with opposition parties to discuss my proposals to introduce a new Admissions Bill. Following these consultations, it is my intention to publish a new Admissions Bill during the current Dáil session. The new Admissions Bill will bring tangible benefits to all parents. The Bill will oblige all schools to admit pupils where there are available places. It is important to note that 80% of schools are not oversubscribed.

As the Deputy may be aware, a Private Members Bill proposing an amendment to section 7(3)(c) of the Equal Status Act has been initiated and is due to be discussed later today. I can advise that I have sought advices from the Attorney General on the proposals. As previously indicated, my preference is to discuss this complex issue with the Oireachtas Committee at the earliest opportunity and I am open to hearing views on the best way to proceed within our existing constitutional framework.

It is my view that an effective way of providing diversity and choice for parents is by providing additional multi-denominational and non-denominational schools, and in this regard, I have committed to increasing the number of these schools with a view to reaching 400 by 2030 as set out in the Programme for Government.

Equality Legislation

35. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department has sought legal opinion on the constitutional position of section 7(3)(c) of the Equal Status Act 2000; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18268/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): It is acknowledged that any change to the Equal Status Act would be extremely difficult as this is a hugely complex area legally, constitutionally, and in other ways.

I note that the previous Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education and Social Protection, when conducting pre-legislative scrutiny of the previously published Admissions Bill, acknowledged the potential tension between Articles 42 (Education) and 44 (Religion) of Bunreacht na hÉireann and concluded that the provisions of the constitution “poses a particular difficulty when legislating in this policy area.”

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Skills Development

36. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his short-term and medium-term proposals to meet the education and skills requirements of a modern economy, given the needs of the manufacturing and service sectors; if he expects to provide sufficient apprenticeships to satisfy current and future requirements; if he has identified any specific areas that require special attention. [18261/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department published a new National Skills Strategy in January 2016. The purpose of this new Strategy is to provide a framework for skills development that will help drive Ireland's growth both economically and societally over the next decade. Through the vision, objectives, actions and indicators, the Strategy will support the development of a well-educated, well-skilled and adaptable labour force, creating and sustaining a strong pool of talented people of all ages throughout Ireland.

The Strategy underlines the importance of employer participation in the development and effective use of skills. This can happen through influencing the skills development of graduates, upskilling existing staff and by supporting knowledge transfer between educational institutions and enterprises. The Strategy sets out new structures to drive better engagement between employers, education and training providers and other stakeholders. I will be appointing a new National Skills Council, which will oversee Strategy implementation and consider and respond to labour market trends and sectoral needs.

A network of 9 Regional Skills Fora has also been established to foster greater engagement between the education and training system, employers and other enterprise stakeholders in building the skills of each region. The fora provide a vehicle for close co-operation at regional level between education and training providers and enterprise, between the different education and training providers themselves and a local link with the implementation of other strategies such as the Regional Action Plans for Jobs and Pathways to Work.

The expansion of the apprenticeship system is one of my key priorities and I am encouraged by the increase in apprenticeship registrations in existing trades and the progress being made in introducing new apprenticeships, focusing initially on the 25 priority proposals identified by the Apprenticeship Council through their public call. In the Programme for a Partnership.

Government we have committed to double the number of apprenticeships by 2020. We will target 100 different apprenticeship schemes spread across sectors of the economy and in every region of Ireland.

Schools Building Projects Status

37. **Deputy Josepha Madigan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps he will take to expedite the building and planning issues that have arisen for a school (details supplied); and if the school can be built earlier than 2018. [17915/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy will be aware of the planning difficulties associated with this educational campus, related largely to the means of access to the site. Planning permission has been sought and refused for both a new primary school and a physical education hall for the existing post-primary school.

An Bord Pleanála has indicated that the matter of assessing alternative means of accessing these lands would benefit from a co-ordinated approach by my Department and the planning authority. Pre-planning discussions have already taken place in this regard with a view to progressing a further planning application as soon as possible for both the new primary school and the physical education hall.

The optimal outcome is a comprehensive and balanced solution to ongoing access issues for this educational campus as a whole and my Department is focused on achieving this outcome. My Department is continuing to engage with the planning authorities in that regard.

Legislative Reviews

38. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to carry out or commission a revised plan for the implementation of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Acts, particularly given that the most recent report of this type was published ten years ago; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18072/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that, Section 2 of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004, providing for the inclusive education of children with special educational needs and the sections of the Act which placed the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) on a statutory footing, were commenced in 2005.

The remaining sections of the EPSEN Act, have yet to be commenced. Legal advice indicates that the EPSEN Act, as it is currently constituted, may not be implemented on a phased, or age cohort, basis.

The NCSE has published a Plan for the Implementation of the EPSEN Act. This report, which was published in 2006, made recommendations which suggested that additional investment over a period of years of up to €235m per annum, across the education and health sectors, would be required to fully implement the EPSEN Act.

My Department's opinion is that the level of investment required could be significantly greater than that envisaged in the NCSE report. However, a total estimate of this amount has not been quantified.

Revised estimates of the amount of additional expenditure required to fully implement the

remaining sections of the EPSEN Act have not recently been conducted. The level of additional expenditure required would have to take into account annual demographic growth and service developments in the area of special educational needs, pricing adjustments and salary cost differentials on an ongoing basis.

Estimates would also have to be made as to the number of pupils who might currently qualify for the statutory service provisions envisaged by the EPSEN Act.

I wish to advise that the NCSE has a statutory function under the EPSEN Act to advise me in relation to matters concerning the education of children with special educational needs.

While awaiting the full implementation of the EPSEN Act, the NCSE has published a number of policy advice papers.

These reports include the NCSE Report on Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Schools (2013) and the Report of the NCSE Working Group: Proposed New Model for Allocating Teaching Resources for Students with Special Educational Needs (2014).

The reports made a number of recommendations aimed at developing a better or more effective alternative to the current resource allocation model, and which aims to move the system towards ultimate implementation of the EPSEN Act.

It is therefore planned to bring into effect many of the good ideas contained in the EPSEN Act, on a non-statutory basis initially, through policy developments across a range of areas, in conjunction with NCSE policy advice.

Under the Programme for a Partnership Government, I have also committed to consulting with stakeholders to see how best to progress sections of the EPSEN Act that were introduced on a non-statutory basis.

School Curriculum

39. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of negotiations with the Association of Secondary Teachers of Ireland regarding the outstanding dispute over reform of the junior education cycle; to address concerns by students and parents that students in schools staffed by members of the Association of Secondary Teachers of Ireland will lose 10% in English examinations in 2017 due to the lack of a resolution. [18281/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Students currently in second year of Junior Cycle who have not completed their first Classroom-Based Assessment (CBA) will, as agreed with the teacher unions, have the opportunity to complete this early in the first term of the coming school year.

It is a matter of deep regret that ASTI has failed to deliver on the 2015 agreement with their leadership. The refusal to cooperate with the new framework is impacting on current junior cycle students of English.

On foot of a letter received from the General Secretary of ASTI last month, indicating that the ASTI looked forward to engaging with me to resolve issues that are of concern to their members, including junior cycle reform, I met with ASTI last week and had an exchange of views in relation to junior cycle. I advised ASTI that I would welcome further engagement on this matter and I hope that the ASTI will agree to this.

School Transport Administration

40. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to address concerns that the school transport programme is not being run on an efficient basis, especially with regard to route selection criteria and the criteria for providing a service to students wishing to avail of the programme on a concessionary basis. [18280/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): The purpose of my Department's School Transport Scheme is, having regard to available resources, to support the transport to and from school of children who reside remote from their nearest school.

School Transport is a very significant operation managed by Bus Éireann on behalf of my Department. In the region of 113,000 children, including some 10,000 children with special educational needs, are transported in approximately 4,000 vehicles each school day. The overall costs of the scheme have reduced by some 7% since 2008 as a result of policy changes and other efficiencies. One of the main objectives of the Scheme is to ensure that, as far as possible, eligible children have a reasonable level of service while at the same time, ensuring that school transport vehicles are fully utilised in an efficient and cost effective manner. One of the impacts of the policy changes introduced in recent years is that there has been a reduction in the number of eligible pupils availing of school transport places and a growth in the number of pupils who avail of places on a concessionary basis.

Routes are planned on the basis of the locations of children who are eligible for school transport only.

In general, children are eligible for school transport if they meet the requisite distance criterion and are attending their nearest school having regard to ethos and language.

Children who are not eligible for school transport may avail of school transport on a concessionary basis only; the demand for transport on a concessionary basis is mainly from families whose children who are not attending their nearest 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.

The Programme for Government commits to review the concessionary charges and rules element of the School Transport Scheme prior to Budget 2017.

This review, which is being commenced, will be aimed at identifying issues in relation to current rules and charges relating to concessionary places under the School Transport Scheme with a view to maximising the effectiveness of available services for children.

The results of the review will be considered in the context of Budget 2017.

Pending this review, there will be no planned programme of downsizing school buses in the coming school year. There will be route changes and variations in line with normal operational decisions that occur from year to year, and any impacts in terms of increases or decreases of available places will be marginal, in line with what occurs every year.

Teachers' Remuneration

41. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will end the position where newer teachers are on inferior pay rates and conditions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18283/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Government has committed to establishing a Public Service Pay Commission to examine pay levels across the Public Service, including entry pay levels. The terms of reference and timescale for the Commission's work are a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

The Government recognises the importance of being able to attract quality new entrants to the Public Service, particularly so in important professional areas like education.

The restrictions in entry pay levels were introduced in 2011 and 2012 across the public service at a time when the pressure in public finances was severe and the scope for new recruitment was very restricted.

Under the Lansdowne Road Agreement the process of restoring public service pay is commencing. An important feature of this is the flat rate increase which is being implemented. This is proportionately more valuable to those early in their careers. Restoration of the supervision and substitution payment is provided for subject to co-operation with the Lansdowne Road Agreement. The Lansdowne Road Agreement did not address the issue of pay of new entrants.

My Department continues to seek to engage with teacher unions on issues of mutual concern and has recently reached agreement with INTO and TUI in respect of:

- discussions to improve the position of teachers on fixed-term and part-time teaching
- a robust review of in-school management structures
- an increase in the quantum of the extra Croke Park hours which do not have to be worked on a "whole school" basis.

The Government has also indicated that it will support the gradual negotiated unwinding of FEMPI measures having due regard to the priority to improve public services and in recognition of the essential role played by public servants.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

42. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the Department of Health or any agencies acting for that Department informed his Department of their intention to remove supports to a school (details supplied) and if they have advised parents to seek this funding from his Department. [17911/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) makes allocations for Teachers and Special Needs Assistants to special schools each year. In doing so, they take into account the number of pupils enrolled to the school and the care needs of the pupils attending the school, in accordance with my Department's allocation criteria.

The number of special school teaching posts which will be allocated to St Augustine's Special School by the NCSE for the coming 2016/17 school year will be 22 teachers and 1 Administrative Principal.

The number of Special Needs Assistant posts (SNAs) which will be allocated to the school

for coming 2016/17 school year will be 28 SNAs.

This is the same number of teaching and SNA posts which were allocated to the school during the current 2015/16 school year.

There has therefore been no reduction to the number of SNA or special school teaching posts being allocated to the school by the NCSE.

I understand that the staffing and service adjustments referred to in this question relate to the provision of Residential and Vocational Services which are provided to the school by St John Of God's Community Services, and the proposed reconfiguration of these services.

I also understand that a meeting recently took place between Health Service Executive (HSE) officials and the management team of St John of God's Services, on 20th June, 2016, regarding this matter. Following this meeting, it was agreed that the status quo provision will remain in place until such time as the proposals are fully considered and discussed between all relevant stakeholders.

This means that all services currently provided by St John of God's Community Services at St Augustine's school will continue without change until such a time as these proposals are worked through.

Officials from my Department have recently been in contact with their colleagues at the Department of Health regarding this matter, however, I can advise that my Department was not informed in advance of the intention by St John of God's Community Services to reconfigure their services at the school, and was not asked to provide additional funding to supplement any service reorganisation.

My Department will continue to work with other service providers such as the HSE and St John of God's Community Services, as necessary, in order to resolve any outstanding issues.

Teachers' Remuneration

43. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has met with the Irish National Teachers' Organisation, the Teachers Union of Ireland and the Association of Secondary Teachers in Ireland on the issue of post-2011 entrants to teaching having a different pay rate to pre-2011 entrants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18267/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Government has committed to establishing a Public Service Pay Commission to examine pay levels across the Public Service, including entry pay levels. The terms of reference and timescale for the Commission's work are a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform and would require broad consultation, including engagement with staff representatives as was committed to in the Lansdowne Road Agreement. The teacher unions have made it clear to my Department that this is an issue of major concern to them. I am making arrangements to meet them as part of consultations with key stakeholders in the education and training sector on a range of issues.

Schools Mental Health Strategies

44. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to consider developing and issuing a circular to primary schools in order to incorporate weekly discussions on the issue of mental health and well-being in the classroom; to encourage the roll-out of basic awareness

strategies such as story-telling and question and answer sessions, to promote a positive sense of health and well-being; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18217/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department is strongly supportive of the promotion of positive mental health awareness in both primary and post-primary schools as part of an overall healthy lifestyle for our young people. The Department adopts a holistic and integrated approach to supporting the work of schools in promoting positive mental health and to supporting those with a broad range of problems, behavioural, emotional and social.

My Department issued a circular to all primary schools in February this year promoting and encouraging Healthy Lifestyles for their pupils. Schools and the wider education sector have a vital role to play in contributing to the Government's 'Healthy Ireland' agenda that is being led by the Department of Health and is supported by my Department. It is acknowledged that positive mental and psychological wellbeing are a key aspect of healthy lifestyles. Schools are contributing to the overall physical, mental health and wellbeing of our young people but this must be done in collaboration with their families and their community.

Creating a healthy lifestyle spans the curriculum in schools, whole-school ethos, quality of teaching, learning and assessment, pupil support, pastoral care and the provision of professional development for teachers. It also involves other supports such as educational psychological services and the interface with other agencies, both nationally and locally. Schools support these areas also through their implementation of their anti-bullying, substance misuse, attendance policies and through the delivery of the SPHE curriculum.

It is also important that work in this area commences when pupils are at an early age. To this end, Wellbeing Guidelines for Primary Schools were published by my Department in January 2015. These guidelines were developed, along with guidelines for post-primary schools, following a process of wide consultation, by a working group with representation from the Teacher Education Section/Inspectorate, SPHE Support Service, National Psychological Service (NEPS), Department of Health and the Health Service Executive/National Office for Suicide Prevention (NOSP).

The guidelines provide practical guidance to schools on how they can promote positive mental health and well-being in an integrated school-wide way. They also provide evidence-based advice on how to support young people who may be at risk of suicidal behaviour.

The Guidelines are for all members of the school community, boards of management and in-school management teams who play a central leadership role in positive mental health promotion. They are also useful for parents' associations, student councils, health and other personnel who are seeking an understanding of how to work in and with schools.

Specific attention is drawn within the Guidelines to the identification of pupils with mental health difficulties, the support process and referral pathways available to schools to provide for their needs and where the difficulties result in absences from school support mechanisms are suggested to ease the pupils re-integration.

My Department, in collaboration with the Department of Health and the HSE, provides support to schools to implement this agenda. At Primary school level the HSE's Health Promotion Officers and my Department's NEPS service respectively support school staff delivery of programmes such as Zippy's Friends and the Friends for Life which promote children's resilience and coping skills which enable them better to manage anxiety.

School Transport Administration

45. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to review the situation whereby persons over 70 years of age cannot transport children to and from school, but the same person can carry the same children outside of school hours; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18265/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): The Deputy is aware that Bus Éireann has advised my Department that in response to the expressed wishes of many school bus drivers - both Bus Éireann and private contractor school bus drivers - who wanted to remain in the position upon reaching retirement age at sixty-five years, and following the advice of their Medical Department, the Company decided to alter the compulsory retirement age for school bus drivers who provide services under the School Transport Scheme to enable experienced personnel to remain on in the position for a maximum of five more years if desired.

School bus drivers who opt to remain on after sixty-five years of age may do so up to the age of seventy, if they are satisfied to do so, subject to annual medical review and once they continue to hold the requisite driving licence. Bus Éireann has further advised that the opinion of the Bus Éireann Chief Medical Officer is that, given the demanding and safety critical nature of School Bus driving, 70 years of age is deemed a reasonable age at which to retire from such employment.

In light of the foregoing I have no plans to review the situation.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

46. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his proposals to meet the special needs school place requirements at primary and secondary level and if he plans to ensure the availability of the relevant number of teachers and special needs assistants in the next five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18260/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that funding for special education provision in 2016 will amount to some €1.5 billion, which is equivalent to over 17% of the gross overall current allocation for education and training. It has increased by 10% in the past two years.

The investment which is being made to support children with special educational needs is an area of spending which has been prioritised above most other areas by this Government.

The policy of my Department is that children with special educational needs should be included where possible and appropriate in mainstream placements with additional supports provided. In circumstances where children with special educational need require more specialised interventions, special school or special class places are also available.

Children, therefore, have a number of placement options including mainstream placement with support, placement in a special class in a mainstream school or placement in a special class in a special school.

We now have the highest level of Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support, Resource Teaching allocations and Special Class provision that we have ever had, which will ensure that children with special educational needs can continue to participate in education and be supported in a manner appropriate to their needs.

I recently announced that from September next 12,900 Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) will be available for allocation to primary and secondary schools, which is 860 more posts, or a 7% increase, in the number of posts over which were available last year. In total the number of SNA posts available has increased by almost 22% from 10,575 posts available in 2011.

There are currently over 11,800 learning support and Resource Teacher posts in mainstream primary and post primary schools providing additional teaching support to pupils with special educational needs.

In May of this year the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) allocated 7,015 Resource Teaching posts to mainstream schools for September 2016, which is an increase of approximately 9% over the number allocated at September 2015.

In total, 7,452 resource teacher posts will be available for allocation to schools for 2016/17, which represents an increase of 41% from 5,265 posts available in 2011.

In addition, approximately 150 new Special Classes will be opened for the 2016/17 school year, which means there will be over 1,150 special classes in place, compared to 548 special classes in 2011.

The NCSE, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) will continue to engage with schools in order to plan for, and to open, new special classes each year, in order to ensure there are sufficient special class placements available at primary and post primary school level to meet demand in a given area.

125 special schools also provide specialist education for those pupils who need it.

The provision which is being made ensures that children with special educational needs can continue to participate in education and be supported in a manner appropriate to their needs.

As funding for the provision of special educational needs supports for future years will be considered annually, as part of the annual estimates process, I am not in a position to set out details of the anticipated provision for children with special educational needs for the future five year period. However, I can confirm that this Government will continue to ensure that the supports required to ensure that all children with special educational needs can continue to participate in education will be provided.

Special Educational Needs Staff

47. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to review the situation whereby a school that applies for hours under the special needs assistant scheme is not informed until August of that year, which happened in 2015, leaving schools and families unaware of the situation until the children are due to return to school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18279/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), for allocating Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) to schools, to support children with special educational needs. The NCSE operates within my Department's criteria in allocating such support.

The Deputy will be aware that last week I announced that 860 additional SNAs will be available for allocation to schools from September 2016.

12,900 SNA posts will now be available. This is more SNAs than we have ever had previously and will ensure that all children who qualify for SNA support can continue to receive access to such support.

In total, the number of SNAs available has increased by almost 22% since 2011, at which point 10,575 posts were available.

The criteria by which SNA support is allocated to schools is set out in my Departments Circular, DES 30/2014, which states that a key feature of the NCSE allocation process is to provide an annual allocation of SNA support to eligible schools.

The NCSE issues notification to schools each year requesting they submit applications for SNA support to the NCSE for the coming school year. Having considered all of the applications received, the NCSE advises schools of their SNA allocation quantum for the coming school year, taking into account the number of valid applications received and the assessed care needs of the children concerned.

This year, the NCSE asked all schools to submit applications for SNA support by 29th February, 2016.

The NCSE advised all schools of their allocations for SNA support for the 2016/17 school year, on 14th June, 2016, based on the number of valid applications received.

The provision of allocations in June ensures that schools have sufficient time to plan for the provision of supports in advance of September 2016. It also gives schools certainty as to the resources which will be available to them for the coming school year.

Whereas the NCSE will continue to consider applications throughout the school year, in cases where schools have enrolled new pupils with care needs, where new assessments are received, or in cases of emergencies, the main allocation of SNA support is now made to schools on an annual allocation basis and most schools will by now have received their SNA allocations for September 2016.

Details of the allocations for SNA support made to schools is available at www.ncse.ie.

Closed-Circuit Television Systems

48. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the regulations in place with regard to closed circuit television cameras on private property that border property in public places, that is, private houses in a housing estate; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18114/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy Dara Murphy): The general position is that the Data Protection Acts 1988 and 2003 apply to personal images recorded by means of video cameras unless the recording activity relates to an individual's own personal, family or recreational activities. The recording of images in public places is, therefore, generally covered by data protection legislation. Useful material on this issue is available on the website of the Data Protection Commissioner, including information on the statutory obligations placed on those who use such systems to collect personal data and the rights of, and redress mechanisms available to, those whose personal data are processed by such means (www.dataprotection.ie).

Commencement of Legislation

49. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to commence all sections of the Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act 2015; the reason for the delay; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18395/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 was signed into law by the President on 30 December 2015 but has not yet been commenced. It was indicated during the debates on the Bill in the Oireachtas that commencement of the Act is planned for the latter half of 2016 and this remains the position.

Deputies will appreciate that careful planning and groundwork, and not just funding, has to be put in to ensure that the commencement of the Act is correctly, appropriately and effectively handled. My officials are working carefully on this at present in consultation with the Department of Health and the Mental Health Commission.

A Steering Group on the Implementation of the Decision Support Service is now in place to oversee the establishment and commissioning of the Decision Support Service within the Mental Health Commission, including overseeing the recruitment of the Director of the Service and matters relating to the resourcing of the Service. The Steering Group comprises senior officials from the Department of Justice and Equality, the Department of Health and the Mental Health Commission and a key early deliverable for this group will be the transfer of personnel to the Mental Health Commission to further the startup project.

The commencement of Part 8 of the Act, which provides a legislative framework for advance healthcare directives, is a matter for the Minister for Health.

Legislative Programme

50. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to review the minimum statutory retirement age for those persons willing and able to continue working; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17919/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): In my capacity as Minister for Justice and Equality, I have responsibility for equality legislation, which provides for retirement ages in line with the relevant EU Directive provision that differences of treatment on the grounds of age are permissible if, within the context of national law, they are objectively and reasonably justified by a legitimate aim including legitimate employment policy, labour market and vocational training objectives, and if the means of achieving that aim are appropriate and necessary. The equality legislation also provides for the provision of fixed term contracts following contractual retirement age if, within the context of national law, the provision of such contracts is duly objectively and reasonably justified.

I have no ministerial responsibility for retirement age issues generally either in the public sector (where mandatory retirement ages are a feature of public sector employment law) or the private sector (where there is no statutory retirement age). The Deputy will be interested to know that the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform is leading a cross-Departmental working group on Fuller Working Lives which is examining the full range of working life and retirement issues and which is expected to report shortly.

Garda Operations

51. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of incident calls to Tallaght and Rathfarnham Garda stations received between 1 January and 31 May 2016, by month; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17955/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Garda authorities that the Communications Centre in the Dublin Metropolitan Region is responsible for the management of all emergency calls received to the emergency line-999 within that Region. The number of incidents recorded in the Communications Centre for the Tallaght and Rathfarnham areas between 1 January 2016 and 31 May 2016 is as follows:

Tallaght and Rathfarnham Incident Calls January - May 2016

January	February	March	April	May
1,500	1,452	1,630	1,443	1,594

Local Garda management closely monitors the allocation of all resources, including mobile units, in the context of crime trends, policing needs and other operational strategies in place on a District, Divisional and Regional level, to ensure optimum use is made of Garda resources, and the best possible Garda service is provided to the public. Every effort is made to ensure that all calls received are attended to in a timely manner and this is an aspect that is kept under review.

Court Sitings

52. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the relocation of the court services to Tallaght, Dublin 24; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17956/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will be aware, under the provisions of the Courts Service Act 1998, management of the courts, including the provision of accommodation for court sittings, is the responsibility of the Courts Service which is independent in exercising its functions. However, in order to be of assistance, I have had enquiries made and I am informed that the District Court in Tallaght court currently sits 4 days per week. Charge sheets and summonses are dealt with on 3.5 days per week with a Juvenile court sitting 0.5 days per week. The Courts Service has advised that there are no plans to change the business profile of the court services currently provided at Tallaght courthouse.

Garda Misconduct Allegations

53. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if a person (details supplied) will be consulted in the drafting of the terms of the reference of the statutory inquiry into a case; if she has begun drafting these terms of terms of reference and when she will finalise them; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17970/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Deputy refers to a case which has been the subject of a review carried out under the Independent

Review Mechanism set up by the Government to consider complaints of Garda misconduct received by the Taoiseach and myself.

In the case referred to in the Deputy's question, counsel recommended a non-statutory inquiry. I accepted this recommendation and informed the complainant of my decision. Subsequently, in consultation with the Attorney General on this and the other cases where an inquiry was recommended, I decided that a statutory inquiry under section 42 of the Garda Síochána Act would be a more effective instrument for such an inquiry. This fact was communicated to the person concerned on 18 May, 2016.

I am currently consulting with the Attorney General about the terms of reference for the inquiry and I will be in further contact with the person referred to in due course.

Garda Investigations

54. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality to provide details of all costs associated with the Garda Síochána investigation into a person (details supplied) including the number of gardaí and overtime involved in the investigation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17976/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Deputy will appreciate that I do not have a direct role in relation to the management of particular Garda investigations. To be of assistance I have asked the Garda authorities for a report on the matters referred to and I will contact the Deputy directly when the report is to hand.

Disability Act Employment Targets

55. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the steps she has taken to ensure the public service is implementing a proactive approach to employing persons with disabilities in line with Part 5 of the Disability Act 2005; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18000/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Implementation of Part 5 of the Disability Act 2005 is monitored on an ongoing basis by the National Disability Authority. The Authority reports each year on progress made towards the current statutory 3% target for employment in the public sector. The most recent report published in 2015 shows that at the end of 2014, 3.5% of staff employed in public sector bodies are people with disabilities. This is an increase from 3.4% in 2013 and is the fourth successive year of exceeding the 3% target.

These provisions are being strengthened in the context of the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities. The Strategy was launched on 2 October 2015, and sets out a ten-year approach to ensuring that people with disabilities who are able to, and want to, work are supported and enabled to do so. It is a cross-government approach that brings together actions by different Departments and State agencies in a concerted effort to address the barriers and challenges that impact on employment of people with disabilities. In tandem with that, it seeks to ensure there will be joined-up services and supports at local level to support individuals on their journey into and in employment.

The Strategy's six strategic priorities are to:

- Build skills, capacity and independence;

- Provide bridges and supports into work;
- Make work pay;
- Promote job retention and re-entry to work;
- Provide coordinated and seamless support;
- Engage employers.

The Strategy contains commitments in relation to:

- An increase in the public service employment target of people with disabilities on a phased basis from 3% to 6%;

- Special public service competitions for people with disabilities and the opening up of alternative recruitment channels for people with disabilities;

- The provision of an NDA-assisted employer helpline to provide expert guidance and peer support to employers in relation to the employment of staff with disabilities.

The implementation of the Strategy will be subject to regular monitoring, and there will be a review and renewal every three years. The Strategy Implementation Group will publish its first Annual Report before end-2016.

Immigration Data

56. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the numbers of unaccompanied children relocated here; her deliberations with European Union colleagues on this matter; and her plans to allow those children access to claim asylum here. [18022/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP) was established by Government decision on 10 September 2015 as a direct response to the humanitarian crisis that developed in Southern Europe as a consequence of mass migration from areas of conflict in the Middle East and Africa. In announcing the Programme, the Government recognised the importance of addressing the position of unaccompanied children. However, as indicated in previous responses to parliamentary questions, the pace of the relocation programme in Ireland and across the European Union has been hampered by significant operational delays and technical issues due to the sheer numbers involved and other logistical difficulties that have arisen at the ‘hotspot’ locations in Italy and Greece.

A team of officials from my Department, including the Director of the Irish Refugee Protection Programme, travelled to Greece earlier this month to meet with Irish embassy officials and relevant Greek authorities both to signal Ireland’s tangible willingness to assist and to identify ways of addressing the obstacles that have arisen. The outcome of that visit has been very positive and the Greek authorities have now confirmed that, within the coming months, they will be able to increase significantly the overall numbers available to Ireland.

Yesterday, I chaired a meeting of the high level Task Force established to oversee the implementation of the IRPP during which an approach to taking unaccompanied minors (most likely from Greece) was discussed. Further consideration of this will now be given by the relevant agencies and Departments, including Tusla, the Child and Family Agency under the auspices of

the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and officials from my own Department.

I continue to work proactively with my colleagues in Europe to ensure that Ireland and the European Union responds comprehensively to all aspects of the ongoing migration and refugee crisis. The next Justice and Home Affairs Council meeting is taking place on 7th and 8th July where further discussion on the implementation of agreed measures will take place.

Garda Deployment

57. Deputy Louise O'Reilly asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda Síochána foot patrols in Rush, County Dublin, since January 2016 by month, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18056/16]

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 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 am advised that the specific information requested regarding the number of foot patrols in Rush is not readily available and would necessitate a disproportionate expenditure of Garda time and resources to collate.

I have been informed by the Commissioner that the area in question is patrolled by Garda members who are assigned to the Balbriggan Garda District and that as of the 30 April 2016, the latest date for which figures are readily available, there were 89 members attached to the Balbriggan District.

I am further informed that additional patrols under Operation 'Hybrid' are also operating in this area. During the summer months as part of Operation Irene additional mobile and mountain-bike patrols are deployed by local Garda Management focused in the area referred to, its environs and surrounding amenities.

Visa Applications

58. Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality why a person (details supplied) who has a religious volunteer visa was refused permission to stay here having completed the three years, despite such a visa allowing for an extension of 12 months; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18153/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I have been informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person mentioned by the Deputy was granted permission on 9 July 2011 to allow them to work as a Volunteer in the State. Under the Immigration Arrangements for Lay Volunteers, where permission was granted on or after 1 January 2011, such permission is granted for 12 months at a time for a maximum period of 3 years. This person will have completed their 3

years on 30 August 2016 when their permission is due to expire. Volunteers are deemed to be any person who is undertaking voluntary work, which may or may not involve a payment, for an organisation such as a charity, religious institution/order/church or other voluntary organisation.

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

Legislative Measures

59. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she is aware of the Amnesty International report, Norway: The Human Cost of Crushing the Market: Criminalization of Sex Work in Norway; if its conclusions have implications for Part 4 of the Sexual Offences Bill 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18213/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Bill 2015, which completed all stages in the Seanad in January 2016, provides for two new offences of purchasing sexual services, in the context of prostitution. The purpose of these offences is to target the demand for prostitution. The first is a general offence of paying to engage in sexual activity with a prostitute which carries a penalty of a fine of up to €500 for a first offence and fines of up to €1000 for a second or subsequent offence. The second is the more serious offence of paying for sexual activity with a trafficked person, in the context of prostitution, and carries a potential penalty of up to 5 years imprisonment and/or a fine. In both cases, the person selling the sexual service will not commit an offence.

These proposals have been developed following extensive consultation, initiated by my Department, dating back to 2012. The new offences also implement the recommendation of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice, Equality and Defence which called for the introduction of an offence criminalising the purchase of sexual services. The purpose of introducing these provisions is primarily to target the trafficking and sexual exploitation of persons through prostitution.

In deciding to put forward these provisions I have considered all sides of the debate, including those with positions similar to Amnesty International. I have considered the experience of those states which have introduced similar measures and those states which have addressed prostitution in a different way. I have also considered the reports and findings of various international organisations. Both the Council of Europe and the European Parliament have recognised the effectiveness of the criminalisation of the purchase of sexual services as a tool in the fight against human trafficking.

Further research will inevitably be published during the progress of the legislation and it will continue to be examined and considered. I would note that many of the findings of this latest report by Amnesty International relate to issues not directly connected with the law criminalising the purchase of sexual services, for example issues of homelessness and discrimination faced by sex workers. I am acutely conscious of the myriad of difficulties faced daily by vulnerable men and women involved in sex work and I am under no illusion that these difficulties will be solved by this legislation alone.

Therefore, in addition to criminalising the purchase of sexual services, there is a need to offer additional supports to men and women who wish to exit prostitution. Ruhama provide support to those involved in prostitution including assistance with exiting prostitution. My Department through the Anti-Human Trafficking Unit provide funding to Ruhama - €225,000 in 2015 (an increase from €172,000 in 2014). The funding is provided both for work with victims of human trafficking and for their work with women affected by prostitution.

I remain convinced that to target the exploitation associated with prostitution requires targeting those who demand those services. The most direct way of combating this form of exploitation is to send the message to those who pay for these services, and who ignore the exploitation of the women and men involved, that their behaviour is unacceptable and that their behaviour supports the exploitation of other people.

Anti-Social Behaviour

60. Deputy Róisín Shortall asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she is aware of the difficulties for An Garda Síochána in policing anti-social activity associated with public drinking in view of the fact that this is not currently an offence and by-laws vary in this regard depending on the local authority, harbour authority, transport authority, and so on; and the steps she will take to address this escalating problem. [18271/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised that the Garda authorities engage regularly with local authorities and other relevant bodies, including those referred to, as well as business and community interests in relation to the management of public events, gatherings in public places and the maintenance of public order, including in relation to the misuse of alcohol and under-age drinking. Gardaí also implement relevant policing operations as required including with respect to areas favoured for public recreation during the summer months.

There is a range of legislation in place to address the misuse of alcohol in public places, including section 37A of the Intoxicating Liquor Act 1988, (as inserted by section 14 of the Intoxicating Liquor Act 2008), which provides that where a Garda suspects that a person is under 18 years of age and that he or she, or anyone accompanying him or her, is in possession of intoxicating liquor for consumption by a person under 18 years (other than in a private dwelling), the Garda may seek an explanation and if not satisfied with the reply, may seize the bottle or container of intoxicating liquor. The Garda may also seek the name, address and age of the person suspected of being under 18 years of age. It is an offence for a person, when requested by a Garda, to refuse to give his or her name, address and age, to give a name, address or age that is false or misleading, or to refuse to hand over the bottle or container.

Moreover, section 8A of the Criminal Justice (Public Order) Act 1994, (as inserted by section 19 of the Intoxicating Liquor Act 2008), provides that a member of the Garda Síochána may, in certain circumstances, seize intoxicating liquor from any person regardless of age. Gardaí may also request the person to provide his or her name and address, to desist from certain behaviour and to leave the place concerned in a peaceable and orderly manner. Gardaí may use these powers to prevent nuisance or annoyance to others and to forestall damage to property or a breach of the peace. Any failure by a person to cooperate with a request to hand over intoxicating liquor or to give his or her name and address is an offence.

In conclusion, I am advised by the Garda authorities that Gardaí continue to utilise the wide-ranging legislative powers which are available to them in dealing with the matters referred to. I might add that if the Garda Commissioner feels that there are other legislative measures that

should be taken in this area I would of course give very careful consideration to any proposals which she might wish to make.

Private Security Industry Regulation

61. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality when she will form the appeals board under the public service agreement licence appeals scheme and when it will reach a decision on a particular case (details supplied) on which six jobs are dependent and on many other cases. [18313/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Private Security Appeal Board (PSAB) is an independent body established under the Private Security Services Act 2004, as amended, to consider appeals against decisions of the Private Security Authority. It is independent in the performance of its functions in accordance with the Act. I wish to inform the Deputy that the necessary arrangements are currently in train to appoint a new Board. When the appointments process has been completed the company to which the Deputy refers will be contacted directly by the PSAB regarding its appeal.

Closed-Circuit Television Systems

62. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if funding is available for community closed-circuit television and how a community group can apply for it; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18314/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will be aware, the Programme for a Partnership Government includes a commitment to provide investment in CCTV systems along the road network and in urban centres.

I am very conscious of the value that communities, especially rural communities, place on CCTV as a means of deterring crime and assisting in the detection of offenders. With this in mind, I instigated a review of the effectiveness of the Community CCTV Scheme in conjunction with the Garda authorities. The outcome of this review will inform the development of proposals to give effect to the Programme commitment.

Garda Recruitment

63. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she will begin a new recruitment process for An Garda Síochána in 2016; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18335/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): This Government is committed to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country in order to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and deter crime.

As the Deputy will be aware, when the financial crisis hit, the Government of the time introduced a moratorium on recruitment and the four year National Recovery Plan, published in 2010, envisaged a steady reduction in Garda numbers. Thankfully, in a recovering economy, we were able to launch a recruitment campaign and reopen the Garda College in September 2014. Since then a total of 851 Garda trainees have been recruited with a further 300 planned

to be recruited during the remainder of this year. So far 463 of the new Garda trainees have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream uniform duties nationwide. Another 76 will attest on the 7 July with 150 more to attest in November.

The Programme for Government, “A Programme for a Partnership Government” commits to continuing the ongoing accelerated Garda recruitment programme with a view to increasing Garda numbers to 15,000. Taking account of projected retirements, the current rate of recruitment will bring Garda numbers to around the 13,000 mark this year. We must, I believe, endeavour to make more rapid progress than this to reach our target of 15,000 and I am engaging with my colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, in relation to increasing the planned annual intake this year and in coming years .

In accelerating recruitment it is, of course, essential to ensure that An Garda Síochána has the capacity to train larger numbers without any diminution in the quality of its training programme, and to provide appropriate supervision and support to newly qualified Gardaí to ensure that victims, and the public generally, are well served by their policing service. My officials are also engaging with Garda management as a matter of priority in relation to the preparation of a recruitment plan for the next five years that will deliver increased numbers of Gardaí without any compromise on the quality of those recruited or the training programme. I expect to be in position to bring my proposals in this regard to Government before the Summer.

In order to fulfil the recruitment commitment for 2016 and beyond a new recruitment campaign was launched in last November. That campaign, which closed on 6 January, attracted strong interest with in the region of 16,500 applications received by the Public Appointments Service which is organising the competition on behalf of the Garda Commissioner. There are no plans to announce a new recruitment campaign at present, however, the timing of a new campaign will be kept under review in the context of fulfilling the commitment to ongoing accelerated recruitment in the Programme for Government.

Residency Permits

64. **Deputy Jonathan O’Brien** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of EU1 applications for residence permits by family members of European Union citizens exercising free movement for work or other purposes received by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service in 2015 and in 2016 to date. [18340/16]

65. **Deputy Jonathan O’Brien** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she is aware of the fact that it is currently taking 14 to 16 weeks for the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service to acknowledge receipt of an application for a residence permit and the difficulties this poses for family members of European Union citizens bearing in mind the requirement under Article 10 of Directive 2004/38/EC to issue a certificate of application for residence permits; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18341/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 64 and 65 together.

I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that it received 6,183 EU1 applications for residence permits by family members of EU citizens exercising free movement rights in 2015 and 2,595 up to 23 June, 2016.

Insofar as the current processing time referred to by the Deputy is concerned, I am advised that there is a significant number of cases on hand arising from an unprecedented and sustained increase of approximately 70% in such applications since 2014. INIS appreciates the impact of

associated delays on the persons concerned and has taken a number of measures to address the backlog including assignment of additional staff resources and the sanction of regular overtime. I am also advised that available INIS resources and operational and organisational structures are kept under ongoing review to ensure that resources are targeted.

Cognisance must also be given to wider policy issues and in that regard, it is noted that there has been a major increase (now making up over half of such applications) from UK nationals seeking to come here with non-EEA spouse/family members. This obviously raises concerns in relation to the operation of and potential abuses of the Common Travel Area (CTA). In this regard, Ireland's position is that the CTA be retained post BREXIT and accordingly, addressing such potential abuses is critical to maintaining the integrity of the CTA at this time.

Legislative Measures

66. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality her plans for the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Bill 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18342/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): In September 2015, I published the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Bill 2015, as approved by Government. The Bill includes wide ranging provisions to enhance the protection of children from sexual abuse and exploitation including through more effective targeting of acts of child sexual grooming. When enacted, the Bill will facilitate full compliance with the criminal law provisions of a number of international legal instruments and implement the recommendations of a number of Oireachtas committees. The Bill also provides for new offences of purchasing sexual services, in the context of prostitution. The purpose of these offences is to target the demand for prostitution.

The Bill completed all stages in Seanad Éireann in January 2016. This Bill has been returned to the Dáil Order Paper by a motion approved by Dáil Éireann on Wednesday, 1 June. Enactment of this important piece of legislation is a priority for the Government.

Garda Strength

67. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the details of Garda Síochána numbers in Ballymun and Santry stations by year for each of the years 2010 to 2016; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18350/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of personnel among the Garda Regions, Divisions and Districts. Garda management keep this distribution under continual review taking into account crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the best possible use is made of these resources. In regard to the deployment of Garda personnel, a distribution model is used which takes into account all relevant factors including population, crime trends and the policing needs of each individual Division. It is the responsibility of the Divisional Officer to allocate personnel within his/her Division as appropriate.

I have been informed by the Garda Commissioner that the Garda strength of Ballymun and Santry Garda Stations, which form part of the Dublin Metropolitan North (DMR North) Division, in the years 31 December 2010 to 2015 and up to the 30 April 2016, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was as set out in the table.

As the Deputy will be aware, when the financial crisis hit, the Government of the time introduced a moratorium on recruitment and the four year National Recovery Plan, published in 2010, envisaged a steady reduction in Garda numbers. Thankfully, in a recovering economy, we were able to reopen the Garda College in September 2014, and a total of 851 Garda trainees have been recruited with a further 300 planned to be recruited during the remainder of this year. So far 463 of the new Garda trainees have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream uniform duties nationwide. Another 76 will attest on the 7 July with 150 more to attest in November. I am assured by the Commissioner that the needs of all Garda Divisions are fully considered when determining the allocation of newly attested Gardaí and that so far this year 35 newly attested Gardaí have been assigned to DMR North.

This Government is committed to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country in order to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and deter crime. Key to achieving this goal is the commitment in the Programme for Government, “A Programme for a Partnership Government” to continue the ongoing accelerated Garda recruitment programme with a view to increasing Garda numbers to 15,000.

Taking account of projected retirements, the current rate of recruitment will bring Garda numbers to around the 13,000 mark this year. We must, I believe, endeavour to make more rapid progress than this to reach our target of 15,000 and I am engaging with my colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, in relation to increasing the planned annual intake this year and in coming years

Garda Strength of Ballymun and Santry Garda Stations 2010 - 2016

Station	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016*
Ballymun	128	113	118	118	114	124	121
Santry	82	81	102	95	90	82	82

* to 30 April, 2016

Legislative Programme

68. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the status of legislation that protects victims of cybercrimes (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18355/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Section 10 of the Non-Fatal Offences Against the Person Act 1997 provides that any person who, without lawful authority or reasonable excuse, by any means including by use of the telephone, harasses another by persistently following, watching, pestering, besetting or communicating with him or her, is guilty of an offence. Harassment is deemed to occur where a person seriously interferes with the other’s peace and privacy or causes alarm, distress or harm to the other. Section 10(3) also provides for orders to be made by the court to prevent communication by any means with the victim or to approach within any distance specified by the court of the place of residence or employment of the victim. Such an order can be made even in circumstances where the accused person is not convicted of the offence if the court is satisfied, having regard to the evidence, that it is in the interests of justice.

While aspects of what is known loosely as “revenge pornography” are addressed by the harassment offence in Section 10 of the Non-Fatal Offences Against the Person Act 1997, there has been a growing awareness and concern in relation to issues such as cyber-harassment, revenge pornography, and related harmful internet content in recent years with the growth of

cyber technology. The Law Reform Commission (LRC) is currently carrying out a project on Cybercrime affecting personal safety, privacy and reputation, including cyberbullying. In November 2014 the LRC published an Issues Paper and sought the views of interested parties on the key issues it had identified. The issue of revenge pornography was specifically addressed in that paper. In April 2015 it held a seminar to discuss these issues. It is hoped that the LRC Report will be published in the coming months and its recommendations, including any proposals in relation to legislation, will then be considered.

Separately and following the publication by the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Transport and Communications of its Report on Addressing the growth of Social Media and tackling Cyberbullying in 2013, the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources established the Internet Content Advisory Group to provide expert, independent advice on Internet Governance issues (in forming legislative, policy and regulatory recommendations to Government). The Group's Report was published in June 2014 and included wide ranging recommendations which included changes to institutional, legislative and governance arrangements. The recommendations are currently being progressed in consultations between the relevant Ministers.

Garda Equipment

69. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of extra Garda Síochána vehicles that were fitted with automatic number plate recognition equipment in each of the years 2014 to 2016 to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18398/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will appreciate, decisions in relation to the provision and allocation of resources is a matter for the Garda Commissioner in the light of her identified operational demands and the availability of resources and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter.

I am informed that the number of official Garda vehicles fitted with ANPR as of 1 March for the years 2014 - 2016 is as follows:

Garda Vehicles with ANPR as of 1 March (each year)

2014	2015	2016
116	121	100

Automated Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) technology was introduced into An Garda Síochána in 2008. It works on the basis of an in-car-camera using optical character recognition technology to check vehicle registration number plates against PULSE to identify, for example, stolen or untaxed vehicles, expired NCT certificates and expired certificates of roadworthiness for commercial vehicles.

The technology includes a speed detection and video recording capability and is utilised for both roads policing and as an investigative and intelligence tool. It is an internationally recognised tool which can significantly reduce crime, increase detection rates and provide vital intelligence in the prevention and detection of terrorism and in tackling organised crime groups operating around the country.

While ANPR is fitted in official Garda vehicles in all Garda Divisions and Districts nation-

wide, the number of vehicles operating the technology can vary from time to time due to such factors as repair and maintenance of the equipment and the need to update software. The use of ANPR, including the current capabilities and any possible expansion thereof, is kept under constant review by An Garda Síochána.

Laboratory Facilities

70. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she will significantly increase laboratory facilities at Forensic Science Ireland; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18399/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I fully recognise the very significant contribution of Forensic Science Ireland (FSI) in the investigation and prosecution of criminal offences. FSI delivers independent expert opinion, advice, training and research to support the Irish criminal justice system. It provides a range of services in this regard, from crime scene attendance to presentation of evidence in court and all of the analysis in between.

The need for a new purpose built forensic science laboratory appropriate to the State's requirements is long-standing. The Government is committed to the construction of a state-of-the-art laboratory at Backweston and the project is included in the Capital Plan with funds due to come on stream in 2019. I have said previously that I am anxious, if at all possible, to bring forward that date and will avail of any opportunity that presents itself to do so.

Legislative Programme

71. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to introduce or amend existing equality legislation in order to abolish mandatory retirement ages; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18408/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): In my capacity as Minister for Justice and Equality, I have responsibility for equality legislation, which provides for retirement ages in line with the relevant EU Directive provision that differences of treatment on the grounds of age are permissible if, within the context of national law, they are objectively and reasonably justified by a legitimate aim including legitimate employment policy, labour market and vocational training objectives, and if the means of achieving that aim are appropriate and necessary.

I have no ministerial responsibility for retirement age issues generally either in the public sector (where mandatory retirement ages are a feature of public sector employment law) or the private sector (where there is no statutory retirement age). The Deputy will be interested to know that the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform is leading a cross-Departmental working group on Fuller Working Lives which is examining the full range of working life and retirement issues and which is expected to report shortly.

Garda Reorganisation

72. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she will consider establishing a heavy recovery unit in County Westmeath for serious accidents and to improve efficiency; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18432/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is primarily responsible for contractual arrangements relating to An Garda Síochána and I, as Minister, have no role in the matter.

I am advised by the Garda authorities that, following an appropriate procurement process, a towing management contract was put in place in Westmeath in 2014 which comprehends vehicle recovery, including heavy goods vehicles which have either broken down or been involved in road traffic accidents, storage and the collection of fines.

Crime Data

73. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of cars reported to An Garda Síochána as stolen and the number of these not recovered in each of the years 2010 to 2016 to date in tabular form. [18438/16]

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 understand that while statistics in relation to the theft of vehicles are produced the position in relation to the recovery of stolen vehicles is not recorded in the official crime figures.

However, I have asked the CSO to forward the available statistics in relation to the information requested directly to the Deputy.

Crime Data

74. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of home burglaries reported to An Garda Síochána in each of the years 2010 to 2016 to date in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18439/16]

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 in relation to the information requested directly to the Deputy.

Garda Reserve

75. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of recruits who have opted out of the Garda Síochána Reserve, by division, in each of the years 2010 to 2016 to date in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18448/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Deputy will appreciate the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of personnel, including the Garda Reserve, among the Garda Regions, Divisions, and Districts. Garda management keep this distribution under continual review in the context of crime trends and polic-

ing priorities so as to ensure that the best possible use is made of all resources.

The Garda Reserve makes a real and tangible contribution to the policing of communities right across the country. This is recognised in the Programme for Government “A Programme for a Partnership Government” which includes a commitment to double the Garda Reserve to act in a supportive role undertaking local patrols and crime reduction measures. The expansion of the Garda Reserve will complement the commitments in the Programme to continue the ongoing accelerated Garda recruitment programme with a view to increasing Garda numbers to 15,000 and also to increase further civilianisation to free up Gardaí to front-line policing duties. The delivery of these measures over the lifetime of the Government will ensure an enhanced visible policing presence in communities nationwide.

The recruitment campaign for 2016 for full-time members of the An Garda Síochána included a special stream for eligible reserve members as a means of giving due recognition to satisfactory service by such members. I am pleased to note that provisional figures show that 169 Garda reserves applied under this stream and that 70 successfully completed the assessment tests and interview.

I have been informed by the Garda Commissioner that the number of Garda Reserves who were discharged during the years 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016 (to 27 June) is as set out in the table. The breakdown of Garda Reserve discharges by Divisions is not readily available and can only be obtained by the disproportionate expenditure of Garda time and resources relative to the information sought.

Garda Reserves Departures*

Year	Total
2010	35
2011	51
2012	51
2013	117
2014	167
2015	195
2016 (as of 27/06/2016)	84

*Please note that departures include resignations, retirements, dismissals and deaths.

Garda Training

76. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality about the number of trainee members of An Garda Síochána who have been allowed to pass through any phase of their training without fully completing that phase since the inception of the Bachelor of Arts in Applied Policing; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18449/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that all Gardaí recruited since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014 are required to undertake the new 2 year training programme which leads to a Bachelor of Arts in Applied Policing and is accredited by the University of Limerick. The programme is the outcome of a comprehensive review of foundation training for entrants to An Garda Síochána and exemplifies best practice.

The programme is divided into three phases as outlined below, all of which must be fully completed before progressing to the next phase. Participants are required to sit mandatory academic examinations and professional assessments and are required to pass all examinations and assessments in order to progress to the conclusion of the programme. I am advised by the Garda Commissioner that no group of trainee Gardaí has been allowed to progress through a phase without fully completing the previous phase of the programme.

Phase 1, which lasts 32 weeks, is based in the Garda College and places a strong emphasis on problem-based learning where students learn in small groups through engagement with realistic policing scenarios. This methodology emphasises the development of ‘learning to learn’ skills, the development of reflective practice and supports the transition into learning in an operational policing environment. At the end of Phase 1 successful Garda trainees are attested (i.e. become members of the Garda Síochána with full police powers) and are dispersed to Garda stations throughout the country, where they are assigned to mainstream policing duties .

Phase 2, which lasts for 65 weeks, is primarily based in Garda stations with appropriate training and development structures in place that include access to a trained tutor Garda and a permanently appointed supervisory sergeant who is thoroughly familiar with their responsibilities under the training programme. During the course of their placement, trainees move through three development stages from assisting his or her Garda tutor to taking the lead role and being assisted by the tutor, to finally the autonomous stage where they are deployed in regular policing activity and work independently within the operational unit. Over the course of the placement they also return to the Garda College for a number to weeks to further enhance their skills in specialist areas including sexual assault, intelligence-led policing, file preparation and court presentation and so on.

Phase 3 consists of seven weeks of preparation for final exams and assessments and I look forward to the first batch of new recruits graduating from the programme this year. It is, of course, too early to conduct a formal evaluation of the new programme but I understand from those leading the programme that the feedback from managers and colleagues on the ground is positive.

Fiscal Policy

77. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Finance to provide revenue and expenditure current and capital as a percentage of gross domestic product in the years 2015 to 2021 in tabular form. [18273/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I presume the Deputy is seeking this information in the context of the publication of the Summer Economic Statement (SES). The information sought is set out in nominal terms in Table 3 on page 16 of the SES. For the Deputy’s convenience, the table below sets out, as percentages of GDP, projected gross voted expenditure, both current and capital, and tax revenues and Appropriations-in-Aid, again both current and capital, from 2015 to 2021.

The expenditure and revenue forecasts are compliant with the fiscal rules under the preventive arm of the stability and growth pact. The table does not take account of the planned contributions to the rainy day fund of €1 billion per annum in 2019, 2020 and 2021. If these contributions were spent, then expenditure as a percentage of GDP would increase by c.0.4% in the relevant years.

Non-voted current and capital expenditure, the majority of which relates to interest, the EU

Budget contribution and certain deficit neutral cash flow loans, and capital resources, the bulk of which relates to the repayment of the cash flow loans, have been left out of the table below because these elements relate to matters largely beyond our direct control. However, the relevant nominal forecast figures may be found in Table 3 in the SES.

-	2015 - % of GDP	2016 - % of GDP	2017 - % of GDP	2018 - % of GDP	2019 - % of GDP	2020 - % of GDP	2021 - % of GDP
Gross Voted Current Expenditure	23.7%	22.4%	21.8%	21.1%	20.5%	20.0%	19.6%
Gross Voted Capital Expenditure	1.8%	1.7%	1.8%	2.0%	2.2%	2.3%	2.4%
Total Gross voted expenditure	25.5%	24.1%	23.6%	23.1%	22.7%	22.3%	22.0%
Tax Revenue	21.2%	20.8%	20.4%	21.2%	20.7%	20.5%	20.4%
Current A-in-A's & Departmental Balances	5.4%	4.9%	4.7%	4.5%	4.2%	4.0%	3.8%
Capital A-in-A's	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%
Total revenue from tax & A-in-A's	26.7%	25.9%	25.2%	25.8%	25.0%	24.7%	24.4%

Ministerial Meetings

78. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if he has been invited to the European Parliament's economic and monetary affairs dialogue hearings and his response to any invitation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17946/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs of the European Parliament extended an invitation to me, in late 2015, under Article 2a of Regulation 1467/97 (as amended by Regulation 1177/2011) and Article 14(3) of Regulation 472/2013 (Two-Pack regulation, which provides for Post Programme Surveillance) to appear before the Committee as part of an economic dialogue and exchange of views with Committee Members.

Owing to Parliamentary work commitments surrounding the Finance Bill, the Deposit Guarantee Scheme legislation and the subsequent announcement of the pending general election it was agreed to take up the invitation later in 2016, following the general election. The Committee has been in contact again and the invitation is currently under consideration.

I was also invited by the Committee to attend an exchange of views on a budgetary capacity for the Eurozone on 11 July 2016 along with other Eurozone Ministers. It was decided at EuroGroup that Mr Djesselblom, President of EuroGroup, would attend before the Committee on behalf of the Eurogroup.

Ireland Strategic Investment Fund Investments

79. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the value of investments the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund has made in fossil fuel-related investments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17947/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF) informs me that its exposure to fossil fuel companies is in its global portfolio. The global portfolio is a transition portfolio the purpose of which is to manage the legacy assets inherited from its predecessor fund, the National Pensions Reserve Fund (NPRF) as the Fund transitions fully into Irish assets. In keeping with the ISIF's mandate to hold or invest its assets (other than directed investments) on a commercial basis in a manner designed to support economic activity and employment in Ireland, these legacy investments are being sold by ISIF over time to fund Irish investment commitments as they arise.

In the absence of a globally accepted definition and list of fossil fuel companies, a company by company analysis of the Fund's entire holdings would be necessary to determine the full exposure. A preliminary and unaudited value of the Fund's investment in the Oil, Gas and Consumable Fuels industry group, as defined by the leading equity index provided by MSCI Inc, indicates exposure of approximately €79m of equity, representing 1% of the Fund's investments as of 31 December 2015. However, the Fund is currently undergoing a significant reshaping of its Global portfolio and current exposure is significantly reduced - estimated to be approximately €50m via both equity and fixed income exposures.

Ireland Strategic Investment Fund Investments

80. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the value of investments the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund has made in companies involved in hydraulic fracturing here or elsewhere; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17948/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Ireland Strategic Investment Fund's (ISIF) has some limited exposure to companies involved in hydraulic fracturing in its global portfolio. The global portfolio is a transition portfolio the purpose of which is to manage the legacy assets inherited from its predecessor fund, the National Pensions Reserve Fund (NPRF) as the Fund transitions fully into Irish assets. In keeping with the ISIF's mandate to hold or invest its assets (other than directed investments) on a commercial basis in a manner designed to support economic activity and employment in Ireland, these legacy investments are being sold by ISIF over time to fund Irish investment commitments as they arise. In the absence of a globally accepted methodology or definition of companies involved in hydraulic fracturing, a preliminary and unaudited estimation of the Fund's current exposure to these types of companies is approximately €8m. This represents 0.1% of the Fund's investments.

Tax Data

81. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Finance the income, gains and taxable income of companies that filed a return on corporation tax, by range of tax liability band (details supplied) in each of the years 2008 to 2014 in tabular form. [18015/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by Revenue that the tables below show, by range of tax liability, the net trading income, net chargeable gains and taxable income of companies that filed a Corporation Tax return in each of the years 2008 -2014. I am advised, following an extensive review of Revenue data, that the taxable income information is not available for the year 2008.

The Deputy may wish to note that tax liability is calculated on the basis of applying the various Corporation Tax rates to trading and non-trading profits and incomes of companies and allows for the deduction of certain reliefs, allowances and credits at various points in the calculation process. This calculation process is outlined in detail on the Revenue website under the heading Corporation Tax Calculation at <http://www.revenue.ie/en/about/statistics/corporation-tax-calculation.html>.

