

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 3, inclusive, answered orally

Questions Nos. 4 to 6, inclusive, resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 7 to 12, inclusive, answered orally.

Budget Consultation Process

13. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the measures in place, as part of the reform programme undertaken by his Department, to ensure transparency and accountability around the way budget decisions are made by his Department; if his attention has been drawn to the Free Legal Advice Centres' response to the recent budget and their call for his Department to publish a human rights and equality statement alongside the Budget Statement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30762/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am aware of FLAC's response to Budget 2017, and note that it welcomed the greater supports the Budget provides for older persons, carers and families with young children. I would not, however, share its assessment that there is a lack of transparency and accountability around how Budget decisions are made.

The Government is strongly committed to delivering greater openness and transparency in the budgetary process and to build upon the recent reforms of the budgetary architecture to facilitate a more open inclusive process with greater information sharing and Parliamentary engagement throughout the budgetary process.

As part of this process the National Economic Dialogue, held in June, facilitated an open and inclusive exchange in advance of Budget 2017 on the competing economic and social priorities facing the Government. It was informed by the macro-economic and fiscal parameters set out in the Summer Economic Statement.

My Department also published a Mid-Year Expenditure Report in July. This new Report set out the detailed expenditure context for Budget 2017, including baseline pre-Budget Ministerial Expenditure Ceilings for all Departments. This report provided the starting point for the examination by the Oireachtas of budgetary priorities for 2017.

The Minister for Finance and I met with the Committee on Budgetary Oversight in advance of the presentation of the Estimates to the House, to discuss budgetary priorities. The Committee published its report on Budget 2017 on 3 October which has been responded to, in respect of expenditure issues, in the Expenditure Report 2017 and in summary form on the Budget

2017 website.

The commitment in the Programme for Partnership Government to develop a process of budget and policy proofing as a means of advancing equality, reducing poverty and strengthening economic and social rights is key to the issue of equality-proofing expenditure decisions also discussed in FLAC's response.

In this regard, my Department has already developed a new Social Impact Assessment Framework designed to focus on the impacts of public expenditure on recipient households. In addition to publishing a detailed paper on the overall Framework on the Budget 2017 website www.budget.gov.ie, a social impact assessment of Targeted Childcare Schemes and the General Medical Services Scheme were also published. This work will compliment the existing ex-post impact assessment conducted by the Departments of Finance and Social Protection using the SWITCH model to assess the impact of the main tax and social welfare measures in the Budget. The most recent SWITCH model analysis, conducted by the ESRI and published in the Irish Times last week, found that the greatest gains in Budget 2017 are in the lowest income quintile, driven largely by the welfare rate increases in the Budget.

Questions Nos. 14 to 17, inclusive, answered orally.

Public Services Provision

18. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his views on the public spending to GDP rate; his further views on whether it is sufficient to deliver quality public services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30841/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): There is a substantial increase of €1.9bn in Gross Voted Expenditure in the Estimates for 2017. This represents an increase of almost 3.5 per cent. As well as including €0.9bn for various expenditure pre-commitments such as demographic related expenditure pressures and the Lansdowne Road Agreement, there was €1bn allocated for additional measures. These measures include:- additional staffing in Health, Justice and Education;- progressing the Action Plan for Housing in 2017; and - the introduction of a new single Affordable Childcare Scheme and a number of increases to Social Welfare rates.

While in technical terms, Ireland's General Government Expenditure as a percentage of GDP is projected to decrease - from an estimated 28.3% in 2016 to 27.8% in 2017 - a number of significant factors need to be taken into account in assessing this trend.

The recent revisions to Ireland's GDP level for 2015 published by the CSO highlight that the ratio set out above must be interpreted with very significant caution. I would draw the Deputy's attention to the recent report of the Dáil Committee on Budgetary Oversight - which highlighted the limitations in key macroeconomic variables to accurately reflect developments in the economy in light of the scale of these revisions. Indeed, the Department of Finance warn in Budget 2017 documentation using inflated national accounts figures as a basis for future policy commitments.