Corporation Tax For The Tax Year 2008 (Taxable Income Not Available)

Range Of Tax Liability	Net Trading Income - €m	Net Chargeable Gains - €m
No Net Liability	7,058	123
€1 - €25,000	8,141	53
€25,001 - €50,000	1,636	24
€50,001 - €75,000	777	25
€75,001 - €100,000	672	14
€100,001 - €200,000	2,295	64
€200,001 - €300,000	933	34
€300,001 - €400,000	783	183
€400,001 - €500,000	446	15
€500,001 - €600,000	285	38
€600,001 - €700,000	234	29
€700,001 - €800,000	850	14
€800,001 - €900,000	128	5
€900,001 - €1,000,000	187	17
€1,000,001 - €5,000,000	3,114	143
€5,000,001 - €10,000,000	1,810	45
over €10,000,000	13,593	370
Total	42,941	1,195

Corporation Tax Liability For The Tax Year 2009

Range Of Tax Liability	Net Trading Income - €m	Net Chargeable Gains - €m	Net Taxable Income - €m
No Net Liability	4,285	59	1,729
€1 - €25,000	1,462	21	1,280
€25,001 - €50,000	798	16	962

Range Of Tax Liability	Net Trading Income - €m	Net Chargeable Gains - €m	Net Taxable Income - €m
No Net Liability	4,285	59	1,729
€50,001 - €75,000	483	13	470
€75,001 - €100,000	330	4	333
€100,001 - €200,000	1,432	25	1,027
€200,001 - €300,000	980	11	641
€300,001 - €400,000	755	22	691
€400,001 - €500,000	382	4	396
€500,001 - €600,000	368	10	384
€600,001 - €700,000	361	5	400
€700,001 - €800,000	256	14	301
€800,001 - €900,000	737	9	256
€900,001 - €1,000,000	331	4	330
€1,000,001 - €5,000,000	7,577	97	5,715
€5,000,001 - €10,000,000	3,840	36	3,578
over €10,000,000	26,485	86	19,264
Total	50,860	435	37,756

Corporation Tax Liability For The Tax Year 2010

Range Of Tax Liability	Net Trading Income - €m	Net Chargeable Gains - €m	Net Taxable Income - €m
No Net Liability	3,731	87	3,354
€1 - €25,000	1,247	33	1,113
€25,001 - €50,000	766	9	616
€50,001 - €75,000	395	13	428
€75,001 - €100,000	359	5	304
€100,001 - €200,000	2,792	15	1,158
€200,001 - €300,000	617	4	586
€300,001 - €400,000	516	0	504
€400,001 - €500,000	892	-	365
€500,001 - €600,000	338	7	353
€600,001 - €700,000	414	10	436
€700,001 - €800,000	374	3	316
€800,001 - €900,000	247	11	277
€900,001 - €1,000,000	668	6	651
€1,000,001 - €5,000,000	8,156	111	6,425
€5,000,001 - €10,000,000	3,490	-	2,928
over €10,000,000	29,637	1	21,402
Total	54,638	316	41,216

Corporation Tax Liability For The Tax Year 2011

Questions - Written Answers

Range Of Tax Liability	Net Trading Income - €m	Net Chargeable Gains - €m	Net Taxable Income - €m
No Net Liability	2,887	121	2,341
€1 - €25,000	1,914	16	1,177
€25,001 - €50,000	749	9	640
€50,001 - €75,000	814	5	839
€75,001 - €100,000	292	4	280
€100,001 - €200,000	1,578	12	1,027
€200,001 - €300,000	543	13	601
€300,001 - €400,000	735	3	518
€400,001 - €500,000	381	8	490
€500,001 - €600,000	346	4	374
€600,001 - €700,000	393	6	336
€700,001 - €800,000	432	7	280
€800,001 - €900,000	218	2	230
€900,001 - €1,000,000	427	0	374
€1,000,001 - €5,000,000	7,931	122	5,937
€5,000,001 - €10,000,000	4,265	27	2,765
over €10,000,000	31,942	7	21,855
Total	55,846	366	40,063

Corporation Tax Liability For The Tax Year 2012

Range Of Tax Liability	Net Trading Income - €m	Net Chargeable Gains - €m	Net Taxable Income - €m
No Net Liability	6,334	59	3,356
€1 - €25,000	1,989	23	1,573
€25,001 - €50,000	730	7	685
€50,001 - €75,000	364	3	380
€75,001 - €100,000	290	5	305
€100,001 - €200,000	1,930	47	1,022
€200,001 - €300,000	650	5	610
€300,001 - €400,000	529	5	498
€400,001 - €500,000	413	3	426
€500,001 - €600,000	401	11	399
€600,001 - €700,000	506	6	392
€700,001 - €800,000	378	3	327
€800,001 - €900,000	681	-	264
€900,001 - €1,000,000	290	1	246
€1,000,001 - €5,000,000	7,769	61	6,196

Range Of Tax Liability	Net Trading Income - €m	Net Chargeable Gains - €m	Net Taxable Income - €m
No Net Liability	6,334	59	3,356
€5,000,001 - €10,000,000	3,467	21	2,866
over €10,000,000	31,138	0	23,698
Total	57,858	260	43,243

Corporation Tax Liability For The Tax Year 2013

Range Of Tax Liability	Net Trading Income - €m	Net Chargeable Gains - €m	Net Taxable Income - €m
No Net Liability	2,124	344	2,391
€1 - €25,000	4,556	16	3,059
€25,001 - €50,000	718	6	648
€50,001 - €75,000	503	5	447
€75,001 - €100,000	333	4	493
€100,001 - €200,000	1,979	10	1,129
€200,001 - €300,000	814	9	681
€300,001 - €400,000	1,237	7	650
€400,001 - €500,000	490	3	429
€500,001 - €600,000	803	0	508
€600,001 - €700,000	376	1	326
€700,001 - €800,000	345	4	278
€800,001 - €900,000	297	-	237
€900,001 - €1,000,000	286	3	213
€1,000,001 - €5,000,000	7,094	33	5,197
€5,000,001 - €10,000,000	4,796	42	3,570
over €10,000,000	30,407	158	20,208
Total	57,160	646	40,462

Corporation Tax Liability For The Tax Year 2014

Range Of Tax Liability	Net Trading Income - €m	Net Chargeable Gains - €m	Net Taxable Income - €m
No Net Liability	2,010	28	3,645
€1 - €25,000	2,260	25	2,200
€25,001 - €50,000	956	7	818
€50,001 - €75,000	3,592	5	878
€75,001 - €100,000	430	6	476
€100,001 - €200,000	1,879	27	1,222
€200,001 - €300,000	1,566	8	1,024

Range Of Tax Liability	Net Trading Income - €m	Net Chargeable Gains - €m	Net Taxable Income - €m
No Net Liability	2,010	28	3,645
€300,001 - €400,000	589	10	725
€400,001 - €500,000	585	5	551
€500,001 - €600,000	642	6	404
€600,001 - €700,000	518	12	458
€700,001 - €800,000	327	2	320
€800,001 - €900,000	554	6	372
€900,001 - €1,000,000	247	5	271
€1,000,001 - €5,000,000	11,041	106	7,613
€5,000,001 - €10,000,000	6,261	40	4,138
over €10,000,000	31,658	306	25,590
Total	65,117	604	50,703

Tax Reliefs Data

82. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Finance the number of persons who availed of tax relief under the disabled drivers and disabled passengers scheme in each of the years 2013 to 2016 to date by county in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18038/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by Revenue that the number of persons that availed of relief from VRT and VAT under the Disabled Drivers & Passengers Scheme, in each of the years 2013, 2014, 2015 and to date in 2016 is as follows:

County	2013	2014	2015	2016
Carlow	37	41	40	24
Cavan	66	82	95	43
Clare	179	198	211	138
Cork	796	835	926	635
Donegal	174	261	219	166
Dublin	701	818	871	596
Galway	365	415	453	306
Kerry	160	187	217	118
Kildare	120	130	141	83
Kilkenny	90	73	87	69
Laois	38	58	63	44
Leitrim	50	54	69	29
Limerick	238	291	287	212
Longford	35	33	40	14
Louth	132	170	191	111

County	2013	2014	2015	2016
Mayo	226	272	320	202
Meath	161	152	180	90
Monaghan	66	69	72	50
Offaly	50	51	58	42
Roscommon	92	94	117	79
Sligo	83	103	134	63
Tipperary	162	192	221	145
Waterford	93	92	114	79
Westmeath	54	66	66	38
Wexford	111	165	137	92
Wicklow	78	95	111	77
Total	4,357	4,997	5,440	3,545

Tax Collection

83. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of value added tax the Revenue Commissioners has levied from the public making text donations to charities in each of the years 2013 to 2016 to date. [18050/16]

84. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Finance why the Revenue Commissioners levies tax on text charity donations but not on other donations and refunds tax for donations over €250. [18051/16]

85. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Finance if he will consider changing the legislation by which the Revenue Commissioners levies tax from charitable donations made by text so that charities do not get penalised for using this mechanism for fundraising. [18052/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 83 to 85, inclusive, together.

I am advised by Revenue that charitable donations are outside the scope of VAT. This means that VAT does not apply to such donations. In the case of charitable donations made by text, where the full amount of the donation is passed over directly to the charity concerned, the entire amount is deemed outside the scope of VAT. In circumstances where a telecommunications provider charges a fee for their services, the fee is liable to VAT at the standard rate, currently 23%, while the monies that are transferred to the charity are outside the scope of VAT.

VAT returns do not require the yield from a particular product or activity to be identified and therefore it is not possible to provide details of VAT returned in respect of any fees charged by telecommunications providers for charitable donations.

The VAT treatment of charitable donations made by text message is set out in Revenue's eBrief 100/14 which is available at <http://www.revenue.ie/en/practitioner/ebrief/archive/2014/no-1002014.html>.

Tax Reliefs Application

86. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Finance how a person can claim the

value added tax on fuel where they have been approved to drive an adapted car by the Revenue Commissioners; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18111/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers Scheme provides a range of tax reliefs linked to the purchase and use of specially constructed or adapted vehicles by drivers and passengers with a disability. Under the terms of the scheme, a person can claim remission or repayment of vehicle registration tax (VRT), repayment of value-added tax (VAT) on the purchase of a vehicle and repayment of VAT on the cost of adapting a vehicle.

Since January 2015, a person who qualifies for tax relief under the scheme is also eligible for a fuel grant under the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers Fuel Grant Regulations 2015. The Grant relates to fuel used during the previous 12 months in the transportation of the person with the disability and is paid in arrears. Full details of the scheme can be obtained in the VRT 7 information booklet on <http://www.revenue.ie/en/tax/vrt/leaflets/index.html>.

Banking Sector Regulation

87. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if the practice of crowdfunding and peer-to-peer lending is regulated by the Central Bank; if he is aware of the extent of such practices here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18212/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Crowdfunding is not currently a regulated activity in Ireland. In June 2014 the Central Bank of Ireland issued a Consumer Notice on Crowdfunding which alerts consumers to the fact that crowdfunding is not a regulated activity. The notice can be found via the following link: <http://www.centralbank.ie/press-area/press-releases/Pages/ConsumerNoticeCrowdfunding.aspx>. However, it should be noted that if a crowdfunding platform intends to offer ancillary services which are regulated (e.g. payment services), an authorization is needed only as far as these services are concerned, since these services may only be performed by banks or other authorized financial institutions. There are currently several crowdfunding platforms active in the Irish market and the Government recognises that crowdfunding can be a valuable source of funding for SMEs either as a complement to, or as an alternative to traditional bank finance. The European Commission recently published a detailed report which finds that several member states of the EU have developed, or are in the process of developing national regulatory regimes but currently there is no evidence of a firm proposal from the Commission to bring forward an EU regulatory initiative.

Insurance Industry

88. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Finance if he had any communication with the insurance industry in relation to the exorbitant rates being quoted to insure young drivers; the steps he will take to assist with the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18227/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As Minister for Finance, I am concerned that there should be a stable insurance sector and that the risk to policyholders and to the wider financial system are limited. An adequately-reserved, cost-competitive insurance sector is a vital component of economic activity and financial stability.

The current high cost of insurance is a concern for the Government. While the provision and pricing of insurance policies is a commercial matter for insurance companies, this does not

preclude the Government from introducing measures which may, in the longer term, lead to a better claims environment. This is a complex matter to address and it involves a number of Government Departments, State Bodies and private sector organisations. I have established a task force in my Department to undertake a Review of Policy in the Insurance Sector.

The first phase of the work of the task force is a Review of the Framework for Motor Insurance Compensation. This is being carried out jointly with the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport. My colleague, the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, and I expect to receive this first report shortly.

Separately, the broader work of the task force includes an examination of the factors underlying the recent increases in the cost of motor insurance but also including other aspects of insurance policy such as the availability of insurance at reasonable cost to particular businesses and sectors of the community which are reported to be having problems in this regard.

This work of the task force is being undertaken in consultation with the Central Bank of Ireland, other Government Departments, Agencies and interested bodies, including the insurance industry, as represented by Insurance Ireland. The aim of the review is to recommend measures to improve the functioning and regulation of the insurance sector in Ireland, identifying the issues that can be addressed on a more immediate basis and those that need more long-term policy implementation. This work will be completed over the coming months.

With regard to specific communications with the insurance industry regarding the cost of insurance, the Review of Policy in the Insurance Sector project is currently examining the Framework for Motor Insurance Compensation and there has been a number of meetings with the insurance industry, including the MIBI, focused on that element of the project. The next phase will involve in depth discussions with the industry on the drivers of insurance costs.

Tax Exemptions

89. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if the payment of a domicile levy here enables a person to claim exemption from tax liability in the United States of America under the double taxation clauses in the 1997 treaty between the two countries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18315/16]

90. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the number of cases in which Irish persons have attempted to claim exemption from foreign taxation on the basis that they have paid the domicile levy here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18316/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 89 and 90 together.

I am informed by Revenue that the Irish taxes covered by the Ireland/United States double taxation treaty 1997 are income tax, corporation tax and capital gains tax and any identical or substantially similar taxes imposed after the date of signature of the treaty. This is provided for in Article 2 of the treaty, which deals with taxes covered. I am further informed that it has been the view of Revenue, since its introduction in 2010, that the domicile levy could not be regarded as a tax covered by that treaty. I am further informed that Revenue does not maintain a record of the number of cases, to the extent that such exist, of attempted claims to exemption from foreign taxation on the basis that the domicile levy has been paid in Ireland.

Tax Data

91. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the number of persons who paid the domicile levy and the amount that was collected from the levy in 2015; his plans to increase the levy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18317/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The domicile levy was introduced in the Finance Act 2010. The first year for which individuals were required to make returns was the year 2010 and these returns had to be filed by 31 October 2011 or by 15 November 2011 for individuals using Revenue Online Services (ROS).

Domicile Levy returns for 2015 are not due to be filed until 31 October 2016 so there are no figures available as yet for that year.

The table sets out the number of individuals who filed domicile levy returns in respect of each year since its introduction together with the amount of levy declared in respect of those returns and the amounts that have been paid. Outstanding amounts are subject to ongoing compliance action by Revenue.

Year for which return is made	Number of individuals	Amount of domicile levy per filed returns	Amount of domicile levy paid in relation to returns filed
2010	31	€3,680,013	€3,395,624
2011	29	€3,816,152	€3,746,797
2012	21	€2,672,300	€2,427,541
2013	15	€1,787,681	€1,787,681
2014	12	€1,986,858	€1,986,858

Of the above, the total amount of domicile levy payments actually made in 2015 was €3,298,910. These payments were made by 18 individuals, some of whom paid the levy for more than one year. The table sets out the years for which domicile levy was paid in 2015 and the amounts related to each year. Late payments of the domicile levy would have been subject to a statutory interest charge.

Domicile levy year	Amount of domicile levy paid
2010	€427,717
2011	€600,000
2012	€200,000
2013	€207,199
2014	€1,863,994
Total	€3,298,910

I have no plans at present to make changes to the domicile levy.

Tax Reliefs Data

92. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Finance when appeal hearings for tax relief for disabled drivers under the primary medical certificate scheme will be held in County Galway, given the unfairness of having persons with severe disabilities travelling to Dublin for hearings; why he does not facilitate hearings in regional areas on a regular basis; the number

of appellants from County Galway who have had to travel to Dublin for hearings in each of the years 2014 to 2016 to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18389/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Hearings of the Disabled Drivers Medical Board of Appeal are held on average twice a month at the National Rehabilitation Hospital in Dún Laoghaire, which has the facilities to cater for people with mobility impairing disabilities of the kind provided for under the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers Scheme.

The Medical Board of Appeal holds regional clinics as demand arises. I'm informed that one clinic per year, for the past four years, has been held in Cork City. A regional clinic is scheduled for September this year in the Mercy University Hospital, Cork City. It is important that the Medical Board of Appeal conducts appeals in the appropriate clinical environment. As far as I'm aware there are no plans to hold a regional clinic in Galway this year.

I would point out that Regulation 6(1)(e) of the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Regulations, 1994 (S.I. 353 of 1994) provides that the Medical Board of Appeal is independent in the exercise of its functions.

It has not been possible in the time allowed for the Medical Board of Appeal to provide the number of appellants from County Galway who have attended appeal hearings in the National Rehabilitation Hospital, Dún Laoghaire from 2014 to date. However, I will ensure that this information is forwarded directly to the Deputy once it is available.

Universal Social Charge Data

93. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance the number of workers who would be removed from liability if he increased the entry point of the universal social charge to €15,000 per year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18396/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by Revenue that the additional number of persons who would become exempt from the Universal Social Charge (USC) if the current exemption threshold of €13,000 was increased to €15,000 would be in the order of 80,000 persons. This would result in an estimated 33% of income earners being exempt from the USC.

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

Fiscal Data

94. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if the fiscal space of €1 billion for 2017 is estimated at before or after he takes account of the carry-forward impact of measures from budget 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18415/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The calculation underpinning the estimated €1 billion net fiscal space is illustrated in Table A2 on page 27 of the Summer Economic Statement. The discretionary measures as detailed in item 8 include the carry forward impact of tax measures from budget 2016.

By definition, expenditure measures are included in the base for the calculation of the fol-

lowing year's fiscal space.

I should point out that the exact impacts of carryover will be reviewed as part of the normal Budgetary process, as there are a lot of moving parts to be considered, such as economic growth, take up of various schemes and specific tax relevant factors, which could impact on the expected return from the measures.

Stamp Duty

95. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the yield from stamp duty on transfers of shares in Irish incorporated companies in each of the years from 2010 to 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18416/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by Revenue that a breakdown of Stamp Duty receipts in tabular form is available at <http://www.revenue.ie/en/about/statistics/receipts-stamp-duty.html> including the years 2010 to 2015.

The Deputy may wish to note that the net receipt figures for Stamp Duty paid on share transactions includes all companies which are incorporated within the State.

Tax Data

96. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 120 of 21 June 2015 the number of settlements the Revenue Commissioners entered into for a sum greater than €100,000 and €500,000 respectively which resulted in non-publication by virtue of the provisions of section 1086 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997, in each of the years 2014 and 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18417/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by Revenue that on foot of compliance interventions finalised in 2014 and 2015 the numbers of settlements which did not meet the criteria for publication are set out in the table:

Settlements greater than	2014	2015
€100,000	658	666
€500,000	124	115

I am further informed that the main reasons why settlements in excess of €100,000 would not fall to be published are where the taxpayer has made a qualifying voluntary disclosure or where the matter relates to a technical adjustment, that is the additional tax liability arises due to a genuine mistaken interpretation or application of the legislation.

Tax Compliance

97. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of applications for a certificate of tax compliance which the Revenue Commissioners rejected in each of the years from 2011 to 2015; how the basis of rejection was broken down across the different categories of non-compliance; the number that related specifically to the local property tax; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18419/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by Revenue that the general scheme of tax clearance certification is provided for by Section 1095 of the 1997 Taxes Consolidation Act (as amended).

Revenue can not issue a Tax Clearance certificate where the applicant has not paid all tax, interest and penalties, or has not filed all tax returns that are correctly due. Revenue is also prevented from issuing a Tax Clearance certificate to a partnership unless each individual partner is fully tax compliant or, to a company unless the beneficial owner is fully tax compliant. Revenue will however issue a Tax Clearance certificate where the applicant files all outstanding returns and enters into a phased payment arrangement in respect of the liability.

Revenue has also advised that the tax clearance system is a highly automated process designed for rapid turnaround of applications and notification to the applicant where issues arise. In the vast majority of cases where it is not immediately possible to issue a tax clearance certificate, a mutually acceptable arrangement can be agreed and certification issued. This is particularly the case in respect of refusals related to Local Property Tax where more than 97% are very quickly rectified.

The table sets out the number of tax clearance applications that were rejected for the years 2011 to 2015 inclusive. The figures for 2013 to 2015 include 3,500, 14,000 and 12,000 rejections respectively on foot of LPT non-compliance.

Year	No of Tax Clearance Applications Rejected	% Rejected
2011	46,314	22%
2012	46,817	22%
2013	48,046	21%
2014	63,522	25%
2015	53,501	21%

Insurance Industry

98. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 107 of 16 June 2016, the number of claims motor insurance companies paid by amounts paid in respect of personal injuries, vehicle damage, legal fees and so on by year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18440/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The annual Private Motor Insurance Statistics report published by the Central Bank of Ireland is compiled from policy level data submitted by Insurance Ireland to the Central Bank. The most recent such Report which is for the year 2013 is available on the Central Bank's website at <http://www.centralbank.ie/polstats/stats/motorins/Documents/Private%20Motor%20Insurance%20Statistics%202013.pdf>.

I am informed by the Central Bank that it does not publish the number of claims that the total amount of motor liability claims pay-outs relate to. However, it stated that the annual Private Motor Insurance Statistics report does provide a significant amount of information in relation to motor insurance claims development costs.

I am further informed by the Central Bank that in the context of the data submitted to it by Insurance Ireland, it is not possible to obtain a comprehensive assessment of all costs and revenues relating to motor claims. This is because the submission from Insurance Ireland does

not supply data on additional claims-related costs, including: estimates on the cost of claims incurred but not yet reported (IBNR) to insurers, changes in estimates of existing claims for prior year accidents and contributions to the claims against uninsured motorists paid to the Motor Insurers' Bureau of Ireland. Other costs not included are distribution, commissions, expenses, reinsurance and taxation.

Aside from the annual Private Motor Insurance Statistics Report a significant amount of additional claims data is available through the Central Bank's Insurance Statistical Review, Insurance Ireland's Annual Fact-file, the Companies Registration Office and commercial organisations who collate and sell claims data to interested parties.

As I have highlighted to the House previously, the lack of data presents difficulties from a policy analysis and development perspective in the area of insurance. The issues being examined in my Department's Review of Policy in the Insurance Sector includes the availability of data and the work of the task force will include examining options such as a national claims register and motor insurance policy data. This work will take into account what information is currently available and identify any shortfalls.

Insurance Industry

99. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Finance the impact the decline in returns on investments through low interest rates has had on the insurance industry and the huge hikes in insurance premiums that have been suffered by consumers; his plans to deal with unreasonable hikes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18514/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Differing reasons have been put forward by various interested parties to explain Ireland's current increasing insurance costs. Motor insurance appears to be particularly affected with the cost of premiums increasing significantly in the past twelve months.

Reasons often presented include the increased level of insurance claims and the increasing value of compensation awards. Others highlight that the highly competitive nature of the domestic market for non-life insurance in recent years has begun to impact on firms' underwriting profitability with underwriting losses reported in 2014 for a number of high-impact firms.

The Central Bank of Ireland has a statutory responsibility to ensure firms assess risks appropriately and offer insurance at a price that adequately takes into account the conditions prevailing in the market such as increasing claims costs. This ensures firms have the ability to pay all policyholders' claims without recourse to public or consumer funds. It does not have a statutory role in relation to setting premium prices.

In the *Macro Finance Review for H1 2016* that was published on 14 June, the Central Bank highlighted a number of issues facing the non-life insurance sector, which included the impact of the low interest rate environment that has resulted in a fall in investment income which historically was used to offset underwriting losses. The report stated that the Bank believes investment income will continue to decline as proceeds from maturing assets are reinvested in lower yielding assets. The Report concluded that the domestic non-life insurance sector continues to face a difficult operating environment with all of the high-impact firms reporting underwriting losses in 2015 primarily due to current challenges in the Irish motor market. As a risk-sensitive regulatory framework, Solvency II, which came into effect on 1 January 2016, should strengthen insurers' resilience.

I am informed by the Central Bank that the decline in returns on investments through low

interest rates has been a key theme in its engagement with the insurance industry for a number of years and forms a key part of its supervisory engagement with individual firms. The Opinion on Supervisory Response to a Prolonged Low Interest Rate Environment published by the European Insurance and Occupational Pensions Authority (EIOPA) in February 2013 required all National Competent Authorities to intensify the monitoring and supervision of insurance and reinsurance undertakings with exposure to the risks posed by a low interest rate environment.

To examine the issues affecting the cost of insurance in more detail and to assess what the options are for the Government, I have established a task force in my Department to undertake a Review of Policy in the Insurance Sector. The first phase of the work of the task force, which began in January 2016, is a review of the Framework for Motor Insurance Compensation. This is being carried out jointly with the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport. This review also deals with broader issues around the Insurance Compensation Fund and its report will be submitted shortly to me and my colleague, the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport.

The broader work of the task force includes an examination of the issues debated during the Dáil Private Member's Motion of 8th and 9th of June. The work is being undertaken in consultation with the Central Bank of Ireland, other Government Departments, Agencies and interested bodies. The aim of the review is to identify the factors contributing to the increasing costs of insurance, and to recommend measures to improve the functioning and regulation of the insurance sector in Ireland, identifying the issues that can be addressed on a more immediate basis and those that need more long-term policy implementation.

This work will be completed over the coming months.

Mortgage Lending

100. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Finance if there is a timeframe in which a person's entitlement to the first-time buyers status for the purpose of availing of the 10% deposit rule as opposed to the 20% rule could be reinstated (details supplied). [18530/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Central Bank, which has an independent mandate to preserve and protect financial stability, introduced macro prudential mortgage lending regulations to increase the resilience of the banking and household sectors to the property market and to reduce the risk of bank credit and house price spirals from developing in the future. These measures apply proportionate lending limits, including certain loan to value restrictions, to such lending. For primary home mortgage lending, an 80% loan to value limit generally applies, but for first time buyers a 90% loan to value limit applies to the value of a property up to €220,000 and an 80% limit applies to any excess value above that amount.

A first time buyer is defined in the relevant statutory instrument (see the following: <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2015/si/47/made/en/pdf>) as "a borrower to whom no housing loan has ever before been advanced". Where the borrower under a housing loan is more than one person and one or more of those persons has previously been advanced a housing loan, none of those persons is regarded as a first-time buyer for the purpose of the regulations. I am informed by the Central Bank a borrower(s), if they have been advanced a housing loan previously, cannot revert to a first time buyer status after a period of time.

However, it should be noted that the regulations also provide a certain flexibility to lenders, based on their own commercial considerations and subject also to compliance with consumer protection rules, to provide a certain amount of mortgage lending in excess of these LTV thresholds.

School Transport Eligibility

101. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Education and Skills why persons (details supplied) find themselves in a situation where the eldest child who is nine years of age qualifies for the school bus and the two younger members of the family who are six and eight years of age are concessionary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18167/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): Changes to the School Transport Schemes, including the 'Closed School Rule (CSR)', were announced in Budget 2011 and derived from recommendations in the Value for Money Review of the Scheme.

From the commencement of the 2011/12 school year the distance eligibility criterion of 3.2 kilometres was applied nationally to all children travelling under the primary school transport scheme, including those travelling under the CSR.

The second element of the change which took effect from the commencement of the 2012/13 school year applied only in the case of children commencing their primary education from that date. This second element restricted eligibility for school transport to those children who meet the distance eligibility criterion and are travelling to their nearest school.

Children who were eligible for school transport and who are availing of school transport services, will retain their eligibility for the duration of their primary education cycle provided there is no change in their current circumstances.

Bus Éireann has advised that the older child, referred to by the Deputy, is eligible for school transport under the CSR. However, her siblings are not attending their nearest school, and are therefore not eligible under the terms of the scheme.

Children who are not eligible for school transport, may apply for transport on a concessionary basis only. 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.

The family should liaise with their local Bus Éireann office regarding the availability of concessionary transport for the 2016/17 school year.

The terms of this scheme are applied equitably on a national basis.

School Transport

102. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the revenue Bus Éireann received for contract maintenance as referred to in the European Commission State-Aid Final Decision of 18 October 2014 in each of the years 2005 to 2016 to date, in tabular form. [18521/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): The reference to contract maintenance as referred to by the Deputy relates to the overall activities undertaken by Bus Éireann as opposed to the specific services provided under the School Transport Scheme.

My Department is satisfied that the financial accounting for Bus Éireann's operation of the School Transport Scheme, including the Bus Éireann Annual Report and the annual indepen-

dently audited account of the school transport scheme is in full compliance with the 1975 Summary of Accounting Arrangements and with all relevant accounting standards and guidelines.

Copies of the above reports for the years 2006 - 2015 inclusive, are available on my Department's website at www.education.ie.

Third Level Funding

103. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when he will publish the report (details supplied) into funding of the third level sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18565/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Government recognises the importance of higher education to Ireland's future economic and social development and also the huge impact a higher education experience has on the lives of individuals. In considering the best way forward, the previous Government established an Expert Group to examine future funding requirements for higher education and to present options for developing a sustainable long term funding strategy for the sector.

The Expert Group has completed its work and its report will shortly be published. This report will allow for a real and meaningful discussion on the funding requirements of the sector and how those requirements should be met. As signalled in the Programme for Government, the report will be published and it is the intention to consult the cross-party Oireachtas Committee as part of the process for formulating a plan for the future of this sector. This will ensure that all views can be heard and considered on the most appropriate way forward for the Irish higher education system. I would like to assure the Deputy that we will engage quickly and openly with the Committee on this issue.

School Staff

104. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a school (details supplied) in relation to the possible loss of a teacher; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17927/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The criteria used for the allocation of teaching posts for the 2016/2017 school year is set out in Circular 0007/2016. The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the 30 September 2015.

The enrolment returns submitted by the school referred to by the Deputy for 30 September 2015 was 81. An enrolment of 82 was required to retain the fourth teaching post in the school.

The staffing circular includes an appeals mechanism for schools to submit an appeal under certain criteria to an independent Appeals Board. The school referred to by the Deputy submitted an appeal to the May 2016 meeting of the Primary Staffing Appeals Board. The school requires an enrolment of 82 on 30 September 2016 in order to retain the fourth teaching post. In its appeal, the school projected an enrolment of 80 for 30 September 2016. As a result, the school has been informed that its appeal does not meet the criteria set out in Circular 0007/2016.

The Primary Staffing Appeals Board operates independently of the Department and its decision is final.

Disadvantaged Status

105. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when he will review the status of the eligibility of schools which are not covered under the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17945/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that the review of the DEIS programme is currently underway and it is my intention that a New Action Plan for disadvantaged schools will be published by the end of this year. I also wish to advise the Deputy that changes to the current programme will not be made pending the outcome of the review.

The review is looking at all aspects of DEIS, including the identification process for the inclusion of schools in the programme, the range and impact of different elements of the School Support Programme, and the scope for increased integration of services provided by other Departments and agencies, in order to improve effectiveness.

The programme for a Partnership Government has committed to publish a new updated Action Plan for Educational Inclusion within 12 months. Subject to Government approval, it is intended to start to implement actions arising from an updated plan in the 2017/18 school year.

The number of additional schools to be included in the programme will be determined by a new identification process for this purpose, which is currently in development.

In the meantime, I do not propose to make any changes to the current programme, including the addition of further schools until the completion of the Review and agreement on a new Action Plan.

School Accommodation

106. **Deputy John Paul Phelan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of applications for extra accommodation by a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17987/16]

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

The applications concerned are currently being assessed and a decision will be conveyed to the respective school authorities as soon as this process has been finalised.

School Accommodation

107. **Deputy John Paul Phelan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of applications for extra accommodation by schools (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17988/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm that the schools referred to by the Deputy have both submitted applications for additional accommodation.

With regard to the first named school, I understand that my Department has discussed the

application with the school concerned and has sought additional information. When this is received, the application can be considered further.

The application from the second named school is currently being assessed and a decision will be conveyed to the school authority as soon as this process is finalised.

Schools Building Projects Status

108. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status on the provision of facilities for a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17991/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy may be aware, planning permission was granted for the construction of a new 16 classroom school building on a site currently in the ownership of Cork City Council. This school building is intended to accommodate the school to which the Deputy refers.

The acquisition by my Department of the site in question is currently at an advanced stage.

Special Educational Needs Staff

109. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there has been a change to the manner in which special needs assistants can be recruited to preschools from September 2016 and the qualifications they must hold; the nature of any change; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18002/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible, through its network of Special Needs Organisers (SENOs) for allocating Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) support to mainstream Primary, Post Primary and Special Schools, to assist children with special educational needs who also have additional and significant care needs. The NCSE makes such allocations in accordance with my Departments criteria for the scheme.

Circular 0030/2014, which is available on my Department's website www.education.ie, sets out my Department's policy in relation to the Special Needs Assistant (SNA) scheme. The Circular explains that SNA support is not provided to pre-school services which operate outside of the primary or special school provision, other than in early intervention classes in recognised primary schools, or special schools, where support is provided for as part of the schools total quantum of SNA support.

As the NCSE does not allocate Special Needs Assistants to preschool services and have never done so, there has been no change in relation to the allocation of SNAs.

However, supports for childcare, including pre-school education, are provided by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. The principal vehicle for the delivery of pre-school education is the free Pre-School Year in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme which was introduced in January 2010 and provides for early learning in a formal setting to children in the year before they commence primary school.

Children with disabilities will now have better access to pre-school services under a new Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) programme of supports, which was recently announced, on 15th June 2016, by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs.

AIM is a child-centred model, involving seven levels of progressive support, moving from the universal to the targeted, depending on the needs of the child and the pre-school.

The supports include: A new Inclusion Charter for the Early Years sector, alongside updated and strengthened Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Guidelines for Early Childhood Care and Education.

In relation to the qualifications of early years practitioners, a new higher education programme for early years practitioners (LINC) which will commence from September 2016.

A new national specialist service which is based in the Better Start National Early Years Quality Development Service will provide expert advice, mentoring and support to pre-school providers from a team of 50 specialists in early years care and education for children with disabilities.

A new national scheme will provide specialised equipment, appliances and minor alterations which are necessary to support a child's participation in the ECCE programme.

A new national scheme will also provide additional capitation to pre-school providers where this is critical to fund extra support in the classroom and enable a child's participation in pre-school. It is estimated that only 1 to 1.5% of children in pre-school will require, and therefore be eligible for, this scheme of additional capitation.

Details of the supports which will be available under AIM can be found at www.preschoolaccess.ie which contains comprehensive information on the access and inclusion model and on how to apply for the new schemes and supports.

Questions relating to provision of such services in preschool settings should be addressed my colleague, the Minister for Children & Youth Affairs.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

110. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the catchment area a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary falls into to attend an autism spectrum disorder unit in a secondary school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18004/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department's priority is to ensure that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all pupils seeking school places in the area.

The NCSE have advised that there are four post primary schools in the area referred to by the Deputy that have classes for pupils with ASD. These are Ardscoil na mBraithre Clonmel 65320J; St. Ailbe's School, Rosanna Road, Tipperary Town 72480W; Coláiste Dun Iascaigh, Cashel Road, Cahir 76063D and Cashel Community School, Dualla Road, Cashel 91497A.

The NCSE have also advised that they expect to open up to 150 new special classes for the coming school year. Full details of all special classes are available at www.ncse.ie.

The enrolment of a child to a school is a matter, in the first instance, for the parent of the child and the Board of Management of a school. However, parents who may need advice or assistance in transitioning their child to post primary school, or are experiencing difficulties in securing a school placement should contact their local SENO. All schools have the contact details of their local SENO.

Parents can choose which school to apply to and, where the school has places available, the pupil should be admitted. However, in schools where there are more applicants than places available a selection process may be necessary. This selection process and the enrolment policy on which it is based must be non-discriminatory and must be applied fairly in respect of all applicants. However, this may result in some pupils not obtaining a place in the school of their first choice.

Section 29 of the Education Act, 1998 provides for an appeal by a parent or guardian to the Secretary General of my Department, where a Board of Management of a school, or a person acting on behalf of the Board, refuses to enrol a student in a school. My Department has no authority to compel a school to admit a pupil, except in the case of an appeal under section 29 of the Education Act, 1998 being upheld.

Application forms for taking a section 29 appeal are available on my Department's website at the following *link*: <http://www.education.ie/en/Parents/Services/Appeal-against-Permanent-Exclusion-Suspension-or-Refusal-to-Enrol/Section-29-Appeals-Application-Form.doc>, or by contacting Section 29 Administration Unit, Friars Mill Road, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath, phone 0761 108588. Appeals should be taken within 42 days from receipt of written notification from the school's Board of Management.

The Programme for Government 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.

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. The new Bill will oblige all schools to admit pupils where there are available places.

Public Sector Staff Remuneration

111. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Education and Skills how he will treat non-union members with regards to the announced pay cuts and withholding of payments and increments from Association of Secondary Teachers of Ireland members, who are now outside of the Lansdowne Road Agreement, LRA; if he will consider non-union teachers as having accepted or rejected the LRA; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18005/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As is the norm with public service collective agreements, the Lansdowne Road Agreement was negotiated with trade unions which are recognised as representing staff in the public service (including teachers). It is normal practice in the public service that the decision of the trade union recognised as holding representative rights for a particular grade or sector will determine the position for all relevant staff in that grade/sector. This context does not allow for acceptance or rejection of collective agreements by staff on an individual basis.

Accordingly, there is no proposal at this time to treat teachers separately based on the fact that they are not a member of a trade union.

Questions - Written Answers
Schools Building Projects

112. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he is aware of delays to commencement of the rebuild at a school (details supplied); if he has now examined the timetable of construction and the reasons for delay; if he is aware of the urgent need for this project to commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18007/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The major building project for the school in question is at an advanced stage of architectural planning, Stage 2(b) - Detailed Design, which includes the applications for Planning Permission, Fire Certificate and Disability Access Certificate and the preparation of Tender Documents. All statutory approvals have been secured and the Design Team were authorised to complete Stage 2b.

The stage 2b report has been reviewed by my Department and additional information was requested. The Design Teams response is currently under review and when that review is complete my Department will revert to the school with regard to the further progression of the project.

However, until the stage 2b report has been fully approved it will not be possible to provide any further indication of the timeframe for the progression of the project to tender and construction.

Schools Building Projects

113. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he is aware of delays to commencement of the rebuild at a school (details supplied); if he has now examined the timetable of construction and the reasons for delay; if he is aware of the urgent need for this project to commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18008/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The school 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.

A tender exercise for a replacement Consultant Mechanical & Electrical Engineer is currently being finalised 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.

School Staff

114. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application by a person (details supplied) in Cork city for recognition of a contract of indefinite duration; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18017/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The decision on whether to issue a Contract of Indefinite Duration (CID) to a teacher is one for their school as employer in the first instance. As part of the agreement between the education partners on the implementation of the Protection of Employees (Fixed Term Work) Act 2003 in the education and training sector, an adjudication system was established to facilitate resolution of disputes in relation to the awarding of CIDs. This system allows teachers who have been refused a CID, or who are unhappy with the hours of the CID where one is awarded, to submit an appeal to an independent Adjudicator for consideration.

The teacher referred to by the Deputy has submitted an appeal under this adjudication process and his appeal is currently being considered by the Adjudicator. When the Adjudicator issues a decision, this will be communicated to the teacher and school concerned.

Third Level Institutions

115. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the total amount spent by each university on taxi hire in each of the years 2013, 2014 and 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18032/16]

116. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the total amount spent on taxi hire in each of the years 2013, 2014 and 2015 in respect of each of the State's institutes of technology; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18033/16]

117. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the total amount spent on legal fees in each of the years 2013, 2014 and 2015 by the State's seven universities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18034/16]

118. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the total amount spent on legal fees in each of the years 2013, 2014 and 2015 by each institute of technology; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18035/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 115 to 118, inclusive, together.

The information requested by the Deputy is not available in my Department. Officials of my Department have asked the Higher Education Authority to request the information from the institutions and I will arrange for it to be sent to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Schools Building Projects

119. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to provide funding to a school (details supplied) for an extension for an additional classroom in place of a prefabricated building he has provided in order that it can cater for an increased pupil enrolment following the provision of an additional teacher for September 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18058/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that the school to which he refers has been allocated funding under my Department's Additional

Accommodation Scheme to provide an additional mainstream classroom. The final approval letter issued to the school authority recently.

I further wish to advise the Deputy that due to the need to prioritise available funding towards the provision of essential school classroom accommodation, it is not possible at this point to provide an indicative timeframe for the provision of funding for a GP room which the school also applied for.

Special Educational Needs Staff

120. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the special needs assistants provided to a school (details supplied) can be maintained at their current level rather than having one special needs assistant removed from the special needs assistants available to that school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18065/16]

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 needs assistants (SNA) 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 continues to accept applications after that date, in recognition that enrolments may not have been completed or where assessments were not completed. I announced on the 14th June, 2016 that 860 additional Special Needs Assistants 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, at a total gross annual cost of €425 million. 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.

In total, the number of SNAs available has increased by almost 22% since 2011, when 10,575 posts were available. 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.

Where a school wishes to make an application for SNA support in respect of a child who was not considered as part of this allocation process they may continue to make such applications to the NCSE.

Where a school wishes to appeal the SNA allocation which has been made to they may do so through the NCSE appeal process, details of which are set out at www.ncse.ie.

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 a specific school, I have referred this question to the NCSE for their consideration and direct reply to the Deputy.

Schools Building Projects Status

121. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 91 of 15 June 2016, what commitment was given regarding the building of an extension to a school (details supplied) and to explain where the allocated funding has gone; if the loss of funding came as a result of a failure on his Department's part to budget correctly for capital projects; if this failure can be or has been remedied with the result that the project can go ahead as previously confirmed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18121/16]

122. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 91 of 15 June 2016 the reason he reneged on the commitment given to begin works on a school (details supplied) in 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18122/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 121 and 122 together.

The building project for the school to which the Deputy refers is included in the 6 year construction programme 2016-21 which was announced in November 2015.

However, as the deputy has been informed, 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. This has meant that the progression to tender stage of the major extension and refurbishment project for this school is not possible at this time. My Department officials wrote to the Board of Management of the school on 28th April notifying them of this.

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.

Schools Building Projects Status

123. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his position on the funding for a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18152/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The project to which the Deputy refers has been devolved for delivery to the Louth and Meath Education and Training (LMETB). Approval has recently been given to the LMETB for the project to proceed to Tender Stage.

In relation to the immediate accommodation requirements, my Department has sent the school authorities the relevant application form to apply for temporary accommodation pending completion of the proposed extension. This matter will be considered further on receipt of the completed form from the school.

Skills Development

124. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the courses developed specifically for new entrants to the jobs market and the range of courses and the levels at which they are available to them; if he has considered training a sector specific workforce to manage the upcoming returnees to the workforce into other areas of work; if there is any cross-departmental work between the various sectors, the training sectors and Departments in terms of innovations in workforce planning and targeted measures to deal with any skills gaps nationally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18170/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department published a new National Skills Strategy in January 2016. The purpose of this new Strategy is to provide a framework for skills development that will help drive Ireland's growth both economically and societally over the next decade. Through the vision, objectives, actions and indicators, the Strategy will support the development of a well-educated, well-skilled and adaptable labour force, creating and sustaining a strong pool of talented people of all ages throughout Ireland. The Strategy underlines the importance of employer participation in the development and effective use of skills. This can happen through influencing the skills development of graduates, upskilling existing staff and by supporting knowledge transfer between educational institutions and enterprises. The Strategy sets out new structures to drive better engagement between employers, education and training providers and other stakeholders. I will be appointing a new National Skills Council, which will oversee Strategy implementation and consider and respond to labour market trends and sectoral needs.

A network of 9 Regional Skills Fora has also been established to foster greater engagement between the education and training system, employers and other enterprise stakeholders in building the skills of each region. The fora provide a vehicle for close co-operation at regional level between education and training providers and enterprise, between the different education and training providers themselves and a local link with the implementation of other strategies such as the Regional Action Plans for Jobs and Pathways to Work.

The expansion of the apprenticeship system is one of my key priorities and I am encouraged by the increase in apprenticeship registrations in existing trades and the progress being made in introducing new apprenticeships, focusing initially on the 25 priority proposals identified by the Apprenticeship Council through their public call. In the Programme for a Partnership Government we have committed to double the number of apprenticeships by 2020. We will target 100 different apprenticeship schemes spread across sectors of the economy and in every region of Ireland.

School Placement

125. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to provide the figures identified by his Department's geographic information system that demonstrate that a new secondary school was required in the Castleknock and Carpenterstown area in Dublin 15. [18214/16]

126. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to provide the figures identified by his Department's geographic information system that demonstrate that a new secondary school is not currently needed in the Ongar and Littlepace area in Dublin 15. [18215/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions

No. 125 and 126 together.

In identifying the requirement for additional school places in a school planning area, my Department uses a Geographical Information System to identify the areas under increased demographic pressure nationwide. The GIS uses data from the Central Statistics Office, Ordnance Survey Ireland, the Department of Social Protection and the 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.

Following the 2015 demographic exercises, four new primary schools and nine new post-primary schools were announced to open in 2017 and 2018 to cater for increased demographic needs in these areas. This includes a new post-primary school which will open in 2017 to serve the Carpenterstown and Castleknock school planning areas in Dublin 15, which will provide an additional 1,000 post-primary pupil places, supplementing provision in these areas.

For school planning purposes, the areas of Ongar and Littlepace fall within the Blanchardstown West school planning area. A new post-primary school, Hansfield Educate Together Secondary School, opened in 2014 to supplement provision from the existing post-primary school, Phibblestown Community School. My Department is satisfied that these two post-primary schools located within this school planning area can between them cater for the demand for post-primary places in the area.

As with other school planning areas nationwide, the demographic data for the areas outlined by the Deputy are being kept under ongoing review by my Department to take account of updated enrolment data and capacity increases in these, and adjoining, school planning areas.

Student Data

127. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the rationale for the basis of questions for foreign national students registering for schools here; and if he acknowledges that the sensitive nature of the questions would be better orientated to spoken language and language needs as opposed to ethnic background and cultural identity as illustrated in a circular (details supplied). [18237/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The circular to which the Deputy refers is Circular 0023/2016 governing the student data required to be returned to my Department for the purpose of analysis and reporting in the areas of social inclusion and integration. A copy of the circular is available on my Department's website at https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0023_2016.pdf.

A detailed rationale for the collection of each item of the data required is set out in Appendix B to the circular. The stated purposes of collection include outcome focused planning of policy and support for minority groups, the monitoring and evaluation of policy supports, and meeting national and EU reporting requirements.

It is important to note that the collection of information on the ethnic and cultural background of students is not a mandatory requirement and may be provided on a voluntary basis by students or their parents. This point is highlighted in Circular by the statement: "The identification in relation to ethnic and cultural background is on the basis of voluntary self-identification. It is not compulsory. Parents and students are free to decline to provide this information."

As this circular relates to collection of information for statistical and reporting purposes, the information requested is kept under review to ensure a currency with the business needs of my

Department and its national and international reporting requirements.

Teachers' Remuneration

128. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills how he will address the issue of pay inequality for teachers; and if he will restore the qualification allowances. [18238/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Government has committed to establishing a Public Service Pay Commission to examine pay levels across the Public Service, including entry pay levels. The terms of reference and timescale for the Commission's work are a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

The Government recognises the importance of being able to attract quality new entrants to the Public Service, particularly so in important professional areas like education.

The restrictions in entry pay levels were introduced in 2011 and 2012 across the public service at a time when the pressure in public finances was severe and the scope for new recruitment was very restricted.

Under the Lansdowne Road Agreement the process of restoring public pay is commencing. An important feature of this is the flat rate increase which is being implemented. This is proportionately more valuable to those early in their careers. Restoration of the supervision and substitution payment is provided for subject to co-operation with the Lansdowne Road Agreement. The Lansdowne Road Agreement did not address the issue of pay of new entrants.

My Department continues to seek to engage with teacher unions on issues of mutual concern and has recently reached agreement with INTO and TUI in respect of:

- discussions to improve the position of teachers on fixed-term and part-time teaching
- a robust review of in-school management structures

- an increase in the quantum of the extra Croke Park hours which do not have to be worked on a "whole school" basis. The Government has also indicated that it will support the gradual negotiated repeal of FEMPI measures having due regard to the priority to improve public services and in recognition of the essential role played by public servants.

School Patronage

129. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills how he will assist the integration of children of different religious beliefs in the same schools; and his views on the Oireachtas joint committee's concern that divestment of patronage seemed to lead to religious segregation rather than the more desirable integration which would result from children of all religious beliefs going to their local national school, regardless of the patronage of that school. [18239/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Some 96% of schools at primary level are currently under the patronage of religious denominations, with 90% under the patronage of the Catholic Church. The need for a greater plurality of provision to respond effectively to changing social needs and to increasing parental demand for multi-denominational or non-denominational education is widely recognised and in that context, I am conscious of the

concerns referred to by the Deputy.

The Government is committed to progressing the development of a dynamic and innovative education system that reflects the diversity of twenty first century Ireland. The Programme for a Partnership Government reflects the Government's objective of strengthening parental choice and further expanding diversity in our school system, specifically by increasing the number of non-denominational and multi-denominational schools with a view to reaching 400 by 2030.

In addition to the phased transfer of Catholic schools to new patrons already under way, this will require considering new ideas and new approaches to substantially accelerate the changes in school provision in order to achieve greater diversity.

I am committed to working with all stakeholders to facilitate this process. I am progressing these matters as a priority and have already commenced a round of consultations with patron bodies in this regard.

Departmental Staff

130. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills how a person was precluded from the competition for position of post-primary inspector (guidance) with an honours (2.1) in M.Ed in education, specialising in guidance. [18243/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department has engaged the Public Appointments Service (PAS) to conduct a recruitment competition for the position of Post Primary Inspector of Guidance at the Department's Inspectorate. The PAS is an independent body established under the Public Service Management Act 2004 and its function is to provide a recruitment and selection service for Civil and Public Service positions.

For the position of Post Primary Inspector of Guidance a candidate must hold the following qualifications:

Hold a recognised, relevant first or second class honours primary degree (Level 8, National Qualifications Framework) which meets the Teaching Council's Curricular Subject Requirements (Post-Primary) or a qualification acceptable to the Public Appointments Service as being equivalent. Hold a recognised teacher education qualification relevant to the post-primary sector (minimum Level 8) gained through a concurrent or consecutive route. Satisfy one of the following conditions (a) or (b):

(a) Either be fully registered (without conditions) with the Teaching Council in Ireland under Regulation 4 (Post-Primary) of the Teaching Council [Registration] Regulations 2009

Or

(b) Satisfy the Public Appointments Service that you are eligible for full registration (without conditions) with the Teaching Council in Ireland under Regulation 4 (Post-Primary) of the Teaching Council [Registration] Regulations 2009 Hold a recognised post-graduate qualification in Guidance. Have at least five years' satisfactory service as a teacher and/or guidance counsellor at second level subsequent to the granting of full registration under the sector Post-primary with the Teaching Council in Ireland (or with an equivalent body in another jurisdiction), at least two years of which must be continuous service in one recognised school or centre for education in Ireland or in a second-level school in another jurisdiction. Have at least three years' experience as guidance counsellor in recognised second-level schools or centres for education in Ireland or in second-level schools in another jurisdiction. It is a matter for the PAS

to apply the terms of recruitment competitions and it is not open to me to intercede or make enquiries on behalf of an individual candidate. Competitions are conducted under the terms of the Code of Practice as published by the Commission for Public Service Appointments (CPSA) and I understand that in the job booklet published by PAS for the competition, that the avenues of appeal open to candidates in the event they were concerned about a decision made in relation to their candidature were stated.

School Curriculum

131. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills how he is addressing concerns of teachers that the new junior certificate curriculum will lead to a diminution of standards in learning and to subject contents that are not challenging. [18245/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The new junior cycle aims to ensure that our students will develop the key skills that are necessary for later learning and for life. It is designed to encourage innovation in schools and creative teaching and learning in the classroom.

The dual approach to assessment in the new junior cycle and the prominence it gives to classroom based assessment and formative assessment will develop better learners. Students will be more skilled in areas such as communication, creativity, critical thinking, managing information, self-management and working with others. Students will also receive feedback on their learning on a regular basis, review their own progress and discuss their progress with their teachers and other students with a view to identifying next steps to be taken. This will help to deepen the students’ learning, help them to become more self-aware as learners and build their capacity to manage their own learning. For example, their motivation to stick with a complex task or problem will be greatly enhanced.

As a result, students will have more satisfying learning experiences and improved outcomes and will be much more prepared for study at senior cycle.

The revised junior cycle curricula have all been internationally benchmarked to ensure that Ireland’s young people have learning opportunities that are among the best in the world. In addition, Ireland will be continuing to participate in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), thus allowing us to monitor any changes in standards over time.

Residential Institutions Statutory Fund

132. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if Caranua has informed him of the introduction of financial limits to eligible applicants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18253/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Caranua, the Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Board, is an independent statutory body established pursuant to the Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Act 2012. While officials from my Department meet regularly with officials from Caranua, it is the Board of Caranua, which is representative of survivors, that would have approved the introduction of financial limits. Caranua has, as you know, a limited fund available to it and the introduction of financial limits was necessary to ensure that the number of survivors benefiting from the fund could be maximised.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

133. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which he expects to be in a position to improve the pupil-teacher ratio at primary or second level in the next five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18262/16]

155. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which he expects to improve the pupil-teacher ratio over the next five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18534/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 133 and 155 together.

Budget 2016 made provision for some 2,260 additional teaching posts for our primary and post primary schools next year. These posts will provide for an improvement in the staffing schedules at primary and post primary levels, enhance the leadership and management roles of deputy principals at post-primary level by reducing their teaching time, an improvement to the scheme of release time for principal teachers at primary level and additional resource posts to meet special education needs.

At primary level there will be a one point improvement to the primary staffing schedule to be implemented for the 2016/17 school year. This will see the primary staffing schedule operate on the basis of a general average of 1 classroom teacher for every 27 pupils. Lower thresholds apply for DEIS Band 1 schools.

At post-primary level the schedule will improve by .3 points, from 19:1 to 18.7:1 for the 2016/17 school year. The position of post-primary DEIS schools will be further enhanced for the 2016/17 school year by a change to an allocation on the basis of 17.95:1 down from 18.25:1.

The Programme for Government has a commitment to reduce class sizes at primary level. In the next Budget I will consider the best approach to further meeting commitments in the Programme for Government.

Question No. 134 withdrawn.

Departmental Staff Remuneration

135. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount saved by having a lower level of pay for new recruits to the public service in his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13012/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As a consequence of the financial crisis, there was a need to enact a number of measures to reduce public expenditure so as to stabilise the country's public finances. A previous Government reduced the salaries and allowances payable to all new entrants to public service recruitment grades by 10% with effect from 1 January 2011. This decision also required that such new entrants would start on the first point of the applicable salary scale, which in the case of teachers had the effect of reducing their starting pay by a further 4-5%. Later in 2011, the Government placed a cap on the overall level of qualification allowances that could be earned by teachers.

Subsequently in 2012, following the public service-wide review of allowances, the Government withdrew qualification allowances for new teachers altogether. However, the Government partially compensated for this by deciding that new entrant teachers would henceforth com-

mence on a new salary scale which had a starting point higher than the starting point of the old scale. In respect of teachers, the estimated cost of reversing the decision to withdraw qualification allowances from post-1 February 2012 entrant teachers is approximately €16 million per annum. In addition, the estimated cost of restoring all post-1 January 2011 entrant teachers (who have been recruited up to June 2016) to the pre-2011 pay scale arrangements is approximately €44 million per annum.

In respect of SNAs, the estimated cost of restoring all post-1 January 2011 entrant SNAs to the pre-2011 pay scale arrangements is approximately €5 million per annum.

The cost figures set out are inclusive of teachers and SNAs on my Department's main payroll, substitute teachers and SNAs, Employers' PRSI and include an estimated cost in respect of teachers and SNAs in Education and Training Board schools. They do not include the cost of removing the cap on qualification allowances because a precise calculation of this would depend on the qualifications held by those individual teachers.

The other main area where post-1 January 2011 entrants have been recruited is in third-level lecturing. The estimated cost of restoring post-1 January 2011 entrant lecturers to the pre-2011 pay scale arrangements is not available at this time but will be forwarded to the Deputy.

Information on the numbers of post-1 January 2011 entrants to other recruitment grades in the sector is not held by my Department. However, given the low level of recruitment to such posts in recent years due to the moratorium, the cost of restoring such staff to the pre-2011 pay scale arrangements is not likely to be significant.

Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools Scheme

136. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the names of the 195 Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools, DEIS, schools in tabular form, including the year in which the school attained DEIS status, the area in which the school is located and the specific DEIS status of the school, rural, urban band 1 or 2. [18319/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that there are 836 schools (646 primary and 190 Post Primary) in the DEIS Programme for 2015/16 school year.

An extensive identification process was conducted by the Educational Research Centre (ERC) on behalf of the Department in 2005 to select the schools for inclusion in the DEIS Programme on the basis of their relative level of disadvantage – with priority being given to the most concentrated levels of disadvantage.

Since the initial DEIS identification process and subsequent appeal process in early 2006, there has been no additionality to the DEIS programme.

Details of 836 schools participating in DEIS, including addresses, and the Band breakdown are available on my Department's website at the following link :<http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools-/>.

Industrial Disputes

137. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the expected impact of the proposed Irish National Teachers Organisation industrial action over the Droichead

pilot induction programme on newly qualified teachers in special schools, special classes or special education settings; and his plans for both resolving the industrial dispute or for dealing specifically with the problem of registration for newly qualified teachers in special education settings. [18320/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Teaching Council is the statutory body with responsibility for professional standards at all stages of the teaching career. In that context, it has established standards for post-qualification professional practice, as set out in, Droichead, the new model of induction for newly qualified primary and post-primary teachers. The model ensures that the same standards and requirements apply to all teachers who have gained conditional registration with the Teaching Council. The Droichead model was the subject of a three-year pilot which informed the Droichead Policy approved by the Teaching Council in March 2016. The new policy includes a number of significant changes to Droichead. These changes were shaped by the teachers who have participated in the pilot phase of Droichead. There will be a further review of the Droichead policy in 2019. In this way, teachers and schools who participate in Droichead over the next few years will have further opportunities to shape and influence the future of their profession's learning.

Following approval of the Droichead process as its policy on induction and probation in March 2016, the Council requested the Inspectorate in my Department to continue to conduct inspection visits for the purpose of probation during the growth and development phase. As part of this growth phase, the Council indicated that from September 2016, newly qualified teachers in mainstream settings may complete probation in the traditional manner, through external evaluation conducted by inspectors. However, completion of the induction/probation process in special education settings can only be achieved through the Droichead process. The growth and development phase of Droichead will commence in September 2016 and by 2018 the Droichead model will be available to all newly qualified teachers to enable them to gain full registration with the Teaching Council.

I would encourage the INTO to engage with the Teaching Council as the statutory professional standards body for teaching to clarify the concerns that it has about Droichead in the first instance. I also wish to inform the Deputy that my Department will continue to work with teacher unions on issues of mutual concern.

School Curriculum

138. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to revise the number of books that children use in school on a daily basis (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18322/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): While my Department prescribes curricula and syllabuses for implementation in schools it does not endorse any textbooks for use in schools. It is a matter for individual schools to select the resources and textbooks available to support their implementation of the curricula or syllabuses that the Department has prescribed.

The decision to use tablets or similar devices is a matter for the Board of Management of a school. Advice on the adoption of tablets in schools is available on the 'PDST-Technology in Education' website which covers areas such as what tablets can offer a school, educational considerations, purchasing considerations and software.

More generally, as part of the new Digital Strategy for Schools, my Department will provide

advice on ICT equipment and digital learning tools that are best-suited to support learning and teaching in schools. €210m will be allocated over the period of the Strategy to fund equipment investment by schools.

Pátrúnacht Scoileanna

139. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** den Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna cé mhéad scoileanna atá ag feidhmiú faoi na pátrúin éagsúla, faoi seach, le cúig bliana anuas. [18323/16]

140. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** den Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna cad iad na torthaí ar na comórtais uile a bhain le pátrúnacht ar na scoileanna nua uile. [18324/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 139 and 140 together.

Faoi láthair tá 4,009 scoil in Éirinn, 3,286 bunscoil ar a n-áirítear 141 scoil speisialta, agus 723 iar-bhunscoil. Tá sonraí faoi na scoileanna seo agus faoin bpátrúnacht atá orthu le fáil ar shuíomh idirlín na Roinne www.education.ie

Mar is eol gan dabht don Teachta, ó 2011 i leith is gnách nach mbunaítear scoileanna nua ach amháin i gceantair a bhfuil fás ag teacht ar an ndéimeagrafach iontu. Chun na críche seo, baineann mo Roinn leas as Córas Faisnéise Geografaí chun na ceantair ar fud na tíre a bhfuil méadú ag teacht ar an mbrú déimeagrafach orthu a shainaithint. Sa chóras seo úsáidtear raon foinsí sonraí chun bearta déimeagrafacha a chur i gcrích ar fud na tíre lena fháil amach cá bhfuil an gá le cóiríocht bhreise scoile ar leibhéal bunscoile agus iarbhunscoile araon.

Ó 2011 i leith, uair ar bith a gcinntear go bhfuil gá le scoil nua chun freastal ar riachtanais dhéimeagrafacha i gceantar, reáchtáilann mo Roinn próiseas pátrúnachta ar leithligh chun a chinneadh cé a bheas ag reáchtáil na scoile. Tá cead ag gach pátrún agus pátrún ionchasach iar-ratas a chur isteach ar pátrúnacht na scoile faoin bpróiseas seo. De réir na gcritéar a úsáidtear i leith pátrúnachta ar scoileanna nua, leagtar béim ar leith ar an éileamh ó na tuismitheoirí ar an iolrachas agus ar an éagsúlacht. Bíonn sainroghanna na dtuismitheoirí i ngach aon cheantar, mar aon le méid na héagsúlachta atá le fáil faoi láthair sa cheantar, mar bhunús ríthábhachtach leis na cinntí maidir le toradh an phróisis. Ina leith seo, ní mór do na pátrúin ionchasacha teim-pléad sainroghanna tuismitheoirí a chur faoi bhráid in éineacht lena n-iarratas ina bhfuil iarrtha ar thuismitheoirí a sainrogha a dhearbhu i bhfabhar oideachas a bheith curtha ar a gclann de réir shamhail scoile an phátrúin sin. Osclaíodh 42 scoil nua faoin bpróiseas seo ó 2011 i leith (24 bunscoil agus 18 iar-bhunscoil) agus éiteas il-sainchreidmheach ag 39 díobh (23 bunscoil agus 16 iar-bhunscoil).

Mar eolas don Teachta, tá tábla leis seo ina bhfuil na scoileanna nua a osclaíodh ó 2011 i leith leagtha amach mar aon le sonraí a gcuid pátrún faoi seach.

Bunscoil

Uimhir Rolla	Ainm na Scoile	Pátrún	Éiteas
20382F	Gaelscoil na Mí	An Foras Pátrúnachta	Multi-denominational
20383H	Hansfield ETNS	Educate Together	Multi-denominational
20384J	Powerstown ETNS	Educate Together	Multi-denominational
20400E	Ballinteer Educate Together NS	Educate Together	Multi-denominational

Uimhir Rolla	Ainm na Scoile	Pátrún	Éiteas
20402I	City West Educate Together NS	Educate Together	Multi-denominational
20398U	Citywest & Saggart CNS	Dublin & Dún Laoghaire ETB	Multi-denominational
20394M	Gaelscoil an Chuillin	An Foras Pátrúnachta	Inter-denominational
20401G	Stepaside Educate Together NS	Educate Together	Multi-denominational
20396Q	Ashbourne Educate Together NS	Educate Together	Multi-denominational
20403K	Kildare Town Educate Together NS	Educate Together	Multi-denominational
20412L	Gaelscoil Teach Giúise	An Foras Pátrúnachta	Multi-denominational
20411J	Firhouse Educate Together NS	Educate Together	Multi-denominational
20425U	Gaelscoil Shliabh Rua	An Foras Pátrúnachta	Multi-denominational
20426W	Scoil Oscair	Dublin & Dún Laoghaire ETB	Multi-denominational
20413N	Douglas Rochestown Educate Together NS	Educate Together	Multi-denominational
20428D	Gaelscoil Mhic Aodha	An Foras Pátrúnachta	Multi-denominational
20422O	Scoil Aoife CNS	Dublin & Dún Laoghaire ETB	Multi-denominational
20440Q	Mallow CNS	Cork ETB	Multi-denominational
20410H	Knocknacarra Educate Together NS	Educate Together	Multi-denominational
20441S	Shellybanks Educate Together NS	Educate Together	Multi-denominational
20473I	Greystones CNS	Kildare & Wicklow ETB	Multidenominational
20462D	Galway Steiner NS	Lifeways Ireland Ltd (Steiner Model)	Multidenominational
20392I	Pelletstown/Ash-town Educate Together NS	Educate Together	Multidenominational
20442U	Scoil Chliodhna CNS Carrigtohill	Cork ETB	Multidenominational

Iar-bhunscoil

Questions - Written Answers

Uimhir Rolla	Ainm na Scoile	Pátrún	Éiteas
76127D	Gorey Community College	Waterford & Wexford ETB	Multi denominational
76213T	Lusk Community College	Dublin & Dún Laoghaire ETB	Multi denominational
76233C	Coláiste Bhaile Chláir	Galway & Roscommon ETB	Multi denominational
76096S	Merlin College, Doughiska	Galway & Roscommon ETB	Multi denominational
76173K	Coláiste na Mí	Louth & Meath ETB	Multi denominational
68101M	Hansfield Educate Together Secondary School	Educate Together	Multi denominational
68083N	Le Chéile Secondary School	Le Chéile Schools Trust	Catholic
76193Q	Maynooth Community College (Maynooth, Co. Kildare)	Kildare & Wicklow ETB	Multi denominational
91573N	Ballymakenny College	Joint patronage of Louth & Meath ETB and Educate Together	Multi denominational
76195U	Pobalcholáiste Chú Chulainn	Louth & Meath ETB	Multi denominational
76196W	De Lacy College	Louth & Meath ETB	Multi denominational
68082L	Coláiste Ghlór na Mara	An Foras Pátrúnachta	Multi denominational
68161H	Gaelcholáiste an Phiarsaigh	An Foras Pátrúnachta	Multi denominational
68081J	Temple Carrig Secondary School	Archbishop of Dublin & Bishop of Glendalough	Church of Ireland
76152C	Kishoge Community College	Dublin & Dún Laoghaire ETB in partnership with Educate Together	Multi denominational
91614B	Community School Celbridge	Jointly Educate Together and Kildare and Wicklow ETB	Multi denominational
76273O	Gaelcholáiste Charraig Uí Leighin	Cork ETB	Multi denominational
76194S	Naas Community College	Kildare & Wicklow ETB	Multi denominational

TSchools Building Projects

141. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans for a permanent school building for a school (details supplied). [18347/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm to the Deputy that the school to which she refers currently has a major building project at construction. This project is for a new school building and is devolved to the OPW for delivery. It is anticipated that the project will be completed in October 2016.

Schools Building Projects Status

142. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the processing of the brief formulation document and schedule of accommodation for a school (details supplied) following the board of management's meeting with his Department on 18 February 2016; when he will commence the next stage, given the complexity of the work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18385/16]

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 the Department's 6 Year Capital Programme announced last November. The project is being progressed with a view to proceeding to tender / construction in 2017, as outlined in the programme.

My Department is currently finalising the project brief and once this process is complete, the project will be progressed into the architectural planning process.

Site Acquisitions

143. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the site acquisition for a new school (details supplied) which is included in the school building programme for commencement in 2017; when he will progress this project to the brief formulation document and schedule of accommodation stage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18386/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Officials from my Department have worked closely with officials from Meath County Council under the Memorandum of Understanding for the acquisition of a site for this building project. A suitable site has been identified and negotiations with the Vendor of this site are underway.

Due to commercial sensitivities relating to site acquisitions generally I am not in a position to provide further details at this time. I can, however, assure you that the site acquisition for the school is being advanced by my Department.

Schools Building Projects Status

144. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the planned construction of a school (details supplied) which is included in the school building programme for commencement in 2016; when will construction be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18387/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The major building project for the school referred to by the Deputy is at stage 2(a) of architectural planning, Developed Design Stage. Statutory approvals have been obtained for this project.

Upon successful completion of Stage 2(a), the project will progress to complete Stage 2(b),

Detailed Design, which will include the preparation of Tender Documents for Contractors.

Until such time as the project has progressed to and completed tender stage and the appointment of a building contractor, it will not be possible to provide an indicative timeframe for the completion of the construction stage of the project.

School Curriculum

145. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the importance he places on pupils being taught about national and international events of an historic and significant nature and if he will consider assigning History as a compulsory subject at junior certificate level. [18409/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Currently, over 90% of students choose history although it is compulsory in only half our schools. Curriculum choice and flexibility is important in motivating students to learn and to remain in school to completion of senior cycle.

It is important that our pupils are taught about significant national and international events in history. This underlies the emphasis on History in the primary schools curriculum, and on a broad and balanced understanding of the past. There is also an important place in our schools for local historical studies, and for social and cultural history. The primary curriculum stresses that studying History is important in assisting children to become confident, informed, critical and responsible adult members of society and in contributing to developing their literacy skills.

Schools across all sectors offer History. History teachers attract students to their subject through their own love and passion for History, and by engaging the natural curiosity of their students in, for example, the lives of people, the origins of the modern world and in objects and documents from the past. History is the 5th most popular subject in the Junior Certificate examination. The Decade of Centenaries is giving added interest to History, especially the 1916 - 2016 celebrations this year, and has seen high levels of engagement by many schools, including around Easter of this year. Great credit is due to students, teachers, school leaders, parents and other education staff for making the education elements of the Ireland 2016 commemorative programme such a success.

I have every confidence that through the implementation of the Framework for Junior Cycle the place of history will be retained and given a new impetus across the junior cycle curriculum. Such an impetus should help to improve take up of History at senior cycle also. In fact, a new specification for Junior Cycle History will shortly be developed by the NCCA. This will involve intensive consultation whereby all interested parties will be able to provide their views. The new specification will be available for implementation in all schools from September 2018.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

146. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a school (details supplied) which wishes to open a preschool specifically for children with autism spectrum disorders; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18420/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible, through its network of Special Needs Organisers (SENOs) for allocating Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) support to

mainstream Primary, Post Primary and Special Schools, to assist children with special educational needs who also have additional and significant care needs. The NCSE makes such allocations in accordance with my Departments criteria for the scheme.

I am advised that the school to which the Deputy refers includes a Special Class for children with Autism which is staffed by 1 teacher and 2 Special Needs Assistants. I am also advised that the school has applied to the NCSE for the establishment of an Early Intervention Unit. The NCSE are currently considering this request and are assessing the need for such a unit in this school. A reply will issue to the school in due course.

In addition I am also advised that a pre-school is located on the campus of this school. This pre-school is operated separately to the school and is primarily funded under the ECCE scheme operated by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. This scheme is the principal vehicle for the delivery of pre-school education. I understand that the staffing of this pre-school is the focus of the Deputy's question.

Children with disabilities will now have better access to pre-school services under a new Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) programme of supports, which was recently announced, on 15th June 2016, by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. AIM is a child-centred model, involving seven levels of progressive support, moving from the universal to the targeted, depending on the needs of the child and the preschool.

The supports include: A new Inclusion Charter for the Early Years sector, alongside updated and strengthened Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Guidelines for Early Childhood Care and Education. A new higher education programme for early years practitioners (LINC) which will commence from September 2016. A new national specialist service which is based in the Better Start National Early Years Quality Development Service will provide expert advice, mentoring and support to preschool providers from a team of 50 specialists in early years care and education for children with disabilities. A new national scheme will provide specialised equipment, appliances and minor alterations which are necessary to support a child's participation in the ECCE programme. A new national scheme will also provide additional capitation to pre-school providers where this is critical to fund extra support in the classroom and enable a child's participation in preschool. It is estimated that only 1% to 1.5% of children in pre-school will require, and therefore be eligible for, this scheme of additional capitation.

Details of the supports which will be available under AIM can be found at www.preschoolaccess.ie which contains comprehensive information on the access and inclusion model and on how to apply for the new schemes and supports.

Questions relating to provision of such services in pre school settings should be addressed my colleague, the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs.

School Transport Eligibility

147. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to ensure transport to and from a school for pupils from Dublin 15 who attend a school (details supplied). [18428/16]

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 Dublin 15 area are not eligible for school transport to the school in question as it is not their nearest secondary school.

Children who are not eligible for school transport may avail of transport on a concessionary basis only. 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. Families wishing to avail of transport on a concessionary basis should liaise with their local Bus Éireann office regarding the availability of such transport.

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

Schools Establishment

148. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a project (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18431/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department carries out demographic analyses at primary and post-primary level using the Department's Geographical Information System to identify areas under increased demographic pressure nationwide. The system uses data from the Central Statistics Office, Ordnance Survey Ireland, the Department of Social Protection and information from my own Department's databases.

Arising from the outcome of these demographic analyses, it was confirmed that four new primary schools and nine new post-primary schools would open in 2017 and 2018, including a new post-primary school for the area referred to by the Deputy which will open in September 2017.

In April this year, my Department issued an invitation to all school patron bodies and prospective patron bodies to apply for the patronage of the nine new post-primary schools, including the school to serve the area referred to by the Deputy. As part of the application process, prospective patrons must submit completed parental preferences, including whether parents wish their child(ren) to be educated through the medium of Irish or of English. The closing date for receipt of applications to my Department was Wednesday 8th June.

My Department is currently assessing the applications received from the prospective patrons and an assessment report will be prepared for the consideration of the New Schools Establishment Group (NSEG). The Group will then submit a report with recommendations to me for consideration and final decision. I will announce the patronage of the schools in due course and the patronage assessment report will be published on my Department's website.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

149. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he is satisfied with the number of second level schools with special autism spectrum disorder classes; if he believes there are adequate places in these special classes for the number of children coming through the primary system with autism spectrum disorder; the steps he is taking to deal with this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18443/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy will be aware that this Government is committed to ensuring that all children with Special Educational Needs, including those with autism, can have access to an education appropriate to their needs, prefer-

ably in school settings through the primary and post primary school network.

Such placements facilitate access to individualised education programmes which may draw from a range of appropriate educational interventions, delivered by fully qualified professional teachers, with the support of Special Needs Assistants and the appropriate school curriculum.

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

The Deputy will also be aware that the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), for allocating resource teachers and special needs assistants to schools to support students with Special Educational Needs, including Autism.

It is also the role of the NCSE to make appropriate arrangements to establish special classes in schools in communities where the need for such classes has been identified.

SENOs engage with schools annually in order to plan for, and to open, new special classes each year in order to ensure there are sufficient special class placements available at primary and post primary school level to meet demand in a given area.

Special classes within mainstream schools are intended for children who, by virtue of their level of Special Educational Needs, cannot reasonably be educated in a mainstream class setting, but who can still attend their local school in a special class with a lower pupil–teacher ratio of 6:1.5 at post primary level, and also have Special Needs Assistant support normally amounting to 2 SNAs for a class of 6 children.

Progress in developing this network has been significant and in addition to the special school placements there are currently over 1,000 special classes throughout the country at primary and post primary level of which 762 are for children with Autism and 194 of these classes for children with autism are at post primary level.

With regard to the requirement for post primary school places for children with autism, the NCSE, through its network of local SENOs, have been engaging with schools for 2016 - 2017 school year in order to plan for, and to open, new special classes, in order to ensure there are sufficient placements available to meet demand in an area.

The NCSE recently published a list of special classes for the 2016 -2017 school year. In total there will be 1,153 special classes available next year, which is an increase of over 100% in the number of special classes which were available in 2011, which was 548. A total of 237 of these classes will be for pupils with autism at post primary level, which represents an increase of 22% on the 2015 - 2016 academic year.

Details of all of the special classes for children with special educational needs which are attached to mainstream schools are published each year on the NCSE website at *www.ncse.ie*.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

150. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he is aware of the shortage of autism spectrum disorder special second level classes in County Cork; his plans to provide additional classes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18452/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy

that the policy of my Department is that children with special educational needs, including children with autism, should be included where possible and appropriate in mainstream placements with additional supports provided. In circumstances where children with Special Educational Needs require more specialised interventions, special school or special class places are also available.

The Deputy will be aware that the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), is responsible for processing applications from primary and post primary schools for special educational needs supports, including the establishment of special classes in various geographical areas as required. The NCSE operates within my Department's criteria in allocating such support.

SENOs are currently liaising with schools in Cork City and County regarding the establishment of classes for the 2016/17 school year.

The NCSE has advised that for the coming school year there will be an additional 7 new ASD classes in Cork City and County, bringing the total number of ASD classes to 41 at post primary level in mainstream schools in Cork city and County. Each post primary special class for autism has a 6:1.5 pupil-teacher ratio. A full list of special classes is available on the NCSE website www.ncse.ie.

The enrolment of a child to a school is a matter, in the first instance, for the parent of the child and the Board of Management of a school. The NCSE have advised that places are available in some of the new classes and any parent who has concerns about a place for their child for September should contact their local SENO as soon as possible for information on available places.

School Transport Expenditure

151. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 177 of 2 June 2016, if he has specifically asked the auditors of Bus Éireann's statement of account to certify that the revenue he provides to Bus Éireann for school transport services is not used to cross-subsidise its other transport activities. [18522/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): Bus Éireann has provided assurances to my Department that any surplus that may arise in the operation of school transport services in any one year is ring-fenced exclusively for reinvestment in the school transport scheme.

The Department is satisfied that the financial accounting for Bus Éireann's operation of the School Transport Scheme, including the Bus Éireann Annual Report and the annual independently audited account of the school transport scheme is in full compliance with the 1975 Summary of Accounting Arrangements and with all relevant accounting standards and guidelines.

School Placement

152. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which he expects to be in a position to address any outstanding school place shortages resulting in overcrowded classrooms and high pupil-teacher ratios; if he expects to deal with the most urgent in 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18531/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department uses a

Geographical Information System (GIS) to identify where the pressure for school places across the country will arise. The GIS uses data from the Central Statistics Office, Ordnance Survey Ireland, the Department of Social Protection and my Department's own databases. With this information, my Department carries out nationwide demographic exercises at primary and post primary level to determine where additional school accommodation is needed at primary and post-primary levels. The outcome of the latest demographic exercises was that in November 2015, 13 new schools were announced to open nationwide in 2017 and 2018.

The November 2015 announcement also detailed the major school projects that will commence construction from 2016 - 2021 as part of my Department's Six -Year Capital Programme. The programme aims to prioritise new building projects and major extensions, including special schools, in areas where significant demographic need has been established. The Deputy will also be aware that the Capital Programme is also progressing school projects that were announced under my Department's 5 Year Plan (2012-16). In addition, the Capital Programme also provides for devolved funding for additional classrooms for schools, where an immediate accommodation requirement has been identified, such as the appointment of an additional teacher. In that regard, it is open to schools to apply for funding for additional classroom accommodation, where required.

My Department's Forward Planning section will continue to analyse demographic trends and monitor enrolments, to determine the level of additional school provision which may be required to ensure that every child will have access to a physical school place.

School Staff

153. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which he has evaluated the need for provision of extra career guidance officers to meet current and future needs; if he expects to meet the most urgent requirements at an early date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18532/16]

162. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the total current number of career guidance teachers and the likely increase over the coming years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18541/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take questions 153 and 162 together. Up until September 2012, an ex-quota allocation was provided for guidance in addition to the standard teacher allocation to post primary schools. This resource was allocated in accordance with pupil enrolment. Some 42% of second-level schools at the time were allocated at least 22 hours per week in respect of guidance (22 hours being the equivalent of one teaching post) while the remainder of the schools were allocated between 8 and 17 hours of guidance per week.

Since September 2012 at post primary level guidance provision is now being organised by school management from within the staffing schedule allocation. Guidance is a whole school activity and schools have autonomy on how best to prioritise their available resources to meet the requirements in relation to guidance and the provision of an appropriate range of subjects to students. This operates at local school level and therefore the information requested by the Deputy on the number of guidance counsellors in secondary schools is not available centrally within my Department.

The current budget provides an improved staffing allocation to second level schools for the purpose of enhancing guidance provision. This improvement takes effect from next September.

It brings the basis of allocation from 19:1 to 18.7:1 for the 2016 - 2017 school year. This improvement of 0.3 in PTR allocation is a restoration of 50% of the teaching resources that were removed when the allocation of guidance posts was brought within quota.

The delivery of the 50% restoration through a change in the staffing schedule will allow each school to determine how best to allocate the additional resources to meet the guidance needs of the school. The circular issued earlier this year by my Department outlining the allocation of teaching resources clearly stated that this additional resource is to complement existing resources in order to best meet the guidance needs of the school in line with the school's guidance plan.

It is important to note that in previous changes to guidance counselling allocations in 2012, as a consequence of the Budget adjustment which had to be made at the time, all 195 DEIS schools were effectively sheltered from these changes as a result of the more favourable staffing schedule of 18.25:1. This was a 0.75 point improvement compared to the current PTR of 19:1 that applies in non-fee-paying second-level schools.

That was a very important protection for the cohort of our schools in DEIS most in need of support. DEIS schools will also further benefit from the 0.3 improvement to the staffing schedule which will give them an enhanced allocation on the basis of 17.95:1 in respect of the 2016/17 school year.

In the next Budget I will consider the best approach to further meeting commitments in the Programme for Government.

Special Educational Needs Staff

154. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which he expects to continue to facilitate the special needs teaching requirements at primary and second level with particular reference to autism needs at an early date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18533/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The policy of my Department is that children with special educational needs, including children with autism, should be included where possible and appropriate in mainstream placements with additional supports provided. In circumstances where children with special educational needs require more specialised interventions, special school or special class places are also available.

Children, therefore, have a number of placement options including mainstream placement with support, placement in a special class in a mainstream school or placement in a special class in a special school.

We now have the highest level of Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support, Resource Teaching allocations and Special Class provision that we have ever had, which will ensure that children with special educational needs can continue to participate in education and be supported in a manner appropriate to their needs.

I recently announced that from September next 12,900 Special Needs Assistants (SNAs), at a total gross annual cost of €425 million will be available for allocation to primary and secondary schools. This is 860 more posts, or a 7% increase, in the number of posts over which were available last year. In total the number of SNA posts available has increased by almost 22% from 10,575 posts available in 2011.

There are currently over 11,800 Learning Support and Resource Teacher posts in mainstream primary and post primary schools providing additional teaching support to pupils with special educational needs.

In May of this year the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) allocated 7,015 Resource Teaching posts to mainstream schools for September 2016, which is an increase of approximately 9% over the number allocated at September 2015.

In total, 7,452 Resource Teacher posts will be available for allocation to schools for 2016-2017, which represents an increase of 41% from 5,265 posts available in 2011.

In addition, approximately 150 new Special Classes will be opened for the 2016/17 school year, which means there will be over 1,150 special classes in place, compared to 548 special classes in 2011. Of these 1153 classes, there will be 237 post primary, 525 primary and 127 Early Intervention classes for children with autism, in mainstream schools.

Each special class for autism at primary level has a 6:1 pupil teacher ratio and at post-primary level has a 6:1.5 pupil teacher ratio. These classes also have Special Needs Assistant support normally amounting to 2 SNAs for a class of 6 children.

The Deputy will be aware that the NCSE was requested to prepare updated policy advice on the Educational Provision for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders. In developing this policy advice, the NCSE consulted widely with parents, professionals and other stakeholders and interested parties while also conducting research.

The advice is intended to identify the nature and extent of educational intervention/s, teaching practices and other supports which should be provided to enable children with autism to achieve educational outcomes appropriate to their needs and abilities.

An implementation group has now been established to review the recommendations of this policy advice. Any recommendations which relate to the issues raised by the Deputy will be fully considered by this group which will prepare an implementation plan for my consideration.

Question No. 155 answered with Question No. 133.

Schools Building Projects Status

156. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which he expects to meet in full all projects outlined in the capital programme for the current and subsequent years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18535/16]

161. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the schools building programme for County Kildare over the next four years in respect of primary and second level schools, new and refurbishments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18540/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take questions Nos. 156 and 161 together.

I wish to advise the Deputy that it is my Department's intention to fully implement the Six Year Capital Plan (2016 - 2021).

As the Deputy is aware, the Six Year Capital Plan (2016 - 2021), announced last November, as part of the Government's €2.8 billion schools capital investment programme, details the

major school building projects that are scheduled to proceed to tender-construction over the lifetime of the Plan. It is my Department's intention to progress these projects, including those listed for County Kildare, through the various stages of the architectural planning and construction process as outlined in the Plan.

The programme aims to prioritise new building projects and major extensions, including special schools, in areas where significant demographic need has been established. The Deputy will also be aware that the Capital Programme also progresses school projects that were announced under my Department's Five Year Plan (2012 - 2016). In addition, the Capital Programme also provides for devolved funding for additional classrooms for schools, where an immediate enrolment need has been identified, such as the appointment of an additional teacher.

Details of the schools listed on this programme can be found on my Department's website www.education.ie.

Schools Recognition

157. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the degree to which he expects to ensure the viable operation and retention of smaller rural or urban schools including those with a particular ethos; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18536/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department is very aware of the importance of small schools to rural communities and particularly the most dispersed and remote communities. To sustain primary schools in these communities my Department has a more favourable staffing schedule for small schools that are more than 8km distant from the next nearest school of the same type of patronage and language of instruction. This measure is designed to provide rural communities with security about the future of their small schools. With regard to school ethos, the Government supports the concept of parental choice in our school system, whether that be a choice for denominational or multi-denominational education. In regard to retaining small schools, a specific commitment is given in the Programme for a Partnership Government not to close any small school without the consent of parents. I am mindful of the concerns of small schools and will take these into account in considering any planning for future provision.

Teachers' Remuneration

158. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the degree to which he can in the short to medium term address the issue of lower pay for younger teachers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18537/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Government has committed to establishing a Public Service Pay Commission to examine pay levels across the Public Service, including entry pay levels. The terms of reference and timescale for the Commission's work are a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

The Government recognises the importance of being able to attract quality new entrants to the Public Service, particularly so in important professional areas like education.

The restrictions in entry pay levels were introduced in 2011 and 2012 across the public service at a time when the pressure in public finances was severe and the scope for new recruitment was very restricted.

Under the Lansdowne Road Agreement the process of restoring public service pay is commencing. An important feature of this is the flat rate increase which is being implemented. This is proportionately more valuable to those early in their careers. Restoration of the supervision and substitution payment is provided for subject to co-operation with the Lansdowne Road Agreement. The Lansdowne Road Agreement did not address the issue of pay of new entrants.

My Department continues to seek to engage with teacher unions on issues of mutual concern and has recently reached agreement with INTO and TUI in respect of: discussions to improve the position of teachers on fixed-term and part-time teaching; a robust review of in-school management structures; and an increase in the quantum of the extra Croke Park hours which do not have to be worked on a “whole school” basis.

The Government has also indicated that it will support the gradual negotiated unwinding of FEMPI measures having due regard to the priority to improve public services and in recognition of the essential role played by public servants.

Special Educational Needs Staff

159. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he expects to be in a position to meet the full requirement in respect of special needs assistants in the current and future years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18538/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that funding for special education provision in 2016 will amount to some €1.5 billion, which is equivalent to over 17% of the gross overall current allocation for education and training. It has increased by 10% in the past two years.

The investment which is being made to support children with special educational needs is an area of spending which has been prioritised above most other areas by this Government.

This investment includes provision for the highest level of Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support that we have ever had.

I recently announced that from September next, 12,900 Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) will be available for allocation to primary and secondary schools, at a total gross annual cost of €425 million. This is 860 more posts, or a 7% increase, in the number of posts over which were available last year.

In total the number of SNA posts available has increased by almost 22% from 10575 posts available in 2011.

The provision which is being made ensures that children with special educational needs can continue to participate in education and be supported in a manner appropriate to their needs.

Funding for the provision of special educational needs supports for future years will be considered annually, as part of the annual estimates process, however, I can confirm that this Government will continue to ensure that the supports required to ensure that all children with special educational needs can continue to participate in education will be provided.

Teacher Recruitment

160. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent

to which extra teachers have been recruited to meet the emerging needs at primary and second level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18539/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The criteria used for the allocation of teachers to primary schools is published annually on the website of the Department of Education and Skills. The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30 September.

The Deputy will be aware that Budget 2016 made provision for some 2,260 additional teaching posts for our primary and post primary schools next year. These posts will provide for an improvement in the staffing schedules at primary and post primary levels, enhance the leadership and management roles of deputy principals at post-primary level by reducing their teaching time, an improvement to the scheme of release time for principal teachers at primary level and additional resource posts to meet special education needs.

At primary level there will be a one point improvement to the primary staffing schedule to be implemented for the 2016/17 school year. This will see the primary staffing schedule operate on the basis of a general average of 1 classroom teacher for every 27 pupils. Lower thresholds apply for DEIS Band 1 schools.

At post-primary level the schedule will improve by .3 points, from 19:1 to 18.7:1 for the 2016/17 school year. The position of post-primary DEIS schools will be further enhanced for the 2016/17 school year by a change to an allocation on the basis of 17.95:1 down from 18.25:1.

Question No. 161 answered with Question No. 156.

Question No. 162 answered with Question No. 153.

Apprenticeship Programmes

163. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to promote apprenticeships. [18561/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): A campaign to promote apprenticeship is currently being developed by SOLAS in consultation with key partners including the Apprenticeship Council. The campaign will raise awareness and promote the value of apprenticeship for individual apprentices and for employers and it will cover both existing apprenticeships and the new apprenticeships now coming on stream.

This Government has committed to doubling the number of apprenticeship places. In addition to rising numbers entering apprenticeships in the existing trades, the Apprenticeship Council is overseeing the expansion of the apprenticeship system into a range of new areas, following a call for proposals from employers and education and training providers. 25 proposals have been prioritised by the Council for development, with employers on a number of these new apprenticeships planning to recruit in 2016. The Council is working with partners to ensure that information on these new opportunities across a range of sectors and at a range of levels of the National Framework of Qualifications is made available as widely as possible.

Wind Energy Guidelines

164. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and

Local Government the status of wind energy development guidelines (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17925/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): In December 2013, my Department published proposed “draft” revisions to the noise, setback distance and shadow flicker aspects of the 2006 Wind Energy Development Guidelines.

These draft revisions proposed:

- the setting of a more stringent day- and night-time noise limit of 40 decibels for future wind energy developments;

- a mandatory minimum setback distance of 500 metres between a wind turbine and the nearest dwelling for amenity considerations; and

- the complete elimination of shadow flicker between wind turbines and neighbouring dwellings.

A public consultation process was also initiated on these proposed draft revisions to the Guidelines, which ran until 21 February 2014. My Department received submissions from 7,500 organisations and members of the public during this public consultation process.

As outlined in the Programme for a Partnership Government published last month, the Government is committed to finalising the revisions to the 2006 Wind Energy Development Guidelines within 3 to 6 months. The revisions to the Guidelines will be informed by the public consultation process and best international practice. My Department will continue to advance work on the Guidelines, in conjunction with the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources.

The revisions to the Wind Energy Development Guidelines 2006, when finalised, will be issued under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended. Planning authorities, and, where applicable, An Bord Pleanála are required to have regard to such guidelines issued under Section 28 in the performance of their functions under the Planning Acts.

Regeneration Projects

165. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to compensate for the cessation of the Ballymun social regeneration fund in 2017. [18352/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): While investment in the physical regeneration of Ballymun is largely complete, my Department has been continuing to support certain social and economic interventions in Ballymun with funding allocated on the basis of agreed annual work programmes. An allocation of €1.7million is available for these social regeneration initiatives in the Ballymun area for 2016. My Department will be continuing to engage with Dublin City Council regarding the position of such initiatives from 2017 onwards.

Other funding for the Ballymun area from my Department comes via the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP), where the allocation to the Ballymun, Whitehall and Tolka area this year is €1.5 million. SICAP is an important community-focussed programme with the aims of reducing poverty and of promoting social inclusion and equality through local, regional and national engagement and collaboration. It is a key priority of

Government and its vision is to improve the life chances and opportunities of those who are marginalised in society, living in poverty or in unemployment through community development approaches, targeted supports and interagency collaboration, where the values of equality and inclusion are promoted and human rights are respected.

Motor Tax Rates

166. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the recent changes in van tax which appear to have made it more expensive for van users, particularly those who are not self-employed. [18412/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): There have been no changes to motor tax rates for commercial vehicles since the reductions announced in Budget 2016 and given legislative effect in the Motor Vehicle (Duties and Licences) Act 2015. The reductions applied to all vehicles with an unladen weight in excess of 4,000kgs, with no change to rates for smaller commercial vehicles.

To be taxed as a commercial vehicle, a vehicle must be constructed as a goods vehicle and must be used solely in the course of trade or business. Under section 2 of the Finance (Excise Duties) (Vehicles) Act 1952, if a vehicle is being used in a manner that would attract a higher rate of tax, the tax becomes payable at that rate. In other words, if a vehicle is also being used in a private capacity and the relevant private rate applying to the vehicle is higher than the goods rate, then the vehicle must be taxed at the private rate.

Licensing authorities have an obligation under Article 3 of the Road Vehicles (Registration and Licensing) (Amendment) Regulations 1992 to be satisfied that a vehicle is correctly taxed and it is thus open to a motor tax office to seek additional documentation supporting a claim for the commercial rate of motor tax. Such documentation may include a certificate of commercial insurance, evidence of registration for VAT or, at the discretion of the licensing authority concerned, any other appropriate documentation that would indicate that the applicant is in trade or business (including confirmation from an employer that a vehicle is being used by an employee solely in the course of trade or business). It is up to the individual concerned to provide whatever evidence is required by the local authority in order for it to be satisfied that the applicant is entitled to claim what is in effect a concessionary rate of tax.

Voluntary Sector Funding

167. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government to ensure that Show Racism the Red Card receives funding under the support scheme for national organisations (details supplied). [18586/16]

225. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government why an organisation did not receive funding for a project in the latest round of funding despite having been recommended for funding and having received funding for the previous five years under the scheme to support national organisations. [18515/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 167 and 225 together.

The organisation in question submitted an application to Pobal under the Scheme to Support National Organisations in the Community and Voluntary Sector. In total 148 applications were

received and assessed by Pobal on behalf of my Department with 70 organisations to receive funding.

The quality of applications was very high, leading to a highly competitive assessment process. I approved 70 organisations for funding, at a total of €16.4million, well in excess of the indicated amount initially advertised, in an effort to fund as many organisations as possible.

There was an extremely high demand for funding under the scheme, and it was clearly indicated that reaching a minimum threshold score of 65% was no guarantee of funding. Having regard to the funding available, 70 organisations were allocated funding, and the minimum score to be awarded funding was 76%. With the substantially increased allocation to the Scheme, there is no scope to award further funding to other organisations.

Pobal is available to engage with the organisation concerned if it requires further information on its application.

Private Rented Accommodation Standards

168. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to introduce mandatory inspections of private rented accommodation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17929/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Minimum standards for rental accommodation are prescribed in the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2008, as amended by the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) (Amendment) Regulations 2009, made under section 18 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1992.

The Regulations specify requirements in relation to a range of matters, such as structural repair, sanitary facilities, heating, ventilation, natural light and safety of gas and electrical supply. With very limited exemptions, these regulations apply to local authority and voluntary housing units as well as private rented residential accommodation.

All landlords have a legal obligation to ensure that their rented properties comply with these regulations and responsibility for the enforcement of the regulations rests with the relevant local authority supported by a dedicated stream of funding provided from part of the proceeds of tenancy registration fees collected by the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB).

Since the establishment of the RTB, over €30 million has been paid to local authorities to assist them in the performance of their functions under the Housing Acts, including the inspection of rented accommodation. Over 167,000 inspections have been carried out in this period. Following the enactment of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009, local authorities have a strengthened legislative framework available to them which provides for the issuing of Improvement Notices and Prohibition Notices where landlords are in breach of their obligations. Fines for non-compliance with the regulations were also increased; the maximum fine increased from €3,000 to €5,000 and the fine for each day of a continuing offence increased from €250 to €400.

In the short term it is my intention to promote best practice in implementing the regulations across the local authorities. The possibility of shared services across local authority areas is also to be explored.

Waste Management Regulations

169. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government where the functions relating to waste management, regulation of waste collection companies and regulation of recycling facilities will be located after the division of the existing Department of Environment, Community and Local Government into two new Departments. [18001/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Responsibility for environmental functions in relation to waste and resource efficiency, including waste management, regulation of waste collection companies and regulation of recycling facilities, will transfer to the Department of Communications, Energy & Natural Resources. That Department will be renamed as the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment following completion of all relevant transfer of functions processes. The statutory process to give effect to these changes in respect of the environment portfolio is underway and will be completed as soon as possible.

Waste Disposal

170. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government to immediately suspend the planned charge system for waste collection until there is clarity on the outcome of the changes for families and households; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18012/16]

171. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to prevent an increase in the cost of domestic waste collection; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18013/16]

172. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government to order waste collectors to outline the justification behind increases in charges and to outline where customers' money is going; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18014/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 170 to 172, inclusive, together.

In an open market, it is a matter for a waste collector to set charges at the level they consider to be competitive, in compliance with the requirements of environmental and other applicable legislation. However, since the waste industry began releasing its planned pricing plans in relation to the nationwide roll-out of pay-by-weight charging at the start of June, I raised some concerns with the industry regarding the reported increase of waste charges for some customers from July, particularly in relation to some proposed increases in service charges.

In this regard, I engaged actively and intensively with representatives of the waste industry and have agreed a clear way forward that results in customers paying no more than their current rate for presenting the same amount of waste over the next 12 months - by means of a price freeze to end-June 2017.

From 1 January 2017, customers will be able to see through a dual billing process, details in their bills about the amount of waste they are disposing of, their costs under the continuation of their current price plan and details of the comparative pay-by-weight charge. During the transition period, to end June 2017, the Government, in partnership with the waste industry, will

drive an intensive public awareness, information and promotion campaign to support customers in understanding the new system, how they can change their waste management behaviour and manage better their waste costs under a pay-by-weight system.

The above approach provides increased transparency around what charges households would incur under pay-by-weight and also provides householders with information on the operation and benefits of pay by weight along with the option to switch to pay by weight charging from 1 January, 2017.

After the transitional 12-month period, the operation of pay-by-weight and of the wider waste market will be reviewed to inform decisions in relation to arrangements beyond 1 July 2017.

Planning Issues

173. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the legislation relating to the maintenance of privately owned trees when they endanger the private property of another person; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18057/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Planning legislation places no specific restrictions on the height of trees, nor does it make any particular provision for remedy from any other nuisance which may be caused by trees in an urban residential area. However, there is currently a civil remedy available concerning branches or roots of neighbouring trees encroaching on a person's property.

The previous Minister of State for Housing and Planning wrote to the Minister for Justice in June 2012 to explore the possibility of providing a broader civil law remedy for parties affected by high trees and hedges on adjoining properties. In this regard, advice was sought on the possibility of legislative provision being made whereby a person substantially deprived of the enjoyment of their property, such as the deprivation of light caused by high trees on a neighbouring property, could apply to the Courts for an order, and that the Courts could make an order as they see fit, e.g. to cut the trees back to an appropriate height. Safety considerations relating to overhanging trees could also potentially be addressed in any such provisions.

The Minister for Justice responded in July 2012, suggesting that disputes of this nature between neighbours could perhaps be more appropriately dealt with through mediation - which is being increasingly used internationally as a tool for the resolution of civil disputes - rather than through the Courts. In this regard, I understand that the Department of Justice is currently progressing the drafting of a Mediation Bill, aimed at assisting in speeding up the resolution of civil disputes of this nature, thereby reducing legal costs associated with, and ameliorating the stress of, involvement in such contested court proceedings.

Waste Management

174. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if his Department or a body under its aegis has monitored if waste collectors have weighed waste since July 2015 and provided this information to their customers; and if he will provide this data. [18060/16]

179. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local

Government the percentage of households he estimates do not avail of an authorised waste collection service; if he ensures that local authorities investigate whether these households manage their waste in an environmentally acceptable manner in accordance with legislation and waste management plans; and if he can provide statistics on the level of monitoring by local authorities of these households' waste disposal practices. [18105/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 174 and 179 together.

Waste Enforcement Regional Lead Authorities (WERLAs) have been established in each of the three existing waste regions, with responsibility for coordinating waste enforcement actions and ensuring consistent enforcement of waste legislation while still leaving local authority personnel as first responders on the ground to specific breaches of waste legislation. This will facilitate a transformation from process-driven enforcement, structured around separate implementation of individual regulations, to one that focuses greatest effort on the waste problems and issues that matter most and to take swift, proportionate and effective action.

A working group on the introduction of Pay-By-Weight charging, consisting of members from my Department, the WERLA's and the National Waste Collection Permit Office (NWCPO), has to date devised and completed a programme of data collection and inspections to help ensure that household waste collectors are, *inter alia*, weighing waste and making those weights available to customers. The first phase began in March 2015 with an information & awareness visits, followed by vehicle inspections (June 2015), customer account inspections (February 2016) and back office Inspections (April 2016). There are currently further inspections on-going in coordination with the NWCPO review of waste collection permits. The work of the WERLAs is being supported by continued funding provided by my Department for the local authority waste enforcement network. Some €8.2 million is being provided in 2016 for the retention by local authorities of 155 specialised waste enforcement officers, critical to tackling issues such as illegal dumping in local communities and in providing an enhanced response on the ground to infractions of the waste code.

The Environmental Protection Agency National Waste Report from 2012 estimates that approximately 72% of households availed of a kerbside household waste collection service, with other households managing their waste through bring banks, civic amenity sites and waste brought directly to landfill. However, this estimate contains a number of caveats as set out in the Report.

In terms of investigating whether households manage their waste in an environmentally acceptable manner, the Regional Waste Management Plans published in 2015 set out policy actions to:

- identify areas of low collection coverage and survey householders who are currently not availing of a household waste collection service to determine the cause (end 2016);
- design and implement a programme to regulate, enforce and communicate in areas with low collection coverage (ongoing); and
- engage with authorised waste collectors to design solutions to serve communities or areas of low collection coverage and implement the solutions (end 2017).

In addition, certain local authorities have introduced bye-laws which require householders to sign up to a household waste collection service.

Waste Disposal

175. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government to provide statistics and evidence to back the claim made on page three in the Minister's briefing on the introduction of pay-by-weight for household waste that in areas where pay-by-weight is already operating, householders have become more efficient in preventing and segregating their waste, leading to a reduction in the amount of waste collected and a reduction in costs. [18064/16]

177. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government to provide a list of references and studies to corroborate the claim in the briefing on introduction of pay-by-weight for household waste that pay-by-weight drives higher household recycling levels of between 27% and 32% and higher diversion rates from landfill of between 28% and 35%, including the margin of error on these estimates. [18094/16]

178. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of households that have regular waste collection services operating on a pay-by-weight, a flat rate, a pay per lift, or a tag basis, or on a combination of two or more of these, by local authority area, in tabular form. [18095/16]

183. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if his Department still stands over the credibility and reliability of its claim that 87% of households would receive a reduction in household waste bills under the proposed pay-by-weight system or whether it now questions this claim; how this figure was estimated; and if he believes this claim should have been put into the public domain. [18109/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 175, 177, 178 and 183 together.

A Study of Pay-by-use Systems for Maximising Waste Reduction Behaviour in Ireland, published in 2011, estimated that:

- 46% of households used differential bin-based charges (a flat fee),
- 34% used tag-based charges (either pay-by-lift or tags), and
- 20% used weight-based charges .

While the Study does not break down the number of households by local authority area, it does conclude that weight-based charges are the single most effective pay-by-use (PBU) system in terms of waste prevention, waste recycling and diversion of waste from landfill. These charges prompted the highest per household recycling levels (between 27% and 32%), highest diversion rates from landfill (between 28% and 35%) and the lowest total kerbside waste figures (between 800kg and 947kg per annum). The study projected that, if the estimated 80% of those households across Ireland currently on pay per lift/tags and differential bin systems switched to 'per kg' based PBU systems, it could lead to an annual diversion from landfill of approximately 446,000 tonnes of domestic waste *per annum*.

The Study examined three separate forms of Pay-by-Weight system:

- A charge per kg of waste presented, in addition to an annual flat service charge;
- A "banded" weight-based system, using several weight ranges within which the annual weight of waste presented will fall within, with a different price applicable to each weight band;

and

An “average” weight-based system with 800 kg per annum being an average weight - if less than 800 kg is presented during the year, a credit is given for the following year’s bill; if more than 800 kg is presented during the year, the customer is billed for the additional weight.

The data from the Study clearly indicates that a ‘pay per weight (per kg)’ form of weight based-charging is the most effective pricing system in terms of influencing household behaviour under all indicators, as illustrated in Table 4.1.4 of the study, reproduced below.

System	Percentage residual waste	Percentage recycling	Total waste per household (kg)
Per kilogramme weight based charge	65	32	800
All weight based charges taken together (combination of 22 different types of weight based charges)	72	27	947
Tag based (i.e. Tag or per Lift)	79	20	928
Differential (i.e. bin size)	79	21	1,294

The Study highlights the desirability of “providing a continuous pricing signal to householders” through the charging system. For example, when using a smaller bin (even at a lesser charge), the householder will not reduce waste costs if they do not fill their bin and thus have no on-going incentive to change their waste management behaviour to divert waste from landfill any further than is necessary to avoid exceeding the capacity of the smaller bin size.

The practice of charging a simple flat rate fee (annual or otherwise periodic) for waste collection services does not appear from the Study to incentivise the management of waste in line with the national waste policy, the waste hierarchy, the polluter pays principle and incentivising waste reduction and segregation by householders. The argument which has been made is that, by offering the choice of a large and a small residual bin and applying a smaller annual charge for smaller sized bin, due regard is being had for waste prevention. However, the Study identified that the practice of waste compaction undermined the rationale for the use of the smaller size bin. Indeed, the EPA Study’s overall finding on Differential Bin-sized Pay-by-use Charges was that “this PBU system was found to be the least effective system in terms of impact upon the environment, resulting in a high waste to landfill rate (79%) and highest total waste of the three PBU systems (i.e. Pay-by-weight, Tag-a-bag and Differential-Bin-Sizes) studied (1,294kg per household per annum).”

The pay-per-lift approach results imply that it is more effective than a flat fee charging system in terms of encouraging waste reduction and recycling. However, in the case of organic bins, the pay per lift approach encourages consumers to wait until their bin is full and the waste within it is well compacted before having the material removed, which can mean that unnecessary odour nuisance has been created and much of the resource value of the material has diminished by the time it is collected. Applying a per kilogramme pay-by-weight charging system for organic bins encourages a more frequent collection of such material and thus ensures a reduc-

tion in potential odour nuisance and a better quality product to the end processor.

Pay-by-weight per kilogramme is not a new charge, but a new way of charging to incentivise waste prevention and segregation. However, it appears that some companies may have taken the opportunity to increase charges to customers under the guise of the introduction of pay-by-weight, especially to recover costs in instances where the service was being provided below cost.

The 87% figure of people doing better under pay-by-weight was based on a study of a pay-by-weight model which was in actual operation in the South West of the country, when compared to other pricing structures in that particular area. The figures were collated in response to a request to get an indication of how pay-by-weight compared in terms of price. The area chosen had a mix of urban and rural customers and pay-by-weight was long established, so that the customers in that particular area had had the time and opportunity to adapt their behaviour to preventing and segregating waste. The figures showed that households of 4 people or less in that area were better off under pay by weight and those figures were extrapolated, using CSO data on household size, to give an indication of the savings which were achievable.

Private Rented Accommodation

176. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his views on the advice provided to tenants by Threshold (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18079/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Residential Tenancies Act 2004 regulates the landlord-tenant relationship in the private rented residential sector and sets out the rights and obligations of landlords and tenants. The Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) was established as an independent statutory body under the Act to operate a national tenancy registration system and to resolve disputes between landlords and tenants.

Security of tenure under the 2004 Act is based on rolling four-year tenancy cycles. Where a tenant has been in occupation of a dwelling for a continuous period of 6 months and no notice of termination has been served in respect of that tenancy before the expiry of the period of 6 months, the tenancy is established for the remainder of the four year period. This is referred to in the Act as a 'Part 4' tenancy.

A landlord may not terminate a Part 4 tenancy except in very clearly defined circumstances such as a failure by the tenant to comply with his or her obligations in relation to the tenancy. Where there is a dispute regarding the validity of a notice of termination, or where the tenant does not comply with the notice of termination, the dispute may be referred to the RTB for resolution.

Section 87 of the Residential Tenancies Act 2004 states that, if a dispute referred to the RTB relates to the termination of a tenancy for failure by the landlord or tenant to fulfil his or her obligations relating to the tenancy, any remedial action taken by the other party subsequent to the receipt of the notice of termination shall not be taken into consideration by the Board, a mediator, an adjudicator or the Tribunal in dealing with the dispute.

The national housing charity, Threshold, is an independent body which provides advice and advocacy services to those experiencing difficulties within a tenancy. I have no function in the operational matters of this body.

Questions Nos. 177 and 178 answered with Question No. 175.

Question No. 179 answered with Question No. 174.

Waste Disposal Charges

180. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if the interdepartmental working group recommended, on page 7 of A Resource Opportunity - Waste Management Policy in Ireland, measures to minimise the impact of waste charges on low income households was ever established and if so, its recommendations; and if he will make available its report. [18106/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): An interdepartmental working group, established in line with national waste policy to report to Government with options to minimise the impact of waste charges on low income households, has submitted two reports to date.

The working group, which comprises representatives of my Department and the Departments of Social Protection; Public Expenditure and Reform; Finance; and the Tánaiste's Office, submitted its second report to Government in July 2013.

That Government considered the report and, given the complexity of the issues involved, including the fact that the vast majority of households had moved away from local authority collection, with the service now largely provided by private waste collectors, on whom it would be difficult to impose any obligation to provide a waiver system, mandated the working group to continue to explore the issue.

During the period in which local authorities were directly involved in the collection of household waste, a minority of individual Councils offered different levels of discount to selected households, based on different qualification criteria. As local authorities exited the waste collection market, some required the private operators which took on the Councils' customers to provide a level of discount for existing waiver customers only, and even then for a limited time.

The vast majority of such contractual commitments for private operators to provide a waiver have now expired. In that context, the number of households in receipt of waiver discounts is likely to decline over time, especially as some householders were able to take advantage of special reduced offers elsewhere which actually undercut the waiver price. However, selected private operators still offer some level of discount to former waiver customers on a voluntary basis.

In addition, a very limited number of local authorities make financial contributions towards the cost of, or pay for, the collection of waste from certain households. Again, the qualification criteria and level of support differ from area to area.

With the exception of one or two municipal districts, local authorities no longer collect waste and the market is now serviced by a diverse range of private operators, where the fees charged are a matter between service provider and customer and the services offered vary across the country. In that regard, it is becoming increasingly apparent that a national waiver scheme could not be imposed in the context of an open market for waste collection.

Waste Management

181. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government when the last formal review of the household waste collection market was undertaken by his Department or a body under its aegis as well as by the Competition Authority; and to provide an outline of the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the review. [18107/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Altering the structure of household waste collection market was the subject of a public consultation exercise back in 2011. A comprehensive Regulatory Impact Analysis (RIA) from 2012 also considered options regarding the organisation of the household waste collection market and is available on my Department's website at the following weblink: <http://www.environ.ie/sites/default/files/migrated-files/en//Legislation/Environment/Waste/WasteManagement/FileDownload%2C30784%2Cen.pdf>.

The RIA recognised that there were some advantages to the 'franchise bidding' approach (also known as competition for the market) which scored marginally higher than strengthening the regulatory regime and keeping the existing 'side by side' competitive market structure (competition in the market). However, given the critical nature of the waste collection service, the risks associated with moving to 'franchise bidding' were judged to deem this option ultimately less desirable. Noting that there was a possibility that a switch from 'side by side' competition to 'franchise bidding' could incur costs that actually made household waste collection less efficient, the RIA ultimately made the recommendation to strengthen the regulation of the market, especially in light of the risks associated with competition for the market.

The then Competition Authority were tasked, under A Resource Opportunity – Waste Management Policy in Ireland, with carrying out a formal review of the operation of the household waste collection market during 2016. However, this review was deferred, pending the scheduled introduction of pay-by-weight charging, so as to provide sufficient time for the new charging system to take effect before undertaking such a review.

I have recently agreed with industry, as part of a 'price freeze' transition period, that customers will from 1 January 2017 be able to see, through a dual billing process, details in their bills about the amount of waste they are disposing of, their costs under the continuation of their current price plan and details of the comparative pay-by-weight charge with the option to move to pay by weight.

At the end of this 12-month transition period (in July 2017), the Government will review the operation of pay-by-weight and the wider market to inform decisions in relation to the arrangements beyond 1 July 2017.

Waste Management Regulations

182. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of areas for which the separate collection of organics is currently not a required waste permit condition; and the number of households this affects. [18108/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Under the European Union (Household Food Waste and Bio-waste) Regulations 2015, household waste collectors are required to provide, or arrange for the provision of a separate collection service for food waste from households in designated brown bin areas.

In accordance with the Regulatory Impact Assessment prepared for these Regulations, the roll-out of the brown bin has been phased in on a progressive basis, commencing on 1st July

2013. The timetable for when the Regulations take effect is as follows:

- 1st July 2013, for population centres greater than 25,000 persons;
- 31st December 2013, for population centres greater than 20,000 persons;
- 1st July 2014, for population centres greater than 10,000 persons;
- 1st July 2015, for population centres greater than 1,500 persons, and
- 1st July 2016, for population centres greater than 500 persons.

By July of this year, brown bins will have been rolled out to most towns and villages across the country. Notwithstanding this fact, where it is technically and environmentally practical to do so, it is intended to introduce, in the coming months, the measures required to ensure a brown bin service is available to all householders wishing to avail of one, regardless of the size of the communities in which they live within the coming months.

Question No. 183 answered with Question No. 175.

Water and Sewerage Schemes

184. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to allow private group water schemes to be taken over by Irish Water where the water group scheme wishes to do so; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18113/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 provides for the transfer of water services functions from the 34 water services authorities to Irish Water. Under the legislation, Irish Water now has the powers previously held by local authorities in relation to the takeover of Group Water Schemes. This means that Irish Water may acquire by agreement a waterworks or waste water works, subject generally to not fewer than two thirds of those entitled to dispose of it (typically the members of a group water scheme), giving their consent.

It is open, therefore, to group water schemes to contact Irish Water if they wish to have their schemes considered for take over.

During 2015, my Department established a working group involving key stakeholders in the rural water sector to address the development of the sector within the overall water reform programme to ensure that the programme responds effectively to current and future needs. Local authorities, the Water Services Transition Office, Irish Water, the National Federation of Group Water Schemes and my Department are represented on the working group. One of the tasks of the group is to ensure that there is appropriate integration of the Department's Rural Water Programme and Irish Water's Capital Investment Programme so as to fully support rural development and address any environmental issues that may arise.

The working group is also considering a number of areas where there are potential boundary issues with Irish Water or legacy issues which need to be addressed and new approaches in this area will be informed by a number of demonstration projects or pilot schemes. A number of pilot projects relating to the takeover of group water schemes have been undertaken as pathfinders to identify and standardise the processes and documentation required at each step of the taking in charge process. The information and experience gained has fed into an overall governance framework which is to be utilised by Irish Water and relevant local authorities on

all future schemes to be taken in charge.

In January 2016, my Department wrote to local authorities advising them of a new multi-annual approach to the funding of group water schemes for 2016 and beyond under the Rural Water Programme. This will ultimately lead to the development of appropriate prioritised lists of schemes for funding and a series of demonstration projects which will assist in further evolving the programme of investment. Details of the new multi-annual programme are available on my Department's website at <http://www.environ.ie/en/Environment/Water/WaterServices/RuralWaterProgramme/>.

My Department is currently considering local authorities' bids for funding and allocations to authorities under the new programme will be provided shortly.

Community Development Projects

185. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his views on issues raised by a person (details supplied) and if a meeting can be raised in this regard. [18117/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The organisation in question submitted an application to Pobal under the Scheme to Support National Organisations in the Community and Voluntary Sector. In total 148 applications were received and assessed by Pobal on behalf of my Department with 70 organisations to receive funding. The standard of application received was generally of a very high quality ensuring the appraisal process was particularly competitive. I understand that the organisation in question was deemed ineligible as it did not meet the basic eligibility requirements of the Scheme. The application was deemed not to provide sufficient evidence of national reach in relation to engagement across the country as required under SSNO guidelines.