Furthermore, given Ireland's relatively young population, adjusting for the demographic profile of the population also impacts on comparisons with other European countries. This is illustrated on page 14 of the Mid-Year Expenditure Report which shows adjusted public expenditure in Ireland 2014 (as a % of GNI) being above the EU average when account is taken of defence and age-related expenditure.

Finally, account should also be taken of the severity of Ireland's public finance crisis relative to that in most other EU countries.

Budget 2017 marks the third year in succession that gross voted expenditure has been increased. The focus over the coming years must continue to be on moderate, sustainable increases. In this fiscal context, the ongoing review and evaluation of existing programmes and expenditure, rather than targeting a certain expenditure to GDP ratio, can better support effective delivery of public services.

Public Sector Pay

19. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his views on ending different pay scales and terms and conditions for new entrants to the public service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30844/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The 10% reductions in starting pay for certain new entrants were introduced by the then Government in January 2011 as part of the National Recovery Plan in order to reduce the Public Service Pay Bill.

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). From 1 November 2013 pre and post-2011 pay scales were merged into a single consolidated scale applicable to each grade. Generally, the third point of 1 November 2013 payscale is equivalent to the first point of scale of the pre 2011 scale.

The Lansdowne Road Agreement provides the mechanism through which outstanding issues of concern to new recruits to the public service can be addressed in a negotiated way. This is reflected in the recent agreement between my Department, D/Education and Skills, the INTO and the TUI in respect of new entrant teacher pay restoration. Contingent on the introduction of certain reform measures, a new incremental salary scale will be developed which is designed to address the current difference in pay for teachers recruited since 1 February 2012. The revised salary arrangement will be implemented in two phases on 1 January 2017 and 1 January 2018. The effect of this will be to assimilate all post-1 January 2011 and post-1 February 2012 new entrants to teaching onto a single new salary scale which will incorporate the honours primary degree allowance. This new arrangement will apply to members of the teachers unions which have signed up to the Lansdowne Road Agreement (INTO and TUI).

The Government is wholly committed to the implementation of the Lansdowne Road Agreement as the most appropriate way for progress to be made on pay restoration and reform of our public services into the future. This agreement shows how the LRA can resolve issues of concern for our public servants.

Questions Nos. 20 to 25, inclusive, answered orally.

Appointments to State Boards

26. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if, in view of the recent developments at Horse Racing Ireland, there any other State agencies where business cases have been made to his Department for reappointing chief executive officers

beyond their original term; the processes he has in place to ensure proper board procedures are being observed in making such business cases; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30936/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Since my appointment as Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform no other Chief Executive of a Commercial State Body has been reappointed beyond their original term - the consent to the re-appointment of the CEO of Horse Racing Ireland having been given on an exceptional basis.

By way of further information to the Deputy, I am aware that a number of Chief Executives of Commercial State Bodies have, through the operation of law, acquired Contracts of Indefinite Duration under the terms of the Protection of Employees (Fixed-Term Work) Act 2003.

With regard to the governance procedures for state agencies, my Department has recently published a revised and updated Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies, which has been agreed by Government.

This revised and updated document is designed to ensure that both commercial and non-commercial State bodies meet the highest standards of corporate governance. It provides a framework for the application of best practice and is intended to take account of developments in respect of oversight, reporting requirements and the appointment of Board members. The Code is based on the underlying principles of good governance: accountability, transparency, probity and a focus on the sustainable success of the organisation over the longer term.

The updated code outlines the respective responsibilities of the Board, Chairperson, parent Department and Minister, it also outlines the role of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. The Code also provides that the term of a contract of a CEO is normally limited to a single contract period of between five and seven years but there is no maximum length of service for CEO's.