Pobal is available to engage with the organisation concerned if it requires further information on its application.

EU Directives

186. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the status of infringement action by the European Union Commission against Ireland on the State's failure to comply with the Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive; the specific actions required to be taken to meet compliance requirements with the directive; and the amount it could cost to meet the requirements of the directive. [18129/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive sets out the requirements for the collection, treatment and discharge of waste water from urban areas/agglomerations. Compliance with the requirements of this Directive is reported annually by the Environmental Protection Agency in their Urban Waste Water Treatment Report. In September 2013, the European Commission commenced formal infringement proceedings regarding non-compliance with the requirements of the Directive in certain agglomerations. An additional letter of formal notice issued from the European Commission in September 2015. The response to this additional letter of formal notice set out the plans in place in relevant agglomerations to ensure compliance. Since 1 January 2014 Irish Water is responsible for the delivery of water services capital infrastructure. The Irish Water Water Services Strategic Plan sets out that achieving the require-

ments of the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive is a priority. Irish Water has indicated that the total investment in urban waste water up to the period 2021 is expected to be in the region of €2 billion. This would be both in terms of addressing non-compliance where required, and ensuring continued compliance in all agglomerations.

With regard to the formal infringement proceedings, the current position is that 6 monthly progress updates are to be made to the European Commission.

Water and Sewerage Schemes Provision

187. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of design, build and operate water treatment water plants and the cost of these public-private partnerships. [18130/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Since 1 January 2014, Irish Water has statutory responsibility for all aspects of water services planning, delivery and operation at national, regional and local levels. This includes design, build and operate water treatment plants. Irish Water has established a dedicated team to deal with representations and queries from public representatives. The team can be contacted via email to oireachtasmembers@water.ie or by telephone on a dedicated number, 1890 578 578.

In relation to the rural water aspect, responsibility for the administration of my Department's Rural Water Programme, which may include design, build and operate water treatment plants, is devolved to the local authorities. Information on these schemes would be available from the individual local authorities.

Housing Policy

188. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to introduce rent to buy schemes or other affordable house purchase schemes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18140/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I recognise the difficulty faced by households in accessing the housing market. The Programme for a Partnership Government contains a commitment for the introduction of a new model of affordable rental to provide more housing options for low income households and to relieve pressure on the social housing sector. €10 million is being made available from the proceeds of the sale of Bord Gáis Éireann to fund a pilot scheme in 2016. The details of the Scheme are currently being finalised in my Department for roll-out in the coming months. The Scheme will involve an ongoing annual commitment to secure a long term increase in the supply of affordable properties to meet the needs of those households that would struggle to make rental payments under present market conditions. The pilot Scheme is expected to work on the basis of tenants paying the majority of the rental cost from their own resources, with the State helping to meet the shortfall. It is intended that the scheme would be made available to employed households on low to moderate incomes, as well as being a possible support option for some households who qualify for social housing support. A State policy intervention - such as a subsidy - would be applied to bridge the gap between what people can afford, and what the housing market charges. Such a scheme would also be expected to facilitate and incentivise private investment into this sector.

The inadequate level of housing supply is at the heart of the difficulties in the housing sector and, in that regard, measures have already been taken to boost new housing construction and enhance supply at more affordable prices. The “Stabilising Rents – Boosting Supply” package announced by Government in November 2015 included:

- A targeted rebate of development contributions in Dublin and Cork for housing supplied under certain price levels to enhanced supply of more affordable starter homes in key locations;

- New National Apartment Planning Guidelines to reduce the cost of apartment building in Dublin City,

- Changes to aspects of the operation of Strategic Development Zones to enable swifter adjustments to meet market requirements; and,

- The Government’s Irish Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF) to examine funding for housing infrastructure on a case-by-case basis.

The package also included a number of measures to support rent stability in the rented sector, pending additional housing supply coming on stream in the coming years.

Further actions aimed at increasing the supply of housing at more affordable prices are being examined in the context of drafting the Government’s new ‘Action Plan for Housing,’ which is to be published in the coming weeks.

Local Authority Functions

189. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government to ensure that the Local Authority Members Association, LAMA, is invited to attend the local government review committee, which is being run by his Department on an ongoing basis. [18162/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): In 2015, a process was established by my predecessor to review the operation of the revised local government structures. This involved a broadly based Advisory Group, consisting of members appointed in a personal capacity rather than as representatives of particular organisations, and a Local Government Forum for engagement with the Association of Irish Local Government, which is the statutorily recognised body to represent the collective interests of local authorities.

I will consider the question of a role for these groups in the development of potential measures regarding local government reform arising from the Programme for Partnership Government. Subject to decisions in this regard, it would be open to the Advisory Group and the Forum to engage with representatives of the Local Authority Members’ Association in a stakeholder capacity, where appropriate having regard to the different roles of that Association and the Association of Irish Local Government, as set out in sections 225 and 226 of the Local Government Act 2001, as amended by section 56 of the Local Government Reform Act 2014.

Waste Disposal Charges

190. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if it will still be compulsory to weigh bins where the zero cent per kilo option is employed for recyclable waste (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on

the matter. [18179/16]

192. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will allow an extra period of time for all waste collector businesses to complete the conversion of their lorries to pay-by-weight functioning given that some, particularly smaller entities, have found it excessively expensive and have been in the queue for said works to be carried out against an uncertain backdrop regarding its commencement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18181/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 190 and 192 together.

Under the Waste Management (Collection Permit) Regulations 2007, as amended, there has been a requirement since 1 July 2015 for collectors to weigh household waste collected at kerbside, using approved weighing instruments and to make this information available to the householder. The same refuse collection vehicles are often used to collect general waste and recyclable material, so in many instances the vehicle will have a weighing mechanism on board.

With regard to waste management costs, I engaged actively and intensively with representatives of the waste industry and have agreed a clear way forward that results in customers paying no more than their current rate for presenting the same amount of waste over the next 12 months - by means of a price freeze to end-June 2017.

It is my intention that customers from 1 January, 2017 will be able to see, through a dual billing process, details in their bills about the amount of waste they are disposing of, their costs under the continuation of their current price plan and details of the comparative pay-by-weight charge. This will necessitate the weighing of waste collected, a requirement which has already been in place for 12 months.

Waste Management

191. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if black bin bags will still be an option for persons with disabilities, persons living alone and infirm and persons living in a terrace of street houses with no rear access and with no space internally to manoeuvre a wheelie bin through their kitchen, living room and hallways; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18180/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Under the Waste Management (Collection Permit) Regulations 2007, as amended, the collection of bags is being phased out from 1 July, 2016. Local authorities have been requested to designate areas as not being suitable for wheelie bin collections (i.e. designate areas which should remain on bag collections) in advance of the deadline.

In brief, the criteria they have been asked to use in undertaking the exercise to designate 'bag collection areas' are as follows:

- No space within the boundary of the property - front, rear or side - to store 3 bins.
- Physical features which make it difficult to move a bin to the front edge of the property or nearest boundary for presentation, e.g. steep gradient and or steps (the advice of a Roads Engineer should be sought) or that would present an unreasonable difficulty.
- The area (e.g. street) is too narrow for a refuse collection vehicle to access properties and

the nearest Designated Collection Point or suitable presentation point is greater than 100m from the property (again, the advice of a Roads Engineer should be sought on this issue).

- Where the Local Authority is notified of exceptional circumstances by a householder / resident and the Local Authority certifies same.

Many local authorities have now completed the process of designating areas where bag collections may continue, if applicable, and should be contacted for further information.

Question No. 192 answered with Question No. 190.

Local Authority Staff Recruitment

193. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will lift the recruitment embargo in Roscommon County Council to allow the hiring of outdoor staff, as since the embargo was put in place in 2008 Roscommon County Council has lost a significant number of staff and front line services have been severely affected; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18205/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): As announced in Budget 2015, the moratorium on recruitment has been lifted throughout the Local Authority Sector.

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.

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.

Local Authority Members' Remuneration

194. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount provided to councillors for conference expenses by local authority in each of the years 2012 to 2015, inclusive, in tabular form. [18207/16]

195. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the cost to the State and a breakdown by local authority of the representational payment made to councillors in each of the years 2012 to 2015, inclusive, in tabular form. [18208/16]

196. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the cost to the State and a breakdown by local authority of the annual allowance made to councillors in each of the years 2012 to 2015, in tabular form. [18209/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 194 to 196, inclusive, together.

The amounts payable by local authorities to elected members in support of their role as

public representatives in respect of conference expenses, representational payments and annual allowances are as set out in the Local Government (Expenses of Local Authority Members) Regulations 2014, the Local Government (Representational Payment for Members) Regulations 2001 and other associated regulations/circulars issued by my Department.

Under the 2014 Regulations, since 1 June 2014 the maximum amount payable by a local authority in annual conference expenses is €700 multiplied by the number of members of the authority.

The amount of the representational payment payable to members of county councils, city councils and city and county councils has been set at €16,565 per annum since 1 July 2013.

Elected members also receive an annual allowance designed to defray in a structured way reasonable expenses incurred by them in attending meetings associated with their council business. This is calculated using a formula based on the distance from their home to the council offices, standard travel and subsistence rates and a notional number of meetings which a local authority would be expected to hold in a year based on 4 meeting bands. It is supplemented by a fixed amount which varies depending upon which of the 4 meetings bands applies to the local authority concerned. The fixed annual rates are €2,286, €2,413, €2,540 and €2,667. Once 80% or upwards of the relevant number of meetings are attended the member qualifies for the full allowance.

The costs incurred by individual local authorities in making these and other payments to their elected members are a matter for the authorities themselves and are not available in my Department.

Local Authority Housing Data

197. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of new tenant purchase scheme transactions entered into by local authority tenants with Cork City Council and with Cork County Council in each of the years 2011 to 2015, inclusive, and in 2016 to date in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18231/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The information requested on the sale of local authority houses for each of the years 2011 to 2014 is available on my Department's website, and can be viewed via the following link: www.environ.ie/housing/statistics/social-and-affordble/other-local-authority-housing-scheme-statistics.

The data for 2015 and for the first quarter of 2016 is being collated by my Department and will be published shortly on my Department's website.

Local Authority Housing Data

198. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of first-time lettings of local authority housing and of lettings as a result of casual vacancies from 2010 to 2015, inclusive, as used to be published by his Department until 2009; if in 2014 and 2015 lettings as a result of casual vacancies are counted separately from lettings as a result of renovated voids and refurbishments or if they are included in those figures; and if so, the number of lettings as a result of voids and casual vacancies which

are made up of voids and casual vacancies respectively. [18232/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department collects and publishes annual data on the opening and closing stock of rental properties by local authority, including the amount of these that are occupied. These are available at the following link: www.environ.ie/housing/statistics/house-prices-loans-and-profile-borrowers/local-authority-rented-sector-activity. The other categories of data requested by the Deputy are not collected by my Department.

The routine turnaround of vacant social housing stock is a matter for each local authority and is carried out under their ongoing maintenance programme. Lettings to such properties are carried out in accordance with the rules that pertain in the housing authority regarding its scheme of letting priorities.

In addition, my Department introduced a funding programme in 2014 to support local authorities to deal with the build-up of vacant social housing units, the remediation cost of which is beyond the means of the local authorities. This programme also supports the retrofitting of insulation to such houses so that they are returned to use in a very energy efficient condition. Between 2014 and 2015, a total of 5,000 such units were remediated with support from my Department to an overall cost of €60m. This funding by my Department is conditional on the accommodation being tenanted by the local authorities as early as possible following the works, with priority given to homeless families.

Local Authority Housing Data

199. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of new local authority units that were acquired and the number that were leased under the Part V scheme in 2015. [18233/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department collects statistics from local authorities in relation to Part V outputs which are available on my Department's website at www.environ.ie/housing/statistics/affordable-housing/affordable-housing-and-part-v-statistics. The returns for 2015 have been received and the information is being checked and will be published shortly.

The option for a local authority to lease units from a developer under a Part V agreement was only introduced last September and information on the use of this option was not included in the request for information sent to local authorities in respect of 2015. This information will be collected in respect of 2016 and subsequent years.

Social and Affordable Housing

200. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of the new units leased under the social housing current expenditure programme, SHCEP, scheme in 2015 and 2014 that were leased from private landlords and developers; the number of those that were under the Part V scheme; the number of the new SHCEP units in 2014 and 2015 that were leased from National Asset Residential Property Services Limited and to provide a similar breakdown of the total current stock under SHCEP. [18234/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon

Coveney): The information requested is being compiled and will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Library Services

201. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will suspend any proposals to amalgamate library services across county boundaries leading to a centralisation of management, with a significant negative impact for localities and where no cost-benefit analysis of such proposals has been produced to date; and if he will engage in a comprehensive way with the trade union representatives to explore worthy alternatives to these proposals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18240/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Proposals to introduce changes to the library management model are outlined in the report *Managing the Delivery of Effective Library Services*.

The proposed operating 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 Ireland. It does not involve the closure of libraries nor will it require a reduction of the library services available in those areas, in fact, the model seeks to enhance the services that are available. The proposed operating model was developed on foot of a risk assessment. A cost-benefit analysis was not carried out as the reforms were identified as a means for achieving a greater and more equitable standard of library service rather than the requirement to drive greater cost efficiency.

Over the last number of months my Department has been engaging with the respective local authorities to explore the implementation of the revised operating model. We are open to working with the local authorities concerned and if an alternative approach, that yields the same result, is suggested we will consider this and work with the parties involved to achieve the best possible outcome for all concerned.

Local Authority Expenditure

202. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the annual cost of the kilometerage reimbursement scheme incurred by local authority in each of the years 2011 to 2016, to date, in tabular form. [18249/16]

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. In this regard, it is a matter for each individual Chief Executive to manage travel expenses within their own organisation.

Information of the kind sought is not available in my Department.

Services for People with Disabilities

203. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the obligations on the part of public houses that also serve food to provide

wheelchair-accessible toilet facilities for customers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18270/16]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): While I have no role in relation to the regulation of public houses serving food, my Department is responsible for the Building Regulations 1997 to 2014, which provide for the health, safety and welfare of people in and around buildings. All new buildings must comply with the legally enforceable minimum performance standards set out in the Building Regulations.

In this regard, the Building Regulations (Part M Amendment) Regulations 2010, and the accompanying Technical Guidance Document M – Access and Use (2010), which came into effect on 1 January 2012, set out the minimum statutory requirements on accessibility and usability applicable to new buildings, and to existing buildings where new works, a material alteration or a material change of use is proposed.

In broad terms, the requirements of Part M aim to ensure that regardless of age, size or disability:

- new buildings other than dwellings (including multi-unit developments) are accessible and usable;
- extensions to existing buildings other than dwellings are, where practicable, accessible and useable;
- material alterations to existing buildings other than dwellings increase the accessibility and usability of existing buildings, where practicable;
- certain changes of use to existing buildings other than dwellings increase the accessibility and usability of existing buildings, where practicable; and
- new dwellings are visitable.

Part M of the Building Regulations aims to foster an inclusive approach to the design and construction of the built environment. Under the regulations, refreshment facilities, such as restaurants and bars, should be so designed and constructed that they can be accessed and used by both visitors and staff independently or with companions. While the number and location of sanitary facilities required in a building will be dictated by a number of factors including the nature of the building, the size of the building, the number of people who will use the building, gender ratio, patterns of use and the ease of access, under Part M, the objective is to provide independently accessible sanitary facilities that meet the needs of people with a wide range of abilities.

Traveller Accommodation

204. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will increase the national Traveller accommodation budget from €5.5 million to the 2008 level of €40 million as per the recommendation from the Committee on Housing and Homelessness; and when he will set up a stand-alone agency to oversee delivery of Traveller-specific accommodation. [18307/16]

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.

The Report of the Special Committee on Housing and Homelessness, which was published on 17 June, will form a major input into the proposed 'Action Plan for Housing' and all of the recommendations of the Committee, including those related to Traveller-specific accommodation, are being fully considered in that regard.

Furthermore, in terms of the delivery of Traveller-specific accommodation and associated funding, the approach to be followed will be guided by the Programme for Partnership Government commitment 'to establish a special working group to audit the current delivery and implementation of local authorities' Traveller Accommodation Plans and consult with stakeholders on key areas of concern. The group should report a plan for the delivery of safe, culturally appropriate accommodation.

In order to progress this commitment, the Housing Agency is being asked, in the first instance, to commission an independent review of Traveller accommodation expenditure and delivery of units, having regard to the targets contained in the local authority Traveller Accommodation Programmes. These are 5-year rolling programmes prepared and published by each local authority for the provision of Traveller accommodation in their areas. These programmes are subject to comprehensive local stakeholder and public consultation, including members and representatives of the Traveller community. In parallel, the composition and terms of reference of the working group to be established under the Programme for Government commitment will be scoped by the National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee (NTACC), which comprises key stakeholders including representatives of the Traveller community, and submitted to me for consideration. This is in accordance with the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998 which provides, inter alia, that the NTACC may advise the Minister on general matters concerning the preparation, adequacy, implementation and co-ordination of traveller accommodation programmes. The independent review commissioned by the Housing Agency will provide factual information and a key platform for the working group to progress its work effectively.

While the timing of the finalisation of the work of the working group will be dependent upon its terms of reference and work programme, I will be mandating the group to complete their report in the earliest time possible.

Local Authority Funding

205. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will make a subvention available to compensate for the net downward global revaluation, as he did with other councils that were in the same position in 2015, with regard to the impact of the 2015 global valuations on Fingal council's budgets, which will not be felt until 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18327/16]

206. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the courses of action councils can take to make up shortfalls that arose from the downward revaluation of utility companies if compensation from central government will not be paid in 2017, as was the case in 2016 in relation to the impact of the 2015 global valuations on council budgets. [18328/16]

207. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he is concerned with regards to possible shortfalls in council budgets in relation to the impact of the 2015 global valuations on council budgets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18329/16]

208. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he is concerned that the companies which received downward revaluations were all highly profitable companies (details supplied) and that now small business, many of which are still struggling, could be facing hikes to their rates to compensate for the downward revaluation of many profitable companies or alternatively councils may be forced to cut back on expenditure to compensate for the loss, in relation to the impact of the 2015 global valuations on council budgets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18330/16]

219. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will be making the same subventions as listed in a table (details supplied) for 2017, in relation to the 2015 global valuations on council budgets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18429/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 205 to 208, inclusive, and 219 together.

The Commissioner for Valuation is responsible for valuation matters, including the global valuation of property of public utility undertakings under Part 11 of the Valuation Acts 2001 to 2015.

The Valuation Acts 2001 to 2015 come under the remit of the Minister for Justice and Equality. This legislation provides for global valuations of utility undertakings to be carried out by the Valuation Office every five years and entered on the central valuation list. This can result in either increases or decreases to the relevant valuation. In 2015, the Valuation Office carried out global valuations carried for Gas Networks Ireland, Iarnrod Eireann and telecommunications companies BT Ireland, Eircom, Vodafone, Three Ireland and Meteor. In November 2015, the Valuation Office issued a copy of the Valuation Certificate and a schedule setting out the apportioned value for each rating authority to my Department. The previous valuation for these utilities had taken place in 2010. The Global Valuation Certificates showed a reduction in the combined valuations for these utilities of €112m. In addition, the reduction in the global valuation of the ESB, following an appeal to the Valuation Tribunal, reduced the rates payable by the ESB from 2016.

The timing of the global valuations in 2015 caused particular difficulties for local authorities as they were published at an advanced stage of the local authority budgetary process. In this regard, my Department engaged with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and it was agreed that there would be a once-off adjustment in support from the Local Government Fund in 2016 to local authorities affected by the global valuations. The additional allocation provided was on an exceptional and once-off basis, solely for the 2016 budgetary period.

The elected members of a local authority have direct responsibility in law for all reserved functions of the authority, which includes adopting the annual budget, and are democratically accountable for all expenditure by the local authority. As such, it is a matter for each local authority to determine its own spending priorities in the context of the annual budgetary process having regard to both locally identified needs and available resources.

Local Authority Rates

209. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the rates due and paid by Irish Water in each local authority since its inception, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18331/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Section 12 of the Water Services Act 2014 states that public water services property is not rateable for the purposes of the Valuation Act 2001. This exemption applies to Irish Water for the provision of water supply and waste water treatment. Government subvention is not paid directly to Irish Water to fund this cost; instead, it is redirected to provide equivalent funding directly to local authorities, through the Local Government Fund, in respect of rates income foregone.

A breakdown of the amounts paid to local authorities in respect of Irish Water's infrastructure in 2014, 2015 and 2016 is set out in the table. It would be expected that similar amounts would be provided to local authorities in 2017, subject to the normal budgetary process.

Local Authority	2014 - €'000	2015 - €'000	2016 - €'000
Carlow County Council	52	49	49
Cavan County Council	24	28	30
Clare County Council	219	165	165
Cork City Council	850	712	712
Cork County Council	1,535	1,544	1,544
Donegal County Council	415	350	357
Dublin City Council	13,820	14,279	14,052
Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown	3,420	3,334	3,334
Fingal County Council	6,573	5,248	5,249
Galway City Council	30	99	102
Galway County Council	50	33	35
Kerry County Council	589	253	256
Kildare County Council	2,210	2,561	2,571
Kilkenny County Council	169	22	23
Laois County Council	142	76	77
Leitrim County Council	Nil	21	22
Limerick City and County Council	762	1,948	1,988
Longford County Council	95	78	78
Louth County Council	581	586	586
Mayo County Council	198	201	201
Meath County Council	261	308	308
Monaghan County Council	96	96	11
Offaly County Council	15	Nil	Nil
Roscommon County Council	Nil	Nil	Nil
Sligo County Council	136	132	132
South Dublin County Council	8,518	6,852	6,852
Tipperary County Council	760	426	427

Local Authority	2014 - €'000	2015 - €'000	2016 - €'000
Waterford City and County Council	4,485	4,504	4,479
Westmeath County Council	69	69	69
Wexford County Council	130	129	129
Wicklow County Council	2, 521	2,240	2,182
Total	48,725	46,3 45	46,020

Local Authority Rates

210. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if Irish Water will be assessed as rateable or exempt from rates for 2017, in all relevant local authorities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18332/16]

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 Acts 2001 to 2015. Those Acts determine properties that can, and cannot, be considered for rating purposes. The Commissioner for Valuation has responsibility for all valuation matters, including determination under those Acts of relevant property for the purposes of rates.

Under Schedule 4 of the Valuation Act 2001, as amended, the entire network used for the provision of water services by Irish Water is exempt from the payment of commercial rates.

The Valuation Acts 2001 to 2015 come under the remit of the Minister for Justice and Equality.

Local Authority Expenditure

211. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government for a breakdown of expenditure during the Ballymun regeneration programme. [18348/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Over the period 1999 to end 2015, my Department provided over €764 million to Ballymun Regeneration Limited and Dublin City Council towards the physical, social and economic regeneration of Ballymun. The funding is broken down annually as follows:

Year	Amount €	Year	Amount €
1999	6,732,405	2008	75,000,000
2000	20,346,410	2009	63,577,376
2001	59,409,394	2010	40,001,618
2002	73,856,201	2011	20,519,155
2003	72,674,400	2012	30,000,000
2004	74,288,270	2013	18,919,515
2005	98,339,979	2014	5,888,067
2006	52,815,000	2015	2,845,407
2007	48,919,930		

Year	Amount €	Year	Amount €
		Total	764,133,127

Anti-Social Behaviour

212. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the definition of anti-social behaviour for council tenants; and his plans to add domestic violence to that description in the future. [18349/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): “Anti-social behaviour” is defined in the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014 as including either or both of the following,

(a) the manufacture, production, preparation, importation, exportation, sale, supply, possession for the purposes of sale or supply, or distribution of a controlled drug (within the meaning of the Misuse of Drugs Acts 1977 to 2007),

(b) any behaviour which causes or is likely to cause any significant or persistent danger, injury, damage, alarm, loss or fear to any person living, working or otherwise lawfully in or in the vicinity of a house provided by a housing authority under the Housing Acts 1966 to 2014 or Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 or a housing estate in which the house is situate and, without prejudice to the foregoing, includes:

(i) violence, threats, intimidation, coercion, harassment or serious obstruction of any person;

(ii) behaviour which causes any significant or persistent impairment of a person’s use or enjoyment of his or her home; or

(iii) damage to or defacement by writing or other marks of any property, including a person’s home.

I have no plans at present to amend this definition.

Approved Housing Bodies

213. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the assistance he will provide to a group (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18356/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Section 6 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1992 enables housing authorities to provide assistance to Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) for the provision of housing. Section 6 (6) of the Act empowers me, as Minister, to grant approved status for this purpose.

AHBs are independent, not-for-profit organisations. They provide affordable rented housing for people who cannot afford to pay private sector rents or buy their own homes; or for particular groups, such as older people or homeless people.

AHBs also include housing co-operatives, which are housing organisations controlled by their members/tenants who actively participate in setting their policies and making decisions.

Applications for approved status will be considered from the following: Limited Compa-

nies formed by guarantee of their members and not having a shareholding, registered under the Companies Act 2014; Societies registered under the Industrial & Provident Societies Acts 1893-2014; Trusts incorporated under the Charities Acts. A body seeking to obtain, and to retain, approved status, must have as its goal the relief of housing needs, to assist with cases of poverty or hardship, including the welfare of Travellers, and the delivery and management of housing. It must have in its Memorandum and Articles of Association or registered rules, provisions preventing the distribution of any surplus, profit, bonus or dividend to its members and must ensure that its assets are applied solely towards its objects.

Further information on becoming an AHB can be found on my Department's website at: <http://www.environ.ie/housing/social-housing/voluntary-and-cooperative-housing/approved-housing-bodies-ahbs>.

Irish Water Funding

214. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide a breakdown of the composition of the €522 million, including what portion is expected to come from Exchequer funding and what portion from Government borrowing or equity or debt financing, regarding the €522 million allocated for Irish Water capital investment in 2016, as per the Irish Water business plan, in tabular form. [18357/16]

215. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide a breakdown of the composition of this €533 million, including what portion is expected to come from Exchequer funding and what portion from Government borrowing or equity or debt financing, regarding the €533 million allocated for Irish Water capital investment in 2017, as per the Irish Water business plan, in tabular form. [18358/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 214 and 215 together.

Irish Water's capital investment in the period 2016 and 2017 will be funded by a mix of debt and equity (including capital transfers from Government), with the investment programme for the period after end 2016 being subject to future review by the Commission for Energy Regulation, and Government funding being subject to future budgetary decisions.

Irish Water's costs are funded through a mix of revenue from the domestic and non-domestic sector, third party finance (including bank lending and capital markets facilities) and State support which may be in the form of both equity and subvention. The main aspects of the Irish Water funding model are set out in a detailed fact sheet published on my Department's website at <http://www.environ.ie/sites/default/files/migrated-files/en/Publications/Environment/Water/FileDownload%2C39557%2Cen.pdf>.

The capital contribution agreed by Government for Irish Water in 2016 is €184m and this has already been paid to Irish Water to support its increased investment in public water services infrastructure. In addition, the Government is providing €479m in operating subvention to Irish Water in 2016. This subvention is in respect of the child allowance of 21,000 litres per child per annum, a product subsidy and the capping of domestic water charges at the rates set out in the Water Services Act 2014. Provision has also been made for the issue of a working capital loan of up to €58m in 2016 to cover cash flow requirements arising from time lags between billing and payment.

Irish Water's revenue shortfall arising from the proposed suspension of domestic water charges in 2016 is currently under consideration. I intend to bring my proposals on this matter

to Government shortly.

Electoral Reform

216. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government to introduce measures to facilitate those whose occupation necessitates them to spend extended periods of time at sea or in other destinations which does not make it possible to vote at their designated polling station nor permits them to make use of the postal vote facility in relation to voting in elections and referenda; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18368/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Electoral law provides that a person who is entitled to vote at an election or referendum shall vote in person at a polling station allotted to him or her unless they are included in the postal voters list or in the special voters list for the constituency concerned. While electoral law is subject to on-going review, I have no proposals at present to amend the existing arrangements for voting by persons such as those referred to in the Question.

Waste Disposal Charges

217. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if a private waste company (details supplied) is subject to the current negotiations with the Government around the increase of charges; the action he will take against those companies which have increased their service charge as a means of passing additional charges onto their customers, given the 12-month suspension of charges. [18388/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I engaged actively and intensively with representatives of the waste industry in recent weeks and I have agreed a clear way forward that results in customers paying no more than they're currently paying for waste over the next 12 months - by means of a price freeze to end-June 2017. The private waste company to which the Deputy refers is a member of a representative body which was part of that engagement and that representative body has indicated it will honour the agreement.

It is my intention that customers will from 1 January, 2017 be able to see through a dual billing process, details in their bills about the amount of waste they are disposing of, their costs under the continuation of their current price plan and details of the comparative pay-by-weight charge.

During this transition period, the Government, in partnership with the waste industry, will drive an intensive public awareness, information and promotion campaign to support customers in understanding the new system, how they can change their waste management behaviour and manage better their waste costs under a pay-by-weight system.

The above approach provides increased transparency around what charges households would incur under pay-by-weight and also provides householders with information on the operation and benefits of pay by weight along with the option to switch to pay by weight charging from 1 January, 2017.

After the transitional 12-month period, the operation of pay-by-weight and of the wider waste market will be reviewed to inform decisions in relation to arrangements beyond 1 July

2017.

Approved Housing Bodies

218. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government to revert to this Deputy on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18413/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Section 6(6) of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1992 makes provision to grant approved housing body (AHB) status to housing associations. AHBs consist mainly of voluntary or co-operative organisations limited by guarantee and registered under the Companies Acts; societies registered under the Industrial & Provident Societies Acts; and/or Trusts incorporated under the Charities Acts.

The appointment of directors to Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) is a matter for the Boards of such bodies and I have no role in relation to such appointments.

Question No. 219 answered with Question No. 205.

Waste Management

220. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the steps he is taking to encourage producers of goods to reduce the amount of packaging; if he will carry out a pilot study to establish what packaging waste consumers know they do not need; if he will widely advertise the provision of composting facilities, classes in composting for persons and communities by local authorities, and the Stop Food Waste campaign to reduce and eliminate the need for collection of organic waste; if he will fund composting facilities for communities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18441/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The European Union (Packaging) Regulations 2014 aim to facilitate the achievement of targets for recovery of packaging waste established by EU Directive 94/62/EC on packaging and packaging waste. They also impose obligations on producers who supply packaging.

Repak, as the approved Compliance Scheme for Packaging in Ireland, fulfil these obligations on behalf of its members who represent the majority of packaging producers in Ireland. Repak employ an expert team of Packaging Technologists to assist companies in optimising their packaging systems and to prevent packaging waste, in line with their producer responsibility obligations. They achieve this by working directly with Government, environmental agencies and industry to deliver programmes that reduce the amount of packaging placed onto the Irish market. Repak technologists work directly with companies to identify areas where packaging waste can be prevented or minimised. On-site surveys are carried out and 'Packaging Optimisation Reports' are compiled that guide member companies through the opportunities they have to improve their packaging systems and to reduce their packaging waste. This saves material and money for the companies involved, and in turn helps to reduce the overall amount of packaging placed on the Irish market.

Repak also carry out work in relation to consumer awareness. Since 2002, Repak has run key educational campaigns, targeted at consumer awareness and encouraging recycling. PR and media campaigns for consumer awareness take place regularly around key consumption

and shopping periods (Easter and Christmas). These campaigns are nation-wide and across media, advertising, digital and social media channels. In addition, it promotes an Annual Repak Recycling Week in October, where the aim is to educate consumers on key issues on packaging recycling (from contamination, to better recycling habits at home and at work). It also collaborates with members (e.g. Cadbury's, IKEA, etc.) to extend a broader recycling message on packaging and glass recycling nation-wide with marketing communication campaigns across advertising, public relations, digital and social media.

Thanks to such initiatives, Ireland has been compliant with all statutory packaging recovery targets set since 2001 and continues to exceed our EU targets.

The successful prevention of food waste and the optimal methodology for managing such waste when it arises is dependent on appropriate education and awareness measures being introduced to support households. In this regard, my Department has worked with the Composting and Anaerobic Digestion Association of Ireland to develop a website, *www.brownbin.ie*, to provide the public with the information required to use the brown bin appropriately, including advice on food waste prevention and home composting. I am confident that initiatives such as this can assist the public in the diversion of their food waste towards more beneficial uses and ensuring that full value can be derived from this resource.

Furthermore, my Department continues to support the Local Authority Prevention Network (LAPN) through the National Waste Prevention Programme. The LAPN aims to build capacity in local authorities for promoting waste prevention at a local and grassroots level for the benefit of their regions and many of their programmes focus on food waste, including awareness raising campaigns, on-site work with businesses, information stands at festivals, events and public locations. Their "Stop Food Waste Challenge" targets householders and small business through a mix of national promotion on food waste prevention (TV, radio, social media, newspaper articles).

The Local Agenda 21 Environmental Partnership Fund, which has operated since 1997, also promotes sustainable development by assisting small-scale environmental projects at local level. These projects involve partnership arrangements between local authorities and various local groups, including community groups, schools and environmental NGOs and have been used to support small-scale community projects, including the development of community composting facilities.

Local Authority Boundaries Review

221. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the status of the Carlow boundary review committee; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18442/16]

228. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the status of plans for local authority boundary changes in Athlone, Galway, Drogheda and Waterford. [18547/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 221 and 228 together.

The chairpersons of the committees which are reviewing the boundaries at Athlone, Carlow, Drogheda and Waterford have indicated that further work is required in order to complete the reviews, including work arising from the large volume of submissions received on foot of public consultations. My Department has been in communication with the chairpersons regarding

the additional timescale required, and it is anticipated that these reports will be submitted in the Autumn. As the committees are independent in the performance of their functions, it is not appropriate for me to comment further on the matter.

Local Authority Housing Funding

222. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his detailed funding plans for 50,000 local authority houses; if he envisages that all of these houses will be managed by local authorities given the recent Oireachtas Committee on Housing and Homelessness report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18450/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department is currently preparing an 'Action Plan for Housing', which will seek to address the challenges in the housing sector in a targeted and meaningful way. It will build on the considerable work already carried out or underway in this area. I can assure the Deputy that the recommendations of the Report of the Special Committee on Housing and Homelessness are being considered in the context of the development of the Action Plan.

My priority is of course to expedite and boost supply of all types of housing, including social housing, in the immediate, medium and longer-terms and this will be set out in the Action Plan, which I will publish in the coming weeks.

Local Authority Housing Provision

223. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the details of the home acquisition programme, by homes purchased by local authorities, by amount paid, by amount invested in homes before letting them, by homes managed by local authorities, for each local authority, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18451/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The table sets out the funding provided by my Department to local authorities for the acquisition of new and previously owned housing and apartments for social housing from 2014 to end May 2016. This includes direct purchases, purchases under Part V arrangements and the delivery of turnkey projects. Some local authorities also fund acquisitions from their own resources such as local property tax receipts and that spending is not reflected in the table. In relation to 2016, while not all local authorities have drawn down funding from my Department up to this point, all are pursuing the acquisition of new and previously owned housing and apartments.

Local Authority	2014	2015	2016 to date
Carlow County Council	€1,036,537	€929,075	€0
Cavan County Council	€787,148	€835,739	€0
Clare County Council	€328,820	€2,189,831	€0
Cork County Council	€611,030	€1,986,691	€0
Cork City Council	€0	€18,980,853	€0
Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown Co Co	€0	€425,474	€0

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Local Authority	2014	2015	2016 to date
Donegal County Council	€1,819,421	€1,944,766	€387,426
Dublin City Council	€6,411,860.50	€11,249,798.75	€0
Fingal County Council	€5,515,564	€17,948,978	€0
Galway County Council	€2,060,000	€570,198	€821,615
Galway City Council	€0	€730,676	€0
Kerry County Council	€880,513	€4,117,222	€0
Kildare County Council	€2,676,716	€11,259,500	€6,072,968
Kilkenny County Council	€938,285	€3,452,059.40	€0
Laois County Council	€2,014,367	€3,014,346	€118,193
Leitrim County Council	€67,257	€218,890	€0
Limerick City & County Council	€209,051.75	€0	€0
Longford County Council	€288,768	€97,942	€0
Louth County Council	€1,690,970	€3,910,326	€1,090,617.50
Mayo County Council	€171,700	€796,646	€657,617
Meath County Council	€1,559,425	€4,227,836	€1,180,048.20
Monaghan County Council	€714,560	€1,038,308	€0
Offaly County Council	€906,044	€840,426	€23,994
Roscommon County Council	€0	€562,638	€0
Sligo County Council	€2,498,236	€2,520,968	€239,871
South Dublin County Council	€0	€0	€0
Tipperary County Council	€1,223,564	€5,803,070	€70,804
Waterford City & County Council	€1,084,471.06	€476,920	€295,000
Westmeath County Council	€323,606	€403,323	€0
Wexford County Council	€1,216,178	€1,703,856.50	€0
Wicklow County Council	€618,075	€2,038,393.19	€0

It should be noted that details on the numbers of social housing units purchased across all local authorities is published on my Department's website at the following link:

www.environ.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision.

Data in respect of quarter 1 of 2016 is currently being collated and will be published shortly. However, preliminary outputs for the period indicate that over 200 units have been completed by local authorities, through either construction or acquisition of units under my Department's local authority housing programme.

Waste Disposal Charges

224. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government why there is a disparity between refuse providers in that some charge for recyclables while others do not; if he will address this in the review he is to undertake in the coming 12 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18453/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): In an open market, it has always been a matter for the waste collector to set charges at the level they consider to be competitive, in compliance with the requirements of relevant legislation. Excessive pricing by individual companies will offer the opportunity for rival operators to provide their services at a cheaper price.

In response to recent concerns regarding reported price increases for some customers, I have engaged actively with representatives of the waste industry to ensure that waste collection charges are fair and transparent. I have agreed a clear way forward that results in customers paying no more than they are currently paying for waste over the next 12 months - by means of a price freeze to end-June 2017, to prepare better for the change-over to pay-by-weight charging. An intensive public awareness, information and promotion campaign will be rolled out over the coming months to support customers in understanding the new system, how they can change their waste management behaviour and manage better their waste costs under a pay-by-weight system.

Furthermore, the Government has set a minimum mandatory fee per kg for the different types of household waste: 11 cent for black bin (residual waste), 6 cent for brown bin (organic). However, in order to encourage further improvement in recycling, I decided that a zero cent minimum fee per kg may be charged for green bins (recyclate).

In light of the above, it is unlikely that the form of charging for the collection of recyclable waste will form part of the review which is scheduled to take place over the coming 12 months.

Question No. 225 answered with Question No. 167.

Local Authority Housing Mortgages

226. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of housing loan applications that have been made and which were successful to each local authority in 2015 and in Quarter 1 of 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18524/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The information requested in relation to new loans advanced by each local authority in 2015 is available on my Department's website at:

www.environ.ie/housing/statistics/house-prices-loans-and-profile-borrowers/local-authority-loan-activity by clicking on the link entitled, "LA loans paid by individual LA 2011-2015". Information on new loans advanced by each local authority in Q1 2016 is being finalised and will be published on my Department's website as soon as possible.

Proposed Legislation

227. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government when he will publish further required amendments in relation to the Fore-shore Act 1933 as amended; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18542/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Drafting of the Maritime Area and Foreshore (Amendment) Bill is well advanced and it is my intention to publish the Bill during the Autumn Oireachtas session.

Question No. 228 answered with Question No. 221.

Local Authority Boundaries Review

229. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his views on local authority arrangements in counties Cork and Galway; if he is still considering the amalgamation of local authorities in both counties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18548/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): In 2015 the Cork Local Government Committee was appointed to carry out an objective review of local government arrangements in Cork city and county including the boundary of Cork city and to make recommendations with respect to whether the boundary of the city should be altered or whether Cork City Council and Cork County Council should be unified. The Committee's report, which incorporates a minority report, was submitted to the Minister on 2 September 2015.

Similarly, in 2015 the Galway Local Government Committee was appointed to carry out an objective review of local government arrangements in Galway to examine whether the boundary of Galway city should be altered or whether Galway City Council and Galway County Council should be unified. The Committee's report was submitted to the Minister on 30 November 2015.

The issues dealt with in the reviews of local government arrangements in Cork and Galway (including both the majority and minority positions in the Cork report) were referred to the Cabinet Committee on Social Policy and Public Service Reform for consideration earlier this year. These matters will also be considered in the preparation of a report for Government and the Oireachtas by mid-2017, pursuant to the Programme for a Partnership Government on potential measures to boost local government leadership and accountability and to ensure that local government funding, structures and responsibilities strengthen local democracy.

Vacant Sites Levy

230. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government with respect to the new vacant site levy that will take effect in 2018, if only owners of properties that have been vacant a year from January 2018 will be liable to pay the tax or if owners of properties that have been vacant a year prior to January 2018 will also be liable to pay the levy in 2018. [18549/16]

231. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if, in view of the Oireachtas Committee on Housing and Homelessness report, he will agree to amend the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015 to ensure the levy will also apply to public bodies such as the Office of Public Works and local authorities. [18550/16]

232. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if the rate of the vacant site levy is high enough to act as a disincentive to land hoarding in view of evidence given to the Oireachtas Committee on Housing and Homeless-

ness. [18551/16]

233. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government with respect to the new vacant site levy, how the market valuation of the land will be determined and by what body; if local authorities or another body will undertake any global site valuations at regular intervals; and if there will be any link with site valuation for commercial rates purposes. [18552/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 230 to 233, inclusive, together.

The Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015, enacted in July 2015, introduced a new measure, the vacant site levy, which is aimed at incentivising the development of vacant, under-utilised sites in urban areas.

Under the Act, planning authorities are required to establish a register of vacant sites in their areas, beginning on 1 January 2017 and to issue annual notices to owners of vacant sites by 1 June 2018 in respect of vacant sites on the register on 1 January 2018. The levy shall be applied by planning authorities, commencing on 1 January 2019 in respect of sites which were vacant and on the vacant site register during the year 2018 and shall subsequently be applied on an annual basis thereafter, as long as a site remains on the vacant site register in the preceding year.

Planning authorities are empowered to apply an annual vacant site levy of 3% of the market value of vacant sites exceeding 0.05 hectares in area - with reduced or zero rates of levy applying in specific circumstances - which, in the planning authority's opinion, were vacant or idle in the preceding year, in areas identified by the planning authority in its development plan or local area plan for residential or regeneration development. The 3% rate of vacant site levy is consistent with the rate applied to derelict sites under the Derelict Sites Act 1991 and is considered reasonable, without being over-punitive, for the purposes of incentivising the activation of such sites for residential or regeneration purposes. In this regard, it is also worth noting that all levies due on an individual site shall remain a charge on the land concerned until all outstanding levies due are paid so there will be a cumulative effect associated with not activating a site for development purposes for each year a site remains vacant or idle.

The Act further provides that residential or regeneration land, regardless of ownership, either public or private, will be subject to the levy if it meets the criteria for a vacant site.

In addition, the Act provides that planning authorities shall determine - utilising a suitably qualified person for this purpose - the market value of a vacant site placed on the register on the basis of the price it would fetch if sold on the open market, with the market valuation being required to be reviewed at least every 3 years. The owner of a vacant site may appeal the market value determination arrived at by a planning authority to the Valuation Tribunal.

My Department intends to issue guidelines to planning authorities in relation to the practical implementation of the vacant site levy provisions shortly.

Departmental Reports

234. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government to provide a list of all analysis or reports undertaken by his Department or a body under its aegis since 2012 which have sought to audit construction costs in the residential and commercial construction industry, including the name of the report with a short description of the nature of the analysis undertaken and whether the report has been published. [18553/16]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): While costs are examined in the context of the delivery of social housing and in proposing amendments to the regulatory environment, my Department has no role in relation to the audit of construction costs in the commercial sector.

In relation to residential development, in the context of social housing provision, my Department undertakes analysis in respect of the average costs associated with the delivery of a range of differently sized social housing units, both in terms of construction costs and 'all-in' costs. These costs are based on an analysis of returned data from local authorities on social housing schemes. Nevertheless, information on the average cost of current social housing developments of various sizes is preliminary at this stage and will be better informed when a greater number of projects have completed the tendering stage over the months ahead. My Department has also input into work led by the Department of Finance in relation to construction costs which was undertaken under the Construction 2020 Strategy.

In general terms, the cost of delivering housing is largely dependent on the type, size and geographic location of the development concerned, the availability of services, access to infrastructure and on the contractual arrangements leading to its construction. Against this background, construction costs can vary greatly across the country which gives rise to difficulties in developing more accurate costings for the various house types in the absence of site-specific and evidence based information.

In terms of the regulatory environment, since 2012, amendments have been made to Parts A (Structure), D (Materials and Workmanship), J (Heat Producing Appliances), K (Stairways, Ladders, Ramps and Guards) and E (Sound) of the *Building Regulations 1997*. Each of these amendments was accompanied by a Regulatory Impact Assessment which examined, among other things, the incremental impact on the costs on construction that would arise from the new regulatory requirements proposed therein.

Part A (Structure) of the Building Regulations was amended in 2012 to facilitate the implementation and use of Eurocodes for construction works and structural construction products. The Regulatory Impact Assessment is available at www.environ.ie/regulatory-impact-assessment-structural-safety-buildings-proposed-amendment-tgd-part-structure. Part D (Materials and Workmanship) of the Building Regulations was amended in 2013 to take account of the implementation of *Regulation (EU) No. 305/2011 laying down harmonised conditions for the marketing of construction products*. The accompanying Regulatory Impact Assessment is available at <http://www.environ.ie/regulatory-impact-assessment-construction-products-2013>.

Part J (Heat Producing Appliances) of the Building Regulations was amended in 2014 to provide for, among other things, the detection and warning of carbon monoxide in dwellings. The associated Regulatory Impact Assessment is available at <http://www.environ.ie/regulatory-impact-analysis-draft-regulations-tgd-part-j>. Part K (Stairways, Ladders, Ramps and Guards) of the Building Regulations was amended in 2014 to provide, among other things, additional guidance on prevention of falls from windows in new dwellings.

Part E (Sound) of the Building Regulations was also amended in 2014 to improve the sound performance of new attached dwellings. The associated Regulatory Impact Assessment is available to view or download at <http://www.environ.ie/draft-regulatory-impact-assessment-tgd-part-e-sound>.

Separate to revisions to the Building Regulations, my Department has also made a number of revisions to the *Building Control Regulations 1997*.

The development of the *Building Control (Amendment) Regulations 2014*, which strength-

ened requirements in relation to accountability for compliance with Building Regulations, was informed by the *Strengthening the Building Control System - A Document to inform public consultation on Draft Building Control (Amendment) Regulations 2012*. The Building Control (Amendment) Regulations 2014, were reviewed following their first 12 months in operation to consider, among other things, the impact of the regulations on single dwellings and extensions to existing dwellings. A suite of consultation documents, which include specific information on costs, are available at <http://www.environ.ie/housing/building-standards/building-regulations/public-consultation-review-building-control>.

In accordance with the *Programme for a Partnership Government*, my Department is preparing an Action Plan for Housing with a view to identifying any reasonable and appropriate measures that may be taken in the interests of reducing construction overheads in order to facilitate an increased level of housing output into the future and a broader review of the costs of construction may be considered in this regard.

Housing Assistance Payments Implementation

235. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government when the housing assistance payment is expected to be rolled out in County Wicklow; and the additional resources that will be allocated as regards staff and finances. [18562/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) Scheme will be rolled out to a further group of local authority administrative areas in Quarter 4 of this year, including Wicklow County Council, subject to the necessary statutory regulations being in place.

My Department is currently liaising with Wicklow County Council in relation to staffing and training needs to support the introduction of HAP in this administrative area.

Local Authority Staff

236. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he is aware of the problems with staff in the housing department in Wicklow County Council, particularly in the Bray municipal district; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18563/16]

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 is not aware of any problems with staff in the housing department in Wicklow County Council. Any local issue of this kind is a matter for the Chief Executive of Wicklow County Council.

Climate Change Policy

237. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the actions he plans to take on tackling climate change and reducing Ireland's level of emissions of carbon dioxide. [16172/16]

238. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he is aware of the recent confirmation from scientists in the southern hemisphere that global levels of carbon dioxide have passed 400 parts per million; if he is concerned that such levels pose a threat to the earth's biodiversity and to human civilisation, given that the last time levels reached this stage humans did not exist; the radical steps he proposes to cut emissions of carbon dioxide; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16175/16]

239. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he is concerned that the new structures introduced into the various Ministries and their respective responsibilities mean a downgrading of climate change as an issue, and to outline which Minister is responsible for answering questions relating to climate change. [17120/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 237 to 239, inclusive, together.

Climate change has been prioritised by the new Government as reflected in the establishment of a new role of Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment.

However, pending the formal legal transfer of the climate functions from the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government to the new Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment, there is an interim period where responsibility for some statutory and other issues, remains with me as Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government. Once all the necessary legal instruments are put in place to effect the transfer of the relevant functions, my colleague, Minister Naughten, will have full responsibility for climate matters. Notwithstanding this transition process, Minister Naughten is already fully engaged in policy development and issues relating to the climate change agenda within the newly expanded remit of his Department.

The extent of the challenge to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, in line with our EU and international commitments, is well understood by the Government, as reflected in the National Policy Position on Climate Action and Low Carbon Development, published in April 2014, and now underpinned by the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015 which was enacted in December 2015. The National Policy Position provides a high-level policy direction for the adoption and implementation by Government of plans to enable the State to move to a low-carbon economy by 2050. Statutory authority for the plans is set out in the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015.

In accordance with Section 4 of the Act, the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government must submit a National Mitigation Plan to Government for approval by June 2017 at the latest. As stated above, this function will pass to Minister Naughten once the necessary legal instruments are put in place.

Work is well underway on the development of the first statutory National Mitigation Plan, the primary objective of which will be to track implementation of measures already underway and identify additional measures in the longer term to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and progress the overall national low carbon transition agenda to 2050. The first iteration of the National Mitigation Plan will place a particular focus on putting the necessary measures in place to address the challenge to 2020 but also in terms of planning ahead to ensure that appropriate policies and measures will be in place beyond that.

The ultimate objective of successive National Mitigation Plans is to incrementally achieve this low carbon transition vision by 2050. In that context, the National Mitigation Plan will have regard to Ireland's obligations under the current 2009 Effort Sharing Decision, the Paris

Agreement and any likely future EU and international obligations that may arise, including new national targets to be agreed under the 2030 climate and energy package.

The Paris Agreement sets out a long-term goal to put the world on track to limit global warming to well below 2 degrees centigrade above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 degrees. In this regard, it is noted that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has been tasked with evaluating what will be the specific policy implications of this goal with a special report to be published in 2018. Notwithstanding this, the overall outcome of the Paris Conference means that the long-term objective that Ireland has already established in the National Policy Position, and that is now underpinned by the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015, namely to pursue substantial decarbonisation of the energy, transport and built environment sectors as well as pursuing neutrality in the land sector, will now be undertaken within a broader international context.

Climate Change Advisory Council

240. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if and when he established the advisory council pursuant to section 9(1) of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015; the names of its chairperson and members; if and how often it has met; the recommendations it has made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16171/16]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): In accordance with Section 8(1) of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015, the Climate Change Advisory Council was established on 18th January 2016 by Ministerial Order. The composition of the Council is as follows:

Composition of Council	-
Professor John FitzGerald (Chairperson),	formerly of the ESRI
Professor Dr Ottmar Edenhofer	Professor of Economics of Climate Change at the Technical University of Berlin and Deputy Director and Chief Economist of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research
Professor Frank Convery	Chief Economist, Environmental Defence Fund, New York
Professor J. Peter Clinch	Jean Monnet Professor of Economic Integration (Environmental Policy) and UCD Professor of Public Policy
Professor Anna Davies	Professor of Geography at Trinity College Dublin
Professor Alan Matthews	Professor Emeritus of European Agricultural Policy at Trinity College Dublin
Mr Joseph Curtin	Senior Research Fellow, IIEA
Ms Laura Burke	Director General of the Environmental Protection Agency
Mr Jim Gannon	Chief Executive of Sustainable Energy Ireland
Professor Gerry Boyle	Director of Teagasc

Composition of Council	-
Professor Alan Barrett	Director of the Economic and Social Research Institute

In line with the provisions of Section 11(3) of the Act, the Council is independent in the performance of its functions. It is therefore completely a matter for the Council to determine the frequency of its meetings. Notwithstanding this, you may wish to note that the Council has already met on several occasions, including during its interim period of operation from June 2015 to January 2016.

The Council will in time be preparing material to be included in its annual and periodic reporting requirements as set out under the legislation. To date, the Council has provided formal recommendations on one occasion where recommendations in relation to the proposal for Phase IV of the Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) were received.

Paternity Leave

241. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will make the payments retrospective to anyone who would qualify on or after 1 September 2016 in relation to the Paternity Leave and Benefit Bill 2016, given that this scheme was promised to be effected from 1 September 2016 and it now appears that it will not come into effect until 30 September 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18054/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As part of Budget 2016, the Government announced its plan to introduce two weeks paid paternity leave in September 2016.

The legislative proposals for the introduction of paternity leave and paternity benefit are currently being debated in the Houses of the Oireachtas. When enacted, this legislation will allow new fathers, including fathers of adopted children, to start the combined package of paternity leave and paternity benefit at any time within the first six months following the birth of the child or, in the case of adoptions the day of placement. The Bill also provides for same sex couples on an equal basis with other couples. In relation to the operation of the Scheme, my Department will provide a minimum of paid paternity benefit of €230 per week for the two weeks of paternity leave.

Every scheme must have a start date and a Government decision was made that the paternity leave and paternity benefit scheme would come into effect on 30th September 2016. As a result, paternity benefit will only be payable for a child born or placed on or after the 30th September 2016.

It is very difficult to estimate the numbers that will take up paternity leave and paternity benefit. My Department estimates that it could be 30,000 to 40,000 fathers who will receive paternity benefit in a full year, at a cost of €20 million. This year, 2016, the payment is expected to cost the exchequer €5 million, which equates to one quarter of the expected full year cost.

Community Employment Schemes Supervisors

242. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he is aware that supervisors working on community employment schemes reaching 66 years of age are being forced

to retire from their jobs as funding for their salaries is being withdrawn when in fact there is no legal retirement age here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18176/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Community Employment (CE) is a non-statutory scheme put in place to support persons who are long-term unemployed and other vulnerable groups to gain the confidence and skills to re-enter the labour market. Schemes are sponsored by local community and voluntary groups who provide valuable support services to local communities. These sponsoring organisations employ supervisory staff to administer the scheme.

Funding is provided by the Department to the sponsoring organisations for the employment of staff up to state pension age. Once the staff member reaches state pension age (currently 66 years of age), that person can no longer be funded under CE. This is a long-established procedure which sponsoring organisations have signed up to as part of their contractual arrangement with the Department and it is applied equally across all schemes participating on CE. I have no current plans to change these arrangements.

Local Employment Service

243. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Social Protection his views on the gap in provision for essential equipment for a person (details supplied) on a training course who is expected to pay €500 for tools because his or her address is different from other participants on the same course who have been provided with the same equipment without charge. [18274/16]

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 Department's network of Intreo Offices does not have access to a grant or subsidy to pay for the provision of such equipment.

The Department of Social Protection contracts for the provision of a Local Employment Service (LES) with 23 organisations across the State in areas of particular disadvantage. LES services include mediation support to clients living within a specified catchment to help place them into jobs. The mediators have access to a limited Mediator Fund. This fund is available where a mediator identifies that a client needs an additional support to facilitate their entry into the labour market and that this need cannot be met by any state provider. The Mediator Fund can be used to support a client to purchase tools to allow him/her to take up a particular job.

There are a number of LES organisations serving clients in the north Dublin area based in Ballymun, Finglas and Coolock. There is no LES in the Swords area and therefore no additional support of this nature is available to clients living in that catchment area.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Jobseeker's Allowance

244. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Social Protection in regard to a finding that a person who is one of a couple has no entitlement following an assessment of household means, if it is unfair that this person is not entitled to a basic income similar to that of a dependent jobseeker who is under 25 years of age, where legislation allows that young persons dependent on their parents are allowed a minimum of €40 per week; if he will allow for a basic minimum income for adults in households to allow them some level of financial inde-

pendence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17917/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Jobseeker's allowance is a means tested social assistance scheme. In the case of a couple, account is taken of the means of both members of the couple and this reflects the fact that married couples, civil partners and cohabitants are financially interdependent on each other.

The jobseeker's allowance scheme features a range of disregards and tapering arrangements where one or both members of the couple are working. Where, for example, the spouse, civil partner or cohabitee is in employment, the employed person can earn up to €31,410 per annum (gross) before entitlement is fully withdrawn from the jobseeker's allowance claimant (assuming no other means). In the case of a couple with two children, the equivalent figure is €36,815 per annum. The introduction of a minimum level of entitlement where, ordinarily, there is no entitlement because of the level of means of one or both of the parties would represent a significant change to the provision of means-tested payments in Ireland and would target additional resources at households not currently entitled including some higher income households.

Where a jobseeker's allowance claimant is aged under 25, the value of the benefit and privilege derived from living with a parent or step-parent is assessed for means test purposes. In practice, benefit and privilege is taken to mean the value of board and lodging to applicants residing in the home of parents and the value of same is assessed by reference to a formula (with a wide range of income disregards). The purpose of the assessment is to achieve a degree of equity as between applicants who have this benefit and those who have not, and between people living in relatively better-off households and those whose circumstances are less well off.

Where the claimant's means (from the value of any benefit and privilege and any other means) are in excess of the statutory rate of jobseeker's allowance, no payment is made. Where the claimant's means result in an entitlement to jobseeker's allowance of a rate of €1 per week or less than €40 per week, a minimum payment of €40 per week is paid. Accordingly, the current arrangements guarantee a minimum rate of payment where there is an underlying entitlement to jobseeker's allowance in the first instance and does not apply where this is not the case. It should be noted, in this regard, that the assessment of the value of benefit and privilege does not imply that there is a direct financial transfer from a parent to the adult child and the current arrangements ensure that the jobseeker has access to some direct cash support. Such arrangements are not available to jobseekers who do not have an underlying entitlement to a payment because they reside in higher income parental households.

Any changes to the means testing arrangements of jobseeker's allowance would have to be considered in an overall policy and budgetary context.