The updated code can be found at the following link: <http://govacc.per.gov.ie/governance-of-state-bodies/>

Additional Voluntary Contributions

27. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide a breakdown, by grade, of the number of civil servants participating in additional voluntary contribution, AVC, schemes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30927/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Participation in AVC schemes is a matter for individual civil servants, some of whom participate in schemes set up by their trade union.

Through long established practice, deductions for such schemes are facilitated by Payroll Divisions across the Civil Service. As the Deputy may be aware, a Payroll Shared Service Centre is operated by the National Shared Services Office in my Department. The number of Civil Servants and Prison Officers paid by the Payroll Shared Service Centre (PSSC) who are participating in an AVC scheme as at 17 October 2016, listed by grade, is detailed in the table attached. The table contains the grade descriptions as recorded by the PSSC. Some of these have been edited in cases where the full grade description details might reveal the private information of an identifiable individual.

TOTAL NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES PER GRADE PAYING INTO AVC

GRADE	EMPLOYEES
ADVISORY COUNSEL GRADE 1	1
ADVISORY COUNSEL GRADE 2 (MOD)	2
AERONAUTICAL OFFICER GRADE 1 PPC	1
A/LIBRARIAN(COURTS)	1
AISTRITHEOIR GRAD 3 - FULL PRSI	1
AK1	1
AO HIGHER SCALE	1
AO HIGHER SCALE - FULL PRSI	4
AO STANDARD SCALE - PPC	9
ARCHAEOLOGIST	2
ARCHAEOLOGIST PPC	3
ARCHITECT PPC	3
ARCHIVIST	1
ARCHIVIST-PPC	2
A.P. (ORD)	1
ASST AGRICULTURAL INSP PPC	2
ASST DIRECTOR P&WS MODIFIED	1
ASS PRIN FULL PRSI	1
ASS PARL COUNSEL GRADE 2 PPC	1
ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL LEGAL EXECUTIVE	1
ASST CHIEF INSP edited	1
ASST CHIEF INSP edited	2
ASST CHIEF INSP edited	1
ASST LEGAL ADVISOR - FULL PRSI	1
ASST PARLIAMENTARY COUNSEL GRADE 1	1
ASST PRINCIPAL	86
ASST PRINCIPAL HIGHER	111
ASST PRINCIPAL HIGHER PPC	12
ASST PRINCIPAL MOD	16
ASST PRINCIPAL PPC	27
ASST PRINCIPAL(ORD) (P&W)	1
ASST PRINCIPAL(ORD) P&WS - PPC	1
ASST SECRETARY	10
ASST.SUPERINT edited	1
ASSISTANT CHIEF OFFICER	148
ASSISTANT CHIEF OFFICER edited	125
ASSISTANT GOVERNOR	20
ASSISTANT GOVERNOR edited	6
ASSISTANT GOVERNOR OF WORKS	3
AUDITOR STANDARD SCALE PPC	1
AUDITOR ENV - PPC	1
AUDITOR STANDARD SCALE PPC	1
BFW/TRADE FOREMAN	4
CIVILIAN TYPISTS	5
CIVILIAN CLERKS	2
CAMPUS GOVERNOR	1
CHIEF NURSE OFFICER 2 MOD	2