Carer's Allowance Applications

245. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Social Protection when he will process an application by a person (details supplied) under the carer's allowance scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17922/16]

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 15 March 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 spouse of the person concerned is in receipt of a weekly social welfare support for the family.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Question No. 246 withdrawn.

Social Welfare Code

247. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of a query (details supplied) regarding persons wanting to receive their social welfare payments through their local post offices instead of banks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17936/16]

283. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Social Protection why he continues to correspond with persons in receipt of social welfare payments requesting them to consider opting for payment by electronic fund transfer despite the fact these same persons have indicated they want to continue using the post office; if he is aware of the importance of these transactions to the post office network; why he is continuing with this policy while a Government backed process is under way to secure and develop the post office network; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18230/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 247 and 283 together.

I can assure the Deputy that my department is not undertaking any measures which seek to influence customer choice in the manner of payment away from cash payments at the Post Office.

To specifically address the deputy's query my department has a cohort of jobseeker customers who are classified as casual jobseekers. These are in-work customers who can claim a jobseekers payment for 2 to 3 days per week or who work week on/week-off. These customers were paid by cheque each week.

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

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

My department did write to all of these casual jobseekers offering the option of a payment to an account. The vast majority have responded and opted for payment to an account.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Appeals

248. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the correct rate of payment due to a person (details supplied) whose appeal has been allowed under the disability allowance scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17966/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): I confirm that my department was notified by the Social Welfare Appeals Office on the 21 June 2016 that the appeal for the person in question against a disallowance of disability allowance was upheld.

Her file has been passed to a deciding officer to implement the appeals officer's decision and the person concerned will be notified in writing of the details as soon as possible.

Community Employment Schemes Eligibility

249. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a person selected for JobPath is prohibited from applying for a community employment scheme. [17971/16]

280. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection if persons selected for JobPath can transfer onto community employment, JobBridge or Gateway schemes. [18196/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 249 and 280 together.

Given the need to manage the allocation of places effectively, the Department does not, in general, facilitate or encourage jobseekers to transfer from or leave one activation support scheme to take up a place on another activation support scheme. However JobPath participants may apply to participate on other schemes and can, subject to assessment by a case officer, commence on other schemes following completion of their JobPath engagement. The period of engagement on JobPath is typically 12 months.

Participants on JobPath receive intensive individual support to help them tackle barriers to employment and to assist them in finding full-time paid sustainable employment. Each person is assigned to a personal adviser who assesses a person's skills, experience, challenges and work goals. The personal adviser and the participant draw up a personal progression plan that includes a schedule of activities, actions and job-focused targets which may include work experience via the JobBridge internship scheme provided that this internship is undertaken voluntarily by the jobseeker and does not substitute for provision of the JobPath advisory service. If a jobseeker receiving support under JobPath takes up a JobBridge opportunity they will continue to work with their JobPath adviser during the internship programme. If they are subsequently placed into a job they will continue to receive support for at least three months, and up to twelve months, while in employment.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Support Grant

250. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an entitlement to a carer's support grant for a person (details supplied). [17985/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Carer's Support Grant (CSG)

is paid automatically in June of each year (usually on the first Thursday of the month) to carers, such as the person concerned, who are in receipt of a qualifying payment on the first Thursday in June.

The CSG for the person concerned issued to their nominated post office on 2 June 2016.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

251. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will prioritise and grant an application by a person (details supplied) under the carer's allowance scheme; the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17992/16]

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 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.

Free Travel Scheme Administration

252. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason for the delay in processing applications for the free travel pass at the Bishop Street office of Intreo in Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17993/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The purpose of the Public Services Card (PSC) is to enable individuals to gain access to public services more efficiently and with a minimum of duplication of effort, while at the same time preserving their privacy to the maximum extent possible. The PSC is designed to replace other cards within the public sector such as the free travel pass and the social services card of this Department and to make it easy for providers of public services to verify the identity of customers. Intreo Centre Bishops Square currently processes PSC applications for customers within the Dublin 6, 6W and 12 areas. Customers that are currently in receipt of a free travel pass but do not have a PSC are invited to attend a scheduled appointment to complete the SAFE process in Intreo Centre Bishops Square and when their PSC card issues it will incorporate their free travel pass. Department customers can also book an appointment online to apply for their PSC or alternatively they can walk in and book an appointment in the office. The issuing of PSCs with the free travel pass is an ongoing process in Intreo Centre Bishops Square and any delay in processing these applica-

tions is regrettable, however the Department is endeavouring to ensure that all its customers are facilitated with an appointment without any undue delay.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Family Income Supplement

253. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will consider changing the family income supplement regulations for a person accessing a higher paying job that surpasses the income limit from losing all support, to a graduated system that would allow a person to get a promotion or higher paying job while also maintaining some level of family income support throughout the set transition period. [17996/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Family Income Supplement (FIS) is an in-work support which provides an income top-up for employees on low earnings with children. FIS is designed to prevent child and family poverty and to offer a financial incentive to take-up employment as compared to social welfare payments. Expenditure on FIS for 2016 is estimated to be of the order of €410 million and it is currently paid to some 56,000 families in respect of almost 123,000 children.

As part of Budget 2016 Family Income Supplement income thresholds were increased by €5 for families with one child and €10 for families with two or more children.

An integral part of FIS is that the payment continues at the same rate for a period of 52 weeks, assuming the eligibility requirements continue to be met, except in the following circumstances:

- If a claimant starts to care for an additional child in the course of the 52 weeks.
- If a claimant was getting a one-parent family payment and this payment was stopped because their youngest child reached the relevant age limit.

The rate of payment will not change if there is an increase or decrease in earnings. The advantage of this approach, which is unique to the FIS scheme, is that claimants will receive a guaranteed level of income support throughout the period. This certainty is important to the success of the scheme as it provides an incentive to claimants to maximise their earnings from employment (e.g. more hours, higher wages). For those who experience a reduction in earnings, the rate of payment will be reassessed at renewal of their FIS claim.

There are currently no plans to introduce a graduated FIS scheme, which would continue to pay FIS above the current family thresholds. The introduction of such a system could have significant financial implications for the Exchequer and would have to be considered carefully in an overall budgetary context.

Jobseeker's Allowance Eligibility

254. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will consider changing the rules whereby persons who are third level students and are not in college, are fully available for work, seeking work but not able to find work during the summer months, would be allowed sign for jobseeker's allowance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17997/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The jobseeker's allowance scheme provides income support for people who have lost work and are unable to find alternative full-time employment. The 2016 Estimates for my Department provide for expenditure this year on the jobseeker's allowance scheme of €2.45 billion.

Social welfare legislation states that a person is not entitled to jobseeker's allowance while attending a course of study. This disqualification also extends to the holiday periods, including the summer holidays. It also provides that a person shall be regarded as attending a course of study:

- for 3 months immediately following the completion or the leaving by that person of second level education or the completion by him or her of the leaving certificate examination of the Department of Education and Skills, whichever is the later;

- for the duration of an academic year, or

- for the period immediately following the completion of one academic year, other than the final academic year of a course of study, up to the beginning of the following year.

The disqualification for receipt of jobseeker's benefit or allowance does not apply in the case of mature students during the period between two academic years. During this period a mature student can apply for jobseeker's benefit or allowance, subject to satisfying the standard qualifying conditions, including that of being available for full-time work.

The disqualification for three months is a targeted measure aimed at protecting young people from welfare dependency. If college students were eligible for a jobseeker's payment for the summer months it could prove a significant disincentive for them to continue their education.

There are therefore no plans to amend jobseeker's allowance legislation in relation to this issue.

Social Welfare Offices

255. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a new Intreo office (details supplied) will open to the public; the services which will be available at the office; the amount spent to date on the building, fit out and ancillary works; when his Department acquired the building and site from the Health Service Executive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17999/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The new Intreo office in Carrigaline, County Cork, is expected to open during July 2016. This means that the totality of Intreo services will be offered from two locations in the town. These services include income support, employment support, social welfare inspectorate, community welfare and a public service card facility.

Expenditure on this Intreo project amounts to €0.9m. The OPW has leased this property from the HSE with effect from the 1st of January 2015.

Carer's Allowance Applications

256. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an application by a person (details supplied) under the carer's allowance scheme; and if he will make a

statement on the matter. [18027/16]

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 20 April 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 his needs he should apply for a means-tested supplementary welfare allowance from her local community welfare service.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pension (Non-Contributory)

257. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Social Protection to review the threshold of savings considered under the State pension (non-contributory) scheme (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18039/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): In assessing means for social assistance payments, account is taken of the income and the value of capital and property of the claimant and their spouse/partner.

Social welfare legislation provides that the yearly value of property (including capital) owned but not personally used or enjoyed is assessable for means testing purposes for social assistance payments. Such property includes all monies held in financial institutions or otherwise, the market value of shares and houses and premises owned by a claimant which may or may not be put to commercial use. However, it does not include property such as the family home or, for example, a premises used by the claimant in carrying out a business.

For assessment purposes, savings are assessed by reference to the following, as follows:

Capital - Assessment Formula

AMOUNT OF CAPITAL	WEEKLY MEANS ASSESSED
Up to €20,000	Nil
€20,000 - €30,000	€1 per each €1,000
€30,000 - €40,000	€2 per each €1,000
Over €40,000	€4 per each €1,000

It should be noted that for the purposes of the State pension non-contributory, the amounts above are doubled in the case of a couple.

No account is taken of interest or dividend payments received in the means assessment. The

assessment formula reflects the fact that there is an expectation that persons with reasonable amounts of capital and property are in a position to use that capital or to realise the value of property to support themselves without having to rely solely on a means tested welfare payment.

If the threshold were to be increased, the people who would benefit would be those who had income or assets of varying levels and, accordingly, such claimants would be treated more favourably than claimants who had fewer or no personal resources. Any changes to the current arrangements would have to be considered in an overall policy and Budgetary context.

Rent Supplement Scheme

258. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he is aware that Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council is assessing payments under the disability allowance scheme and the family income supplement scheme for rent purposes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18042/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): This is a matter for housing authorities, operating under the Housing Acts 1966 -2014, which come under the remit of the Minister for Environment, Community and Local Government. The Minister for Social Protection has no role in relation to this matter.

Disability Allowance

259. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Social Protection when he will issue a decision to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18049/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The person concerned has been awarded disability allowance with effect from 11 May 2016. The first payment was made by his chosen payment method on 22 June 2016.

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

Invalidity Pension Eligibility

260. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection to indicate eligibility for invalidity pension in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18062/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The person concerned is currently in receipt of a disability allowance payment from my Department.

Invalidity pension (IP) is a payment for people who are permanently incapable of work because of illness or incapacity and who satisfy the pay related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions.

To qualify for IP a claimant must, inter alia, have at least 260 (5 years) paid PRSI contribu-

tions since entering social insurance and 48 contributions paid or credited in the last complete contribution year before the date of their claim. Only PRSI classes A, E or H contributions are reckonable for IP purposes.

A claimant must be regarded as permanently incapable of work, which is defined as:

- incapacity for work of such a nature that the likelihood is that the claimant will be incapable of work for life

OR

- an incapacity which has existed for 12 months prior to the date of claim, and where the Deciding Officer or an Appeals Officer is satisfied that the claimant is likely to be unable to work for 1 year from the date of claim.

According to the Department's records, it appears that the person concerned satisfies the PRSI contribution criteria for IP. However, entitlement to IP can only be definitively determined on receipt of a completed claim form. A claim form for IP issued to the person in question on 23 June 2016. On receipt of the completed form, a decision on her eligibility will be made and she will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility

261. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a sum is taken into account for subsequent social protection allowances, if a person receives a €100,000 redundancy payment after in excess of 25 years of employment; if any interest received on the amount, subject to deposit interest retention tax is taken into account in terms of a person's social protection entitlements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18074/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): In assessing means for social assistance payments, account is taken of the income and the value of capital (including redundancy payments) of the claimant and their spouse/partner.

For means assessment purposes, savings are assessed by reference to the following formula:

Capital – Assessment Formula

AMOUNT OF CAPITAL	WEEKLY MEANS ASSESSED
Up to €20,000	Nil
€20,000 - €30,000	€1 per each €1,000
€30,000 - €40,000	€2 per each €1,000
Over €40,000	€4 per each €1,000

In the case of state pension non-contributory and carer's allowance claimants who are one of a couple, the amounts above are doubled. The initial capital disregard is €50,000 for claimants of disability allowance and €5,000 for claimants of supplementary welfare allowance.

It should be noted that no account is taken of interest or dividend payments received in the means assessment. The assessment formula reflects the fact that there is an expectation that persons with reasonable amounts of capital and property are in a position to use that capital or to realise the value of property to support themselves without having to rely solely on a means tested welfare payment.

Any changes to the current arrangements would have to be considered in an overall policy and Budgetary context.

State Pension (Contributory)

262. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason a person (details supplied) has been means tested for a State pension (non-contributory), despite the fact that the person concerned is a Magdalen laundry survivor and provision has been made to allow them to receive an amount equivalent to the State pension (contributory); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18098/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Magdalen Commission Scheme is administered by my Department on behalf of the Department of Justice and Equality. The scheme enables the women over the age of 66 who qualify to receive the equivalent of the maximum rate of State pension contributory for the remainder of their lives. The current maximum rate of State pension contributory is €233.30 per week. If a person is already receiving a payment from this Department, the rate of that payment is taken into account when assessing any entitlement to payment under the Magdalen Scheme.

The person in question is currently receiving both the State pension non-contributory and Carer's Allowance and the cumulative amount of both these payments is in excess of the current maximum weekly rate of State pension contributory. As the person concerned is already in receipt of payments in excess of the current maximum weekly rate of State pension contributory of €233.30, entitlement to payment under the Magdalen Scheme does not arise in this case. In the event that the lady in question is no longer eligible for Carer's Allowance at some future date, an appropriate adjustment will be made to her payment at that stage which will ensure that she continues to receive the maximum payment allowable under the Magdalen Commission Scheme.

I hope this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

Jobseeker's Allowance Payments

263. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an appeal by a person (details supplied) under the jobseeker's allowance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18115/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): A revised decision was made on the Jobseeker's Allowance application based on new information provided by the person concerned. The full rate of payment relevant to the client's age will be paid from the date of application. Any arrears due will issue with the first payment.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Rent Supplement Scheme Data

264. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason the numbers in receipt of rent supplement fell from 71,533 in January 2015 to 61,247 at the end of 2015 and 57,605 at the end of March 2016; and the numbers currently in receipt of rent supplement. [18120/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The rent supplement scheme plays a vital role in housing families and individuals, with the scheme currently supporting approximately 55,000 people for which the Government has provided approximately €267 million for 2016.

The numbers of rent supplement have been dropping at a pace since they reached a peak of over 97,000 in 2010. As the Deputy outlines, the numbers have continued to drop from 71,533 in January 2015 to 61,247 at the end of 2015.

There are many factors for the fall in rent supplement recipients including the improving economy and the fall in the Live Register. There are some 20,100 rent supplement recipients on the Live Register, representing circa 6.7% of the total May 2016 Live Register. The recent reduction in recipients can be mainly attributed to the significant change in rent supplement policy with the introduction of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP). Under HAP, responsibility for the provision of rental assistance to those with a long-term housing need transfers to local authorities, under the auspices of the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government. HAP is currently operational in 19 of the 31 local authority areas with over 10,500 tenancies now in place. The Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS), in operation since 2004, has also continued its operations in the transfer of rent supplement customers.

Officials in the Department of Social Protection are working closely with those in the lead Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government and the relevant local authorities, in supporting the further implementation of HAP with further local authorities expected to come on stream this autumn.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Farm Assist Scheme Data

265. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Social Protection his plans to simplify the farm assist scheme and in particular to remove the requirement for audited accounts; his further plans to restore income and child disregards to the farm assist scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18123/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The farm assist scheme provides support for farmers on low incomes and is similar to jobseeker's allowance. Farm assist recipients retain the advantages of the jobseeker's allowance scheme such as the retention of secondary benefits and access to activation programmes. The 2016 Revised Estimates for my Department provide for expenditure of €85 million on the farm assist scheme.

Changes introduced in Budgets 2012 and 2013 brought farm assist into closer alignment with the jobseeker's allowance scheme's treatment of self-employed people. Farm families with the lowest income were least impacted by these changes as the headline rates of farm assist were maintained.

To qualify for payment under the farm assist scheme, a person must satisfy a means test. Where necessary and possible, details of receipts and expenditure will be verified by a Social Welfare Inspector. In these circumstances, the onus is on the applicant to provide the required documentation

It is important to emphasise that while details of income and expenditure from the previous year are basic to the assessment, the assessment itself is not a book-keeping exercise based on one particular year. Financial information such as the most recently available accounts of the

farm are, of course, relevant to an assessment of means. However, while such accounts may be informative they are not an absolute requirement. As such the farm assist means test is designed to be flexible so as to allow for significant income fluctuations from one year to the next.

The Programme for Government contains the commitment to undertake a “Review of the Farm Assist Scheme, recognising the challenges facing farmers on low incomes”. I have asked my officials to review the farm assist scheme from a policy and an administrative point of view.

Any changes to the scheme will have to be considered in a budgetary context.

Social Welfare Overpayments

266. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will clarify his response to Parliamentary Question No. 449 of 17 May 2016 (details supplied). [18127/16]

267. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Social Protection if the decision to recoup invalidity pension for the period May 1991 to March 1996 in the case of a person (details supplied) could be reviewed in light of fresh facts and evidence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18128/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): I propose to take Questions Nos. 266 and 267 together.

The overpayment occurred as the person in question was engaged in self-employment during the period 09 May 1991 to the 13 March 1996 while in receipt of invalidity pension (IP). The person in question appealed the overpayment to the independent SWAO. An appeals officer (AO), having taken all available information into account, upheld the department’s decision and disallowed the appeal. The person in question was notified of the decision of the AO on 10th June 1997. The decision of an AO is final and conclusive in the absence of fresh facts or evidence not available at the time of the appeal. The new facts and evidence submitted as supporting documentation shall be forwarded to the independent SWAO for consideration.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Defined Benefit Pension Schemes

268. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of defined benefit pension schemes in deficit. [18149/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): According to information published by the Pensions Authority in May 2016 based on data submitted during 2014 and 2015 to the Pensions Authority under the Annual Actuarial Data Return, of a total of 666 defined benefit schemes 203 schemes were in deficit while some 463 schemes satisfied the requirements of the funding standard as set out in the Pensions Act.

The majority of these schemes in deficit have put in place funding proposals to bring them back into a funded position. The overall deficit in defined benefit pension schemes is estimated at €3.7bn. It is estimated that there are currently some €60.4 billion of assets in defined benefit pension schemes.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Civil Registration Documentation

269. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Social Protection the role a registrar plays in the removal of presumption of paternity and in respect of legally recognising a marriage nullity for the purposes of recognising a divorced person as a single person; the procedures a person must follow where a certificate of divorce is held from another country where a couple might present to register the birth of a new baby or apply for a marriage certificate to another other than the originally married couple; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18161/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Status of Children Act 1987 provides that where a married woman gives birth to a child her spouse is presumed to be the father of the child.

Where the spouse is not the father of the child, Section 22 of the Civil Registration Act 2004 provides that the presumption may be rebutted by either:

1. a statutory declaration of the person to whom the mother was married that he is not the father of the child, or

2. a statutory declaration by the mother that she has been living apart from her spouse during the period of 10 months ending immediately before the birth of the child by virtue of a decree of divorce, a decree of divorce *a mensa et thoro*, a decree of nullity of marriage or a deed of separation.

The relevant documents should be presented to the registrar for examination at the time of registration of the birth.

Where a couple wish to marry each other and one or both has been granted a divorce in another jurisdiction, all relevant papers (including marriage certificates and court orders) should be submitted to the registrar when the couple attend to give notification of intent to marry. A foreign divorce may be recognised and the Registrar General's Office will examine the foreign divorce for recognition under Irish law. Ultimately, the recognition of foreign divorces is a matter for the courts. Recognition of EU divorces granted prior to 1 March 2001 and all other foreign divorces is governed by the Domicile & Recognition of Foreign Divorces Act 1986.

Persons who have been granted a divorce in another jurisdiction are advised to seek an appointment with the registrar well in advance of their intended date of marriage to allow sufficient time for all papers to be processed.

Family Income Supplement Data

270. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Social Protection the details of legislation which changed family income supplement, FIS, to be means tested for rent allowance by local authorities and social housing bodies (details supplied). [18166/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Department of Social Protection's rent supplement scheme plays a vital role in housing families and individuals, with the scheme supporting approximately 55,000 people for which the Government has provided approximately €267 million for 2016.

Rent supplement is subject to a means test that is normally calculated to ensure that a person, after the payment of their rent, has an income equal to the rate of supplementary welfare al-

lowance (SWA) that is appropriate to their family circumstances, less a minimum contribution that recipients are required to pay from their own resources. The weekly minimum contribution is €30 for a single adult household and €40 for coupled households. Many recipients pay more than this amount because recipients are also required, subject to income disregards, to contribute any additional assessable means that they have over and above the appropriate basic SWA rate towards their accommodation costs.

The rent supplement assessment provides for a gradual withdrawal of payment as hours of employment or earnings increase. Income from employment and family income supplement (FIS) in excess of the standard SWA weekly rate of payment attract an additional income disregard and are assessed as follows; the first €75 of such additional income together with 25% of any additional income above €75 is disregarded for means assessment purposes.

The legislative basis for the assessment of FIS as assessable income for rent supplement purposes was provided by way of Regulation under Article 4(b) of Statutory Instrument 267 of 2007.

Policy regarding the differential rents scheme operated by local authorities is a matter for my colleague, the Minister for the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Community Employment Schemes Data

271. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he is aware that funding is being withdrawn from community employment schemes for supervisors reaching 66 years of age and thereby forcing supervisors into retirement when there is no legal retirement age here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18178/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Community Employment (CE) is a non-statutory scheme put in place to support persons who are long-term unemployed and other vulnerable groups to gain the confidence and skills to re-enter the labour market. Schemes are sponsored by local community and voluntary groups who provide valuable support services to local communities. These sponsoring organisations employ supervisory staff to administer the scheme.

Funding is provided by the Department to the sponsoring organisations for the employment of staff up to state pension age. Once the staff member reaches state pension age (currently 66 years of age), that person can no longer be funded under CE. This is a long-established procedure which sponsoring organisations have signed up to as part of their contractual arrangement with the Department and it is applied equally across all schemes participating on CE. I currently have no plans to change these arrangements.

Community Employment Schemes Funding

272. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he is aware that currently the financial viability of a large number of community employment schemes is at stake and may face closure due to the massive increases both in insurance premiums and accounting fees imposed on community and voluntary sponsors; if he will consider increasing the material grant per participant to the 2011 rate of €20 per week per participant; and if he will make a

statement on the matter. [18183/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Each community employment (CE) scheme has an individually set weekly materials rate per participant based on a detailed appraisal of their actual annual expenditure levels in previous years. All expenditure must be accounted for and vouched by way of receipts. It is the responsibility of the scheme to ensure that they have obtained the best price, including for the scheme's audit and insurance services and that they have achieved value for money.

The Department has become aware in recent times of an increase in insurance premiums for CE schemes. The main reasons cited for this is an increase in claims frequency over recent years by such schemes. In the first instance, the Department recommends that schemes seek alternative quotes to ensure they get value for money. In this context, schemes are asked to be especially mindful of their obligations under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005.

Insurance premium costs are reimbursed from the CE materials budget for the scheme. While the Department is not in a position to allocate additional monies to the materials budget in 2016, if there is a scheme experiencing particular difficulties, the sponsor should contact their local DSP office and the matter will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

JobPath Implementation

273. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of persons who have been selected for JobPath since its inception. [18189/16]

274. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of persons who have been referred to Turas Nua through JobPath, by county, in tabular form. [18190/16]

275. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of persons who have been referred to Seetec through JobPath, by county, in tabular form. [18191/16]

276. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of persons who have obtained employment through Turas Nua, by county, in tabular form. [18192/16]

277. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of persons who have obtained employment through Seetec, by county, in tabular form. [18193/16]

278. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the amount paid to Turas Nua since it was selected to deliver JobPath. [18194/16]

279. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the amount paid to Seetec since it was selected to deliver JobPath. [18195/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 273 to 279, inclusive, together.

As the Deputy will be aware JobPath is a new approach to employment activation designed to support long-term unemployed people and those most at risk of becoming long-term unemployed to secure and sustain paid employment. Two companies, Turas Nua and Seetec, have been contracted by the Department to deliver the JobPath service.

The table provides a breakdown of referrals by company and by county:

Contractor Name	County	Total	
Seetec	Cavan	1006	
	Donegal	1652	
	Dublin	5546	
	Galway	2140	
	Kildare	100	
	Leitrim	248	
	Longford	1194	
	Louth	1808	
	Mayo	1074	
	Meath	648	
	Monaghan	344	
	Offaly	254	
	Roscommon	62	
	Sligo	448	
	Westmeath	1116	
	Seetec Total	17640	
	Turas Nua	Carlow	1021
		Clare	1087
		Cork	3865
Galway		51	
Kerry		1467	
Kildare		1916	
Kilkenny		692	
Laois		380	
Limerick		2513	
Offaly		886	
Tipperary		1154	
Waterford		1960	
Wexford		1923	
Wicklow		1316	
Turas Nua Total		20231	
Grand Total	37871		

Note: both companies deliver JobPath services in different parts of Galway, Offaly & Kildare.

Clients receive support for 52 weeks but this period may continue for up to 130 weeks e.g. where a person engages in further education/training (for up to 26 weeks) and receives “in work” support (for up to 52 weeks). The rollout of JobPath commenced in July 2015 on a “soft-launch” basis. To date no one has completed their engagement with the JobPath service. Detailed analyses of JobPath data will be published later this year. As indicated in “Pathways to Work 2016 – 2020” the Department intends to publish performance statistics of contracted providers including JobPath from Q3 2016.

JobPath is a payment by results model and all initial costs are borne by the companies. JobPath is so structured that the companies will not be able to fully recover their costs until they place sufficient numbers of jobseekers into sustainable jobs. It is not intended to publish the

individual payments to the JobPath companies as these are commercially sensitive and to do so would place the State at a disadvantage both in terms of the contracts now in place and any future procurement that may be undertaken.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Question No. 280 answered with Question No. 249.

Illness Benefit Appeals

281. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an application by a person (details supplied) for a social protection appeal. [18206/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Payment of illness benefit to the person concerned was disallowed by a Deciding Officer following an examination by a Medical Assessor of the Department who expressed the opinion that she was capable of work.

An appeal was registered on 24 February 2016 and the Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that, in accordance with statutory requirements, the Department had been asked to provide the documentation in the case and the Deciding Officer's comments on the grounds of the appeal. In that context, an assessment by another Medical Assessor was carried out. These papers were received in the Social Welfare Appeals Office on 13 June 2016 and the case will now be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral appeal hearing.

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

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Insurance

282. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 94 of 7 July 2015, why officeholders who pay under the pay-related social insurance payment class of K do not receive any social insurance entitlements; and if he will reconsider his Department's position on this. [18210/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Since January 2011, public office holders pay PRSI at the Class K rate of 4% on their income as an office holder, provided that income exceeds €5,200 a year.

Public officeholders include the President, members of both Houses of the Oireachtas, members of the Judiciary, the Attorney General, the Comptroller and Auditor General, and city and county councillors.

All public office holders are liable to pay the contribution regardless of age. Payment of Class K PRSI does not establish any social insurance entitlements.

Prior to the introduction of the Class K charge, all public office holders were exempt from PRSI on their income as a public office holder. Then, as now, they could establish and protect

their social insurance entitlements based on their non-office holder activities or through the payment of Voluntary Contributions.

The Class K PRSI charge for public office holders was introduced on the basis that public office holders were a group who unlike most self-employed and employees did not pay a 4% contribution and so has a lower marginal rate of income tax/USC and PRSI.

I am currently examining whether changes are required to the basis on which class K is charged for councillors. There are a number of possible approaches including removing the Class K charge from councillors, bringing them into cover under Class S or, alternatively, Class A or retaining the status quo. Any changes to the current Class K arrangements will need to take into account the social insurance and occupational pension position of office holders generally.

Before making any decision on this matter I will ensure that any relevant Ministers and representatives groups are consulted.

Question No. 283 answered with Question No. 247.

Carer's Allowance Applications

284. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will issue payment to a person (details supplied) under the carer's allowance scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18235/16]

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 14 June 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.

Social Welfare Offices

285. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Social Protection the efforts he is making to reduce the holding times for persons ringing various sections in his Department; if he is aware that claimants sometimes have to wait 25 minutes or more before they get to speak to a person; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18236/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): In 2015, my Department answered some 8.3 million telephone calls across its network of Intreo Centres, branch offices and centralised scheme areas. In addition to the telephone service, my Department provides a range of contact channels for customers including face to face, e-mail, SMS (text), and online through our website www.welfare.ie.

My Department endeavours to provide the most responsive telephone service possible to its customers. To that effect, it has implemented a call management system across centralised scheme areas, which allows managers to monitor and manage call volumes. The system provides a flexible means of managing sudden peaks in customer demand and allows for the active management of calls by way of assigning, where feasible, more staff to the telephone lines at peak periods. The system's report for May 2016 shows the average call waiting times to be just over two minutes, ranging from the shortest at ten seconds to the longest at eighteen minutes.

In addition, my Department has recently upgraded its IVR (Interactive Voice Technology) to improve call treatment and reduce the average time it takes for customers to reach the correct call queue to 30 seconds across all offices.

Intreo Centres, in addition to providing a telephone service, have introduced a range of initiatives aimed at streamlining claim processing in recent years. These initiatives, including a dedicated appointment service for jobseekers, aim to provide comprehensive information and advice at early claim stages, reducing the level of subsequent telephone queries.

My Department is focused on modernising its service delivery platform, making full use of new and emerging technologies to broaden the range of service delivery channels offered. The Department's new online self-service facility www.mywelfare.ie is designed to enable customers access personalised Department of Social Protection services at a time and place that suits them. A number of services have already been delivered on this new facility and more will be added on a phased basis.

In order to equip staff to deal effectively with customers, the Department provides training in customer service which includes communicating effectively with customers, effective telephone techniques, active listening and the importance of understanding and empathy. Training courses also include raising of awareness of disability, mental health and diversity issues relevant to staff and customers.

The Department has a formal comments and complaints procedure in place to allow customers give feedback on the quality of services they receive. If a customer is unhappy with the quality of service received, they can submit a complaint online at www.welfare.ie, by email to qcs@welfare.ie, by telephone to 1890 66 22 44, or in writing to Quality Customer Services, Social Welfare Services, College Road, Sligo. All such complaints will be dealt with promptly, fairly and impartially.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Rural Social Scheme

286. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of the enhancement of the rural social scheme (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18376/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The purpose of the rural social scheme (RSS) is to provide income support aimed at low-income farmers and fishermen in receipt of certain social welfare payments who are underemployed in their primary occupation. Persons are engaged for 19½ hours per week to provide certain services of benefit to rural communities. The scheme currently provides work opportunities for around 2,600 participants and 130 supervisory staff.

The funds allocated for the scheme in 2016 amount to €44.3m. This level of funding does

not allow for recruitment above the numbers stated above.

With the ongoing welcome economic recovery, the eligibility criteria for RSS will be kept under review to ensure that it remains fit for purpose and to ensure that the numbers on the scheme continue to be appropriate.

Farm Assist Scheme

287. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of the amendment of the farm assist scheme (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18378/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The farm assist scheme provides support for farmers on low incomes and is similar to jobseeker's allowance. Farm assist recipients retain the advantages of the jobseeker's allowance scheme such as the retention of secondary benefits and access to activation programmes. The 2016 Revised Estimates for my Department provide for expenditure of €85 million on the farm assist scheme.

Changes introduced in Budgets 2012 and 2013 brought farm assist into closer alignment with the jobseeker's allowance scheme's treatment of self-employed people. Farm families with the lowest income were least impacted by these changes as the headline rates of farm assist were maintained.

The Programme for Government contains the commitment to undertake a "Review of the Farm Assist Scheme, recognising the challenges facing farmers on low incomes". I have asked my officials to review the farm assist scheme from a policy and an administrative point of view.

Any changes to the scheme will have to be considered in a budgetary context.

Question No. 288 withdrawn.

One-Parent Family Payment Payments

289. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Social Protection if the same or similar reductions would apply in a given situation (details supplied); the changes in social protection payment rates that would apply across the range of payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18392/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The one-parent family payment weekly rate of payment for a recipient with one child (and no means) is €217.80 per week (excluding any supplementary payments, such as fuel allowance). This is the same weekly rate which is payable to a single person with one child in receipt of jobseeker's allowance, disability allowance and farm assist. The personal weekly rate is €188 per week for all of these schemes.

It should be noted that where two people are married, civil partners or cohabiting and are living together, there is no entitlement to a one parent family payment. In the case of jobseeker's allowance, jobseeker's benefit, illness benefit, injury benefit, farm assist and pre-retirement allowance either one or both members of the couple can claim a payment in their own right if they satisfy the relevant contingency. While the maximum personal weekly rate of these payments is €188 per week, the total amount a couple can receive is limited to the equivalent of one personal rate of payment (€188 per week) and one increase for a qualified adult (€124.80), or the rate that applies once means are taken into account. Payment is then made to each member

of the couple at half this total entitlement including an increase for qualified children, if any. Alternatively, one member of the couple may claim an increase for a qualified adult (and any qualified children). Similar arrangements apply in the case of invalidity pension and State pensions (contributory and non-contributory) but the maximum rates payable are somewhat higher as the personal and qualified adult rates are higher. Limitation does not apply where one of the couple is entitled to a carer's allowance or disability allowance.

There have been no changes to these arrangements since the report referenced by the Deputy was published. The current arrangements apply to all affected couples regardless of whether one has been a lone parent at any stage and reflect the fact that two individuals maintaining one household will incur lower costs than two people maintaining separate households.

Any changes to the proportional payment of social welfare payments for qualified adults or the limitation arrangements described above would involve significant costs and there are no such plans under consideration at present.

Work Placement Programmes

290. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will extend the time a person can remain with a community and voluntary organisation under the Tús work placement initiative where this is mutually agreeable or desirable. [18394/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The purpose of Tús is the provision of short-term quality work opportunities for those who are unemployed for more than one year in order to break the cycle of unemployment and to improve a person's opportunities in returning to the labour market. Currently, there are no circumstances under which a person's term on Tús can be extended.

The Tús budget for 2016 allows for 8,000 participants. Extending the period of participation beyond one year for current participants would reduce the number of placements available to other people who are long-term unemployed. The existing 12-month placement period on Tús is adequate to meet the objectives of the initiative whilst also ensuring that as many unemployed people as possible are able to benefit from it.

Tús was introduced as a direct response to the growth in the level of unemployment during the financial crisis. With the ongoing welcome reductions in the live register, a review of work schemes, including Tús, is necessary to ensure that the number and nature of schemes and the conditions governing participation on same continues to be appropriate. I will be considering all of these issues over the coming months.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications

291. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Social Protection when he will process a decision on an application by a person (details supplied) under the domiciliary care allowance scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18405/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): An application for domiciliary care allowance (DCA) was received from the person concerned on 15 October 2015. The original decision in the case was not to allow the application, as it was not considered that the person concerned met the qualifying criteria. Following a review of that

decision, the person concerned has been notified that DCA has now been awarded in her case.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Family Income Supplement Applications

292. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an application by a person (details supplied) under the family income supplement scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18411/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The person concerned applied for Family Income Supplement (FIS) on 16 March 2016.

In order to qualify for FIS, the applicant cannot be in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance (JA) or be included as an Increased Qualified Adult (IQA) on their spouse/partners JA.

In this case, the person's spouse/partner is claiming an IQA on their Social Welfare payment. A letter issued to the person concerned on 24 March 2016 which advised them to contact their local Intreo office as it would be more beneficial for them to claim FIS than the IQA on their spouse/partner JA.

A completed form was received in FIS section on 24 June from the person concerned requesting the removal of the IQA and this has been forwarded to the relevant Intreo office.

Once the IQA has been removed from the JA claim, the FIS application will be processed without delay.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Redundancy Payments

293. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of claims under the redundancy payments scheme in each of the years 2011 to 2015 to date, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18418/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The purpose of the redundancy payments scheme is to compensate employees for the loss of their jobs where the employer is unable to pay statutory redundancy due to financial difficulties or insolvency. Redundancy payments are based on the employee's length of reckonable service and reckonable weekly remuneration. The scheme is funded by the Social Insurance Fund, which is made up of PRSI contributions from employers, employees and self-employed.

The table sets out the number of claims under the redundancy payments scheme between 2011 and 2015. The claim load has fallen from almost 50,000 in 2011 to just over 4,300 in 2015, a reduction of 90 per cent. Expenditure has also reduced from €312 million in 2011 to €35 million in 2015, a decrease of around 90 per cent.

The downward trend in claims and expenditure reflects the Government decision to abolish the rebate to employers (who could pay statutory redundancy) in 2013. It also highlights the decline in job losses following the return to economic growth.

Redundancy Payments Scheme Claims and Expenditure 2011 – 2015

Year	Claims processed	Expenditure
2011	49,762	€311.96m
2012	33,072	€301.76m
2013	14,088	€126.10m
2014	6,883	€ 64.6m
2015	4,333	€ 34.9m*

*Draft expenditure figure for 2015, pending completion of the SIF Accounts

Work Placement Programmes

294. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Social Protection to provide a further list of the 50 applicants under the Tús work placement initiative in Celbridge, Leixlip and Maynooth in County Kildare, in addition to the list provided five weeks ago, so as to allow the supervisors to fill the vacancies for the host community groups; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18425/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): TÚS is an activation initiative for those who are unemployed and on the Live Register. It provides short-term quality and suitable working opportunities for people who are unemployed while at the same time carrying out beneficial work within communities.

Eligible clients are selected for inclusion in the initiative through a random selection process undertaken centrally within each Division and requested to respond to the TÚS work placement invitation. Thereafter a listing of potential candidates is supplied to the implementing body, usually the local partnership who invite them for interview. All requests for potential TÚS participants are processed promptly and within agreed timeframes. A request was received at the end of last week from Kildare County Partnership and is currently being processed.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Jobseeker's Benefit

295. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will review the average weekly earnings thresholds under the jobseeker's benefit scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18426/16]

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

Since the extension of full social insurance cover to part-time workers from April 1991, a range of measures were introduced to the short-term illness and jobseeker's benefit schemes in order to ensure that disincentives to employment were not created. In the absence of these measures, a situation would exist whereby many workers on low incomes would have access to weekly social welfare payments greatly in excess of their income from employment. For instance, while someone earning €31.17 a week or more would have been liable for PRSI Class A contributions, the maximum personal rate of illness and jobseeker's benefit from January 1993 was €70.60 a week, i.e. the social welfare benefits available could have been more than twice the level of income from employment for some people.

To overcome the potential disincentives involved, new arrangements were introduced from January 1993 to relate the rate of benefit payable to the level of the claimant's earnings. These measures were regularly updated to keep pace with changes in benefit levels. Adjustments in Budget 2009 sought to bring the income threshold and banding structure back into line with the level of benefits payable.

Jobseeker's Benefit rates are graduated according to an applicant's earnings in the relevant tax year and reduced rates of jobseeker's benefit are payable where the average reckonable weekly earnings are less than the prescribed amount. Under the current arrangements jobseeker's benefit recipients with earnings of less than €300 per week in the relevant tax year - for claims in 2016, the relevant tax year is 2014 - get a personal rate ranging from €84.50 to €147.30, and reduced rates for qualified adults may also apply. Jobseeker's benefit recipients with average earnings over €300 per week in the relevant tax year will receive a personal rate of €188 per week. Recipients of jobseeker's benefit may also opt to transfer to jobseeker's allowance.

Any changes to the average weekly earnings thresholds under the jobseeker's benefit scheme would have to be considered in an overall policy and budgetary context.

Carer's Allowance Applications

296. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Social Protection when he will reach a decision on an application by a person (details supplied) under the carer's allowance scheme. [18444/16]

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 8 April 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, both the person concerned and his spouse are in receipt of a weekly social welfare support.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

One-Parent Family Payment Data

297. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the net cost in 2016 of setting the eligible age at which the parent's youngest child is eligible at ten, 12 and 14 years of age under the one-parent family payment scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18481/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The information that the Deputy has requested is currently not available in my Department. Given the complex nature of the request, my Department will provide the information directly to the Deputy in due course. This will include the answer to the previous question submitted by the Deputy regarding increasing

the age of the youngest child to 14 years for receipt of the One-Parent Family Payment.

One-Parent Family Payment Data

298. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the full year cost in 2016 of increasing the income disregard under the one-parent family payment scheme from its current threshold of €90 per week to €95, €100, €105, €110, 115, €120 and €125 per week, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18483/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The full cost of extending the current threshold of the income disregard under the One-Parent Family Payment (OFP) from its current threshold of €90 a week to €95 a week; €100 a week; €105 a week; €110 a week; €115 a week; €120 a week; and €125 a week is outlined in tabular form. These figures are based on the current profile of OFP customers as of June 2016.

Increase income disregard to:	Estimated cost to the Exchequer in for full year	Estimated cost to the Exchequer for July-Dec 2016
€95 a week	€1,650,000	€825,000
€100 a week	€3,300,000	€1,650,000
€105 a week	€4,950,000	€2,475,000
€110 a week	€6,600,000	€3,300,000
€115 a week	€8,250,000	€4,125,000
€120 a week	€9,900,000	€4,950,000
€125 a week	€11,550,000	€5,775,000

Social Welfare Schemes Data

299. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the full year cost in 2016 of increasing the entitlement under the child benefit scheme by €5, €6, €7, €8, €9 and €10 per month, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18484/16]

301. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the full year cost in 2016 of increasing each working age payment by €3, €4, €5, €6, €7, €8, €9 and €10, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18487/16]

302. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the full year cost in 2016 of increasing the entitlement under the jobseeker’s allowance scheme of €100 per week for those from 18 to 24 years of age by €5, €6, €7, €8, €9, €10, €15, €20 and €25 per week, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18488/16]

303. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the full year cost in 2016 of increasing the entitlement under the jobseeker’s allowance scheme for those in receipt of €144 per week by €5, €6, €7, €8, €9, €10, €15, €20 and €25 per week, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18490/16]

305. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the full year cost in 2016 of increasing the State pension by €5; €6; €7; €8; €9; €10 and €15 by week, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18493/16]

306. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the full year cost in 2016 of increasing entitlement under the living alone allowance scheme by €2, €3, €4, €5, €6, €7, €8,

€9, €10 and €15, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18495/16]

309. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the full year cost in 2016 of increasing the entitlement under the disability allowance scheme, the carer’s benefit scheme, the invalidity pension scheme and the blind pension scheme by €5, €6, €7, €8, €9, €10, €15 and €20 per week, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18498/16]

310. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the full year cost in 2016 of increasing the grant under the carer’s support scheme by €50, €75, €100, €120, €125, €150, €175 and €200; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18499/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 299, 301 to 303, inclusive, 305, 306, 309 and 310 together.

The costings sought by the Deputy are outlined in the format agreed with the Deputy’s office. The costs of higher or lower increases in the various rates of payment are proportionate to the costs shown for a given rate of increase. As also requested by the Deputy’s office, the costs do not include the costs of proportionate increases for qualified adults.

The cost of a €10 increase in the monthly rate of Child Benefit is estimated at €146.5 million in 2017.

The cost of a €10 increase in the weekly rate of the Living Alone Allowance is estimated at €102.4 million in 2017.

A €100 increase in the rate of the Carer’s Support Grant is estimated at €8.9 million in 2017 with a €200 increase estimated at costing €17.8 million.

The remaining costings are listed in the two following tables:

Table 1: Indicative cost of each €10 increase in weekly personal rates for those of working age – this includes a €10 increase for jobseekers aged under 26 as well as for recipients of Disability Allowance, Carer’s Benefit, Invalidity Pension and Blind Pension.

Scheme	Cost in 2017 €m
Social Insurance Schemes	
Widow/er’s or Surviving Civil Partner’s (Con) Pension	15.9
Deserted Wife’s Benefit	2.2
Invalidity Pension	29.0
Guardian’s Payment (Contributory)	0.7
Disablement Pension	3.3
Illness Benefit	26.9
Injury Benefit	0.6
Incapacity Supplement	0.5
Jobseeker’s Benefit	16.2
Carer’s Benefit	1.4
Health and Safety Benefit	0.0
Maternity & Adoptive Benefit	11.6
Total Social Insurance Schemes	108.3
Social Assistance Schemes	

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Scheme	Cost in 2017 €m
Blind Person's Pension	0.7
Widow/ers or Surviving Civil Partner's (Non-Con) Pension	0.8
Deserted Wife's Allowance	0.1
One-Parent Family Payment	21.5
Carer's Allowance	19.0
Half Rate Carer's Allowance	5.2
Guardian's Payment (Non-Contributory)	0.2
Jobseeker's Allowance	104.7
Jobseeker's Allowance (€100 rate)	11.6
Jobseeker's Allowance (€144 rate)	2.3
Pre-Retirement Allowance	0.1
Disability Allowance	66.2
Farm Assist	4.2
Back to Education Allowance	5.7
Back to Work Enterprise Allowance	5.3
Community Employment Programme	12.8
TÚS - Community Work Placement Initiative	4.3
Rural Social Scheme	1.4
JobBridge - National Internship	1.2
Gateway	1.1
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	7.6
Total Social Assistance Schemes	276.1
OVERALL TOTAL	384.4

Table 2: Indicative cost of each €10 increase in weekly personal rates for those of pension age

Scheme	Cost in 2017 €m
State Pension Contributory	173.0
Widow/er's or Surviving Civil Partner's (Con) Pension	43.1
Deserted Wife's Benefit	1.2
Death Benefit Pension	0.3
State Pension Non Contributory	49.5
Carer's Allowance	1.1
Half Rate Carer's Allowance	2.6
OVERALL TOTAL	270.8

The costs shown above are on a full year basis and assume that, where relevant, each increase is implemented from the beginning of January. It should be noted that these costings relate to 2017 and are subject to change over the coming months in the context of emerging trends and associated revision of the estimated numbers of recipients for 2017.

Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance Scheme Data

300. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the full-year cost in 2016 of increasing the entitlement under the back to school clothing and footwear allowance scheme for the age groups specified by €10; €15; €20; €25; €30; €35; €40; €50; €60; €70; €80; €90; and €100, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18486/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The back to school clothing and footwear allowance (BSCFA) scheme provides a once-off payment to eligible families to assist with the extra costs when children start school each autumn. The Government has provided €38.8 million for this scheme in 2016.

I recently announced that the 2016 BSCFA scheme is open for applications. In 2016, similar to arrangements in previous years, a large proportion of BSCFA payments (approximately 109,000 families in respect of approximately 193,000 children) are being fully automated with no application form required. Letters issued in early June informing families of their entitlement and notifying them that payment would issue during the week ending 15th July. The rate of payment is €100 in respect of children aged 4 to 11 and €200 for children over 12 years in second level education. The total amount to be paid to these customers will be circa €29 million.

Customers who did not receive notification of an automated payment are required to make a written application for the payment. Application forms are available in all Departmental offices, via SMS (text Form BTSCFA followed by name and address to 51909), from the website www.welfare.ie or by email to the Department at BSCFA@welfare.ie.

Using the total number of children, 281,000, covered by the scheme in 2015 as a basis, the additional cost to increase the BSCFA rates by the amounts listed per age group is set out in the tabular statement. Changes to increase the rate of payment to any scheme administered by the Department would have to be considered in a budgetary context.

Tabular Statement

Full-Year Additional Cost to Increase BSCFA rates by amounts listed:

Age Group 4-11 years (161,000 Children)		Age Group Over 12 years(120,000 Children)	
Increased Payment Amount	Cost of Increase	Increased Payment Amount	Cost of Increase
€10	€1.61 million	€10	€1.2 million
€15	€2.42 million	€15	€1.8 million
€20	€3.22 million	€20	€2.4 million
€25	€4.03 million	€25	€3.0 million
€30	€4.83 million	€30	€3.6 million
€35	€5.64 million	€35	€4.2 million
€40	€6.44 million	€40	€4.8 million
€50	€8.05 million	€50	€6.0 million
€60	€9.66 million	€60	€7.2 million
€70	€11.27 million	€70	€8.4 million
€80	€12.88 million	€80	€9.6 million
€90	€14.49 million	€90	€10.8 million

Age Group 4-11 years (161,000 Children)		Age Group Over 12 years(120,000 Children)	
Increased Payment Amount	Cost of Increase	Increased Payment Amount	Cost of Increase
€100	€16.1 million	€100	€12.0 million

Questions Nos. 301 to 303, inclusive, answered with Question No. 299.

Treatment Benefit Scheme

304. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the benefits that have been withdrawn under the treatment benefits package since 2010; the full-year cost in 2016 of restoring each of these benefits based on contracts agreed with dental and medical practitioners at the time they were withdrawn and based on a 5%, 10% and 15% increase on the rates agreed at the time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18492/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The dental and optical benefit schemes were restricted to a free annual dental exam and a free two yearly optical examination from January 2010.

The potential cost of restoring the scheme in 2016 to its 2009 format (assuming the same level of customer applications as in 2009), would be as set out in the following table, allowing for the potential % increase in fees as suggested by the Deputy (shown in €millions):

Scheme	2009*	+5%	+10%	+15%
Dental	62.3	65.4	68.5	71.6
Optical	17	17.9	18.7	19.6
Total	79.3	83.3	87.2	91.2

* (These figures represent payments for claims paid by the Department only, and do not include the annual reimbursements to the HSE in respect of dual-qualified PRSI/medical card customers, which added another €13M to the cost of these benefits in 2009).

While the increases suggested by the Deputy have been applied in the table of costings above, it should be noted that any increase in fees would be a matter for Government as part of an overall budget process.

These figures represent the potential cost of the schemes (based on 2009 application levels), including examinations, which have continued to be provided to customers and for which the fee payable has not increased since 2009.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Questions Nos. 305 and 306 answered with Question No. 299.

Household Benefits Scheme

307. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the full-year cost in 2016 of restoring the entitlement under the telephone allowance scheme to the rate it was at in 2010 and in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18496/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The savings arising from the initial reduction and subsequent discontinuance of the telephone allowance meant that my Department was able to retain the other valuable elements of the household benefits package such as the electricity and gas allowance and the television licence. My Department will spend approximately €228 million this year on these elements of the household benefits package for over 419,000 customers. The cost of the telephone allowance scheme had risen significantly each year, as the number of eligible customers grew. In 2007 there were some 316,000 people receiving the telephone allowance compared to almost 396,000 at the end of September 2013. This was an increase of 25%, or an average increase of nearly 4% per annum.

In 2010 the value of the telephone allowance was €310.80 per annum. The cost of restoring the allowance at 2010 levels is estimated to be in the region of €125m to €131m per annum. In 2013 the value of the telephone allowance was €114.00 per annum. The cost of restoring the allowance at 2013 levels is estimated to be in the region of €46m to €48m per annum.

Any decision to restore the telephone allowance would have to be considered in the context of overall budgetary negotiations.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Fuel Allowance Data

308. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the full year cost in 2016 of extending the number of weeks the entitlement is paid under the fuel allowance scheme by one, two, three and four weeks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18497/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The fuel allowance is a payment of €22.50 per week for 26 weeks from October to April, to 391,000 low income households, at an estimated cost of €224 million in 2016. The purpose of this payment is to assist these households with their energy costs. The allowance represents a contribution towards the energy costs of a household. It is not intended to meet those costs in full. Only one allowance is paid per household. My Department also pays an electricity or gas allowance as part of the household benefits package to approximately 419,000 customers, at an estimated cost of €228 million in 2016.

Any decision to extend the fuel allowance season would have to be considered in the overall budgetary negotiations.

The estimated cost of increasing the fuel allowance duration by one, two, three and four weeks at the current rate would be as follows -

No. of weeks	Cost increase per annum*
1	€9m
2	€18m
3	€26m
4	€35m

*Figures are rounded to the nearest million.

The best way to tackle fuel poverty in the long term is to improve the energy efficiency of the dwelling. My Department works closely with the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources on these issues and in moving forward the actions agreed in the Energy Affordability Strategy. In that regard, the Better Energy Homes scheme provides support to-

wards the installation of attic and wall insulation, and heating system upgrades.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Questions Nos. 309 and 310 answered with Question No. 299.

Disability Allowance Applications

311. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Social Protection when he will issue a decision to a person (details supplied) under the disability allowance scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18508/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Following a review of the entitlement of the person in question, disability allowance (DA) was disallowed with effect from 22 June 2016 as a deciding officer (DO), having taken into account all the available evidence, decided that the person in question has means in excess of the statutory limit for his circumstances. Notification of this decision issued to the person in question on 15 June 2016.

The person in question has been advised of his right to have this decision reviewed by a DO or to appeal this decision to the social welfare appeals office.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

312. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an application by a person (details supplied) under the carer's allowance scheme; if he will expedite it; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18544/16]

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 8 April 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, both the person concerned and his spouse are in receipt of a weekly social welfare support.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Homeless Persons Supports

313. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade when he will issue a response to the concerns raised by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in correspondence dated September 2015 on housing and water provision

for homeless persons in County Cork; and his approach to the provision of water and sanitation services for the homeless. [17933/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade receives correspondence from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on a regular basis. Where such correspondence relates to domestic policies, Departments with lead responsibility for the relevant policy issues are asked to provide input for the reply to the United Nations.

The response to the correspondence from the UN Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living and on the rights to non-discrimination in this context, and the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, was submitted to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights by Ireland's Permanent Mission to the UN in Geneva. In a statement issued on 6 June 2016 the Special Rapporteurs acknowledged receipt of the response.

The content of the response and other issues relating to the provision of water and sanitation services for the homeless are a matter for my colleague the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government.

Military Aircraft Landings

314. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if permission was sought and if he granted it for two four-engine military planes to land at Ireland West Regional Airport on 20 June 2016; his views regarding their presence at the airport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17951/16]

315. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if permission was sought and if he granted it for a military plane (details supplied) to be present at Ireland West Regional Airport on 20 June 2016; his views regarding its presence at the airport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17954/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 314 and 315 together.

To facilitate arrangements for the US Vice President's visit to the Mayo area, permission was sought for two unarmed US military transport aircraft, type C-17A, to land at Ireland West Airport Knock on 20 June 2016. The aircraft were carrying passenger vehicles in support of the visit.

The requests stated that the aircraft were unarmed, carried no arms, ammunition or explosives and that they would not engage in intelligence gathering. The requests also stated that the flights did not form part of any military operation or exercises. Permission for the landings was granted subject to these conditions.

The visit of Vice President Biden and other high level visits help to promote Ireland's interests internationally and contribute to the development of strong economic, political and cultural links.

Foreign Conflicts

316. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will

formally recognise the actions of the Islamic State of Syria and Iraq against the Yazidi people as genocide, given the United Nations report citing these actions as such; his proposals to encourage the international community to recognise the genocide and to request the United Nations Security Council to refer this ongoing barbarity to the International Criminal Court; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18043/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): We have already welcomed the latest report by the UN Human Rights Council Commission of Inquiry into the situation in Syria in a national statement delivered in the Council earlier this month.

I want to acknowledge the authoritative and comprehensive nature of the report. The report, based on direct testimony from survivors, makes clear the horrific crimes against the Yazidi population by Daesh and finds compelling evidence for the crime of genocide. I welcome the report and its findings.

I wholeheartedly agree with the Deputy that the international community has a duty to ensure that the victims of these crimes receive justice and accountability for their suffering and loss.

In 2014 Ireland and over 50 other members of the UN co-sponsored a proposed resolution calling for referral of the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court. I repeat my regret and disappointment that this proposed resolution was vetoed by Russia and China. I believe that this latest report underlines the urgency and importance of such a referral and will engage in renewed efforts with Ireland's international partners to pursue this action.

Human Rights

317. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the fact that a person's (details supplied) citizenship has been revoked in Bahrain; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18110/16]

325. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he is aware that the ruling regime in Bahrain has revoked the citizenship and passport of a person (details supplied) and the person will then be considered stateless; and if he will raise this case and the continued human rights violations in Bahrain with his Bahraini counterpart. [18226/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 317 and 325 together.

I am aware of the decision by the Bahraini authorities to revoke the citizenship of this person.

The right to a nationality is a fundamental human right. I am aware that since 2014, Bahrain has revoked the citizenship of over 250 people. This is a worrying development, in particular in light of other recent moves in Bahrain to restrict freedom of expression, such as the dissolution of Al Wefaq, the largest opposition political grouping. I call on Bahrain to fully respect its international human rights obligations.

Actions like these increase sectarian divides, and only serve to stall Bahrain's path towards national reconciliation. This decision has already triggered protests and demonstrations. Preventing people from expressing their views does not quash people's grievances; it only reinforces them. I call on the protesters and the Bahraini authorities alike to exercise restraint, for the protesters to express their views peacefully and for the authorities to permit them to do this.

This decision also risks increasing regional tensions. I call on all leaders in the region, political and religious, to avoid actions and statements that would further increase these tensions. I urge Bahrain to recommit to an inclusive, peaceful and open dialogue for national reconciliation that will serve the interests of all Bahrainis, regardless of religious beliefs or political preferences.

I stand with our EU partners in continuing to support Bahrain, in promoting further reforms aimed at strengthening human rights and the rule of law in a context free of violence and where freedom of expression is respected.

Passport Applications Fees

318. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will consider reintroducing old age pension rates on passport applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18139/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): A decision was taken in the 2005 budget to exempt applicants aged 65 and over from the passport fee. In 2011 the Government decided in light of the budgetary situation to discontinue the exemption and to apply the same ten-year passport fee to all applicants aged 18 years or over.

The annualised fee for a standard ten year Irish passport compares favourably with many other jurisdictions. At €8 per year, the Irish passport fee compares with approximately €9.60 for a French passport, €9.40 per year for a British passport, €9.90 per year for an American passport and €16.70 per year for an Australian passport.

Given that the shortfall in revenue would have to be met by the taxpayer I do not have any plans at this time to reduce the fee charged to older applicants.

Middle East Peace Process

319. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade to provide a report on his recent trip to Israel and Palestine; whom he met and the subjects discussed; his views on the current state of play in the Middle East peace process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18220/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): In the course of my visit, I met with Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Israel, Mr. Benjamin Netanyahu. I also met with the leader of the opposition in the Knesset, Mr. Isaac Herzog, and with the Chair of the Knesset's Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, Mr. Avi Dichter.

In Ramallah, I met with the Palestinian Prime Minister, Mr. Rami Hamdallah, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Riad Malki.

I also met with the Deputy Commissioner of the UN Relief and Works Agency, Ms. Sandra Mitchell, and with the local office of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance.

My visit to the region was planned before the scheduling of the French-hosted conference on the Middle East Peace Process, which took place in Paris on 3 June and in which I participated, but it afforded a timely opportunity to follow up on that meeting.

In all of my political meetings, I made clear my support for the French initiative, which aims to inject new momentum into the stalled peace process through international support and engagement. I said this based on my own assessment of the situation and based also on the experience of the peace process on this island in which international support, from the US and elsewhere, proved invaluable at different times.

The Palestinian side has publicly welcomed this renewed international engagement and I discussed in some detail with Minister Malki his priorities for follow-up to the Paris conference. The Israeli Government have said clearly that they do not see value in this approach and repeated their wish to move to direct negotiations with the Palestinians, without wider international involvement.

In my meetings I made clear the interest of the members of this House and of the Irish public in the Middle East Peace Process.

In my meetings, I also discussed a range of more specific issues, including the expansion of settlements and the threat they pose to the peace process, the serious humanitarian situation in Gaza and the progress that has been made in reconstruction there as well as the limited improvements that have been made in access for goods, and the prospects for Palestinian reconciliation in the talks that have been taking place between Fatah and Hamas.

My visit came shortly after the 8 June terrorist attack in Tel Aviv and the security situation in Israel and in the occupied Palestinian territories was discussed.

The implications of developments in the wider region, in particular the ongoing conflict in Syria, were discussed in some detail. In this context, I also visited the Golan Heights and met with the Irish troops serving with the UN Disengagement Observation Force there. My visit reinforced once again the very urgent need to bring a political resolution to the horrific conflict in Syria which has cruelly ended and shattered so many innocent lives.

The Middle East Peace Process remains stalled. In explicit recognition of the view that the status quo is not sustainable, the French Government have been working to mobilise international engagement to help advance the prospects for peace. This is not an easy task but it deserves and will receive our full support.

Foreign Conflicts

320. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he is aware of reports that Turkish soldiers shot dead eight refugees on the Turkish-Syrian border on 19 June 2016; that it has been reported that 60 civilians have been shot while trying to flee across the border from Syria into Turkey since the beginning of 2016; and if he will urgently raise these cases with his Turkish counterpart. [18221/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I learned with concern of the death of eight refugees on the Turkish-Syrian border on 19 June. I am also aware that the Turkish Foreign Ministry has refuted allegations that the refugees were shot by border guards, saying that Turkish security forces ‘act fully within the legal framework’.

Furthermore, I am aware of recent reports by Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, including testimony from migrants and witnesses that some Turkish border guards have used violence against Syrians.

These reports are very worrying. While Turkey has a right to secure its border with Syria,

all actions on the part of Turkey must be in line with international law.

More broadly, the issue of human rights in Turkey has been raised by the Taoiseach at meetings of the European Council and continues to form an integral part of the country's enlargement process, which we, along with our European partners, keep under close review. At the Foreign Affairs Council on 23 May, I reiterated Ireland's concerns in respect of the rule of law, human rights and freedom of the media in Turkey and the need to hold Turkey to account to the core European values inherent in the accession process.

United Nations

321. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he is aware of the Western European and Others Group's decision to nominate Israel for the chairmanship of the United Nations General Assembly Sixth Committee; if Ireland will back this nomination; and if he is concerned that Israel, a state that continues to breach international law and conventions, international humanitarian law and countless United Nations resolutions, is being nominated to head a legal committee that aims to promote international law and protect basic human rights and freedoms. [18222/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The effectiveness and universality of the United Nations system has been a central principle of Irish foreign policy for very many decades. Successive Irish Governments have accepted that Israel, like any other state, should be able to stand for election to, and occupy positions in, UN structures. On this basis, Ireland has agreed to the inclusion of Israel in relevant Western European and Others Groups (WEOG), in a number of UN fora, so long as they are refused membership of their natural geographic group.

There are very many states within the UN system with which Ireland would have serious human rights concerns.

In the recent election for the Chair of the General Assembly's Sixth (Legal Affairs) Committee, the system of rotation used it meant that it was expected that a WEOG candidate would be elected. Israel was the only member of WEOG to stand for the post and was duly elected to the Chair.

Human Rights

322. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the progress he has made on developing a national plan on business and human rights. [18223/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Ireland's National Plan on Business and Human Rights, when completed, will implement the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights which were endorsed by the UN Human Rights Council in June 2011. The Guiding Principles provide a globally recognised framework which outlines the roles of States and business enterprises in protecting human rights.

On the occasion of Human Rights Day, 10 December 2015, I was pleased to announce the publication of the Working Outline of the National Plan on Business and Human Rights. The Working Outline has provided a basis for further consultations on the development of the National Plan.

During the first quarter of 2016 my Department hosted consultations on the Working Out-

line of Ireland's National Plan which were attended by representatives of Government Departments, civil society, academics and the business community. The Department also issued an invitation for written submissions on the Working Outline; these submissions are available on the Department's website.

The input received through these discussions and submissions is being reviewed in consultation with Government Departments and with a view to producing a first draft of the National Plan.

Foreign Conflicts

323. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he is aware that the Israeli non-governmental organisation B'Tselem has announced that it will no longer refer cases of alleged abuse to the Israeli military for disciplinary action that it has said co-operation with the military investigation and enforcement systems has not achieved justice but lent legitimacy to the occupation regime and helped whitewash it; his views on this development; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18224/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Ireland has long been concerned about the growing frequency of the use of force, including lethal force, by Israeli security forces in non-life-threatening situations in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and by an evident lack of accountability in relation to incidents involving the security forces. The same behaviours are not seen where the security forces are engaged in similar circumstances with Israeli citizens.

We have expressed these concerns both directly to the Israeli authorities and in EU discussions on the situation. Ireland also supports a number of Israeli and Palestinian NGOs active on cases of injustice and abuses. It is a matter of concern that B'Tselem, a highly respected Israeli NGO, has to conclude that it is wasting its time in bringing complaints to the authorities about instances of abuse.

I call clearly for the Israeli authorities to ensure that the same standards of rules of engagement and accountability apply whenever the security forces are engaged with civilians, Israeli or Palestinian.

Trade Missions Data

324. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he is aware of Value Added in Africa's second report on Ireland's trade with its key partner countries in Africa: 2011-2014; that it outlines that Ireland's balance of trade with its key partner countries in Africa has become more unbalanced in Ireland's favour, increasing from 15:1 in Ireland's favour to 60:1; that this is a negative reflection on Ireland's commitment to a policy coherence for development; and his plans to rectify this imbalance. [18225/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am aware of the recent report by *Value Added in Africa* that reviews trade between Ireland and six countries in Africa over the period 2011 to 2014.

The enhancement of economic relations with Africa is a central pillar of my Department's *Africa Strategy*. Two-way trade, in goods and services, between Ireland and Africa increased by about one third between 2010 and 2014, from €3.4 billion to €4.5 billion.

I welcome the growth we are now seeing in Irish exports to Africa. This responds to opportunities in the market and is very much in line with the Government's focus on boosting exports to new and emerging markets.

In focusing on just six African countries where Ireland has bilateral development programmes, the *Value Added in Africa* report presents a very limited aspect of Ireland's trade relations with Africa. It is difficult to draw definitive conclusions from the data provided, given that the amounts involved are relatively low and, as the report states, a single sale can have a significant impact on trade figures.

Total imports by the six African countries referred to grew nearly tenfold over the period analysed. This was largely due to increases in consumption and in external and domestic investment. Imports specifically from Ireland have grown at about half this rate. The growth in exports from the countries to Ireland has been lower, but this is not surprising given the structure of the Irish economy, which means that we are not a direct importer of many of the primary products that our partner countries in Africa produce.

The Irish Government does not bear primary responsibility for boosting African exports to Ireland, and nor should we. However, through the Irish Aid programme, Ireland is contributing to the social and economic development of our partner countries in Africa. This includes efforts to increase production of value-added goods for both domestic consumption and for export. Indeed, Irish Aid provides grant support to *Value Added in Africa* specifically for this purpose. We have also supported the Fairtrade movement in order to increase export opportunities, and to ensure that Irish companies and consumers choose products which deliver a fair return for African producers.

Trade with Ireland alone will never constitute a significant component of the export markets that countries in Africa need. What is needed is the ability to access and export to global scale markets such as the EU, US and emerging markets, and to trade regionally. For this reason, Irish Aid is supporting the efforts of Geneva-based multilateral organisations to build the capacity of developing countries to implement their own trade and investment policies.

We have also carefully monitored the negotiations of Economic Partnership Agreements between the EU and African countries to ensure that they serve the development interests of our African partners. The implementation of these Agreements has the potential to further boost African exports.

In advance of the Africa-Ireland Economic Forum in Dublin earlier this month, my Department hosted a round table to facilitate experience sharing between Ireland's trade and investment promotion experts and their counterparts from African countries. The Forum itself, with 450 participants, also provided a platform to identify and explore opportunities for trade and investment between Ireland and Africa, including in agri-business, energy/cleantech and aviation.

Question No. 325 answered with Question No. 317.

Diplomatic Representation

326. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he plans to open a new Irish consulate general office in Cardiff, Wales; the cost of doing this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18400/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): At present, Ireland's diplomatic network includes 61 Embassies, 7 multilateral missions, 11 Consulates Gen-

eral and one Representative office. The scale and presence of the network is considered by the Government on an ongoing basis.

Any decision to adjust the State's external representation, including the opening of missions, will have regard to national priorities and available financial and staffing resources. A range of factors are taken into account in considering our diplomatic representation overseas, including our national political, economic and trade priorities, as well as the availability of resources. However, current resource constraints do not allow us to have resident representation in all the locations that might objectively justify it having regard to political, economic and trade factors.

Ireland's bilateral relationship with Wales will continue to be fully sustained and promoted through Ireland's Embassy in London, who have prioritised this objective. Work on Ireland's relations with Wales and the Welsh Government will also be carried out in Dublin, including with the Welsh Government representative at the British Embassy. As there are no immediate plans under consideration for the opening of a Consulate General in Cardiff, the cost of doing so does not arise.

Passport Services

327. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if the Passport Office organises a media advertisement campaign to remind persons to check that their passports are still in date prior to booking their holidays abroad; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18401/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Passport Service takes every opportunity to remind citizens to check their passport validity including through messaging on the Department's website, via social media and also as part of media campaigns such as that for the launch of the Passport Card. In briefing to Members of the Oireachtas I regularly emphasise the need for citizens to apply at least six weeks in advance of travel and to check passport validity before holidays are booked. The assistance of Members in communicating these messages to constituents is appreciated.

In addition to constant messaging on the importance of checking passport expiry dates before travelling, the Passport Service offers a passport reminder service to customers. The reminder service, which can be accessed via the Passport Service web pages at *www.passport.ie*, automatically sends an email both three months and six months before a passport is due to expire to those who register. Registration simply requires passport holders to record their name, email address and expiry date of the passport.

It is envisaged as part of the future online application process for passport renewals for adults (scheduled to launch in early 2017) that reminder notifications will automatically be sent to passport holders well in advance of their renewal date.

Human Rights Cases

328. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will raise with the authorities in Scotland the case of a person (details supplied) who has been assaulted and who has been refused medical treatment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18512/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): My Department is

aware of the case of this Irish citizen, including with regard to recent developments. The Consulate General in Edinburgh has followed up on this matter and is ready to offer all appropriate assistance. As is the case with any imprisoned Irish citizen abroad, any concern related to ill-treatment is treated with the utmost seriousness.

Office of Public Works Properties

329. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the operational status of Barryscourt Castle in Carrigtwohill, County Cork which is in the ownership of the Office of Public Works, including when it will re-open to the public. [17958/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán Canney): The electrical installations and wiring in Barryscourt Castle have been found to be non-compliant with current regulations and constitute a danger to life for occupants and visitors. To avoid the danger of fire or electric shock, the decision was made to close the Castle until remedial works could be carried out.

The dangerous state of the electrical system is made considerably worse by a significant water ingress problem with severe damp problems in walls and roofs throughout large parts of the structure. The electrical system cannot be replaced until the water ingress problem is first dealt with and this must therefore be the priority. A major project to address this is therefore currently being undertaken. This will involve scaffolding the building in sections, undertaking detailed inspections at a high level to assess fabric condition, re-pointing the walls as necessary, removing the scaffolding to a new section and recommencing the process. This work will be carried out by skilled staff from the OPW National Monuments Service and the first phase of scaffolding the building is currently underway.

Due to the complexity of the work, which can only be carried out on a seasonal basis, the shortage of skilled labour resources within the OPW and the need to at times divert these resources to other urgent/emergency works within the Heritage estate, it is difficult to predict with certainty how long this element of the project will take. However, it is intended that works will continue over the next two years while, concurrently, a new electrical system is designed and procured, ready to be installed by a suitably qualified contractor.

It is hoped that Barryscourt Castle will re-open to the public in about 2 years time.

Coastal Protection

330. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of an application for funding by an organisation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17984/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán Canney): I am advised by the Commissioners of Public Works that no application under the Office of Public Works' (OPW) Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme has been submitted by Clare County Council for the area mentioned in this question. The local authority may proceed to engage consultants using its own resources.

The flood risk in Springfield, Clonlara is being assessed under the OPW's Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) Programme. The CFRAM Programme is the core strategy for addressing significant flood risks nationally. Springfield, Clonlara is one of

66 Areas for Further Assessment (AFA's) in the Shannon River Basin District being assessed under the Shannon CFRAM study. The Programme, which is being undertaken by engineering consultants on behalf of the OPW working in partnership with the local authorities, involves the production of predictive flood mapping for each location, the development of preliminary flood risk management options and the production of flood risk management plans.

Under the Shannon CFRAM Study, draft predictive flood maps have been produced and were the subject of a Public Consultation Day in Springfield on 19th November, 2014. Also on 2nd December, 2015 a further event was held to present and discuss preliminary options to manage the assessed flood risks in the Springfield AFA. The draft maps are now being finalised following the conclusion of the national statutory public consultation process on 23rd December, 2015.

Following the finalisation of the flood mapping and the identification of preliminary flood risk management options, the final output from this important project will be integrated Flood Risk Management Plans containing specific measures that can address in a comprehensive and sustainable way the significant flood risks identified along the Shannon River Basin District. The draft Plans will include a prioritised list of measures to address flood risk in an environmentally sustainable and cost effective manner. These Plans will be available for public consultation from mid 2016.

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

The Office of Public Works operates a Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme. This administrative Scheme's eligibility criteria, including a requirement that any measures are cost beneficial are published on the OPW website, <http://www.opw.ie/en/floodriskmanagement/operations/minorfloodworkscoastalprotectionscheme/>. It is not available for repair of damaged infrastructure or for maintenance of existing flood defence or coastal protection assets. It is open to the Council to submit a funding application under the Scheme. Any application received will be considered in accordance with the scheme eligibility criteria and having regard to the overall availability of resources for flood risk management and the Flood Risk Management Plan developed under the CFRAM programme for the area.

Flood Relief Schemes Status

331. **Deputy John Paul Phelan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of the development of the flood relief measures at Thomastown, Graiguenamanagh and Inistioge in County Kilkenny; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17986/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán Canney): Kilkenny County Council (KCC), with funding from the Office of Public Works (OPW) has procured consultants to carry out a pilot project on improving flood resilience in Thomastown and Graiguenamanagh. The study aims to investigate how a community based response to flood events can be facilitated by improving the resilience and preparedness of the local community to deal with flood events and involves surveying properties to assess the potential for appropriate individual property protection (IPP) options for the community.

Inistioge is not included in the pilot study but additional survey work is to be carried out by the consultants in the town during the period of the study in order to gather data on the flood event of December 2015. This will help to inform the development of all possible feasible flood

defence options for Inistioge which along with Thomastown, Graiguenamanagh is an ongoing part of the Catchment Flood Risk and Management (CFRAM) process.

The CFRAM process is the core strategy for addressing the significant flood risks nationally. Thomastown, Graiguenamanagh and Inistioge are three of 40 Areas for Further Assessment (AFAs) in the South East River Basin District being assessed under the South East CFRAM study. The Programme, which is being undertaken by engineering consultants on behalf of the OPW working in partnership with the local authorities, involves the production of predictive flood mapping for each location, the development of preliminary flood risk management options and the production of flood risk management plans.

Under the South East CFRAM Study, draft predictive flood maps have been produced and were the subject of Public Consultation Days in Graiguenamanagh and Inistioge on 3rd March, 2015 and in Thomastown on 23rd March, 2015. In addition, Public Consultation Days were held in Graiguenamanagh and Inistioge on 1st March, 2016 and in Thomastown on 29th February, 2016 to present and discuss preliminary options to manage the assessed flood risks in these AFAs. The draft maps are now being finalised following the conclusion of the national statutory public consultation process on 23rd December, 2015.

Following the finalisation of the flood mapping and the identification of preliminary flood risk management options, the final output from this important project will be integrated Flood Risk Management Plans containing specific measures that can address in a comprehensive and sustainable way the significant flood risks identified along the South East River Basin District. The draft Plans will include a prioritised list of measures to address flood risk in an environmentally sustainable and cost effective manner. These Plans will be available for public consultation later in 2016.

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

Public Sector Pensions Expenditure

332. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the cost of combining the public service pension reduction amendments for 2017 and 2018 into a one year adjustment for retired public service pensioners, by gross pension income band (details supplied), by the number of cases in each band, in tabular form. [18041/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As provided for under the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (FEMPI) Act 2015, a significant phased amelioration of the cuts to public service pensions imposed by the Public Service Pension Reduction (PSPR) is now under way.

On 1 January 2016, the first phase of this amelioration took place by way of increases in the exemption thresholds for PSPR application. These exemption threshold increases fully removed PSPR from a significant number of pensions with relatively lower values, while those pensions which continue to be impacted by PSPR received a boost of €400 per year.

On 1 January 2017, the second phase of PSPR amelioration, acting principally via further exemption threshold increases, will fully remove PSPR from another significant tranche of public service pensioners, while at the same time boosting those pensions which remain affected by PSPR by €500 per year.

On 1 January 2018, the third phase of PSPR amelioration will ensure that all PSPR-impacted pensions with values up to €34,132 will be fully restored, meaning that PSPR will no longer affect such pensions, while those pensions which continue to be impacted by PSPR will get a boost of, in most cases, €780 per year.

This phased pension restoration across the public service under FEMPI 2015 will cost an estimated €90 million on an annual basis when fully implemented from 2018 with the pension restoration occurring on 1 January 2017 costing an estimated €30 million annually, while the pension restoration occurring on 1 January 2018 will cost a further estimated €30 million annually.

Details of the PSPR impositions and FEMPI 2015 amelioration impacts on individual pensions by reference to pension income bands in each of the years 2016, 2017 and 2018 are contained in tabular format in my reply to Question No. 334 on 21 June 2016 while available data in relation to numbers of pensioners by pension income band is set out in the reply to Question No. 246 of 17 November 2015.

Public Sector Staff Recruitment

333. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the formula he uses to calculate the cost of staff recruitment to the public service with regard to new entrants coming in to address additional capacity and staff turnover via retirements from 1 Jan 2017 onwards; and the cost of recruiting new entrants to meet additional capacity and staff turnover, via retirements, for each of the years 2016 to 2018 in tabular form. [18045/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Deputy will recall that at the time of the Expenditure Statement in October 2014 an end to the Moratorium on recruitment and promotion in the public service was announced, to be replaced with new delegated management arrangements to be phased in during 2015 and 2016. These arrangements, which now apply to most Government departments give public service managers the means to respond to service needs as they arise, including considerable flexibility to make staffing and service level delivery decisions at the front line consistent with the resources allocated to pay budgets.

The introduction of the delegated staffing arrangements from 2015, means it is now a matter for line Departments to manage their staffing resources, including recruitment, subject to them remaining within their pay bill ceiling. Each Department can, in turn, determine the suitability of introducing similar arrangements for agencies and offices under its remit.

These new arrangements represent a significant shift away from centralised control and allow for greater flexibility in the management of public service staffing resources. The new approach has also facilitated the introduction of a targeted programme of recruitment into the civil service - my area of direct responsibility in terms of public service employment overall - to address service needs and a shortfall in key skills.

As far as the civil service is concerned significant recruitment has already occurred. At this stage, in advance of the outcome of various competitions, it is not possible to be definitive about actual numbers that will be recruited to the civil service in the course of 2016 or other years. These will be determined by a number of factors including workforce planning, retirement rates and Departments' deciding on their optimal grade mix over the period ahead, with reference to their pay budgets.

As the Deputy will be aware, I have responsibility for the Civil Service while my other Min-

isterial colleagues have responsibility for other parts of the Public Service.

Office of Public Works Projects

334. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform to instruct the Office of Public Works to carry out a review of an application from a local authority to build a retaining wall (details supplied); the reason the application was refused in the first instance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18063/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán Canney): I am advised by the Commissioners of Public Works that an application under the Office of Public Works' (OPW) Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme was submitted by Donegal County Council in January 2016 for a project to build an impermeable concrete wall at Coolyslin, Castlefinn, County Donegal. This application did not satisfy the criterion, published on the OPW website, that any measure proposed must be a cost beneficial solution.

A revised application was received in April 2016 which is currently being assessed.

Public Sector Staff

335. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the sections of Acts that would need to be amended to remove the power of Ministers or other bodies that may set terms and conditions of employment of public servants and that may be exercised to reduce the remuneration or increase the working time of those public servants; the instances where the relevant sections have been used to set terms and conditions of employment of public servants and that may be exercised to reduce the remuneration or increase the working time of those public servants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18066/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I believe the legislative provision referred to in the question by the Deputy relates to Section 2B (inserted by section 2 of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2013) of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (No. 2) Act 2009. This provision was repealed under section 86(3) of the Workplace Relations Act 2015.

Flood Relief Schemes

336. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his views on the case of a person (details supplied) whose house was flooded in December 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18068/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán Canney): The River Flesk does not form part of any Arterial Drainage Scheme which would fall under the remit of the Office of Public Works (OPW) under the 1945 Arterial Drainage Act. The OPW therefore has no responsibility for the maintenance of this river.

Local flooding issues are a matter, in the first instance, for each Local Authority to investigate and address, and Kerry County Council may carry out flood mitigation works using its own resources. I note from the information supplied by the Deputy that the home owner has recently sought assistance from the Council in the matter. It is open to the Council to submit a funding

application to OPW under the Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme. This administrative Scheme's eligibility criteria, including a requirement that any measures are cost beneficial are published on the OPW website, www.opw.ie. Any application received will be considered in accordance with the overall availability of resources for flood risk management and the scheme's eligibility criteria.

Glenflesk village is one of 27 locations in the South West River Basin District and 300 locations nationwide that are being assessed under the OPW's Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) Programme, the purpose of which is to implement the EU Floods Directive and national flood policy. This Programme involves the production of predictive flood mapping for each location, the development of preliminary flood risk management options and the production of flood risk management plans. Under the South Western CFRAM Study, draft predictive flood maps for Glenflesk have been produced and were the subject of a Public Consultation Day in Glenflesk on 21 October 2014. A further Public Consultation Day was held in Glenflesk on 8th December, 2015 to present and discuss preliminary options to manage the significant flood risks.

The draft flood mapping is now being finalised following completion of the national statutory public consultation on 23rd December, 2015. Following finalisation of the mapping and the identification of flood risk management options, the final output from this important project will be integrated Flood Risk Management Plans containing specific measures to address in a comprehensive and sustainable way the significant flood risks identified. The draft Plans are scheduled to be made available for public consultation from mid-2016. Following the public consultation process the finalised Plans will include a prioritised list of measures, both structural and non-structural, to address flood risk in an environmentally sustainable and cost effective manner.

National Monuments

337. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of access to a national monument (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18132/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán Canney): It is assumed that the Deputy is referring to Ballynavenooragh Stone Fort in Ballydavid Co. Kerry.

Given its location and relative inaccessibility, this National Monument would benefit from improved road and car parking provision. However, neither the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht nor the Office of Public Works owns any suitable land in the area for this purpose. There is however excellent pedestrian access to the fort and a number of visitors find their way to it, notwithstanding the difficulties.

Public Sector Staff Remuneration

338. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the formula used by his Department to calculate the cost of public sector staff recruitment if the entry level pay rate was restored to the 2010 rate with regard to new entrants coming in to address additional capacity and staff turnover via retirements from 1 January 2017 onwards; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18135/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Expenditure Statement in October 2014 announced an end to the Moratorium on recruitment and promotion in the public service, to be replaced with new delegated management arrangements to be phased in during 2015 and 2016. These arrangements, which now apply to most Government departments give public service managers the means to respond to service needs arising through staff retirements etc. as they arise, including considerable flexibility to make staffing and service level delivery decisions at the front line consistent with the resources allocated to pay budgets.

The introduction of the delegated staffing arrangements from 2015, means it is now a matter for line Departments to manage their staffing resources, including recruitment, subject to them remaining within their pay bill ceiling. Each Department can, in turn, determine the suitability of introducing similar arrangements for agencies and offices under its remit.

These new arrangements represent a significant shift away from centralised control and allow for greater flexibility in the management of public service staffing resources.

The issue of addressing the difference in incremental salary scales between those public servants, who entered public service employment since 2011 and those who entered before that date was addressed with the relevant union interests under the provisions of the Haddington Road Agreement (HRA). Any further consideration of remuneration adjustment for any group of public servants, including issues relating to more recently recruited public servants, will fall to be examined within the provisions of the Public Service Stability Agreement 2013-2018 (Lansdowne Road Agreement). It will also of course have to comply with the terms of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Acts 2009-2015 (FEMPI), as well as its affordability being underpinned through delivering enhanced work place practices and productivity.

Coastal Protection

339. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the Office of Public Works will provide maps of the parts of Kilgarrylander, classified as flood plain or at flood risk from the River Maine under the Irish coastal protection strategy in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18141/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán Canney): Details of the Irish Coastal Protection Strategy Study, including relevant maps are available on the OPW website at <http://www.opw.ie/en/floodriskmanagement/floodanderosion-mapping/icpss/>.

Public Sector Pensions

340. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the progress the high level forum has made to date and if he envisages a final solution to issues raised with regard to the community and voluntary sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18182/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The issues referred to in the Deputy's question concern Community and Employment Supervisors and Assistant Supervisors who are seeking through their union representatives the allocation of Exchequer funding to implement a Labour Court recommendation relating to the provision of a

pension scheme dating back to 2008. In this regard the position has been that it is not possible for the State to provide funding for such a scheme to employees of private companies notwithstanding the position that those companies are or were reliant on State funding.

These issues have, however, remained under review and my predecessor held a meeting with the relevant trade unions in relation to the matter. The Community Sector High Level Forum has been reconvened in order to examine the matter fully, having regard to the implications for costs and precedent.

Departmental Staff Recruitment

341. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if it is permissible for a county councillor to work as a clerical officer in the Civil Service. [18197/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Civil Service Code of Standards and Behaviour sets out the standards required of civil servants in carrying out their work and applies to all civil servants. These standards of behaviour and values support a high quality public service, based on high levels of personal performance and responsibility. The standards which underpin the general ethos of the Civil Service also include impartiality. The Code is available here: <http://www.sipo.gov.ie/en/Codes-of-Conduct/Civil-Servants/Civil-Service-Code-of-Standards.pdf>.

Specifically in relation to political impartiality, the Code states that Civil servants in the performance of their duties:

(a) must conscientiously serve the duly elected Government of the day, the other institutions of State and the public;

(b) must advise and implement policy impartially and, in particular, be conscious of the need to maintain the independence necessary to give any future Minister or Government confidence in their integrity

and

(c) should not display partiality whether as a result of personal or family ties or otherwise.

To ensure public confidence in the political impartiality of the Civil Service restrictions have traditionally been imposed on civil servants engaging in political activity. These restrictions are set out in Circular 9/2009 available here: <http://circulars.gov.ie/pdf/circular/finance/2009/09.pdf>.

However, the Code permits members of the clerical grades in the Civil Service, and non-industrial civil servants in grades with salary maximum equal to or below the Clerical Officer maximum, to apply to their Department/Office for permission to engage in politics and to stand for local election. Officers employed on particular types of work may, at the discretion of Departmental management, have their applications refused.

Accordingly, if a County Councillor was successful in the recruitment process for a Clerical Officer position in the Civil Service, the question of his/her continued involvement in politics would be a matter for the Department/Office to which he/she was assigned.

Flood Relief Schemes Status

342. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of a flood relief scheme (details supplied); the reason this project has been delayed; when these matters will be addressed; when this scheme will move to tender and construction phases; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18216/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán Canney): The statutory Public Exhibition of the River Mall (Templemore) Flood Relief Scheme took place in March/April of 2015. Following this, work on finalising the detailed design of the scheme has been ongoing. This has involved necessary consultations with relevant stakeholders. The Office of Public Works (OPW) is working to progress the scheme as quickly as possible and aims to submit the scheme to the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform for Confirmation (approval) shortly. Allowing for the required independent review by the Minister of the scheme's Environmental Impact Statement, the OPW would anticipate some preliminary site clearance and associated works commencing in late 2016. A tender competition for a main works contractor will not be necessary as the works will be undertaken by the OPW's direct labour force.

Public Sector Staff Expenses

343. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the average annual cost of the mileage reimbursement scheme within the public service in each of the years 2011 to 2015 and 2016 to date in tabular form. [18247/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): My Department does not normally collect information on overall figures for travel in the Public Service. However, if the Deputy wishes to consult the response given to PQ No. 102, this sets out the most recent estimated figures on this matter.

Ministerial Correspondence

344. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he has received correspondence from a person (details supplied); if he has examined the issue raised; his views on this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18391/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I can confirm that correspondence has been received from this company.

Having reviewed the issues raised, I am satisfied that the Office of Government Procurement ("OGP") tender process was robust, transparent and open and that it acted in line with Circular 10/14 Initiatives to assist SMEs in Public Procurement (April 2014) and the appropriate Directives and Regulations. The tender process enabled participation by all potential tenderers, whilst being mindful of the OGP's core purpose of delivering sustainable value for the taxpayer.

Public Sector Staff Redeployment

345. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of a person who wishes to transfer within the public service (details supplied); the arrangements in place for transfers and swaps; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18434/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, transfers for Clerical Officer and Staff Officer grades, which are represented by the Civil Public & Services Union, can be arranged in accordance with formal procedures which were agreed with the Staff Side at General Council under the Conciliation and Arbitration Scheme for the Civil Service. Agreements were reached for Clerical Officers in 1978 and Staff Officers in 2001.

This formal Central Transfer Scheme provides for cross-Departmental transfer arrangements and is a mechanism for filling vacancies in provincial locations at the agreed grades.

Information on possible or actual transfers under this scheme are not held centrally by my Department.

Interdepartmental transfers between other grades in the Civil Service can be arranged on an informal head-to-head basis. Such transfers are arranged between the officers seeking to move and the relevant Personnel Units and require the agreement of both Personnel Officers.

Action 15 of the Civil Service Renewal Plan has a commitment to develop a mobility scheme both within the civil service and the wider public service. Work on this mobility programme is ongoing with the Civil Service Management Board, Departments and staff interests. It is not possible at this stage to give a definite date when such a scheme may be introduced.

Departmental Staff Promotions

346. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans regarding the internal promotion mechanism in Departments, the filling of vacancies and the issue in respect of external competition; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18435/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, in general, promotion within the Irish Civil Service takes place by way of

- competitions confined to particular Departments (Internal promotion) or
- competitions open to candidates from all Departments (Interdepartmental promotion) or
- open competitions to all qualifying candidates including members of the public.

Candidates who are successful in all competitions are ranked in order of merit and are placed on panels to await appointment when and if a vacancy arises. Promotions are made on the basis of an agreed method of sequences for promotion and recruitment. Sequences vary for each grade and usually involve a combination of open, Interdepartmental and Internal panels.

Increasingly the policy has been for more open recruitment. In 2015 the Civil Service Arbitration Board agreed to more open recruitment for the Assistant Principal and Principal Officer grades.

More open recruitment and more competitive promotion procedures are needed as part of the continued modernisation of the Civil Service so that it can recruit and promote the staff required to advise the Government and implement its policies in an increasingly complex and fast-changing society and economy.

The rationale underpinning this policy is to allow the Civil Service attract staff with the wide range of skills and experience needed in a modern public administration, to actively manage the challenges of an ageing workforce, to ensure that all appointments in the Civil Service

draw on the widest possible pool of available talent, and to provide more open development opportunities for all staff.

Office of Public Works Projects

347. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the progress to date and when works on a castle (details supplied) will be completed. [18543/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán Canney): Conservation works are ongoing at Askeaton Castle and involve the stabilisation and repair of the Castle and the Hellfire Club, an early 17th century building. This is a long-term, complex project and certain works require input from marine engineers as part of the structure is in the river. To date, the curtain wall of the castle has been conserved and repaired. The first phase of works to the Constable Tower, which necessitated a major structural intervention, has been completed, holding works have been undertaken in the Hellfire Club and remedial works to the property which abuts the road and which was recently acquired by the State have been effected. Given the complexity of the works and the delicate nature of the conservation tasks involved, it is not possible to estimate the completion date.

Conscious of the long term nature of the works the Office of Public Works has worked closely with the Askeaton Civic Trust Ltd. in order to facilitate access to the site while works are ongoing. A member of the Trust has been given permission to bring tour groups to Askeaton Castle on weekends during the summer months and the building holidays at the end July/start August. This access appears to satisfy the vast majority of those who wish to visit the site.

Legislative Measures

348. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the legislation in place and the body responsible for the preservation and ongoing maintenance of listed and preserved buildings; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17959/16]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My role, as Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, with regard to the protection and management of our architectural heritage, is set out in the provisions of relevant legislation, as is the role of local authorities. Part IV of the Planning and Development Act 2000 provides for the protection of architectural heritage and gives local planning authorities primary responsibility to identify and protect architectural heritage by including structures on the Record of Protected Structures. The making of an addition to, or a deletion from, the Record of Protected Structures is a reserved function of the relevant planning authority.

A number of State financial supports provide for the conservation and preservation of heritage structures in general.

Financial support is being provided by my Department through a number of structured schemes for the conservation and protection of heritage buildings. My Department itself operates a Structures at Risk Fund to enable conservation works to heritage structures, in both private and public ownership, that are protected under the Planning and Development Acts and are deemed to be at significant risk of deterioration.

This fund, which has an allocation of over €900,000 in 2016, is administered through the local authorities and seeks to encourage the regeneration and reuse of heritage properties and to

help to secure the preservation of protected structures which might otherwise be lost. Applications for this scheme have now closed for 2016, and recommended projects have been recently announced.

I also launched a new €2 million scheme - the Built Heritage Investment Scheme - for the repair and conservation of protected structures on 21 October 2015. This scheme will operate in 2016, via the local authorities, on the same model as the very successful Built Heritage Jobs Leverage Scheme, which ran in 2014. It is expected to support a significant number of projects across the country and to create employment in the conservation and construction industries, while helping to regenerate urban and rural areas. The scheme for this year is now fully allocated.

The Heritage Council, which my Department funds, also provides grants for the protection and preservation of the built heritage. For 2016, the Council is administering a community based heritage grants scheme available for projects that contributed to particular heritage themes, of which further details can be found at www.heritagecouncil.ie.

Leader Programmes Funding

349. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the status of an issue regarding Leader funding; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17968/16]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department issued Funding Agreements for the delivery of the LEADER programme to the first 18 Local Action Groups in the week beginning 20 June 2016. Applications for LEADER funding can commence in these areas from 8 July, provided that the Funding Agreement has been signed by the respective Local Action Groups. Contracts will issue in each of the remaining 10 sub-regional areas as the strategy selection process is concluded. Additional information has been requested by the Independent Selection Committee as regards a number of the strategies in these 10 regions.

The final draft of the LEADER Operating Rules was circulated to all Local Action Groups on 20 June 2016. The official consolidated version of the Operating Rules, which will include some additional appendices, will be available upon the launch of the LEADER programme, which is expected to take place in early July.

Ulster Canal Restoration Project

350. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the status of works to date and plans for progressing the restoration of the Ulster Canal in 2016; the action she has taken and will take to make this a live project, and at the earliest possible time, along the entirety of the already approved section, Lough Erne to Clones; the prospect of having the Lough Neagh to Benburb section commenced in the next 12 months; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18085/16]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Government approval to restore a 2.5 km stretch of the Ulster Canal from the Shannon-Erne Waterway to the International Scout Centre at Castle Saunderson, Co. Cavan was granted on 24 February 2015. The project, which comprises three work phases, is being undertaken by Waterways Ireland.

Phase 1, the site investigation work, has been completed. I have been informed by Waterways Ireland that Phase 2, the River Finn dredging works, was delayed due to a contractual dispute. Works to complete this phase will recommence shortly and it is anticipated that Phase 3, the construction of a new bridge at Derrykerrib, will commence in 2017.

The approval by the North-South Ministerial Council in July 2007 of restoration works to the Ulster Canal related to the 13 km section of the canal between Clones and Upper Lough Erne. The restoration of the Lough Neagh to Benburb section of the canal was not included in that decision.

Arts Funding

351. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will increase the current spend of 0.11% of gross domestic product, GDP on culture and arts to the European average of 0.6% of GDP; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18359/16]

357. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her objectives for arts funding in the coming years; the specific commitments that are in the programme for Government; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18365/16]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 351 and 357 together.

The Programme for a Partnership Government contains a very important commitment to work to progressively increase funding to the arts, including the Arts Council and the Irish Film Board, as the economy continues to improve.

I can assure the Deputy that I will be engaging with my colleagues in Government and with the Oireachtas to seek to advance this commitment in the context of the forthcoming estimates and budgetary processes.

In terms of the particular level of spending referenced, it should be noted that the figures referred to come from a Council of Europe project called *Compendium-Cultural Policies and Trends in Europe*. I understand that many European countries are not included in the figures, including ten EU Member States. The data for the *Compendium* project are provided by independent researchers and it is not a standardised system for collection of statistics.

I further understand that the *Compendium* itself warns that data provided by the researchers are not comparable across countries because each researcher includes different elements in the definition of culture and these elements are reflected in the figures for public expenditure. Figures can also include some, or all, of national, regional or local expenditure. Expenditure on the arts in Ireland comes from multiple sources, both public and private. I understand that the CSO does not produce national statistics that capture the totality of this expenditure as a percentage of GDP.

The issue of a definition of culture and of capturing public expenditure on culture is one which was discussed in the public consultation process that was held for the purpose of developing Ireland's first national cultural policy, *Culture 2025*, and I consider that further research on this issue is warranted in that context.

Cultural Policy

352. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht when she will publish the Culture 2025 strategy document; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18360/16]

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 Kilmainham.

Work by my Department, the Steering Group and a wider Expert Committee continued on the document in early 2016 and is currently ongoing. The 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. As I have stated previously, this first such policy will be a living document and will form the basis of an ongoing dialogue with all who are interested in cultural policy. My Department is continuing to consider inputs on the draft document from the Steering and Expert Groups which I established and I expect to forward a draft for consideration to the relevant Oireachtas Committee shortly.

Arts Funding

353. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the breakdown of all funding allocated to the arts in 2015 by specific category, such as film and theatre. [18361/16]

354. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the funding provided to each local authority for the arts for 2015. [18362/16]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 353 and 354 together.

Details of the funding allocations made to my Department are published each year in the Revised Estimates Volume with the outturn published in the annual Appropriation Account. These publications are available on the website of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and on the website of the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General.

Most of my Department's arts and culture budget is allocated to the agencies under its remit. Within these allocations, the Arts Council is the primary State agency for funding the arts, receiving €58.6 million in 2015. The Council has published details of how that funding was allocated at www.artscouncil.ie/Who_we_funded/.

Funding for film is channelled through the Irish Film Board. The Board was provided with an allocation of €14.5m in 2016 and details of supports provided for projects can be found at www.filmboard.ie.

Direct funding from my Department for arts relates primarily to capital funding for individual projects, as well as the promotion of Irish arts and culture abroad through Culture Ireland. A large element of the Commemorations budget of my Department has also supported a significant number of artistic and cultural events as part of the *Ireland 2016 Centenary Programme*. A small number of other initiatives are also funded directly by my Department, including in relation to supports for certain cultural organisations or specific cultural events. Details of this expenditure are published on my Department's website at www.ahg.gov.ie.

Capital Expenditure Programme

355. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht to provide an update on funding allocations from the 2015 €9 million investment scheme for arts and cultural centres including which arts and cultural centres will be upgraded. [18363/16]

356. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if additional arts funding is being made available as part of the capital investment framework 2016-2021. [18364/16]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 355 and 356 together.

In terms of capital investment in the arts, I announced a new €9 million investment scheme for arts and cultural centres to run over the next three years, focused on upgrading the existing stock of such centres around the country. The funding is being made available as part of the Government's Capital Investment Framework 2016-2021. It is my priority to target investment at existing facilities, to bring the current stock of arts centres up to standard. My Department is finalising the guidelines and application forms in relation to the scheme which I intend to open for applications very shortly.

In addition there are a number of significant capital projects underway for the National Cultural Institutions, including:

- **The National Gallery of Ireland:** A major renovation project is ongoing on the historic Dargan and Milltown wings of the gallery. This work is nearing completion and it is hoped that they will reopen to the public in Q1 2017. This is expected to cost in the order of €33m.

- **The National Archives:** Phase one of a building development plan for the Archives Bishop Street headquarters is due to go to tender shortly. This first phase will cost approximately €8m and will significantly increase the Archives storage capacity in the Bishop Street premises.

- **The National Library of Ireland:** I announced last year a €10m investment in the National Library's historic Kildare Street building. The OPW are currently working with the NLI and my Department to develop a design for the building, which will enhance the storage facilities and public spaces in the building.

The capital needs of other national cultural institutions are also being considered, and will be prioritised as resources permit.

Question No. 357 answered with Question No. 351.

Arts Council Funding

358. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the funding in the years 2014 to 2015 and 2015 to 2016 that the Arts Council allocated to projects in County Louth. [18366/16]

359. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the funding allocations that were made by the Arts Council to each county on a per capita basis in the years 2014 to 2015 and 2015 to 2016. [18367/16]

361. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht to request the Arts Council, An Chomhairle Ealaíon, to provide details of the number of local

authorities which have published an arts plan or a cultural strategy within the past five years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18404/16]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 358, 359 and 361 together.

Primary responsibility for the support and promotion of the arts at all levels is devolved to the Arts Council. The Arts Council operates under the provisions of the Arts Act 2003, which provides, *inter alia*, that the Council is independent in the performance of its functions and in funding the arts.

The Arts Council publishes significant information on its website, including details of funding awards and the reasons for those awards, at *www.artscouncil.ie*.

The publication of individual local authority arts plans is a matter for the local authorities themselves.

In terms of specific matters referred to in the Questions, I have asked the Arts Council to communicate with the Deputies directly.

Departmental Schemes

360. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the schemes her Department has rolled out in recent years; her plans to encourage and reward farmers to allow walking trails on their land; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18369/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Michael Ring): My Department administers the Walks Scheme, which is a trail maintenance scheme where landholders receive modest payments to maintain sections of National Way Marked Ways and other priority walks that traverse their lands.

The number of participants on the Walks Scheme currently stands at 1,908, covering a total of 39 trails. Payments to participants on the Scheme will be in the region of €1.8m for 2016.

Due to budgetary constraints, it has not been possible to bring additional trails onto the existing Walks Scheme since December 2010. There is a commitment in *A Programme for a Partnership Government* to expand the Walks Scheme and plans in that regard will be developed during 2016, with a view to rolling out an expanded scheme in 2017, subject to available funding.

The National Trails Office of Sport Ireland maintains a register of trails across the country and currently has 886 trails listed. Officials from my Department, in association with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, are exploring the possible designation of such walkways under the Basic Payments Scheme, including any possible implementation issues for farmers.

Question No. 361 answered with Question No. 358.

Hospital Consultant Contracts

362. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health his proposals to ensure that adequate resources are provided to continue the present level of services for the centre of ex-

cellence for sarcoma in St. Vincent's Hospital, Dublin; if he is aware of the concerns of the Sarcoma Action Group; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18581/16]

363. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health why the only specialised sarcoma consultant here is due to have their contract terminated on 30 June 2016; the contingency plans the Minister has put in place to look after the 300 patients currently under the care of this consultant; the person who will now be responsible for this national centre of excellence for sarcoma; his plans to deal with the 200 to 250 sarcoma cases that will present in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18641/16]

388. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health why St. Vincent's Hospital in Dublin 4 is dispensing with the services of a person (details supplied). [18053/16]

390. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health if he is aware of the end of a contract in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will investigate a new contract. [18075/16]

430. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if he will facilitate a group (details supplied) in meeting the chief executive officer of St. Vincent's Hospital to discuss their concerns regarding the staffing situation for those in need of sarcoma treatment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18326/16]

435. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health why the only specialised sarcoma consultant (details supplied) is being let go; the qualifications of the person who will look after this consultant's 300-odd patients; the person who will be responsible for the national centre of excellence for sarcoma based in St. Vincent's Hospital in Dublin 4; how he proposes to deal with future cases of sarcoma; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18380/16]

445. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if he will inquire into the termination of a contract (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18437/16]

451. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Health the efforts he is making to convince St. Vincent's Hospital that the specialist in the treatment of sarcoma be retained; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18523/16]

452. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the reason that the sole sarcoma specialist position is being discontinued from the end of the month at St. Vincent's Hospital resulting in the lack of a specialist in this area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18525/16]

453. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Health if he is aware that the only consultant who specialises in the treatment of sarcoma here is not having her contract renewed in St. Vincent's Hospital; his views that this situation will not properly provide for the treatment of sarcoma patients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18526/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 362, 363, 388, 390, 430, 435, 445 and 451 to 453, inclusive, together.

Services for patients with sarcoma are provided in St. Vincent's University Hospital and in Cork University Hospital. Both hospitals are Designated Cancer Centres and have an extensive range of multi-disciplinary services and expert clinical advice available to them.

St Vincent's University Hospital has provided highly specialised and individualised treatment to sarcoma sufferers for a number of years. St. Vincent's has access to all of the relevant specialties, including surgery, medical oncology, radiation oncology, radiology and pathology

and is the largest provider of surgical procedures for soft tissue sarcomas in the country.

A National Clinical Lead in Soft Tissue Sarcomas has been appointed to oversee the services for patients with sarcomas. Irish patients with sarcoma have their cases presented and discussed at one of the two sarcoma multi-disciplinary teams. Members of these teams also have links with European specialists in sarcoma.

A Consultant Medical Oncologist was employed by St. Vincent's hospital on a locum contract to provide cover for another Consultant Medical Oncologists who had taken on the role as Chair of Irish Clinical Oncology Research Group. This Consultant has now returned to his post at the hospital.

I am assured by the HSE that care for patients requiring treatment for sarcoma cancer will continue to receive high quality care at St. Vincent's Hospital and that their management will be provided by one of the hospital's full-time oncologists.

Meanwhile, consideration is also being given to appointing a permanent Consultant Medical Oncologist with a special interest in the area of sarcoma to meet demand at St. Vincent's University Hospital. Such an appointment would be advertised and the appointment process would be conducted in the normal way.

Services for People with Disabilities

364. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Health to examine the case of persons (details supplied); if he will schedule a new assessment of need with urgency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17928/16]

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

Health Services Provision

365. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive an appointment with a specialist; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17930/16]

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

National Lottery Funding Applications

366. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an application by an organisation (details supplied) for lottery funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17934/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My Department administers a National Lottery Discretionary Fund from which once-off grants are paid to community and voluntary organisations providing a range of health related services. Funding in 2016 amounts to €3.286m.

My Department has received a large number of applications under the National Lottery Discretionary Fund which are currently being processed. However, there is no record of having received an application from the organisation referred to by the Deputy.

I have asked the HSE to check if it has received a lottery application from the organisation concerned and to respond directly to the Deputy.

Home Care Packages

367. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Health why he declined an application by a person (details supplied) under the home care package; and if he will request the Health Service Executive to reconsider providing this. [17935/16]

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 Procedures

368. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health when he will allocate a date for a procedure for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17952/16]

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 Help Service Data

369. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the average number of hours applied for and the average number he has granted in County Tipperary under the home help scheme, by week; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17967/16]

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.

Respite Care Services

370. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health why he has reduced the respite service provided to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17972/16]

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.

The Programme for Partnership Government commits to more respite care to facilitate full support for people with a disability.

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

Primary Care Centres Provision

371. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Health his plans and timescale for construction of the new primary care centre in Summerhill, Dublin 1; why a centre (details supplied) was not included in those plans as originally intended. [17975/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Currently the timescale for the construction of the Summerhill primary care centre is two years. On this basis the delivery of health services is scheduled to commence from May 2018. The facility in question, which is not a HSE run service, was neither identified nor considered for inclusion within the new primary care centre at Summerhill. Generally such facilities are not included in primary care centres.

The HSE purchased the site for the Summerhill PCC, currently underway, from Dublin City Council. There may be some misunderstanding over a Dublin City Council project many years ago which proposed developments on this site and where at that time the HSE was interested in providing a health centre.

Hospital Waiting Lists

372. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied). [17977/16]

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.

Suicide Prevention

373. **Deputy Josepha Madigan** asked the Minister for Health to consider setting up a suicide prevention authority; to consider the draft Bill to establish a suicide prevention authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17978/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): I have no plans to set up a separate suicide prevention authority. This function is currently being carried out by the HSE's National Office for Suicide Prevention (NOSP) which was established in 2005 to oversee the implementation of the then national suicide prevention strategy and to coordinate suicide prevention initiatives around the country.

In June last year, the Government launched 'Connecting for Life', our new strategy to reduce suicide and self harm rates over the period 2015-2020. The new Strategy, which has an implementation focus on youth mental health, sets out a vision where fewer lives are lost through suicide, and where communities and individuals are empowered to improve their mental health and well-being. This includes a greater focus on the important area of support for families and communities in suicide prevention, and providing community-based organisations with guidelines, protocols and training on effective suicide prevention. In addition to this, in line with the Programme for Government, a Youth Mental Health Taskforce is currently being formed. This taskforce aims to assist our young people in developing resilience and coping skills to support their emotional well-being at an early stage, and build awareness of how to access high-quality effective services when they need them. It marks a focused approach to youth mental well-being, creating a link between community supports and service supports to assist our young people in reaching their potential.

Connecting for Life provides a detailed and clear plan to achieve each of the goals it proposes, with defined actions and a lead agency and key partners in place for each individual objective. This plan will be supported by robust implementation and governance structures, as well as resourcing and communications frameworks. The Strategy assigns specific responsibility to the NOSP as a statutory agency to fulfil a number of tasks, including the development and implementation of surveillance systems, the implementation and evaluation of the Strategy, the development and provision of suicide prevention training and education programmes, increasing national awareness about suicide prevention and setting out a national suicide research and prevention programme. NOSP, together with the Department of Health, other Government Departments, NGO and community partners are proceeding with the implementation of Connecting for Life.

Neuro-Rehabilitation Services Provision

374. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons in the acute hospital system waiting for brain rehabilitation; the length of time they are waiting and the hospitals concerned, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17979/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): 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.

Neuro-Rehabilitation Services

375. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if he will examine reinstating home-based brain rehabilitation services; the cost of this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17980/16]

376. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the brain rehabilitation services available for persons currently waiting for admission to rehabilitation services or home-based rehabilitation services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17981/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I propose to take Questions Nos. 375 and 376 together.

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.

With regard to Neuro-rehabilitation services, the Programme for Partnership Government places a particular focus on publishing a plan for advancing Neuro-rehabilitation services in the community. Currently a steering group led by the Health Service Executive Social Care Division with representation from the National Clinical Programmes for Rehabilitation Medicine and Neurology, Department of Health, Primary Care, Therapy Professions and the Neurological Alliance of Ireland, has drafted an implementation framework for the National Policy & Strategy for Neuro-rehabilitation services, which has been circulated to members of the steering group and stakeholder agencies.

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

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Appeals

377. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the progress to date in the determination of an appeal for assistance under the fair deal scheme in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17982/16]

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.

Accident and Emergency Departments

378. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Health the proposed opening time for the new accident and emergency unit at Mid West Regional Hospital, Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17983/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): 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.

Orthodontic Services Waiting Lists

379. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons currently awaiting orthodontic treatment with the Health Service Executive in south and north Tipperary; the waiting times for such persons to receive this treatment; the funding allocated for orthodontic treatment and the number of patients per orthodontist in south and north Tipperary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17998/16]

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

Hospital Services

380. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the number of full-time and part-time consultants specialising in children's arthritis currently practising in Crumlin Children's Hospital; his views on whether this is an adequate number and if there is provision to increase this service at Crumlin children's hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18006/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

381. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) can expect to have an assessment for a medical device. [18010/16]

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

Primary Care Centres

382. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if the design challenges for the new primary care centre in Monaghan have been overcome; if the €9 million ring-fenced for this project in 2013 will be spent in Monaghan if it cannot be built in front of Monaghan General Hospital, as originally planned; if this money can be invested in Monaghan General Hospital if plans for primary centre cannot go ahead at this site; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18019/16]

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.

Hospital Waiting Lists

383. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18020/16]

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.

Professional Qualifications

384. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health his plans to regulate counselling qualifications in the area of mental health; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18025/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Psychotherapists and counsellors are not currently regulated under the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005. However, the Act provides that the Minister for Health may, by regulation, designate a health and social care profession not already designated if he or she considers that it is appropriate and in the public interest to do so and if specified criteria have been met.

Regulation of a profession under the Act involves the registration of practitioners who hold qualifications approved by the relevant registration board established under the Act.

In accordance with the Act, the Health and Social Care Professionals Council has been consulted on the question of regulating counsellors and psychotherapists. Its detailed report on the matter is being examined carefully in the Department of Health with a view to deciding the next steps shortly. These steps will, I envisage, include a wider round of consultation involving the

various professional bodies and other interested parties.

The regulation of a new profession under the Act involves a consultation process and the making of a number of statutory instruments by the Minister for Health and by the relevant registration board. I envisage that, subject to the outcome of consultations, the statutory phase to regulate counsellors and psychotherapists under the Act will begin later this year or early next year with the submission of draft designation regulations to the Houses of the Oireachtas for their approval.

While the profession or professions of counsellor and psychotherapist are not yet specifically designated under the 2005 Act, counsellors and psychotherapists are subject to legislation similar to other practitioners including consumer legislation, competition, contract and criminal law. There are also various regulatory controls on many counsellors and psychotherapists operating in Ireland.

The profession of psychologist, for example, is a designated profession under the 2005 Act which means that those psychologists who are counsellors and/or psychotherapists will begin to be regulated when the Psychologists Registration Board, which is due to be established later this year, opens its register.

Psychiatrists, some of whom practice psychotherapy, are regulated under the Medical Practitioners Act 2007. Also, counsellors/therapists working in the publicly funded health sector are required to have minimum qualifications set by the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004.

Professional Qualifications

385. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the counselling qualification the Health Service Executive recognises; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18026/16]

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 Help Service Provision

386. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Health the hours and assistance available to parents with multiple births, the relevant application procedure and the criteria for assistance under the home help scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18037/16]

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.

Hospital Waiting Lists

387. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health when he will allocate a date for a procedure for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18046/16]

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.

Question No. 388 answered with Question No. 362.

Pharmacy Services

389. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Health if the Health Service Executive has recently notified pharmacies that certain products, including blisterpacks, cannot be dispensed monthly but must be collected weekly; if he is aware of the implications of this for persons living in rural areas and for carers of persons in need of everyday items; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18061/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My officials are currently sourcing and collating the information required, and as soon as it is available they will contact the Deputy directly in this matter.

Question No. 390 answered with Question No. 362.

Mental Health Policy

391. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of A Vision for Change (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18076/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): In January 2006, the Government adopted the Report of the Expert Group on Mental Health Policy 'A Vision for Change' as the basis for the future development of mental health services in Ireland. It advocated:

- A holistic view of mental illness and an integrated multidisciplinary approach to addressing the biological, psychological and social factors that contribute to mental health problems;
- A move away from traditional institution-based care to a patient-centred, flexible and community based mental health service;
- A person-centred treatment approach which addresses each of these elements through an

integrated care plan, reflecting best practice, evolved and agreed with both service users and their carers;

- The aiming of interventions at maximising recovery from mental illness, building on the resources within service users and within their immediate social networks, to allow them to achieve meaningful integration and participation in community life; and

- The organisation, nationally, of mental health services in catchment areas for populations of between 250,000 and 400,000, with specialist expertise provided by community mental health teams – expanded multidisciplinary teams of clinicians who work together to service the needs of service users across the life span.

During the implementation of Vision, there has been a move away from traditional psychiatric institutions, which have mostly been closed. A range of community mental health teams have been developed for adults and children and adolescents. Additional funding provided between 2012 and 2016 has also enabled development of specialised areas of the mental health services, including the area of Forensic Mental Health with work commencing on a new hospital in Portrane this year.

‘A Vision for Change’ has guided national mental health policy for the past 10 years and its term comes to an end this year. The Department is currently finalising a request for tender for a review and analysis of international evidence and best practice in the development of mental health services, including a review of current delivery of services in Ireland. This review will provide evidence to determine the policy direction for a revision of ‘A Vision for Change’. The review will also have regard to both human rights and health and well-being objectives.

Health Services Staff Remuneration

392. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of the cooks report of 2000 and the suggested pay rise that was never received (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18077/16]

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.

General Practitioner Services

393. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of the general practitioner service in Rathmore, County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18084/16]

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

Hospital Services

394. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health to expedite an operation for a per-

son (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18089/16]

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.

Nursing Home Services

395. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of regulation of nursing homes run by religious organisations (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18090/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): The Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) is an independent statutory authority established to drive high quality and safe care for people using health and social care services in Ireland. Since 2009 all nursing homes whether public or private are registered and inspected by HIQA. This includes a number of nursing homes operated by religious organisations. However, HIQA's remit does not extend to the regulation of residential centres catering for elderly members of religious orders. Under Section 2 of the Health (Nursing Homes) Act 1990, premises in which the majority of the persons being maintained are members of a religious order or priests of any religion are offered an exemption to registration.

Psychological Services

396. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health his plans to address the chronic waiting lists for child psychology services in County Wexford where there is now a two-year plus waiting list caused mainly by staffing issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18091/16]

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.