Questions - Written Answers

GRADE	EMPLOYEES
CHIEF NURSE OFFICER 2 PPC	5
CHIEF OFFICER 1	9
CHIEF OFFICER 1 (NEW)	2
CHIEF OFFICER 2 (NEW)	20
CHIEF TRADES OFFICER 1	3
CHIEF TRADES OFFICER 2	6
CHIEF TRADES OFFICER 2 (NEW)	1
CLERK 2	1
CHIEF OFFICER 2	34
C.O. (ORD)	1
C.O. (ORD) A1	3
C.O.(ORD) PPC EX REV	1
CDS CARE STAFF	8
CDS CLINICAL NURSE MANAGER 2	1
CDS EX CHEF/CATERING MANAGER	1
CDS GRADE 4	1
CDS NIGHT SUPERVISOR	3
CDS UNIT MANAGER	1
CIVIL ENG. GRADE 3 PPC	3
CHEMIST	1
CHEMIST - FULL PRSI	4
CHEMIST GRADE 2 PPC	5
CHEMIST GRADE 3 PPC	2
CHIEF SURVEYOR FPRSI	1
CIVILIAN DRIVER	1
CLEANER	7
CLEANER FULL PRSI	8
CLERICAL OFF	104
CLERICAL OFF - FULL PRSI	193
CLERICAL OFF - PPC	3
CLERICAL OFF HIGHER SCALES PPC	5
CLERICAL OFFICER HIGHER SCALE	100
CLERICAL OFFICER NEW ENTRANT - PPC	1
CLERICAL OFFICER NEW ENTRANT - FULL PRSI	5
CLERICAL OFF H/S F/PRSI	5
CLERICAL OFFICER TYPIST	4
CLERICAL OFFICER TYPIST-NEW ENTRANT FULL	2
COST AND ESTIMATING CLERK	1
CRAFT CHARGEHAND	1
CO. REG. (OTHER) FULL PRSI	1
COMMUNITY SERVICE SUPERVISORS	3
CONSERVATION RANGER PPC	5
COUNTY REG OTHER THAN DUB/CK	1
CRAFT CHARGEHAND	1
CRAFTSMAN	9
CT. MESSENGER	2
CT.CRIER FULL PRSI	1
CO - ASSISTANT OFF. H/S C & E	16

GRADE	EMPLOYEES
CO STD FRMR FAS 11G	1
CO-TAX OFFICER FULL PRSI	19
COUNSELLOR	3
COUNSELLOR - PPC	1
AUDIT senior edited	1
DUBLIN G.O. BAND 2	4
DUBLIN G.O. BAND 3	6
DEPUTY ASSISTANT CHIEF STATE SOLICITOR	2
DEPUTY ASST CHIEF STATE SOL edited	1
DEPUTY GOVERNOR	3
DEPUTY DIRECTOR edited	1
DEPUTY PRINCIPAL LEGAL EXECUTIVE edited	1
DEVELOPMENT SPECIALISTS PPC	4
DIRECTOR IMES	1
DIVISIONAL INSPECTOR PRIMARY	2
DEP. DIR. F/SCIENCE LAB	3
DEPUTY DIRECTOR edited	1
DISTRICT CONSERVATION OFFICER	1
DISTRICT COSERVATION OFFICER PPC	1
ENGINEER GRADE 1	1
ENGINEER GRADE 2 CIVIL DCENR	1
EO - HTO	216
EO HIGHER SCALE	113
EO HIGHER SCALE - PPC	19
EO STANDARD SCALE	113
EO STANDARD SCALE - PPC	113
EO ORD (EX REV)	2
EO. OFFICER H.SCALE C & E	10
EO.INDOOR OFFICER H.SCALE C & E	4
EO TRAINEE ANAL HIGHER SCL - FULL PRSI	1
EO TRAINEE ANALYST STANDARD SCALE	1
EXAM OF TITLES	1
FIRST SECRETARY - PPC	4
FIRST SECRETARY HIGHER	3
F/SCIENTIST GRADE 1	4
F/SCIENTIST GRADE 1 A1	2
F/SCIENTIST GRADE 2	6
F/SCIENTIST GRADE 2 A1	14
F/SCIENTIST GRADE 3 A1	3
FOREMAN GRADE 1	1
FOREMAN GRADE 3	3
FOREPERSON	3
GOVERNOR 2 edited	1
GOVERNOR 3	2
GOVERNOR GRADE 2	1
GEOLOGIST - FULL PRSI	5
GUIDE	2
GUIDE SUPERVISOR	1

Questions - Written Answers

GRADE	EMPLOYEES
HEAD SERVICES OFFICER	2
HEAD SERVICES OFFICER PPC	3
PSY senior edited	1
HEALTHCARE NURSE MANAGER (PPC)	1
HEO (ORD) A1	1
HEO ORD. (EX REV)	1