Services for People with Disabilities

397. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health why the required services have not

been provided in the case of a person (details supplied). [18097/16]

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 Waiting Lists

398. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health his immediate plans to deal with the 517 children who are currently waiting up to 18 months to see one of the two existing consultants who cater for the entire country in advance of the publication of the national clinical programme for rheumatology's recommendation that 3.9 additional paediatric consultants be appointed in Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18099/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Hospital Mortality Rates

399. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the action he is taking on foot of the findings in his Department's report, National Healthcare Quality Reporting System, in respect of those hospitals that have higher-than-expected death rates; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18116/16]

450. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health his plans to respond to the second annual report of the National Healthcare Quality Reporting System; the actions he will take to address the higher-than-normal deaths in certain hospitals; the discussions he has had with the Health Service Executive regarding this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18520/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 399 and 450 together.

The purpose of the annual National Healthcare Quality Reporting System (NHQRS) Report is to use easily accessible information to develop a better understanding of whole health system performance. The NHQRS was established to provide a broad overall picture of the quality of our health services. It is intended to demonstrate to individual hospitals and other health service providers the importance of examining their own data in order to improve the services they provide. It must however, be understood that the performance and quality of a service cannot be measured by one indicator alone. This is why the NHQRS presents an analysis of a range

of indicators that reflect different parts of the services and allows progress and priorities in the health system to be identified. The NHQRS will help to inform many improvements in service outcomes for patients.

The information will inform my priorities as Minister for Health, it will provide intelligence and information for the 10 Year Plan for Health and I hope the Health Committee will avail of the opportunity to be briefed on this. It will also inform my Department's Statement of Strategy.

The Second annual NHQRS Report was published last Thursday 16th June. It is very encouraging to see improvements in many areas, for example in the areas of immunisation, uptake of cancer screening and survival rates for patients with breast and colorectal cancer which are improving at a rate faster than most other European countries in the OECD. One example of how this information will be used is to ensure that the cancer indicators feed into the new Cancer Strategy currently being drawn up by my Department. Similarly, the figures for stroke patients, indicate over 80% are admitted to hospitals with a designated stroke unit which, again, is to the forefront of other OECD countries.

I recognise that there are areas identified where further room for improvement exists. In particular, considerable variation can be seen between counties in rates of hospitalisation for common chronic diseases such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), asthma, diabetes and heart failure. Identifying this variation is a first step to addressing the reasons why this variation exists and to improving it. For example, the information on COPD is already informing requirements in Primary Care and the National Clinical Effectiveness Committee (NCEC) COPD Guideline being developed by the HSE Clinical Programme for the management of this disease.

General Register Office

400. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 496 of 6 April 2016, why the position of registrar for births, deaths and marriages at the civil registration department in Thurles, County Tipperary, is now not being filled by the Health Service Executive (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18118/16]

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.

Hospital Appointments Status

401. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18125/16]

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.

Health Services

402. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if he will schedule an appointment for a person (details supplied); his views on what can be done to make sure persons get seen in primary school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18126/16]

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

Health Services

403. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health to schedule an appointment for a person (details supplied); his views on what can be done to make sure persons get seen in primary school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18131/16]

410. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health to schedule an appointment for a person (details supplied); his views on what can be done to make sure persons get seen in primary school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18175/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 403 and 410 together.

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

404. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health when he will schedule an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18134/16]

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.

Suicide Incidence

405. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Health the number of deaths by suicide in Health Service Executive hospitals and private hospitals for the period 2006 to 2015, inclusive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18136/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): Any deaths that occur within approved centres such as Health Service Executive hospitals and private hospitals are recorded, and approved centres are required to notify the Mental Health Commission of the death of any resident. Along with the overall number of deaths reported, which are published in the Mental Health Commission annual reports, the number of sudden and unexplained deaths is also noted. A 'sudden and unexplained death' refers to an unexpected death that may have been a suicide or that has occurred in suspicious circumstances as a result of violence or misadventure on the part of others or from any cause other than natural illness or disease. However, as death by suicide may only be determined by a Coroner's inquest, it is not possible for the Mental Health Commission to report on how many of the sudden and unexplained deaths reported were due to suicide.

Health Services

406. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) can be offered an appointment at the earliest of opportunity. [18137/16]

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.

Hospital Appointments Administration

407. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Health if alternative arrangements can be made for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18142/16]

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.

Hospital Waiting Lists

408. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health when he will provide an operation for a person (details supplied); the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18150/16]

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.

Pension Provisions

409. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health further to a parliamentary question to make available a copy of the business case submitted by the Central Remedial Clinic, CRC, in regard to the pensions in the CRC pension and death benefits plan when that business case is received by him. [18160/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has confirmed that it is still working with the CRC to develop a viable alternative pension arrangement for the employees concerned but that as yet a detailed business case has not been submitted by the CRC. The HSE and the CRC most recently met on Monday 20th June to discuss options to progress this issue.

As I have already indicated, when a detailed proposal is received by my Department it will be examined as a matter of urgency. The HSE has indicated that it expects to receive a detailed business case this week.

I do not intend to make the business case available while it is under consideration by my Department and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

Question No. 410 answered with Question No. 403.

Hospital Services

411. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the status of the review being carried out into gynaecology and ante-natal services at Dungloe Community Hospital; if the review has been initiated and when it is expected to be formally completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18177/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Health Services Staff Recruitment

412. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the number of mental health service staff recruited into County Mayo in 2016 to date by month and by number of staff recruited into adult mental health services and child mental health services, in tabular form. [18200/16]

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.

Mental Health Services Staff

413. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the required staff numbers as per A Vision for Change for County Mayo and the western region for both adult mental health staff and child mental health staff. [18201/16]

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.

Mental Health Services Staff

414. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the number of vacant mental health staff posts in both County Mayo and the western region in child mental health services and adult mental health services. [18202/16]

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.

Mental Health Services Provision

415. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons receiving mental health services in County Mayo and the western region. [18203/16]

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.

Mental Health Services

416. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health if there are children under 18 years of age receiving treatment in adult mental health services. [18204/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): It is the policy of the HSE to provide an age appropriate mental health service. A significant majority of young people are now being treated by a Child and Adolescent Mental Health Team. A total of 29 Child and Adolescent service users have been admitted to adult mental health units up to the end of April this year. There have been some difficulties in recruiting and retaining Specialist Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services staff, particularly consultant psychiatrists. Due to these operational staff recruitment and retention challenges at local level, a number of referrals in the 16-18 year age group are dealt with by local Adult Teams under appropriate CAMHS procedures. The Executive is addressing this issue on an on-going basis.

There are 67 Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Teams and extra services for special service needs have also been introduced in recent years. The HSE is committed to addressing the service needs of the 16-18 age cohort by expanding the staffing and range of CAMHS team coverage, supported by prioritisation of funding from the additional mental health funding allocation in 2016, as outlined in the HSE Mental Health Operational Plan 2016.

Progress on this issue has been significant overall in recent years, demonstrated by the fact that the number of such admissions in 2008 was 247, reducing to 95 last year. This is despite a background of increasing demands on the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services generally. There are a number of reasons why such admissions are made. These include distance from a Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services facility, timing of admissions, potential medical issues, potential substance misuse, family concerns and the overall safety of the young person, their family and other service users. The HSE monitors this situation closely with a view to limiting inappropriate admissions as much as possible.

Maternity Services

417. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the lack of reports from the National Maternity Hospital and the Rotunda Hospital, given the recommendation by the Health Information and Quality Authority following its investigation of Portlaoise hospital that monthly safety statements be published by each of the maternity hospitals; if he will require all maternity hospitals to publish reports; if not, the reason; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18211/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Among the recommendations arising from the Chief Medical Officer's "HSE Midland Regional Hospital, Portlaoise Perinatal Deaths, Report to the Minister for Health" of February 2014, and the Health Information and Quality Authority's "Report of the investigation into the safety, quality and standards of services provided by the Health Service Executive to patients in the Midland Regional Hospital, Portlaoise" of May 2015, was that the HSE put in place arrangements for the publication of a full Maternity Patient Safety Statement (MPSS) for each maternity service. This commenced in December 2015.

The Maternity Patient Safety Statements provide individual institutions with a set of basic measures that can help inform assurances around the safety and quality of maternity services. They are a welcome addition to our patient safety assurance systems and the Department commends the participation of the maternity services in this regard. The Department expects that

each individual maternity hospital will make arrangements to publish a full Maternity Patient Safety Statement on their websites and it is my understanding that full reports have been produced by all 19 maternity services for the month of March. Maternity Patient Safety Statements for the month of April are due to be published shortly.

Long-Term Illness Scheme Coverage

418. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Health if he will extend the list of the current conditions covered under the long-term illness scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18228/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Long Term Illness (LTI) Scheme was established under Section 59(3) of the Health Act, 1970 (as amended). Regulations were made in 1971, 1973 and 1975 specifying the conditions covered by the LTI Scheme, which are as follows: acute leukaemia; mental handicap; cerebral palsy; mental illness (in a person under 16); cystic fibrosis; multiple sclerosis; diabetes insipidus; muscular dystrophies; diabetes mellitus; Parkinsonism; epilepsy; phenylketonuria; haemophilia; spina bifida; hydrocephalus; and conditions arising from the use of Thalidomide. There are no plans to extend the list of conditions covered by the LTI Scheme.

Medicinal Products

419. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Health if he will introduce a subsidised asthma medication for persons under 18 years of age in the absence of asthma being recognised under the long-term illness scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18229/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As you are aware, asthma is not one of the 16 conditions covered under the Long Term Illness (LTI) Scheme. There are no plans to extend the list of conditions covered by the LTI Scheme, or to introduce a separate scheme providing subsidised asthma medication.

However, under the Drugs Payment Scheme, no individual or family pays more than €144 per calendar month towards the cost of approved prescribed medicines. The scheme significantly reduces the cost burden for families and individuals incurring ongoing expenditure on medicines.

Under the provisions of the Health Acts, medical cards are provided to persons who are, in the opinion of the Health Service Executive (HSE), unable without undue hardship to arrange GP services for themselves and their dependants. In the assessment process, the HSE can take into account medical costs incurred by an individual or a family.

Health Services Provision

420. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the number of adults being funded by the Health Service Executive in 2015 to receive specialist care in facilities outside the State; if he will provide details in respect of each of those adults on the type of care being provided (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18246/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE 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.

HSE Expenditure

421. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the average cost of the kilometre-age reimbursement scheme incurred in respect of employees of the Health Service Executive in each of the years 2011 to 2016 to date, in tabular form. [18248/16]

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.

General Medical Services Scheme

422. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if he will clarify the status of a charge general practitioners impose on regular blood tests in respect of patients who are suffering from a long-term illness and who are registered under the medical card scheme; if it is standard practice to impose a charge of €20 on each blood test; and if he is aware of the case of persons (details supplied) where the general practitioners imposed a charge of €30. [18250/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Persons covered by the General Medical Services (GMS) Scheme should not be charged for routine phlebotomy services provided by their GP, or the Practice Nurse on behalf of the GP, which are required to either assist in the diagnosis of illness or the treatment of a condition.

In relation to the specific case mentioned, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy on this issue. 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.

Services for People with Disabilities

423. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the number of applications with the Health Service Executive for an assessment of need under the Disability Act; the number it has not completed within the six-month period; and the average expected waiting time from the receipt of an application to the completion of the assessment. [18252/16]

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 service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive 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 up the matter with the HSE.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

424. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Health his efforts to make medical appliances such as FreeStyle Libre and insulin pumps more affordable and available for persons with type 1 diabetes in order to facilitate greater management of the condition; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18257/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): Insulin pump therapy to children under 5 years of age with type 1 diabetes is provided by the Health Service Executive (HSE). Children get access to insulin pumps at national regional pump centres. The centres were developed as a result of greater efficiencies achieved with the purchase of insulin pumps. I have arranged for the Deputy's question on such medical appliances to be referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Hospital Services

425. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the lack of an organised service for stroke or mini-stroke patients at University Hospital Kerry (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18308/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): While there is no dedicated stroke unit at University Hospital Kerry stroke patients can receive treatment within the hospital. As the establishment of a dedicated stroke unit in the hospital is an operational 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.

Services for People with Disabilities

426. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health why local Health Service Executive officials have not met with persons (details supplied) since September 2015 despite stating publicly that they would be willing to do so; if he will order an independent review into the handling of this case; if members of HSE senior management will meet with the family concerned as a matter of urgency to discuss the concerns in relation to this case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18309/16]

427. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health why the recommendations from the disabilities appeals office have not been implemented in the case of a person (details supplied); if he will ensure that these recommendations are implemented as a matter of urgency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18310/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I propose to take Questions Nos. 426 and 427 together.

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.

National Children's Hospital Location

428. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if he is aware of an article (details supplied) written by a doctor in St. James's Hospital in Dublin 8 outlining serious concerns over the proposed locating of the National Children's Hospital at the St. James's campus; and if he will address these concerns. [18318/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Government decision to co-locate the new children's hospital with St James's was announced on 6 November 2012. Satellite centres of the hospital, providing urgent and outpatient care, are to be built on the campuses of Connolly and Tallaght Hospitals. The decision was clinically led, and was made in the best interests of children, with clinical considerations paramount in the decision. As announced in June 2015, the Coombe Women and Infants University Hospital will relocate to the campus in time, achieving tri-location of adult, paediatric and maternity services. Tri-location has benefits for children, adolescents, newborns and mothers. In all cases, the benefits of tri-location are maximised where the adult hospital provides the broadest possible range of clinical sub-specialties and expertise, which are readily accessible for paediatric and maternity patients on the shared campus. St James's Hospital has the broadest range of national specialties of all acute hospitals, as well as strong and well established research and education infrastructure, making it the hospital that best meets the criteria to be the adult co-location partner.

The primary concerns about the location raised in the article referred to by the Deputy are access by car and by helicopter. I can reassure the Deputy that these issues have been carefully addressed in the design and plans for this hospital. The design has recognised the need of most parents to access the hospital by car and ample parking has been provided for families based on current and projected future demand, with three times the current available parking at the existing three children's hospitals in Dublin. The elevated helipad proposed for the new children's hospital will have direct and rapid access to the Critical Care, Theatre and Emergency Departments within the hospital and has been designed in close consultation with the Air Corps and Department of Defence which provides the Emergency Aeromedical Service.

Over the three and a half years since the Government decided on the location for this hospital, extensive work has been completed including preparation of a design brief, procurement of a design team, design development including consultation with patients, families and staff and submission of a planning application. The decision of An Bord Pleanála on April 28 last to grant planning permission for the hospital, satellite centres and related buildings is a huge and very welcome milestone for the project. I am delighted that the first phase of construction can now commence.

Hospital Accommodation Provision

429. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health when additional beds at Kenmare Community Hospital, County Kerry, will be opened (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18325/16]

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.

Question No. 430 answered with Question No. 362.

Medicinal Products Availability

431. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Health if he can confirm that the pharmacy in University Hospital Limerick is refusing to dispense the drug Orkambi for extremely ill patients in counties Clare and Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18334/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly. If he has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Hospital Appointments Status

432. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health when an operation will be provided for a person (details supplied); the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18338/16]

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 the Deputy directly. If she has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Hospital Appointments Status

433. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the status of the case of a person (details supplied), including when the person will receive an appointment. [18344/16]

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.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme

434. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of the amendment of the nursing homes support - fair deal - scheme (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18377/16]

444. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if he will consider reducing the timeframe from five to three years for transferred assets and income being included in the financial assessment for farm families and other self-employed persons under the nursing home support -fair deal - scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18436/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): I propose to take Questions Nos. 434 and 444 together.

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.

It is Government policy to encourage orderly succession arrangements for farms, and this is endorsed by the farming organisations. In most cases early succession arrangements should ensure the transfer of farm assets well in excess of five years before nursing home care is required, meaning that a levy on the farm asset is avoided.

A person's Principal Private Residence (PPR) is only included in the financial assessment for the first three years of the NHSS participants' time in care. Importantly, the farm or relevant business can also qualify for this three year cap where unexpected health events prevent early succession arrangements. This applies where:

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 the 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 the carrying on of the relevant business.

When the NHSS commenced in 2009, a commitment was made that it would be reviewed after three years. 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 (IFA) 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 IFA.

The Programme for a Partnership Government has committed to reviewing the NHSS to remove any discrimination against small business and family farms. The IFA will be contacted by the Working Group in this regard in the near future.

Question No. 435 answered with Question No. 362.

Health Services

436. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Health the cost of retaining a person (details supplied) in a centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18382/16]

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 the Deputy has not received a reply within 15 working days, please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Mental Health Services Provision

437. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons the Ashlin Centre in Beaumont Hospital, Dublin 9, has turned away due to the unavailability of a bed since 30 September 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18383/16]

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.

Ambulance Service Response Times

438. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the percentage performance of the eight-minute and of the 19-minute echo-delta call-outs from the total number of call-outs in County Roscommon in each of the years 2015 and 2016 to date; his views on ongoing problems with ambulance response times in parts of counties Galway, Mayo and Roscommon and in the ambulance blackspot of west County Roscommon and east County Mayo in particular. [18403/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): With regard to the specific query raised by the Deputy, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Of-

office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Hospital Appointments Status

439. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18406/16]

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

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Data

440. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the amount of loans that participants, their estates or next-of-kin have repaid under the nursing home support - fair deal - scheme in each of the years 2009 to 2016 to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18407/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): Under the Nursing Homes Support Scheme, where an applicant's assets include land and property in the State, the 7.5% contribution based on such assets may be deferred and collected from his or her estate after his or her death.

Under Section 26(2)(b) of the Nursing Homes Support Scheme Act 2009 the Revenue Commissioners are the appointed agents for the State in the collection of the repayable monies under the loan element of the Scheme. The Revenue Commissioners and the HSE work together in the calculation of amounts due to be repaid to the State.

The Revenue Commissioners have advised the HSE that the amounts repaid to the State from 2009 to end April 2016 are as follows:

Year	2009-2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Amount	€1,417,502	€4,592,789	€5,902,913	€8,293,435	€12,006,089	€4,148,682

The loan can be repaid at any time but will ultimately fall due for repayment upon the applicant's death.

Rare Diseases

441. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for Health the number of patients and families the new national rare diseases office has dealt with since it opened in June 2015, both in person and through the information helpline. [18423/16]

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 he has 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

442. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Health when he will reinstate the home care package which his Department suspended in February 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18427/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): Home supports are a key mechanism for enabling older people to remain in their own homes and communities for as long as possible and for facilitating their discharge from acute hospitals. From the outset, the resources available for 2016 matched those provided in 2015, so there was never any overall reduction in services. However, the numbers of patients who had completed their acute treatment but required home-care in order to be discharged was very high in the early part of this year, and while the HSE did its best to meet this need it would have been necessary to adjust new service approvals if the original funding limit had applied. To ensure that this does not happen, the Government has increased the resources available. €20m will be allocated to ensure that the 10.4 million home help hours, 15,450 home care packages, 130 intensive home care packages and 313 transitional care beds provided in 2015 are maintained; €10m will ensure that the rate of service allocation can be maintained during the summer months; and €10m has been ring fenced for home care as part of the forthcoming winter initiative.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Review

443. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health if he will review an assessment for a person (details supplied) under the nursing home support - fair deal - scheme. [18433/16]

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 the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them. *Question No. 444 answered with Question No. 334.*

Question No. 445 answered with Question No. 362.

Hospital Procedures

446. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if he is aware that women can wait for four months for an appointment for a breast magnetic resonance imaging scan in the Mater Hospital in Dublin 7 and subsequently have to wait for the results to be interpreted over a period of six weeks or more, as consultants only examine these results on Mondays and Wednesdays, causing extreme stress for the women involved; his views on same; and his plans to rectify this matter. [18446/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly. If she has 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 Promotion

447. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if he has any vacancies in his Department or in the Health Service Executive in the area of health promotion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18447/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): There are currently no vacancies in the Health Promotion Unit of my Department. In respect of vacancies in the Health Service Executive (HSE), my Department has asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter. If he has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private office and they will follow up on the matter with them.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

448. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) will be fitted with an item through the medical card scheme. [18502/16]

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

Home Care Packages Provision

449. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Health to expedite a home care package for persons (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18510/16]

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

Question No. 450 answered with Question No. 399.

Questions Nos. 451 to 453, inclusive, answered with Question No. 362.

Hospital Waiting Lists

454. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health to set out the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied). [18545/16]

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.

Question No. 455 withdrawn.

Veterinary Medicines

456. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine why he took no action to ensure that Irish producers of organic farmed salmon meet the requirements under European Commission Regulation No. 710/2009, given that the Food Safety Authority of Ireland was alerted in February 2016 that organic salmon was being marketed here without the warning required to inform consumers that the product had been treated with chemical veterinary products; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17940/16]

457. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to outline his plans to ensure that the public is made aware of when chemically treated organic salmon is marketed, as required under European Commission Regulation No. 710/2009. [17941/16]

458. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine why he took no action to ensure that Irish producers meet the requirement to protect the consumer, given that organic salmon is being marketed without the warning required under European Commission Regulation No. 710/2009 to inform consumers that the product had been treated with chemical veterinary products; and his plans to address this and to protect consumers. [17942/16]

461. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he is aware that the European Commission Regulation No. 710/2009 requires that packaging states clearly when a product has been treated with chemical veterinary products; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17937/16]

462. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to outline his plans to ensure that stocks of organic salmon treated with chemical veterinary products are clearly identifiable to the consumer and that any products on the market without this warning are withdrawn from the market and no further organic products permitted on the market without meeting European Commission Regulation No. 710/2009. [17938/16]

463. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine why his Department holds no relevant records, given that the European Commission Regulation No. 710/2009 requires that whenever veterinary medicinal products are used such use is declared to the control body or the control authority before the animals are marketed as organic; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17939/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 456 to 458, inclusive, and Questions Nos. 461 to 463, inclusive, together.

Under Commission Regulation No. 710/2009 of 5 August 2009, the use of veterinary treatments is permitted in certain circumstances, provided the governing conditions are adhered to.

If veterinary medicinal products are used, such use must be declared to the Control Body or the Control Authority before the animals are marketed as organic. My Department, as the Competent Authority, has delegated control tasks to five Organic Control Bodies, who receive all such declarations and hold all relevant records.

In addition, Regulation 710/2009 provides that treated stock are to be clearly identifiable. In the case of fish, for example, this means that any batches of fish that have been treated can be identified at the point of production, to ensure amongst other things that the required withdrawal period for the treatment in question is being observed. However, this is an issue of record keeping, not labelling of packaging. Organic operators meet this requirement by maintaining information at their premises giving details of the purpose, date of application, method of application, type of product and relevant withdrawal period, as well as by the declaration of such use to the Control Body and by making all required information available to the Control Body.

It is also important to note that the withdrawal period between the last administration of any such veterinary treatment and the production of organic produced foodstuffs from such animals is twice the withdrawal period applicable for non-organic production for the medicine in question. If the fish are treated in full compliance with the provisions laid down in the Regulation, then they fulfil all the requirements of organic production and may be labelled and sold as such.

Teagasc Courses

459. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to request Teagasc to review a person's (details supplied) eligibility for inclusion in a course and to grant permission to the person to participate in it as a matter of priority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17920/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Teagasc is the main provider of further education in agriculture, food, horticulture, forestry and equine studies. The assessment of eligibility for a Teagasc training course is solely an operational matter for Teagasc and I have no function in this matter.

I understand that the person concerned submitted an application to Teagasc for the Distance Education Green Cert Eligibility for this course is restricted to holders of a "Level 6 or Higher Major Award" in a non-agricultural discipline. The onus is on the applicant to provide proof that their award meets this entry requirement.

Teagasc reviewed the application submitted by the person in question and it was found that her award did not meet the educational eligibility criteria for the Distance Education Green Cert. She was informed that her application could not be processed further.

However, it is open to her to apply to join either the Teagasc Green Cert part-time or full-time training programmes for which there are no minimum education requirements. Further information on course availability is obtainable from her local Teagasc education officer.

GLAS Payments

460. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to set out the status of a payment to a person (details supplied) under the green low-carbon agri-environment scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17931/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): An applica-

tion under Tranche 1 of GLAS was received in my Department on the 16 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.

Questions Nos. 461 to 463, inclusive, answered with Question No. 456.

Agriculture Industry

464. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine whether the primary function of the agricultural sector is the provision of public goods; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17943/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Irish agricultural sector is multi-functional and provides a range of benefits to the economy in terms of economic competitiveness, environmental and social sustainability and land management. In addition to the economic importance of the sector, there are a wide range of public goods associated with agriculture; including social benefits for rural communities, as well as significant environmental benefits in relation to landscape, biodiversity, water quality and carbon sequestration and mitigation.

The agri-food sector is Ireland's largest indigenous industry, contributing €26 billion in turnover and 7.6% of GDP. In 2015, the sector accounted for around 8.4% of total employment, making a particularly significant contribution to employment in rural and coastal areas.

2015 saw the publication of Food Wise 2025 which sets out a ten-year strategy for the agri-food sector. It underlines the sector's unique and special position within the Irish economy, and illustrates the potential for this sector to continue to grow. The strategy sets out the key actions required to maximise the contribution of the sector to economic growth, job creation and environmental sustainability over the next decade.

Rural Recreation Policy

465. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to outline the schemes his Department has rolled out in recent years; his plans to encourage and reward farmers to allow walking trails on their land; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17973/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department administers numerous schemes for the agri-food, forestry and marine sectors and provides services across a wide range of areas under the remit of the Department. Details of all schemes and services available are outlined in my Department's publication "Schemes and Services 2014-2020", copies of which are available from any of the Department's offices around the country or from my Department's website www.agriculture.gov.ie. Copies of the booklet are also available at some Teagasc offices.

Where possible application dates for schemes are included in the Schemes and Services

booklet. Otherwise detailed terms and conditions and application dates are announced and publicised in advance of scheme operation dates.

I am aware that my colleague, the Minister for Regional Development, Rural Affairs, Arts and the Gaeltacht, has responsibility for the Walks Scheme which is a trail maintenance scheme where landholders receive support to maintain sections of National Way Marked Ways and other priority walks that traverse their lands. *A Programme for a Partnership Government* contains a commitment to expand the Walks Scheme, and plans in this regard are due to be developed in 2016 subject to available funding.

Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme

466. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to set out the status of an application by persons (details supplied) under the targeted agricultural modernisation scheme 2; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17974/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The applicants in question have applied under Tranche 3 of the Animal Welfare, Safety and Nutrient Storage Scheme with their application finalised on the online system on 15 June 2016. This tranche closed on 24 June 2016 and the administrative checking of all applications received is ongoing.

Single Payment Scheme Payments

467. **Deputy John Paul Phelan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine why the single farm payment in respect of a person (details supplied) has not yet issued; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18023/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): EU Regulations governing the Basic Payment Scheme provide that all farmers who were eligible to receive a direct payment greater than €100 in 2013 (Single Payment, Grassland Sheep Scheme, Burren Life Scheme, Beef Data Scheme) have an automatic allocation right under the Basic Payment Scheme in 2015.

The person named submitted a 2014 Transfer of Entitlements application seeking the transfer of 20.33 Single Payment Scheme entitlements by gift as transferee. This application was fully processed and the entitlements were transferred to the person named. As neither the transferor of the entitlements in 2014 nor the person named had received a direct payment in 2013 no allocation right had been established under the Basic Payment Scheme. The 2013 Single Payment Scheme entitlements expired on 31st December 2014.

Basic Payment Scheme Applications

468. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when he will complete a review of a 2015 basic payment scheme application by a person (details supplied). [18036/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The above named submitted an application for the Basic Payment Scheme which was received in the Department on 29 May 2015. The application was processed with payments issuing to the nominated bank account in November and December 2015.

The above named claimed on 2014 forestry parcels and these have recently been updated to forestry eligible under the terms of the Basic Payment Scheme and allocated a Reference/Maximum Eligible Area accordingly. This revised position will now be examined by my officials in the context of his current entitlement allocation under the Scheme.

Basic Payment Scheme Applications

469. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 530 of 24 May 2016 to outline the status of an application by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18048/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): An application under the 2015 Basic Payment Scheme was received in my Department from the person named on 12 May 2015. Full payment due to date under the Scheme issued to the nominated bank account of the person named in October and December 2015. A further final balancing payment will issue this week.

TAMS Applications

470. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when will he issue decisions on applications under the targeted agricultural modernisation scheme; the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18082/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): To date 1,723 applicants have received full approval for investments in the TAMS II Schemes.

Earlier this year a further 1,100 part approvals issued for urgently required Dairy Equipment and Low Emission Slurry Spreading Equipment. Approvals continue to issue on an ongoing basis.

Afforestation Programme

471. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of an application by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18087/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The application by the person named under the Afforestation Grant and Premium Scheme was refused as it did not comply with the condition of the Scheme regarding the capacity of the land to produce a commercial crop of timber. The person named was notified of the decision on 17 June 2016 and of his right of appeal against it if dissatisfied.

Farm Inspections

472. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of farm inspections from the Nenagh office of his Department in each of the years 2011 to 2015, inclusive, in tabular form; the number of penalties applied; the percentage of penalties versus inspections; the value of the total penalties applied each year; the national figure for pen-

alties applied as a percentage versus inspections in each year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18103/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The extensive range of data requested by the Deputy is not readily available. However, officials in my Department will compile the data requested and forward it directly to the Deputy at the earliest opportunity.

Import Costs

473. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to remove the 14% import tariff that applies to fertiliser imports to the European Union; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18119/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Farmers across the EU continue to be severely affected by the ongoing difficulties on agricultural markets. The recent packages of support measures from the Commission are welcome, but we should continue to deploy any and all available options that might help to mitigate the effects of these difficulties. Such options should include measures that will help to reduce production costs for farmers.

According to Eurostat, fertiliser is the third most important expenditure item on EU farms, accounting for €19.2bn in 2014. Fertiliser prices have increased significantly in recent years, in part due to the protection provided by the imposition of duties on non-EU imports, while opportunities to manage price risk through hedging mechanisms are limited.

The International Food and Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) published a report in February of this year (commissioned by the Irish Farmers' Association) on the effects of import duty elimination on competition in the EU fertiliser market. The report concluded that the protection afforded to EU manufacturers by the application of anti-dumping duties and customs tariffs is costing farmers up to €1 billion per annum.

I believe that appropriate action in this area could be of significant benefit to farmers at this very difficult time. In addition to the ten-point package that Ireland proposed in the lead-up to the March Council of Agriculture Ministers, we asked the Commission to consider a temporary suspension of import tariffs on fertilisers.

Other Member States made similar calls, and at the March Council Commissioner Hogan indicated his readiness to raise the matter with Commissioner for Economic and Financial Affairs, Taxation and Customs, Pierre Moscovici, and Internal Market Commissioner Elzbieta Bienkowska. At the April Council in Luxembourg, Commissioner Hogan said that he was following up with his colleagues in an effort to secure their agreement to possible changes.

I am continuing to pursue the matter with the Commission and in consultation with my Member State counterparts, and I hope that progress can be made in the short-term. I would hope that Commissioner Moscovici in particular would be in a position to look favourably on this proposal.

Fodder Crisis

474. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of an application by a person (details supplied) for redress following the loss of a crop

due to storm damage. [18151/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named has submitted applications to my Department under the Fodder Aid Scheme and the Emergency Flood Damage Relief Measure. These schemes were introduced by my Department as part of the response to the flooding in December 2015 and January 2016. The Terms and Conditions of the Fodder Aid scheme list the eligible feedstuffs considered for aid under the scheme as silage, hay, straw and concentrates. Therefore, losses to other sources of feed on a holding such as crops in the ground do not qualify for support under this scheme.

The terms and conditions of the Emergency Flood Damage Relief Measure set out that support is available to farmers under 3 categories;

- a) loss of livestock,
- b) damage to fixed agricultural structures and fittings, and
- c) the necessity to move livestock to alternate housing (excluding the cost of feed).

Given that the applications of the person named related to the loss of a maize crop, the applications were not eligible for compensation under the terms of either scheme. The person named has been advised of the decisions in each case, and advised of the appeal options available.

TAMS Payments

475. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when he will issue the outstanding payments under the targeted agricultural modernisation scheme to farmers who have completed approved works; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18173/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The IT functionality to allow TAMS II payment claims to be submitted on line is being finalised within my Department and it is anticipated that it will be available next month. Payments will follow for approved claims.

TAMS Eligibility

476. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will increase the limit on the targeted agricultural modernisation scheme grant for piggeries and poultry farms from the current ceiling of €80,000 to an increased ceiling of €300,000; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18174/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): There are no plans currently to increase the ceiling in the Pig and Poultry Investment Scheme of TAMS II from €80,000. Any increase in this ceiling would require an amendment to the Rural Development Plan and approval from the European Commission.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments

477. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Ma-

rine further to Parliamentary Question No. 821 of 31 May 2016, if payment has issued to a person (details supplied) under the agri-environment options scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18219/16]

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 be made as soon as possible.

Forestry Premium Payments

478. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if there is an option to avail of further funding when a 20-year forestry premium payment finishes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18321/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): There are no options available to forest owners to receive additional premium payments after the last annual premium has been paid. However depending on the species planted there are other schemes which the forest owner can avail off which help cover the costs of various forest management activities. These are as follows;

- Funding for the construction of forest roads is available at a rate of €40/m based on a density of 20m per hectare.

- The Woodland Improvement Scheme: Thinning and Tending Scheme provides support at a rate of €750/ha for broadleaf forests to remove malformed trees and create space for better performing trees to grow.

Details of all Department schemes relating to forestry can be found at <http://www.agriculture.gov.ie/forests-service/grants-and-premium-schemes-2015-2016/> .

Afforestation Programme

479. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans for any additional afforestation schemes to work alongside the afforestation scheme, the native woodland conservation scheme and the environmental enhancement of forests scheme, which would be directed specifically at tackling flooding; if he has spoken to the Minister for Environment, Community and Local Government on this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18336/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Office of Public Works (OPW) leads and coordinates Ireland's whole of government approach to flood risk prevention and management. The Interdepartmental Flood Policy Co-ordination group was established to support the OPW in this role. This group is currently preparing a final report for Government that will contain recommendations for appropriate actions to mitigate the risks posed by flooding. The critical and varied role that forestry performs in combating flood risk in vulnerable areas will be reflected in the report. My Department operates a Forestry Programme

that provides funding for the creation and management of a wide range of forest and woodland types. These schemes as listed by the Deputy, aim to realise a variety of environmental, economic and social benefits and services forest development brings. Included in these benefits is flood alleviation when these measures are used strategically as part of a wider response within a catchment to the threat of flooding. There are no plans to introduce any further schemes to help address the issue of flooding.

The existing schemes can help reduce the risk of flooding in the following ways:

- As part of the Afforestation Scheme, native woodland establishment provides grant aid to cover the full cost of establishment and pays the highest annual premium of all planting categories to create new native woodland on greenfield sites. This measure can be utilised to fund the development of new native woodland on natural floodplains increasing retention capacity in these areas.

These forests also help in retaining floodwaters for a longer period upstream, such areas result in the alleviation of flooding further downstream (mainly in urban areas) and the reduction of damaging high flow rates during spate events.

- Native Woodland Conservation Scheme provides grant aid (along with a 7 year premium, for private woodland owners) to undertake the appropriate restoration of existing woodlands, and also, the conversion of conifer forest to native woodland. One possible application of this scheme is the conversion of existing conifer forests into native woodland at strategic points within catchments, accompanied by drain-blocking and other site restoration measures to reinstate natural site hydrology and retention capacities.

- Woodland Improvement: - Environmental Enhancement: This scheme, which is due for launch in August 2016, provides financial support to forest holders to enhance the environmental qualities of existing forests, including the reinstatement or enhancement of water setbacks and other open areas and, appropriate blocking of existing forest drains. These actions can contribute to flood alleviation by slowing down the flow of heavy rainfall into lower lying areas.

The schemes above were approved by Government in December 2014.

Forestry Management

480. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he has concerns that schemes coming under the Common Agricultural Policy might incentivise recipients to remove trees from their land in order to qualify for said schemes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18337/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Forestry Act 1946 prohibits the felling of trees without a licence. The illegal removal of trees may result in substantial fines and prosecution. Furthermore, depending on the age of the plantation and whether or not it was grant aided, all premium payments and grants paid will be recovered in full by the Department for the area in which the trees were felled. The financial consequences of removing trees illegally are very much dependent on the area cleared. However, regardless of the area felled, I do not believe that qualification criteria for CAP schemes incentivises farmers to remove trees.

TAMS Payments

481. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the targeted agricultural modernisation scheme on-farm investment support scheme (details supplied) regarding approval and payments for farmers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18343/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Approval letters are issuing on a continuing basis to eligible applicants who have applied in the first tranches of the TAMS II investment schemes, to date 1,723 full approvals have issued. A further 1,100 part approvals issued earlier this year for urgently required Dairy Equipment and Low Emission Slurry Spreading Equipment.

The IT functionality to allow TAMS II payment claims to be submitted on line is being finalised within my Department and it is anticipated that it will be available next month. Payments will follow for approved claims.

Greyhound Industry

482. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the inquiry under the chairmanship of a person (details supplied) into the alleged misuse of prohibited substances in the greyhound industry; when the report will be finalised and published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18345/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Morris Report was commissioned by Bord na gCon and its publication is a matter for that organisation. I understand that Bord na gCon expects to publish the report in the coming weeks.

Beef Data Programme

483. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the reopening of the beef data and genomics programme (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18372/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP) is a part of Ireland's Rural Development Programme and provides Irish suckler farmers with some €300 million of funding over the next 6 years. The BDGP builds on the investment in data recording and genomics which have been made in recent years and will continue to drive further developments and improvements in this area.

The BDGP has been agreed with the European Commission as part of Ireland's Rural Development Plan (2014-2020) together with a number of other schemes. I am conscious of the positive effect that the programme will have on the Irish suckler herd. It will help to improve productivity, profitability and carbon efficiency in the Irish suckler herd.

I firmly believe that this scheme will deliver long term and cumulative positive effects for both suckler farmers participating in the scheme and farmers who buy the progeny of suckler cows for further finishing.

In relation to any possible reopening of the scheme this will have to be considered in the context of an assessment of budgetary priorities, the operation of the Rural Development Programme and the potential impact both upon the scheme itself and other schemes.

Sheepmeat Sector

484. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the new €25 million sheep scheme (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18373/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The programme for Government committed to introducing a scheme for sheep farmers under the Rural Development Programme with a budget of €25 million to be provided in Budget 2017. In this regard, a submission will shortly be made to the European Commission. It is my intention that this scheme's design will maximise the number of participants and deliver tangible benefits to the sheep sector in terms of its impact to on-farm practices. Any such scheme must also meet certain exacting criteria laid down by the European Commission in order to avail of EU funding approval. This scheme, in addition to the existing supports available to sheep farmers under the BPS, GLAS, ANC and TAMS, will make a vital contribution to ensuring the continued viability of the Irish sheep sector.

As regards the scheme design and operation, my Department has been in consultation with sectoral stakeholders and is currently working on developing the details of the scheme for engagement with the European Commission. Any scheme must be acceptable to both the European Commission in the context of the requirements of the Rural Development Programme and also take account of the different production systems in the Irish sheep flock.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme

485. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the €25 increase under the disadvantaged areas scheme (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18374/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): A Programme for a Partnership Government sets out the commitment to increase the budget for the Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) Scheme by €25m in Budget 2018. In parallel, the Rural Development Regulation requires all Member States to designate eligible areas under the ANC Scheme by reference to new biophysical criteria by 2018. The technical work underlying this process is currently underway, and the additional €25m will be integrated into the resultant scheme design process in 2018.

Credit Availability

486. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of farmers' requirements for low-cost credit (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18375/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I am fully aware of the pressures on farmers right now and I have committed to working with all the stakeholders, both at national and EU level, to address these issues and ensure that we continue to have a sustainable and resilient sector. One of my priorities is to support the provision of lower-cost, more flexible finance for the sector.

Access to finance was discussed at the Dairy Forum on 21 June, with an exchange of views with the main banks now a part of the agenda at each meeting. Before the meeting I formally

launched the Dairy Forum's 'Financial Management Initiative', a programme of cash flow and financial management training and advice for dairy farmers. I believe that equipping farmers with better financial planning skills is essential and I am encouraging all farmers to engage with this initiative.

Access to finance was also discussed at the meeting of the Food Wise 2025 High Level Implementation Committee earlier this month and we heard from representatives of the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) and the Irish Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF). Both are now active in the market and my Department, in cooperation with all the other State bodies, will continue to explore additional funding mechanisms for farmers, the agrifood sector and for SMEs generally.

I also recently met with the CEOs of the main banks and stressed the need for them to be flexible in the context of increased income volatility. The banks told me that they recognise and are responding to the challenges facing farmers in this regard.

In addition, my Department is about to publish a request for tender to procure an ex-ante assessment to assess any current failures in the access to finance market in Ireland. This is a first step towards the potential introduction of Financial Instruments under the Rural Development Programme.

With specific reference to the more flexible State aid provisions announced by the EU Commission, I am working with all the financial institutions, particularly SBCI, to identify potential solutions to working capital finance for farmers experiencing liquidity gaps. I should point out that these flexibilities do not involve the provision of EU funding.

Import Costs

487. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the removal of tariffs and duties on European Union fertiliser imports (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18379/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Farmers across the EU continue to be severely affected by the ongoing difficulties on agricultural markets. The recent packages of support measures from the Commission are welcome, but we should continue to deploy any and all available options that might help to mitigate the effects of these difficulties. Such options should include measures that will help to reduce production costs for farmers.

According to Eurostat, fertiliser is the third most important expenditure item on EU farms, accounting for €19.2bn in 2014. Fertiliser prices have increased significantly in recent years, in part due to the protection provided by the imposition of duties on non-EU imports, while opportunities to manage price risk through hedging mechanisms are limited.

I believe that appropriate action in this area could be of significant benefit to farmers at this very difficult time. In addition to the ten-point package that Ireland proposed in the lead-up to the March Council of Agriculture Ministers, we asked the Commission to consider a temporary suspension of import tariffs on fertilisers.

Other Member States made similar calls, and at the March Council Commissioner Hogan indicated his readiness to raise the matter with Commissioner for Economic and Financial Affairs, Taxation and Customs, Pierre Moscovici, and Internal Market Commissioner Elzbieta Bienkowska. At the April Council in Luxembourg, Commissioner Hogan said that he was fol-

lowing up with his colleagues in an effort to secure their agreement to possible changes.

I am continuing to pursue the matter with the Commission and in consultation with my Member State counterparts, and I hope that progress can be made in the short-term. I would hope that Commissioner Moscovici in particular would be in a position to look favourably on this proposal.

GLAS Issues

488. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the reopening of the revised green low-carbon agri-environment scheme (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18381/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The overall target for GLAS is to attract 50,000 farmers into the scheme. I am pleased to confirm that some 38,000 farmers have been approved into the first two Tranches of GLAS, 26,500 in GLAS 1 and 11,500 in GLAS 2. This means that there is an opportunity to achieve the participation targets for the scheme through a third tranche of the Scheme. I intend to launch this third GLAS tranche (GLAS 3) later this year and all farmers not already in the scheme, including those who were unsuccessful in their applications for the first two tranches will have the opportunity to submit a new application to GLAS 3 when the scheme opens. I want to reiterate that when preparing applications, it is important that farmers, in consultation with their advisors, ensure that the highest standard environmental plans are presented to the Department, to increase their chance of selection into GLAS 3.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

489. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will expedite a payment to a person (details supplied) who was awarded an agricultural payment some time ago. [18384/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named submitted applications under the 'young farmer' category of the 2015 National Reserve and the Young Farmers' Scheme to my Department. The applications have been finalised and payment under the National Reserve and Young Farmers' Scheme is due to issue shortly.

Agriculture Schemes

490. **Deputy Ciarán Cannon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to supply a copy of the conformity clearance audits from 2009, 2010 and 2012 as used by the European Court of Auditors to determine that Ireland should be subject to a 2% flat rate financial correction of €181.5 million. [18430/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The documentation requested by the Deputy has been forwarded to him under separate cover.

Animal Disease Controls

491. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 1057 of 17 May 2016, when he will issue payment to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18519/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I can confirm that my Department has received an application from the herd owner to which the Deputy refers. The closing date for receipt of applications for PI calves born in 2015 was 4th March 2016. These applications are currently being prepared for payment and it is anticipated that payments will be finalised in the next 4/5 weeks.

Bord na Móna

492. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources why Bord na Móna is pumping water off the bog at Derryadd, County Longford, into the river on the proposed site of the Derryad windfarm; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17965/16]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Denis Naughten): Derryadd is a bog that Bord na Móna use for peat production as part of their normal business. I am informed by the Company that in some locations, the bog or part of the bog, is below the level of the surrounding water table or rivers and, in such cases, it is usual for Bord na Móna to pump water from the bog. This is a common occurrence in bogs located in the Shannon catchment. Pumping is encompassed by Bord na Móna's licensing issued by the EPA. I am further informed by Bord na Móna that there is no connection between the pumping at Derryadd and the co-located wind farm project.

Inland Fisheries Ireland

493. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources why the process of gill netting, a practice carried out by Inland Fisheries to improve water quality, is carried out here; the amount it has cost the taxpayer to date; the other countries use this process; if any other process has been explored to improve water quality here and his plans to cease this practice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18018/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne): I can confirm that Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) carry out fish stock surveys of a number of waters in the State. I am advised by IFI that one of the many purposes behind these surveys is to provide information on the fish communities to the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government in respect of its monitoring obligations under the EU Water Framework Directive.

IFI have also confirmed that fish are surveyed using various methods, including gill nets, and that the fish which are not released during these scientific surveys are further analysed to provide information on age, weight, growth, diet etc. Given the multifaceted nature of survey work, it is not possible to disaggregate costs in respect of the water quality aspects.

The latest available information as regards financial and time inputs to the combined elements of survey/management activity by IFI, since its establishment in 2010, is publically available on IFI's website at the following link <http://www.fisheriesireland.ie/FAQ/faq.html>. I will provide the Deputy with a hard copy in the post.

The issue of water quality generally is a matter for the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government.

Inland Fisheries Stocks

494. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if a recent survey of fishery stocks has been carried out on the River Slaney; if so, when and the findings; if not, when is it proposed to carry out such a survey; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18081/16]

495. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will re-open a hardship fund for drift net licence holders on the rivers Barrow, Nore, Suir and Slaney; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18083/16]

496. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if drift net licences are transferable or inheritable; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18086/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne): I propose to take Questions Nos. 494 to 496, inclusive, together.

Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) is the state agency responsible for the protection, management and conservation of Ireland's inland fisheries and sea angling resources. IFI manages salmon stocks on an individual river basis as each of Ireland's 143 salmon rivers has its own genetically unique stock of salmon

IFI is supported in its management role a statutorily independent Standing Scientific Committee (SSC) on Salmon comprising scientists from IFI, Bord Iascaigh Mhara, the Loughs Agency, the National Parks and Wildlife Service, the Marine Institute, the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (Northern Ireland), and other State bodies and third level institutions.

Scientific and management assessments of each of the distinct stocks, including the River Slaney, are carried out every year and the SSC estimates the number of salmon likely to return to each river in the next fishing season based on estimates of salmon runs over the most recent five years. Each river has an individual conservation limit which is essentially the number of salmon required to spawn to maintain a healthy population. If the estimate of returning salmon is above this limit then salmon from that genetically unique river population may be harvested commercially or by rod and line.

The primary index for evaluation of likely returning numbers is the recorded rod (harvest or catch and release) and commercial catch averaged over the previous 5 years. In the case of the River Slaney, the fish counter data is used to estimate the salmon run. As stated, fisheries are only considered in rivers where the estimated returns are above the conservation limit for the river. I am advised by IFI that a risk analysis is undertaken on any estimate of returns expected to be above the conservation limit. IFI has confirmed no salmon surplus was available using fish counter data for the Slaney averaged over the past five years. The most recent stock assessment on the River Slaney was carried out in October 2015.

Assessments on all 143 Salmon rivers, including the Slaney, are carried out each year and the stocks will be again assessed later this year. The period for assessments takes account of the fishing season and the timing of salmon runs so as to capture as much fresh data as possible in the current year and to ensure that the management legislation can be reviewed before 1 January the following year. This data is added to the most recent 4 years of data to create a new 5 year

average to ensure that a “good” or “bad” year does not have a disproportionate impact on the assessment to the detriment of the conservation imperative

The salmon assessment methodologies used in Ireland are considered internationally as best practice, with many other countries moving towards the development of similar scientific assessment models for salmon stock conservation.

The Salmon Hardship Scheme was introduced following a Government decision in 2006 to cease, for conservation reasons, the commercial salmon mixed stock fishery. Under the scheme, fishermen active in the commercial salmon fishery, could opt to voluntarily cease fishing and undertake not to seek a licence in the future.

In excess of €25m was allocated to the scheme to facilitate payments to fishermen, with a further €5m provided for community development projects. Payments to individuals were based on verifiable track record and recorded catches in the five years prior to its introduction.

The scheme closed for applications on 31 December 2007 and ceased in 2008. I understand that all funds were expended and there are currently no plans to revisit such a scheme.

Public commercial fishing licences are issued annually on a prescribed application basis and, therefore, are not transferable or inheritable. There is no property right attaching to them.

Bord na Móna

497. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the number of acres of bog in total under the control of Bord Na Móna; those that are special areas of conservation, national heritage areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18528/16]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Denis Naughten): I understand from Bord na Móna that the company’s total land holdings amount to approximately 200,000 acres. The vast majority of this is peatland, although there are some small agricultural sites included in that total. Bord na Móna estimate that approximately 3,100 acres of their lands are designated either Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs), Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs) or proposed Natural Heritage Areas (pNHAs). This does not include lands under consideration for designation as SACs or NHAs by the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

Broadband Service Provision

498. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will undertake to ensure broadband roll-out for Pluckstown and Hurdlestown, Athboy, County Meath under the national broadband plan, as the areas nearby are currently being rolled out with fibre broadband; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18198/16]

499. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources when broadband will be rolled-out in Fordstown, Navan, County Meath; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18199/16]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 498 and 499 together.

The National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to deliver high speed services to every city, town, village and individual premises in Ireland. The Programme for a Partnership Government commits to the delivery of the NBP as a matter of priority. This is being achieved through private investment by commercial telecommunications companies and through a State intervention in areas where commercial investment is not forthcoming.

The High Speed Broadband Map, which is available at www.broadband.gov.ie shows the extent of the State Intervention area, which is the subject of procurement. The areas marked BLUE represent those areas where commercial providers are either currently delivering or have previously indicated plans to deliver high speed broadband services. The Department continues to monitor the commercial deployment plans in the BLUE area to ensure that those services are delivered.

The areas marked AMBER on the High Speed Broadband Map represent the target areas for the State Intervention and includes the townlands of Pluckstown, Hurdlestown and Fordstown, County Meath.

The map provides information on a county by county basis with a breakdown of coverage across the townlands in every county including County Meath. Individuals can check whether their premises is in a BLUE or an AMBER area by scrolling through the map online or entering their Eircode. The Department also has a dedicated mailbox and anyone with a query in relation to the Map should email the Department, quoting their Eircode, to broadband@dcenr.gov.ie.

Over 750,000 premises are the focus for the procurement process, which formally commenced in December 2015 with the publication of the Pre-Qualification Questionnaire (‘PQQ’) and Project Information Memorandum. Five responses were received from prospective bidders to this stage of the competitive procurement process by the deadline of 31 March 2016. The second stage in the procurement process will be a formal invitation to Participate in Dialogue (ITPD) to qualifying bidders. I expect that my Department will move to this stage over the coming weeks. The third stage of the procurement process involves the issue of final tender documentation which follows the dialogue process. Following the submission of final tenders by bidders, a winning bidder(s) will be selected for the contract which will comprise one or two lots as set out in the NBP Intervention Strategy. The Department will then enter into formal contract negotiations with the winning bidder(s). It is expected that contract(s) will be awarded by June 2017.

As part of the competitive process, the Department will engage with winning bidder(s) on the best roll-out strategy, in order to target areas of particularly poor service, business needs and / or high demand. This will need to be balanced with the most efficient network roll-out plan. A prioritisation programme will be put in place in this regard, in consultation with the Minister for Regional Development, Rural Affairs, Arts and the Gaeltacht. A detailed rollout plan for the network will be published once contract(s) are in place.

The Programme for a Partnership Government commits also to measures to assist in the roll-out of the network once a contract is awarded. In this regard, Minister Humphreys is leading on the establishment of county or regional broadband taskforces, working with Local Authorities, Local Enterprise Offices, LEADER Groups and other relevant agencies to help accelerate the broadband network build in rural Ireland, once a contract(s) has been awarded.

National Broadband Plan

500. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the names of the companies involved in the tendering process for the recent broadband contract; the criteria involved in drawing up the tender; the companies which got the tender; and how the value of the tender. [18312/16]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Denis Naughten): The National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to deliver high speed services to every city, town, village and individual premises in Ireland. The Programme for a Partnership Government commits to the delivery of the NBP as a matter of priority. This is being achieved through private investment by commercial telecommunications companies and through a State intervention in areas where commercial investment is not forthcoming.

The procurement process for the State intervention to provide high quality, high speed broadband to over 750,000 premises formally commenced in December 2015 with the publication of the Pre-qualification Questionnaire (PQQ) and Project Information Memorandum. The procurement takes the form of a competitive dialogue which is complex and involves several steps:

- **Step 1:** Publication of the Pre-qualification Questionnaire – this step was launched on 22 December 2015.

- **Step 2:** Five responses were received to this stage of the process, by the deadline of 31 March (which was extended by one month, from 29 February to 31 March at the request of bidders). These responses have now been evaluated.

- **Step 3:** Qualified bidders will be invited to commence dialogue (Invitation to Participate in Dialogue). This is scheduled to commence within the next month and will take a number of months;

- **Step 4:** Bidders will be invited to submit detailed solutions for further dialogue (Invitation to submit detailed solutions);

- **Step 4a:** Bidders will then submit detailed solutions for evaluation;

- **Step 5:** Bidders will be invited to submit final, formal tenders following further dialogue

- **Step 5a:** Bidders submit formal tenders;

- **Step 6:** Formal tenders submitted by qualified bidders will be evaluated.

- **Step 7:** Preferred bidder(s) identified

- **Step 8:** 25 year contract awarded – June 2017.

The Deputy will see from Step 3 above that the second stage in the competitive process involves the formal Invitation to Participate in Dialogue (ITPD) to qualifying bidders. This step will commence in the coming weeks. The Deputy will appreciate that the procurement process is ongoing and that I am not in a position to provide the details of prospective bidders.

The timing of each stage of the procurement is dependent on a number of factors, including but not limited to the complexities that may be encountered during the dialogue process. Bidders will need several months to prepare their draft bids and their final formal bids and to get the relevant shareholder and funding approvals at these stages of the process. The Government's Capital Plan commits initial stimulus funding of €275m for the first five years of the NBP. Ultimately the outcome of the procurement process will determine the final cost of the intervention. Therefore, and in order to ensure a competitive procurement process, I am not in a position to

speculate about the potential overall cost of the intervention.

As part of the competitive process, the Department will engage with winning bidder(s) on the best rollout strategy, in order to target areas of particularly poor service, business needs and / or high demand. This will need to be balanced with the most efficient network rollout plan. A prioritisation programme will be put in place in this regard, in consultation with the Minister for Regional Development, Rural Affairs, Arts and the Gaeltacht. A detailed rollout plan for the network will be published once contract(s) are in place.

The Programme for a Partnership Government commits also to measures to assist in the roll-out of the network once a contract is awarded. In this regard, Minister Humphreys is leading on the establishment of county or regional broadband taskforces, working with Local Authorities, Local Enterprise Offices, LEADER Groups and other relevant agencies to help accelerate the broadband network build in rural Ireland, once a contract(s) has been awarded.

Better Energy Homes Scheme Data

501. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the funding the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland provided under the better energy communities scheme by county and local authority in each of the years 2012 to 2016 to date. [18421/16]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) administers the Better Energy Communities scheme on behalf of my Department. The scheme aims to support and encourage community based partnerships to improve the energy efficiency of homes, businesses and community facilities in a local area. To date the scheme has supported the upgrade of more than 12,000 homes and several hundred shared community facilities, from sports clubs to community centres and childcare facilities

Under this year's scheme, €20 million in grant support has been awarded to 38 community groups. This will provide for energy efficiency upgrades to more than 2,600 homes and almost 300 community and commercial facilities. The total investment in energy efficiency, including funding from local communities themselves, is almost €48 million, which will support an estimated 700 direct and indirect jobs right across the country.

Due to the nature of community projects, many individual projects cross county and Local Authority areas. The details of each project that has received funding from my Department under the scheme from 2013-2016, along with the areas where works were delivered, have been forwarded to the Deputy and are also available at the link below. The scheme was only operated on a pilot basis in 2012. My officials, and SEAI, would be happy to consult further with the Deputy to confirm that this material provides sufficient information and identify how best to supply any further data required.

[2013]

[2014]

http://www.seai.ie/Grants/Better_Energy_Communities/Better-Energy-Communities-Projects-2015.pdf

[2016]

Electric Vehicle Grants

502. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the number of grants his Department has paid out and the total value of such grants for the purchase of battery electric vehicles and for plug-in hybrid electric vehicles in each of the years 2010 to 2016 to date. [18422/16]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Electric Vehicle Grant Scheme was introduced in April 2011 to incentivise and support, through grants of up to €5,000, the early deployment of electric vehicles in Ireland. These grants are in addition to the VRT reliefs of up to €5,000 which apply to electric vehicles.

The number of grants paid and the total value of such grants for the purchase of battery electric vehicles and for plug-in hybrid electric vehicles in each year from 2011 to date is set out in the following table:

Year/s	No of Grants	Amount (Euro)
2011	42	198,000
2012	183	767,400
2013	53	242,200
2014	257	1,203,400
2015	555	2,647,800
2016 (to 24 June 2016)	369	1,758,200
Total	1,459	6,817,000

The extent to which electric vehicles are adopted in the short-to-medium term will depend on a range of factors including, *inter alia*, the strength of the economy, the overall numbers of new cars being purchased, the cost of purchasing and running electric vehicles compared to fossil fuel comparators, and the number of different electric vehicle models available to purchase. There are signs that these factors are improving. In 2015, the number of electric vehicles supported under the Electric Vehicle Grant Scheme exceeded the combined total supported over the previous four years. My Department expects that the numbers of electric vehicles in Ireland will continue to increase.

Local Improvement Scheme

503. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of drain cleaning (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17924/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Local Improvement Scheme (LIS) remains in place. This Scheme provides funding for private roads and laneways, the maintenance and improvement of which is, in the first instance, a matter for the relevant landowner. While the LIS does not have a ring-fenced allocation in 2016, local

authorities may use a proportion of State grant funding (15% of the Discretionary Grant) for LIS should they wish to do so. In addition Councils can also provide monies from their own resources towards LIS.

The Programme for a Partnership Government provides that, as the economy recovers, the Government will promote increased funding for Local Improvement Schemes, on an annual basis. A major objective for the new Government will be to prioritise new investment in local and regional road maintenance and improvements, and LIS funding will be promoted in that context.

Public Transport Subsidies

504. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to address concerns on the tax savers scheme (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18148/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issue raised in relation to fares is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) in conjunction with Iarnród Éireann and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Traffic Calming Measures

505. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has received requests for funding from Cork County Council, east Cork municipal district or any other body for the provision of a zebra crossing in Rostellan village in East Cork; and if not, if he will commit to releasing funds to provide such a zebra crossing as was laid out in local area plans since 2011. [18272/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of each local authority, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from local authorities' own resources supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is also a matter for the local authority.

As regards measures to address safety hazards, my Department operates a Safety Improvement Grant Programme whereby local authorities submit a list of schemes in order of priority for consideration for funding. Within the constraints of the overall roads budget, allocations are made to local authorities for the scheme each year. The application received from Cork County Council for 2016 did not include a project at Rostellan. All available funding has been allocated for this year.

When allocating grant funding my Department has emphasised that the commitment of local authorities to contribute significantly from their own resources towards the cost of improving and maintaining the regional and local roads network is essential and that full consideration needs to be given to utilising the Local Property Tax to boost own resources expenditure on regional and local road maintenance and renewal.

Road Traffic Legislation

506. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if and when he will introduce regulations or legislation regarding the use of rickshaws, trikes and other novelty type vehicles; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17918/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): All vehicles are obliged to obey road traffic law. Pedal-powered rickshaws come within the definition of 'pedal cycles' and powered rickshaws are classified as 'mechanically propelled vehicles'. The measures which were introduced last year to allow An Garda Síochána to issue fixed charge notices to cyclists also apply to pedal powered rickshaws and provide an important tool for An Garda Síochána in enforcing the law.

At present there is no specific legislation to regulate the carriage of passengers by rickshaws. I understand that, in response to some concerns - primarily of a safety nature - both Dublin City Council and the National Transport Authority have obtained legal advices in relation to their respective powers to regulate rickshaws. Following consideration of those advices my Department will be consulting the Attorney General on the best way to proceed to provide for the appropriate regulation of rickshaws.

In the case of trikes or other novelty vehicles that come within the definition of mechanically propelled vehicle, it is a matter for the National Transport Authority to determine the appropriateness of licensing such vehicles as small public service vehicles. I have therefore referred your question to the NTA for direct reply to you. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

Road Improvement Schemes

507. **Deputy John Paul Phelan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the current position of his Department and Transport Infrastructure Ireland on the need to upgrade the Waterford to Limerick N24; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17989/16]

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 road projects is a matter for the Transport Infrastructure Ireland (formerly known as the NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the Local Authorities. Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects is a matter in the first instance for TII in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act.

Noting the above 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 days.

Road Projects Status

508. **Deputy John Paul Phelan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the completion of the Ring Road in Kilkenny City with particular emphasis on the section including a new bridge linking the N77 to the R693; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17990/16]

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 road proj-

ects (such as the Kilkenny Northern Ring Road) is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland - TII (formerly known as the NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects is a matter in the first instance for TII in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act.

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

Aviation Issues

509. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he is aware of complaints from the residents of Hollystown and surrounding areas in west Dublin in respect of the noise generated from early morning and late night flights to and from Dublin Airport, between the hours 12 a.m. and 7 a.m; the number of these flights that have taken place in 2015 and 2016 to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18016/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Irish Aviation Authority (IAA) is the Competent Authority in Ireland with the responsibility of ensuring that airport authorities adopt a balanced approach in dealing with noise-related matters at airports. The IAA exercises its responsibilities by reference to EU legislative provisions and I have asked the IAA to liaise directly with the Deputy. The IAA will be in a position to provide the Deputy with information on flight activity. If the Deputy does not receive a reply within ten working days, please advise my private office.

Noise Pollution Legislation

510. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the regulations in place to minimise and mitigate the noise levels to residents in the Hollystown and surrounding areas in Dublin west from aircraft taking off and landing in Dublin Airport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18021/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Environmental Noise Directive (END) 2002/49/EC sets out certain requirements for the assessment and management of environmental noise from transport sources, including from major airports with more than 50,000 aircraft take-off or landing movements per year. Dublin Airport is the only airport in Ireland that falls within this threshold.

The END was transposed into national law by the Environmental Noise Regulations 2006, which set out a two-stage process for addressing environmental noise. Firstly, environmental noise must be assessed through the preparation of strategic noise maps for areas and infrastructure falling within defined criteria. This is undertaken by prescribed noise mapping bodies, which includes Dublin Airport Authority (daa) and local authorities. Secondly, based on the results of the mapping process, the Regulations require the preparation of noise action plans for each area concerned, which is undertaken by the relevant local authority, the prescribed noise action planning body. The fundamental objective of action plans is the prevention and reduction of environmental noise.

The most recent noise mapping exercise found that 200 people are exposed to undesirable night-time levels above 55 dB(A) from aircraft using Dublin Airport. As compared to the pre-

vious mapping exercise in 2007, there has been an overall reduction in the number of people exposed to undesirable night-time noise levels.

In 2008, Dublin Airport Stakeholders Forum set up an Environmental Working Group that works closely with Fingal County Council. This group provides an effective forum for the discussion of all environment matters concerning the development and operation of the airport that have an impact on users, customers of the airport and on people living and working in the surrounding communities.

The management of noise abatement of operational procedures at Dublin Airport is shared by the airport operator, the daa, and the airlines operating at the airport. Under the European Communities (Air Navigation and Transport Rules and Procedures for Noise Related Operating Restrictions at Airports) Regulations 2003, the Irish Aviation Authority has the responsibility of ensuring that the airport operator has in place a system of noise monitoring.

In recognition of its responsibilities in this area, the daa has introduced, and continues to evaluate, a number of initiatives to monitor aircraft noise levels and to mitigate their impact. A flight tracking system is now operated that allows aircraft movements to be analysed and to respond to any complaints relating to aircraft noise. The primary objective of the Noise & Flight Track Department of the daa is to gather information on aircraft approach and departure routes and resultant noise levels at a number of key locations.

The regulatory regime for airport noise at EU airports with more than 50,000 aircraft take-off or landing movements per year has recently been enhanced with the entry into force on 13 June 2016 of Regulation (EU) No 598/2014 which requires that Member States adhere to a specific process known as the ICAO Balanced Approach when considering the introduction of operating restrictions at airports. My Department, along with the Office of the Attorney General and the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, is engaged in discussions regarding arrangements for the appropriate implementation of this Regulation in Ireland.

Aviation Policy

511. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the contacts he has had with his European Union colleagues in relation to the single European sky initiative; if he has taken into consideration the position paper and questionnaire (details supplied) from the European Union parliamentary rapporteur, single European sky; and when he may issue a response. [18024/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The position paper and questionnaire referred to by the Deputy has been circulated on behalf of the Dutch House of Representatives. I consider that national parliamentary initiatives of this nature can most appropriately be progressed in the Member State concerned in the first instance and subsequently, as necessary, in the institutions of the European Union.

It is important to emphasise that, in line with the agreed institutional arrangements for the European Union, discussions between Member State Governments on particular policy issues such as the Single European Sky are held in the formation of the Council of Transport Ministers of the EU. The Council works closely with the European Parliament through the appropriate channels for coordination. In these circumstances, it is not proposed to issue a response to this questionnaire at this time.

While I have not yet had an opportunity to discuss this initiative with my European Union counterparts at Transport Council, officials from my Department are engaged in Sin-

gle European Sky (SES) discussions on an ongoing basis at EU level. These discussions are aimed at progressing various technical elements of the SES and are delivering positive results.

As previously advised to the House, Ireland has consistently given its full support to the Single European Sky initiative since its launch in 2004 and that policy position remains.

Light Rail Projects

512. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the €2.4 billion Metro North project in County Dublin, including if this project will go ahead; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18055/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Programme for Government includes a commitment to proceed with the New Metro North project and funding is provided in the Capital Plan “Building on Recovery Infrastructure & Capital Investment 2016-2021” to facilitate construction of the link commencing in 2021 with a view to delivery by 2026/2027.

The funding constraints that existed when the Capital Plan was being developed, and which continue to exist, mean that we are not in a position to deliver all that is required immediately. The first priority has to be ensuring that we maintain our existing transport infrastructure at what is termed “*steady state*” levels so that it remains safe and fit for purpose after a significant period of under-investment during the fiscal and economic crisis. The funding that is being provided in the Capital Plan for public transport investment will see us reach “*steady state*” funding levels by 2020. In addition, funding is provided to commence critical transport projects such as New Metro North to meet growing demand.

The National Transport Authority (NTA) and Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) have commenced preparatory work on planning and design of New Metro North and a dedicated project Steering Group has been established.

In the event that additional funding becomes available in the next few years, this preparatory work that is now underway will position us to progress the project in line with available funding.

Sports Funding

513. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the funding the State awarded to Athletics Ireland in each of the years 2010 to 2016 to date. [18059/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Sport Ireland, which is funded by my Department, is the statutory body with responsibility for the promotion, development and co-ordination of sport. This includes responsibility for the allocation of current expenditure funding to National Governing Bodies of Sport.

I have referred the Deputy’s Question to Sport Ireland for direct reply in relation to funding provided to Athletics Ireland under Sport Ireland’s funding programmes. I would ask the Deputy to inform my office if a reply is not received within 10 days.

Additionally, details of all Sports Capital allocations made under my Department’s Sports Capital Programme are available on the Department’s website. No new allocations have been made so far in 2016.

Road Projects

514. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he is aware of the status of safety of Poulgorm Cross where the R569 meets the N22 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18078/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As indicated in my response to PQ 16719/16, as Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) (formerly known as the NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects is a matter in the first instance for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act.

Noting the above position, I have referred your question to TII for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

Taxi Regulations

515. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason for the lack of hackney licences being granted (details supplied). [18080/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The regulation of the small public service vehicle (SPSV) industry, including the granting of SPSV licences, is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA), under the provisions of the Taxi Regulation Act 2013.

I have referred your question to the NTA for direct reply to you. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

Road Safety

516. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will legislate for seat belts on public buses; if not, why not; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18088/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Ireland's Entry into Service regulations requires all buses to have Type Approval, which includes the specified standards for safety belts, where they are required, before they are used on the road.

I understand that buses designed to operate in an urban environment, operating at reduced speeds (maximum 65km/h in Ireland if carrying standees) and with passengers in many instances, only having a short journey time, are not, in accordance with EU legislation, required to be fitted with safety belts. Due to the number of people these vehicles can carry, often for short distances, and at reduced speeds for safety reasons their design takes these factors into account while also considering the efficient and swift movement of passengers getting on and off the vehicle.

Legislative provisions pertaining to safety belts on such buses will be reviewed in line with

any future proposed amendments to European legislation in this regard.

Coast Guard Services

517. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to outline the rules regarding the deployment of the Coast Guard helicopter to inland waterways particularly in cases where this may be more expedient in getting to the scene than the Garda Sub-Aqua team; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18096/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Irish Coast Guard which is a Division of my Department provides a response and coordination service for Maritime Search and Rescue (SAR). Irish Coast Guard helicopters provide a day and night-time service, operating out of bases in Sligo, Shannon, Waterford and Dublin. Operations include the mobilisation, organisation and tasking of adequate resources to respond to persons in distress at sea, or to persons at risk of injury or death on the cliffs, shoreline and inland waterways of Ireland. Such tasking may include a direct response initiated by the Coast Guard or a response on foot of a request from an Garda Síochána.

In accordance with the Framework for Major Emergency Management the coordination of an inter-agency response to emergencies on inland waterways is the responsibility of an Garda Síochána, although they may assign the co-ordination of Search and Rescue (SAR) deployments to the Coast Guard.

National Driver Licensing Service

518. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has been made aware of a computer systems failure at the National Driver Licensing Service office in Donegal Town; the date on which the system first became inoperative and the date on which this issue was resolved; the impact which this failure has had on services and what alternative arrangements were put in place for customers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18124/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The operation of the National Driver Licensing Service is the statutory responsibility of the Road Safety Authority, and I have no role in the matters described. I have therefore referred the Question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response has not been received within ten days.

Services for People with Disabilities

519. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the date of the last and next meetings of his Department's accessibility consultative committee; his plans to engage with the disability sector in improving transport services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18147/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): My Department's Accessibility Consultative Committee last met on 25 November 2015. A date for the next meeting has not yet been arranged. *Transport Access for All*, my Department's Sectoral Plan under the Disability Act 2005, was prepared following an extensive consultative process with all stakeholders and continues to guide Departmental policy in improving accessibility to public

transport for people with mobility, sensory and cognitive impairments. My Department is also involved in the National Disability Inclusion Strategy which is working across Departments to support and encourage participation of people with disabilities in society.

Community Development Initiatives

520. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he agrees that Broomfield and District Residents Association do tremendous work in beautifying and litter prevention predominantly in the area of County Meath close to Mellifont Abbey in the context of the Ireland's Ancient East programme; and if funding is available to help such organisations. [18159/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): The role of my Department in relation to tourism lies primarily in the area of national tourism policy. It does not develop or fund individual projects, which is a matter for the Board and Management of Fáilte Ireland.

Accordingly, I have referred the Deputy's question to Fáilte Ireland for direct reply. Please contact my private office if a response is not received within ten working days.

Road Network

521. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to provide the funding in 2016 to complete the process of the compulsory purchase of the land required to commence construction of the link road R150 from Bettystown to Laytown. [18184/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As indicated previously to the Deputy, the improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads in Co. Meath is the statutory responsibility of Meath County Council, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from the Council's own resources supplemented by State road grants.

The Capital Plan 2016-2021 provides that a number of schemes targeting bottlenecks in the road network will be progressed subject to necessary approvals. The R150 Laytown to Bettystown Spine road is one of the projects included in the Capital Plan, subject to necessary approvals including planning. I understand that Meath County Council is liaising with my officials in relation to the project, including the timescale for implementation. An allocation of €50,000 has made in relation to the project this year. All available grant funding for 2016 has now been allocated.

Military Aircraft Landings

522. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a person (details supplied) has made any representations to his Department regarding military use of Knock Airport, by the United States of America; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18244/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): S.I. No. 74/1952 - Air Navigation (Foreign Military Aircraft) Order - provides that the permission of the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade is required for any foreign military aircraft to enter Irish airspace or

land at an Irish airport. I have no function in that regard.

No representations have been made to me or my Department regarding military use of Knock Airport by the United States of America.

Motor Insurance Coverage

523. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport why there are no insurance companies which will at this time give a quotation to a person who is a first-time taxi licence holder for a wheelchair accessible vehicle. [18251/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Motor Insurance is a private contractual matter between the insurance company and their customers. I have no powers to intervene in the matter.

The Central Bank is the Insurance Regulator. As my colleague, the Minister for Finance stated in the Dáil in a statement on insurance costs on 20 April, the Department of Finance will over the coming months be focusing on a broad review of policy in the insurance sector, in consultation with agencies such as the Central Bank, Departments, and other stakeholders. In that context, queries regarding the practices engaged in by the motor insurance companies could be raised with my colleague, the Minister for Finance and with the Department of Finance in the context of that review.

Insurance Ireland operates a free Insurance Information Service for those who have queries, or difficulties in relation to obtaining insurance. If a person is unable to obtain a quotation for motor insurance or feels that the premium proposed or the terms are so excessive that it amounts to a refusal to give them motor insurance, they should contact Insurance Ireland, 5 Harbourmaster Place, IFSC, Dublin 1 DO1 E7E8 Tel. 01.6761820 Fax 01 676 1943 email info@insuranceireland.eu quoting the Declined Cases Agreement. Under the Agreement, the Declined Cases Committee of Insurance Ireland deals with any cases of difficulty in obtaining motor insurance.

National Driver Licensing Service

524. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he is aware that persons from the Inishowen peninsula in County Donegal have to travel an unreasonable distance to attain a learner permit or driving licence at the National Driving Licence Service office in Letterkenny; if he will support the locating of a new office in the Inishowen peninsula. [18256/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The operation of the National Driver Licensing Service (NDLS), including the location of front offices, is the statutory responsibility of the Road Safety Authority, and I have no role in operational matters such as the location of NDLS offices. I have therefore referred the question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response has not been received within ten days.

Motor Insurance

525. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to address the exorbitant cost of car insurance (details supplied); and if he will make a

statement on the matter. [18311/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Motor insurance is provided by private companies in an open and competitive market. Pricing is a matter for the industry and I have no role in the regulation of insurers although I am concerned with the recent trend towards increasing motor insurance costs. As my colleague, the Minister for Finance stated in the Dail in a statement on insurance costs on 20 April, the Department of Finance will over the coming months be focussing on a broad review of policy in the insurance sector, in consultation with agencies such as the Central Bank, Departments, and other stakeholders, and the cost of insurance will be a particular focus of that review.

The only area within my remit whereby I can influence, albeit indirectly, motor insurance costs is through providing An Garda Síochána with the necessary legislative supports for the enforcement of uninsured driving. To that end, the Road Traffic Bill 2016, which is currently awaiting passage through this House having been passed by the Seanad, contains an amendment to the existing requirements which will allow for more robust enforcement by the Garda Síochána.

I am confident that such robust enforcement has the capacity to deliver significant savings to the Motor Insurers Bureau of Ireland in terms of reducing the number of claims with respect to compensating victims of road traffic collisions, which costs the industry and insured drivers here some €50 to €60 million per annum, where uninsured vehicles were responsible for the collision. Those savings should, in turn, have the effect of reducing the overall costs of motor insurance premiums.

Road Projects Status

526. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of funding for a road (details supplied) that requires immediate attention; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18339/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads in Kerry is a statutory function of Kerry County Council in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act, 1993. Works on such roads are a matter for the Council to be funded from its own resources supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of projects to be funded from these monies is a matter for the Council. When allocating grant funding my Department has emphasised that the commitment of local authorities to contribute significantly from their own resources towards the cost of improving and maintaining the regional and local roads network is essential and that full consideration needs to be given to utilising the Local Property Tax to boost own resources expenditure on regional and local road maintenance and renewal. All available funding for 2016 has now been allocated.

Road Safety

527. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to review traffic safety on Jamestown Road (details supplied). [18351/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of local authorities, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads

are funded from local authorities' own resources supplemented by State road grants, where applicable. The selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is also a matter for the local authority. In addition, traffic management in its area is a matter for each local authority under the relevant Road Traffic Acts. Arising from the introduction of the Local Property Tax and the Government decision that local authorities will retain 80% of the tax revenues, the four Dublin Councils became self funding for regional and local roads under the main road grant categories from 2015.

Traffic Management

528. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when plans for Finglas village traffic management will be included in the works programme. [18353/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads in Finglas village is the statutory responsibility of Dublin City Council, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from local authorities' own resources supplemented by State road grants, where applicable. The selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is also a matter for the local authority. In addition, traffic management measures in Finglas are also the responsibility of the local authority. Arising from the introduction of the Local Property Tax and the Government commitment that local authorities will retain 80% of the tax revenues, the four Dublin Councils became self funding for regional and local roads under the main road grant categories from 2015.

Public Service Obligation Levy Data

529. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the criteria he uses to allocate funding under the public service obligation scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18402/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The criteria used to allocate funding under the Public Service Obligation Scheme is governed by the Public Transport Contracts between the National Transport Authority (NTA) and the public transport providers and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Sports Capital Programme Expenditure

530. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the capital and operational funding allocated directly to the Football Association of Ireland in each of the years from 2002 to 2016 to date, not including individual clubs grant aided under the sports capital programme. [18424/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): Details of all allocations under the sports capital programme are published on the Department's website dttas.ie.

In relation to operational funding, Sport Ireland, which is funded by the Department, is the statutory body with responsibility for the promotion, development and co-ordination of sport.

This includes responsibility for the allocation of funding for National Governing Bodies of Sport. As this is a matter for Sport Ireland, I have referred it to Sport Ireland for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to inform my office if a reply is not received within 10 days.

Road Traffic Legislation

531. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if section 38 of the Road Traffic Act 1994 has been enacted and if not, why not. [18503/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Section 38 of the Road Traffic Act 1994 was commenced on 22 July 1994 by S.I. 222 of 1994 - Road Traffic Act 1994 (Commencement) Order 1994.

Public Service Vehicles

532. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of public service vehicle, PSV, licences active from 2009 to 2016 to date; the percentage of persons who passed the recently introduced PSV licence exam; if he has considered modifying the exam to help persons with a disability pass while not diminishing standards; his views that areas will be left without a taxi service as fewer people qualify for the job and people are prohibited from working in excess of eight hours consecutively; and the action he will take in conjunction with the Minister for Finance to tackle the high cost of insurance for the sector. [18527/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The regulation of the small public service vehicle (SPSV) industry, is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the provisions of the Taxi Regulation Act 2013, so I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply as regards the SPSV regulatory aspects. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

In relation to the Deputy's query about insurance costs for the SPSV sector, he may recall that during a Dáil debate on a private members motion on motor insurance earlier this month, the Minister of State at the Department of Finance, Eoghan Murphy T.D., advised the House that the cost of insurance to taxi and hackney drivers will be included in the issues to be addressed by the task force established by the Minister for Finance to review policy in the insurance sector. That task force will examine all issues relating to insurance policy, in consultation with bodies such as the Central Bank, Departments, and other stakeholders, and the cost of insurance will be a particular focus of the review.

For my part, I am confident that the implementation of the actions set out in the Road Safety Strategy 2013-2020 will, over time, lead to a reduction in road traffic collisions, fatalities and injuries and should make an important contribution to reducing the cost of motor insurance. My Department has been pursuing for some time the establishment of a properly functioning motor insurance database with the insurance industry here to show who is insured and who is not. Such a database would facilitate enforcement by An Garda Síochána, and could make a significant contribution towards reducing the level of uninsured driving in Ireland, which costs the industry and insured drivers here €50 to €60 million approximately per annum.

Job Losses

533. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if she

will meet staff at a company (details supplied); if she can ensure that staff will receive the best possible package available to them; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18169/16]

534. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the discussions she or the statutory agencies under the remit of her Department have had or propose to hold with the senior management in a company (details supplied) or with representatives of employees, given the recent announcement of redundancies in that company, to ensure that all possible assistance is provided to employees who may lose their jobs; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18516/16]

535. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the discussions she has had with senior management or representatives of employees in a company (details supplied), in view of the recent announcement of redundancies, to ensure that appropriate supports are provided without delay for employees who may lose their jobs; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18517/16]

547. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation her views on the 70 job losses at a company (details supplied); if there is anything that can be done to protect jobs in this sector; and her plans for job creation in County Cavan. [18168/16]

552. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the discussions she has had or proposes to have with the senior management of a company (details supplied) on the need for this company to retain the maximum level of employment in County Cavan in view of its recent announcement regarding redundancies; if the statutory agencies under the remit of her Department have offered assistance to the company or its employees on employment retention; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18518/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): I propose to take Questions Nos. 533 to 535, inclusive, 547 and 552 together.

I share the Deputies' concern in relation to the recent developments at this company, where 70 job losses were announced last week from its operations in Cavan and Blanchardstown. I am very much aware that these redundancies follow a series of job losses in this company in recent years so this is a further blow, especially to the Cavan town operation.

This decision was made after a strategic internal review by the company. The priority for the Government now is to seek to retain the remaining jobs and work to create new jobs elsewhere in the region.

IDA is engaging with the company so that it can develop a skills profile of the affected workers and will aim to match them with other potential employers. In addition the IDA will continue to engage with the company to seek to influence corporate decisions and to broaden the scope of their operations here. One positive development is that the company's project announced in 2013 for the eventual creation of 150 jobs in an IT project at their Blanchardstown operation currently employs 70 staff and remains on track to reach that employment target.

On the wider picture, I have asked both IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland to redouble their efforts to secure new projects and expand existing operations in Cavan, and to explore all opportunities to replace the jobs being lost there. Enterprise Ireland's job creation work in County Cavan has been particularly successful in recent years with 300 and 190 net new jobs added in 2014 and 2015 respectively. In addition, the Local Enterprise Office in the County has been working to develop the micro-enterprise sector in Cavan and has helped to develop start up enterprises. That work will, of course, continue. The Regional Action Plan for Jobs for the North East and North West is now in place and will be a key instrument in driving job creation

in the region.

As regards services for the staff who will, unfortunately, lose their jobs, my officials have been in touch with both the Department of Social Protection (DSP) and with the local Education and Training Board (ETB). The priority of DSP is to ensure that employees who are made redundant receive their statutory entitlements and jobseeker payments in a timely manner, and it will also proactively help them to access the opportunities for employment in their region.

Officials from that Department have already had preliminary discussions with representatives from the company and will provide information sessions to interested staff over the coming weeks. These sessions will provide staff with advice on jobseekers payments and other income supports. Information will also be provided on the employment supports which will be available to the employees to prepare them to return to work or explore appropriate education and training options. The employees based in Cavan will be advised to make contact with the Cavan INTREO Centre as soon as they have their leaving dates. They will then be provided with the earliest possible appointment to make their claim.

In relation to the local ETB, that body has already contacted the company with a view to offering support, advice and required education and training. The ETB has engaged successfully with Liberty and former staff on previous occasions and is eager to continue this level of engagement.

Grant Payments

536. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation to correct her Department's claim in paragraph three of correspondence dated 20 February 2004 (details supplied) that the release of the approved grant was requested on 14 July 1997, whereas in fact that payment application had been withdrawn on 16 July 1997 and resubmitted on 11 September 1997 after her Department had checked and approved the unpaid invoices which, nevertheless, were later reported to the Director of Public Prosecutions as fraudulent solely by virtue of being unpaid. [17960/16]

537. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if, in its formal statement to the fraud squad dated 26 April 1999, her Department fully informed An Garda Síochána that there was no prohibition on non-Government organisations using unpaid invoices to claim grant payments and that her Department had in August 1997 checked and approved the three unpaid invoices before the payment application was received and acted on (details supplied). [17961/16]

538. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation why correspondence (details supplied) to her Department dated 29 January 1999 from a non-government organisation, which for the first time specifically questioned the validity of using unpaid invoices to claim European Union and European Social Fund grants and was the basis of the subsequent complaint to the fraud squad, remains unanswered. [17962/16]

539. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if her Department's assertion that the application for payment had been made before it had seen the invoices, an assertion which is inaccurate, was the product of its six week internal investigation that it had agreed upon with a person (details supplied) in order to establish the facts. [17963/16]

540. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation to take note of the communications from persons (details supplied) and identify any ministerial response or parliamentary reply which specifically disclosed the truth, namely that there was no prohibition

on the use of unpaid invoices by non-Government organisations to claim payment of European Union and European Social Fund grants. [17964/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): I propose to take Questions Nos. 536 to 540, inclusive, together.

My Department, and previous Ministers, have been in receipt of correspondence from the individual concerned over many years in relation to the issues raised by the Deputy in her Questions. There have been a number of Departments and statutorily independent Offices involved in considering different aspects of the issues raised and insofar as my Department is concerned a complaint was lodged several years ago with the Ombudsman's Office in relation to how my Department had handled the matter. The Ombudsman's Office decided to close their file in this case without any adverse findings issuing against the Department. My Department has also repeatedly responded to Freedom of Information requests related to the questions raised and provided information to the individual concerned. The Information Commissioner, along with the Ombudsman, accepted after a lengthy and comprehensive investigation that my Department had acted appropriately with the individual concerned.

Insofar as European Social Fund Programmes from a decade and more ago are concerned, these have been deemed "closed" for some time by the European Authorities with all payments due from the EU Commission to Ireland fully reconciled.

I am further informed that An Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality, Francis Fitzgerald T.D., has decided to establish an inquiry under the terms of section 42 of the Garda Síochána Act 2005 into Garda actions in respect of allegations made against the person referred to by the Deputy. Accordingly, any specific queries on that inquiry might be raised directly with my colleague.

Legislative Measures

541. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if the Government has given UEFA a guarantee to enact legislation on the prohibition of the sale of match tickets by ticket touts in advance of the Euro 2020 championships and if such legislation is currently being prepared; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18029/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): A commitment has been given to UEFA which relates to the introduction of legislative provisions to prevent the unauthorised transfer and use of tickets for matches during the Euro 2020 Championship, or at official events related to the Euro 2020 Championship. No decisions have been taken as yet on the detail of these provisions.

Legislative Measures

542. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to approve and sign a code of practice on the conduct of adjudications under section 9 of the Construction Contracts Act 2013; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18030/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The Construction Contracts Act, 2013 will apply to certain construction contracts entered into after the 25th July 2016 in accordance with Statutory Instrument No. 165 of 2016 entitled 'Construction Contracts Act, 2013 (Appointed Day) Order 2016'. The parties to an applicable construc-

tion contract entered into after the 25th July must therefore ensure that the contract conforms to the provisions of the new legislation.

I will publish a Code of Practice relating to the conduct of adjudications under section 9 of the Act in the coming weeks, following which there will be a public information campaign undertaken by my Department in relation to the commencement of the legislation.

Legislative Measures

543. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation why Ireland has not yet ratified the United Nations Convention on Contracts for the International Sale of Goods (Vienna, 1980) despite previous recommendations in favour of ratification from the Law Reform Commission and the sales law review group; her plans to bring forward proposals enabling ratification; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18031/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): In order to enable the United Nations Convention on Contracts for the International Sale of Goods (Vienna, 1980) to be ratified and come into force in Ireland, primary legislation will be required. This issue will be considered in the context of the reform of sale of goods law as it applies to contracts between businesses that my Department hopes to undertake after legislation to reform consumer law on the supply of goods, digital content and services has been finalised. While both the Law Reform Commission and the Sales Law Review Group recommended that Ireland accedes to the Convention, there are some specific issues that require examination, such as whether Ireland should avail of some, or all, of the derogations permitted by the Convention.

Labour Court

544. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of appeals to the Labour Court which it has considered as being out of time and has not heard as a consequence in each of the years from 2011 to 2016 to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18047/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The time frame for the lodgement of appeals to the Labour Court is governed by statute.

An appeal against a recommendation of an Adjudication Officer under the Industrial Relations Act 1969 is governed by Section 13 (9) of the 1969 Act and Section 36 (2) of the Industrial Relations Act 1990. Section 36 (2) of the Industrial Relations Act 1990 provides that an appeal against a recommendation of an Adjudication Officer must be made within six weeks of the making of the recommendation. There is no provision in that section for an extension of time.

An appeal to the Labour Court under Employment Rights legislation is now governed by the provisions of Section 44 of the Workplace Relations Act, 2015 which commenced on 1 October 2015 and is applicable to appeals lodged after that date. Section 44(3) of this Act provides that an appeal shall be given to the Labour Court not later than 42 days from the date of the decision concerned. Section 44(4) provides that the Labour Court may allow an appeal that is lodged after this time frame if it is satisfied that it was due to exceptional circumstances.

The number of appeals to the Labour Court that it has considered as being out of time and therefore not heard in each of the years 2011 to 2016 to date is set out below. From 1 October 2015 appeals that would previously have gone to the Employment Appeals Tribunal now go

instead to an expanded Labour Court. Consequently, figures for 2016 will reflect this additional workload.

Year	Total
2016 (to date)	29
2015	39
2014	22
2013	29
2012	38
2011	33

IDA Site Visits

545. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of site visits made by IDA Ireland client companies to each county, on a county basis and in tabular form, in 2016 to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18104/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): IDA Ireland maintains statistics of site visits by potential investors on a quarterly basis. During quarter one of 2016, there were a total of 136 IDA Ireland sponsored site visits by potential investors to various locations throughout the country. The table sets out, on a county-by-county basis, the number of IDA Ireland sponsored site visits during this period.

It is important to note that data on site visits is not an accurate measure of the level of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) activity in a region or county. That is because approximately 70% of all FDI investment won by IDA Ireland comes from its existing client base, rather than new companies.

The true measure of FDI is reflected in IDA Ireland's record 2015 results. IDA Ireland client companies created just under 19,000 (18,983) jobs on the ground during the year across a range of sectors, with every region of Ireland posting net gains in jobs.

While IDA Ireland does attempt to influence the choice of location, the final decision as to where to visit and ultimately locate is taken in all cases by the client company.

IDA Ireland Jobs Statistics 2015; Site Visits 2015 and Quarter 1 2016 by County

County	No. of Companies	Total Jobs	New Jobs 2015	Site Visits 2015	Site Visits Q1 2016
Carlow	7	768	19	1	0
Cavan	7	1,165	29	0	0
Clare	68	6,599	646	12	3
Cork	148	31,900	4,062	48	11
Donegal	12	2,918	330	5	1
Dublin	652	77,244	8,864	242	57
Galway	60	14,297	1,267	41	10
Kerry	12	1,931	89	6	1
Kildare	22	10,313	679	7	5
Kilkenny	5	650	9	10	4
Laois	2	97	10	4	0

County	No. of Companies	Total Jobs	New Jobs 2015	Site Visits 2015	Site Visits Q1 2016
Leitrim	4	423	16	8	1
Limerick	52	8,849	1,018	40	9
Longford	5	686	46	2	1
Louth	21	3,245	317	20	5
Mayo	18	3,981	159	3	2
Meath	17	1,571	89	7	2
Monaghan	5	146	52	2	0
Offaly	10	902	58	8	1
Roscommon	9	936	99	2	0
Sligo	22	2,029	132	15	4
Tipperary	12	3,518	95	12	4
Waterford	33	5,662	536	31	4
Westmeath	16	2,529	212	28	9
Wexford	17	2,486	101	4	1
Wicklow	18	2,211	49	7	1
Total	1,254	187,056	18,983	565	136

IDA Site Visits

546. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of IDA Ireland visits over each of the past ten years to Longford, Tullamore, Athlone and Mullingar, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18112/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): I am informed by IDA Ireland that, for reasons of client confidentiality and commercial sensitivity, the Agency collects data on site visits on a county basis only. The number of site visits for Longford, Offaly and Westmeath for the years 2006 to 2015 inclusive and the numbers for the first quarter of 2016 are following.

Since 2015 IDA Ireland has been working towards targets set out in their strategy “*Winning - Foreign Direct Investment 2015-2019*”. For the first time, under this strategy, ambitious investment targets have been set on a regional basis whereby the Agency aims to increase the level of investment by between 30% to 40% in each region. The new strategy is already showing promise. In 2015, the number of site visits to all three counties, Longford, Offaly and Westmeath, more than doubled when compared to 2014.

The Government is committed to achieving balanced regional development. Over the course of 2015 and early 2016, my Department published eight Regional Action Plans for Jobs, including a plan for the Midlands. The key sectors in the regions targeted in the plan include manufacturing, tourism, food and energy. Actions to be delivered over the period 2015-2017 include:

- A series of actions to promote 25% more start-ups in the midlands, including extra funding, mentoring programmes and establishing new incubator spaces for entrepreneurs like Offaly Innovation Centre (The Junction) in Tullamore,

- A series of actions aimed at attracting at least 25 additional multinational investment projects to the region by 2019, including building two advance facilities for Athlone, Appointing an

IDA Ireland Regional Manager for the Midlands,

- Ensuring that key Agency personnel overseas have enhanced knowledge and marketing plans for the region,

- Establishing a Midlands manufacturing technologies campus.

The first Progress Report on the implementation of the Plan, covering the period to end-June 2016, will be completed and published in Q3 2016.

Site Visits by County 2006-2015 – Longford, Offaly and Westmeath

County	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Longford	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Offaly	1	4	11	6	7	1	3	1	1	8
Westmeath	16	18	18	14	22	15	7	9	12	28

Site Visits by County Q1 2016 – Longford, Offaly and Westmeath

County	Q12016
Longford	1
Offaly	1
Westmeath	9

Question No. 547 answered with Question No. 533.

Labour Court

548. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if she is aware of an anomalous situation in the operation of the Labour Court (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18187/16]

549. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of appeals the Labour Court rejected as a result of late submission, in tabular form; and if she will instruct its appeals office to supply the date for the last day of appeal on decisions in addition to the number of days before the appeal deadline. [18188/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): I propose to take Questions Nos. 548 and 549 together.

I have brought these matters to the attention of the Labour Court. The court is independent in the carrying out of its statutory functions. I am informed that the number of appeals to the Labour Court that it has considered as being out of time and therefore not heard in each of the years 2011 to 2016 to date is set out below:

Year	Total
2016 (to date)	29
2015	39
2014	22
2013	29
2012	38
2011	33

The time frame for the lodgement of appeals to the Labour Court is governed by statute.

An appeal against a recommendation of an Adjudication Officer under the Industrial Relations Act 1969 is governed by Section 13 (9) of the 1969 Act and Section 36 (2) of the Industrial Relations Act 1990. Section 36(2) of the Industrial Relations Act 1990 provides that an appeal against a recommendation of an Adjudication Officer must be made within six weeks of the making of the recommendation.

An appeal to the Labour Court under Employment Rights legislation is now governed by the provisions of Section 44 of the Workplace Relations Act, 2015 which commenced on 1 October 2015 and is applicable to appeals lodged after that date. Section 44(3) of this Act provides that an appeal shall be given to the Labour Court not later than 42 days from the date of the decision concerned. The time limit starts to run from the date of the decision and the actual date on the decision counts as part of the six week period allowed in which to make an appeal. A decision of the High Court in 2013 on this point has upheld this legal interpretation.

In this regard section 18 (h) of the Interpretation Act 2005 states as follows:

“Periods of time. Where a period of time is expressed to begin on or be reckoned from a particular day, that day shall be deemed to be included in the period and, where a period of time is expressed to end on or be reckoned to a particular day, that day shall be deemed to be included in the period;”.

Work Permits Applications

550. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if a decision has been made on a work permit for a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18333/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O’Connor): The application in question was refused on 15 March as the occupation is on the List of Ineligible Categories of Employment for Employment Permits. Furthermore, the remuneration on offer was less than the minimum annual remuneration specified in Regulations for this employment permit type.

In addition, the Labour Market Needs Test was not satisfied in that the applicant did not provide evidence that an advertisement relating to the proposed employment had run in a local newspaper or on a jobs website for three days during the 90 days preceding this application, as is required in the Regulations. Also, the manner in which the advertisement was published did not meet the requirements set out in the Regulations.

An unsuccessful applicant for an employment permit may seek a review of the decision to refuse the permit. All reviews are based on the information provided at time of application or information valid at the time of application but not provided until review stage. Any such

submission must be made on the prescribed form which is available on the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation's website. Whilst further correspondence was received from the applicant, no request for review in line with the requirements was received. The applicant sought a refund of the employment permit fee and this issued in May.

Enterprise Ireland

551. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation when Enterprise Ireland will consider an application by a company in the United Kingdom (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18410/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): I am informed by Enterprise Ireland that they made contact with this company regarding their application. This company does not meet the Enterprise Ireland remit and they have been advised to make contact with IDA Ireland as they are a Chinese Manufacturer wishing to set up a European base. I would encourage the company to continue their interaction with IDA Ireland and hope that this interaction will be of assistance to the company in developing the enterprise concerned.

Question No. 552 answered with Question No. 533.

Special Educational Needs Staff

553. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if there has been a change to the manner in which special needs assistants can be recruited to preschools from September 2016 and the qualifications they must hold; the nature of any change; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18003/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Policy on Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) is the responsibility of my colleague, Richard Bruton, T.D., Minister for Education and Skills. I understand that the SNA model operates in primary and secondary schools.

For the pre-school sector, I am delighted to provide details of a new model of supports, funded by my Department, which I recently unveiled and which will support children with a disability to access the free pre-school programme. A new Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) is now available to enable children with disabilities to access and fully participate in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. The model will deliver seven levels of progressive support, moving from the universal to the targeted, to enable the full inclusion and meaningful participation of children with disabilities in the ECCE Programme. The new model focuses on the developmental level of children with disabilities, their functional ability, their strengths and their needs. It is not an SNA model, but is much more comprehensive, and will not focus on diagnosis, recognising that many children may not have a formal diagnosis at the time of presenting to pre-school.

The main supports offered under the model include:

- A new higher education programme to upskill early years practitioners in inclusive early years care and education. My Department will fund a small capitation increase where service providers employ a graduate from the programme;
- A dedicated website containing comprehensive information resources for parents and

providers. Information can be accessed at www.preschoolaccess.ie;

- Advice and support from a team of 50 experts in early years education for children with disabilities;
- A scheme for the provision of specialised equipment, appliances and minor building alterations;
- Therapeutic intervention where this is needed to allow a child enrol, and fully participate in, pre-school; and
- Additional capitation to enable the pre-school leader to buy-in additional support or reduce the staff to child ratio where this is critical to ensuring a child's participation.

Service providers, in partnership with parents, can now submit applications to Pobal for supports under the AIM model to allow them to plan for pre-school enrolment in September 2016.

It will take some time for the model to be fully embedded and to build capacity across the system. In the meantime, there is a commitment that all supports currently available through the HSE and various agencies will remain in place until the model is fully operational.

Further information on this new pre-school model is available at www.preschoolaccess.ie.

Early Childhood Care and Education

554. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to widen the scope, in terms of qualifying age for the child, of the second free preschool early childhood care and education year; if a person (details supplied) qualifies for the second year; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18011/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): While changes to the age criteria for the Early Childhood Care and Education Programme were announced in Budget 2016 last October, they do not come into effect until this coming September. From September 2016, children will be eligible to start the ECCE Programme when they turn age 3, and can continue in the ECCE Programme until they start primary school (once the child is not older than 5½ years at the end of the relevant pre-school year i.e. end June). This extension of the ECCE Programme will increase the number of children benefitting from about 67,000 to around 127,000 in a given programme year. From September 2016 children will be able to enrol in the ECCE Programme at three different points in the year namely September, January and April. This means that parents can enrol their child in the ECCE Programme as soon as possible after their child reaches age 3.

Children born on 1 January 2012 and who are currently availing of the ECCE Programme may apply again from September for a further 38 weeks of the ECCE programme as they will meet the criteria of not being older than 5½ years at the end of the relevant pre-school year i.e. end June. However, some parents may decide to send their child to primary school in September as ECCE is not a mandatory programme. Children born prior to January 2012 will not be eligible to avail of the ECCE programme in September 2016.

Exceptions to these criteria can only currently be made in the event that a child has been diagnosed as having a special/additional need. Any request for an exemption from ECCE eligibility criteria must be supported by a medical assessment report from the HSE/medical

specialist, specifying the child's special need and diagnosis. In such a case, an application should be made to the Early Years Policies and Programmes Unit of my Department, attaching a supporting medical report.

Youth Work Projects Funding

555. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the status of an application by an organisation (details supplied) for funding under the special project for youth. [18138/16]

563. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs to approve an application by an organisation (details supplied) for a project bus under the special protection for youth scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18393/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 555 and 563 together.

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 including those from disadvantaged communities. In 2016, funding of €51m has been provided to my Department for these schemes. Foróige Balbriggan Youth Service, operating as CRYPTIC, was allocated €82,669 under the Special Projects for Youth Scheme in 2016.

The funding schemes, including the Special Projects for Youth, support national and local youth work provision to some 380,000 young people and involve approximately 1,400 youth work staff in 477 projects and 40,000 volunteers working in youth work services and communities throughout the country.

Some €2.6m in capital funding, provided in Budget 2016, is being made available to my Department to support small scale projects, including refurbishment, health and safety fit-outs and accessibility improvements in local youth services. The applications for capital grants, under the scheme, are currently being processed and I hope to announce details of the successful applicants in the coming weeks.

Missing Children

556. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, further to Parliamentary Question No. 697 of 13 May 2014, other than social media to advertise the 116000 hotline, if there are posters on display in all Garda Síochána stations, public libraries and schools; and if it states on the posters that members of the public may call the hotline if they see a missing child or if they have any information to pass on regarding a missing child. [18154/16]

557. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of calls received by the 116000 hotline in each of the years 2013 to 2015. [18155/16]

558. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if the 116000 helpline is handed out to print media or Aertel each time a child goes missing; and where exactly on the Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children's web page, missing children's hotline, does it state that members of the public can call the 116000 helpline if they see a missing child or have any information to pass on regarding a missing child. [18156/16]

559. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the location on the Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children website it states that members of the public can call the 116000 helpline if they have a concern for a child's welfare; and if the 116000 helpline can be used to report issues other than a missing child. [18157/16]

560. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the amount of European Union and State funding the 116000 helpline has received in each of the years 2013 to 2015; the number of full-time staff who are employed by the 116000 hotline; and if there has been any cut back to staff recently.. [18158/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 556 to 560, inclusive, together.

The 116 000 Missing Children Hotline number is operated by the Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (ISPCC) and is financially supported by my Department. The Hotline is not an emergency number and, in such instances, the first point of contact is An Garda Síochána at 112/999.

My Department has been informed by the ISPCC that posters and business cards were delivered to the Missing Persons Bureau in An Garda Síochána Headquarters for distribution to all Garda stations nationwide. The posters were utilised to advertise and promote the service. The posters named the service, highlighted the contact number and noted the support of my Department. In 2014, ISPCC personnel spent almost 460 hours on the distribution of posters in community venues around Ireland. In addition, in any ISPCC outreach that took place in a school or community venue, the ISPCC staff member/volunteer also spoke about the Hotline service. The ISPCC continues to raise awareness of the Missing Children Hotline in ongoing media work; e.g. press release and social media use to mark International Missing Children's Day on 25th May 2016.

In respect of the numbers of calls received by the Hotline in each of the years 2013 to 2015, the ISPCC have provided the following information:

- 523 calls in 2013 (this includes a high number of test calls made to check initial functionality)
- 218 calls in 2014 and
- 217 calls in 2015.

There was a total of 51 calls in the 1st Quarter of 2016.

The ISPCC has advised that it regularly keeps the media informed of the number of the Hotline and its purpose. While the 116000 number is not provided to print media each time a child goes missing, information provided to the ISPCC by An Garda Síochána is distributed appropriately within the ISPCC to relevant personnel, so that local support needs can be identified and provided where appropriate. Information is also posted to the Missing Children Hotline website – www.missingchildrenshotline.ie - where appropriate and subsequently to the Facebook and Twitter pages. Where the case is concluded, the post is removed from the site to protect the identity of the child.

Information on the Hotline is located on the ISPCC website at www.ispcc.ie/missingchildren. This page clearly states that members of the public can call the 116000 helpline if they have a concern in respect of a missing child or information in respect of a missing child. It clearly states that in an emergency situation, a report should be made to An Garda Síochána.

The Hotline takes calls from the general public and if necessary, will redirect them to the relevant authorities. In addition to the Missing Children Hotline, the ISPCC has a separate Support Line available to members of the public if they have any concerns about a child's welfare. It can be contacted by phoning 01 6767960.

The ISPCC has advised that the amount of European Union and State funding the 116000 helpline received from 2013 is as follows:

Funder / Year	2013	2014	2015
EU Daphne Programme	€ 75,878.68	€ 75,878.68	€ 0*
DCYA	€ 87,631.75	€ 85,447.72	€ 86,969.25
Total	€ 163,510.43	€ 161,326.40	€ 86,969.25

*No funding was available for Hotlines in 2015 from the European Daphne Programme, so the ISPCC did not apply for that year. The ISPCC has advised that it made a successful application to the Programme for 2016.

With regard to staffing, the ISPCC employs staff to run the various helplines including the Hotline, Childline and the European Helpline as well as staff to answer calls and provide administrative support.

The number of staff employed, as set out below, includes all staff involved in the provision of the various phone helpline services provided by the ISPCC. All helpline staff are trained to take calls from each helpline number and therefore all staff employed in the helpline services are available to take calls from the Hotline. These staff are supported by trained volunteers of whom there was a total of 507 at the end of May 2016.

Year	2013	2014	2015
Full time equivalent staff	29.3	29.9	26.5

It should be noted that the Hotline has the following purposes:

- Informs all callers to the Hotline that An Garda Síochána is the Agency responsible for investigating missing children and as such, should be the first port of call in respect of a missing child.
- Provides emotional support to children who are missing, their family and others responsible for the missing child.
- Offers guidance and advice to the callers regarding a missing child.
- Reports cases where a child is at immediate risk as per Children First.
- Re-directs calls outside the scope of the Hotline.
- Provides a confidential text support via sending an automated generic SMS to the missing child when parental consent is received.

Family Support Services

561. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her

views on a matter (details supplied) regarding family life in disadvantaged social groups; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18346/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): There is a clear and developing basis for the provision of family support services by the Child and Family Agency. The Agency, established in 2014 pursuant to the Child and Family Agency Act 2013, assumed responsibility for a range of functions including those of the Family Support Agency. Consequently, the Child and Family Agency provides core funding for the operation of Family Resource Centres throughout the country. Also, the functions of the Child and Family Agency under the 2013 Act include supporting and encouraging the effective functioning of families and, in that context, providing preventative family support services aimed at promoting the welfare of children.

In April 2015, in line with a commitment in *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures – The national policy framework for children & young people 2014-2020*, my Department published a ‘High-Level Policy Statement on Supporting Parents and Families’. The Statement provides the policy context for the discharge by the Child and Family Agency of its family support function. The Statement specifies that it is essential that parenting and family supports and services are designed to be fully inclusive and take full cognisance of evolving family forms.

The Child and Family Agency is currently involved in a major programme to develop and mainstream Prevention, Partnership and Family Support (PP&FS) over the period 2015-2018. This Programme, launched in April 2015, is a key component of the Agency’s National Service Delivery Framework. Since the launch of the Programme, the Agency has been working to progress eight main work streams identified. These comprise an area-based approach and the use of ‘Meitheal’: a National Practice Model for all agencies working with children, young people, and their families; participation; information; commissioning; public awareness; supporting parents; alternative care strategy and workforce learning and development.

More detailed information regarding the services provided by the Child and Family Agency in the areas of Family and Community Support can be found on their website (www.tusla.ie).

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

562. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will provide additional hours of special needs assistance to a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18371/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Policy on Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) is the responsibility of my colleague, Richard Bruton, T.D., Minister for Education and Skills. I understand that the SNA model operates in primary and secondary schools.

For the pre-school sector, I am delighted to provide details of a new model of supports, funded by my Department, which I recently unveiled and which will support children with a disability to access the free pre-school programme. A new Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) is now available to enable children with disabilities to access and fully participate in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. The model will deliver seven levels of progressive support, moving from the universal to the targeted, to enable the full inclusion and meaningful participation of children with disabilities in the ECCE Programme. The new model focuses on the developmental level of children with disabilities, their functional ability, their strengths and their needs. It is not an SNA model, but is much more comprehensive, and will

not focus on diagnosis, recognising that many children may not have a formal diagnosis at the time of presenting to pre-school.

The main supports offered under the model include:

- A new higher education programme to upskill early years practitioners in inclusive early years care and education. My Department will fund a small capitation increase where service providers employ a graduate from the programme;
- A dedicated website containing comprehensive information resources for parents and providers. Information can be accessed at www.preschoolaccess.ie;
- Advice and support from a team of 50 experts in early years education for children with disabilities;
- A scheme for the provision of specialised equipment, appliances and minor building alterations;
- Therapeutic intervention where this is needed to allow a child enrol, and fully participate in, pre-school; and
- Additional capitation to enable the pre-school leader to buy-in additional support or reduce the staff to child ratio where this is critical to ensuring a child's participation.

Service providers, in partnership with parents, can now submit applications to Pobal for supports under the AIM model to allow them to plan for pre-school enrolment in September 2016. Further information on AIM can be accessed at www.preschoolaccess.ie.

It will take some time for the model to be fully embedded and to build capacity across the system. In the meantime, there is a commitment that all supports currently available through the HSE and various agencies will remain in place until the model is fully operational. My Department has raised this particular case with the HSE and I will revert to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Question No. 563 answered with Question No. 555.

Preschool Services

564. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if a person (details supplied) is entitled to a second year of free preschool under the early childhood care and education scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18414/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): In Budget 2016, my Department announced a significant expansion to pre-school provision under the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme. This measure, which will be introduced from September 2016, means that children will be eligible to start free pre-school when they reach the age of 3, and continue to avail of free pre-school until they start primary school (once the child is not older than 5 years and 6 months at the end of the pre-school year i.e. end June). Following the introduction of the expanded programme there will be three opportunities each year - in September, January and April - for eligible children to enrol for the free pre-school provision. This will ensure that children aged 3 or over have the opportunity to enrol as soon as possible after their third birthday. The maximum number of free pre-school weeks to which a child is entitled will depend on their date of birth, and the age at which they start primary school.

The expansion of the ECCE programme will see the number of children benefitting from the Programme rise from around 67,000 to around 127,000 in a given programme year. For the 2016/17 programme year, it is estimated that 89,500 children will be eligible to enrol in the Programme from September 2016, an additional 22,000 from January 2017 and a further 15,500 from April 2017. Accommodating this expansion requires a significant increase in capacity in the pre-school sector; providers need time to implement any needed infrastructural or services changes, or to hire additional staff. The September 2016 implementation date was set to allow pre-school providers to put such measures in place. Should an earlier start date have been chosen, the likelihood is that there would not have been sufficient capacity in the sector to accommodate all children.

In addition, an upper age limit for participation in free pre-school was set by the Inter-Departmental Group on Future Investment on the advice of the Department of Education and Skills. Limiting the diversity in age ranges in primary school is considered to be generally in the best interest of children, in relation to peer interaction in junior infants, as well as other educational considerations. This does mean that different children will spend different lengths of time in free pre-school, but our focus throughout in considering these issues was how to achieve the best outcomes for children.

A child born 24 October 2012 is eligible to enrol in free pre-school, under the ECCE scheme in September 2016 as this is the earliest entry point after the child's third birthday. They will not be eligible to enrol again in September 2017 as the child would be over the upper age limit of 5 years and 6 months at the end of the 2017/2018 pre-school year (i.e. June 2018).

Industrial Disputes

565. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she is aware of the ongoing dispute between Childminding Ireland and IMPACT members in Kilcoole, County Wicklow; if she will use her influence to require Childminding Ireland to engage in normal negotiations through the State's industrial relations bodies; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18445/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I am aware of the difficulties currently being experienced in Childminding Ireland in relation to the proposed restructuring of the organisation. The dispute between IMPACT members and Childminding Ireland is regrettable. However, the restructuring and the current dispute is an operational matter for the employer and the Board of Childminding Ireland. In the circumstances, it would be inappropriate for me as Minister for Children and Youth Affairs to interfere in such matters.

I am aware that both IMPACT and Childminding Ireland have re-engaged with the Workplace Relations Commission. I hope that the matter will be resolved quickly and to the satisfaction of all parties.

Defence Forces Pensions

566. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he is aware of any concerns regarding the administration of the soldiers' welfare fund in Baldonnell. [18163/16]

Taoiseach and Minister for Defence (Deputy Enda Kenny): I am advised by the military authorities that there is an investigation currently underway in relation to the administration of the Benevolent Fund, which is funded through voluntary contributions from members of the

Defence Forces. I understand that there is no direct Exchequer funding involved. That being said, pending the conclusion of this investigation I am not in a position to comment further.

Departmental Equipment

567. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the amounts received by his Department for the sale of the Government jet. [18164/16]

Taoiseach and Minister for Defence (Deputy Enda Kenny): In July 2014, the Gulfstream IV aircraft, which had been in service for 23 years, travelled to the Gulfstream Aerospace Corporation (GAC) facility in Savannah, Georgia, USA, for its annual maintenance inspection. During this inspection, it became apparent that the servicing and repair of the aircraft would have involved a significantly higher level of investment than was anticipated. Given the number of flying hours achieved, the age of the aircraft and the expected repair costs involved it was decided that all work on the aircraft should cease, the servicing and repair of the aircraft would not be completed, the aircraft was to be withdrawn from operational service in the Air Corps and the aircraft would not be returned back to Ireland.

With the assistance of Gulfstream Aerospace Corporation, the Department of Defence concluded the sale of the aircraft on an “as seen” basis with a US based company, Journey Aviation, based in Florida, USA in December 2014. The amount received by the Department of Defence for the sale of the Government Jet was US\$500,000. In addition, the sale of related spare parts for the aircraft to Journey Aviation also on an “as seen” basis took place in February 2015 for a sum of US \$60,000.

Defence Forces Remuneration

568. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence why he has not made payments to Army rangers and cooks which were due to be awarded under an adjudication process, given that the public finances have been restored to stability. [18165/16]

Taoiseach and Minister for Defence (Deputy Enda Kenny): On 27th September 2010 the Adjudicator under the Conciliation and Arbitration Scheme for members of the Permanent Defence Force awarded increases in the Army Ranger Wing allowance and in technical pay to cooks. These awards are backdated to 1 June 2006. The Adjudicator’s Findings cannot be implemented having regard to the provisions of Sections 2 and 5 of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (No 2) Act 2009.

These two adjudications are part of the outstanding adjudication findings covered under paragraph 1.16 of the Public Service Agreement 2010-2014. Paragraph 5.3 of the Public Service Stability Agreement 2013-2018, known as the Lansdowne Road Agreement, states that “The Parties have agreed that any outstanding adjudications as referred to in paragraph 1.16 of the Public Service Agreement 2010-2014 will be reviewed jointly by the Parties prior to the expiry of this agreement.” The review mechanism is the subject of ongoing consideration in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

Defence Forces Recruitment

569. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of vacancies in the medical corps of the Defence Forces; the length of time each post has

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been vacant; the steps he will take to fill each post; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18397/16]

Taoiseach and Minister for Defence (Deputy Enda Kenny): The information sought by the Deputy is currently being compiled by the military authorities and I will forward same when received. Having regard to the recent vacancies, it has been necessary to identify alternative options for the provision of medical services to the Defence Forces. In this connection, a joint civilian/military Standing Committee has been set up with a view to advancing the development of a sustainable integrated medical service and to address appropriate means of delivery of key medical capabilities for the Defence Forces. An integrated model for the provision of the required medical services, involving both the Medical Corps and outsourced service provision is currently being progressed.