TOTAL NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES PER GRADE PAYING INTO AVC

GRADE	EMPLOYEES
HEO HIGHER SCALE	114
HEO HIGHER SCALE PPC	3
HEO INSPECTOR DOT	109
HEO STANDARD PPC	66
HEO STANDARD SCALE	143
HEO INSPECTOR	2
HEO SYSTEMS ANALYST STANDARD SCALE	1
HEO. FORMER SUPERVISING OFF. H/S C & E	1
HEO.FORMER HIGHER OFF.H/S C & E	4
HIGHER LEGAL EXECUTIVE	1
HIGHER LEGAL EXECUTIVE FULL PRSI	1
HIGHER TAX OFFICER PPC	4
IND TRAINING INSTRUCTOR 2	2
INDUSTRIAL MANAGER	5
INDUSTRIAL MANAGER PPC	1
INDUSTRIAL SUPERVISOR	9
INDUSTRIAL SUPERVISOR (CLASS 'A' PRSI)	6
INSPECTOR OF WORKS	2
INDUSTRIAL TRAINING INSTRUCTOR 2 (NEW)	2
INSPECTOR GRADE 1	1
INSPECTOR/INSTRUCTOR	4
INSP.TAXES H.G.H.SCALE	4
INSPECTOR GUID SERV&PSYCHOL	3
INSPECTOR GUID SERV&PSYCHOL - FULL PRSI	10
INVESTIGATOR - FULL PRSI	2
KPR OF MANUSCRIPTS PPC	1
LIBRARY ASS. 1 - PPC	1
LABORATORY ATTENDANT PPC	1
LABORATORY ATTENDANT STATE LAB	1
LABORATORY TECHNICIAN -FULL PRSI	3
METEOROLOGICAL OFF HIGH SCL	1
METEOROLOGICAL OFF STAN SCL	2
METEOROLOGICAL OFF STAN SCL PPC	3
METEOROLOGIST	1
METEOROLOGIST - PPC	1
NURSE OFFICER	17

GRADE	EMPLOYEES
NURSE OFFICER PPC	51
OGP - CATEGORY SPECIALIST HIGHER PPC	1
PASO GRADE 1 - PPC	1
PASO GRADE 2 - PPC	3
PASO GRADE 3 (PPC)	9
PASO GRADE 3 - NON PPC	1
PRISON OFFICER	534
PRISON OFFICER (NEW)	1225
P.O. (ORD)	1
PO (ORD) FULL PRSI	1
PARLIAMENTARY COUNSEL PPC	1
PERSONAL SEC MIN/MOS	2
PHARMACIST (NEW)	1
POST PRIMARY INSPECTOR	3
POST PRIMARY INSPECTOR - FULL PRSI	3
PRINCIPAL METEOROLOGICAL OFF	1
PRINCIPAL - PPC	14
PRINCIPAL ADV HIGHER LEVEL PPC	1
PRINCIPAL CHEMIST	2
PRINCIPAL CLERK PPC	1
PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENT SPECIALIST - PPC	1
PRINCIPAL GEOLOGIST	1
PRINCIPAL GEOLOGIST - PPC	1
PRINCIPAL HIGHER SCALE - PPC	5
PRINCIPAL OFFICER	25
PRINCIPAL OFFICER HIGHER	38
PROSECUTION SOLICITOR senior edited	1
PRINCIPAL SOLICITOR	1
PRINCIPAL SOLICITOR edited	3
PROB.&WEL.OFFICER A1	44
PROB.&WEL.OFFICER MODIFIED	12
PROFESSIONAL ACCOUNTANT GR 2 PPC	1
PROFESSIONAL ACCT GR 1 PPC	2
PROFESSIONAL OFFICER GRADE 3 FULL PRSI	1
PSYCHOLOGIST 2 A1	
PROSECUTION SOLICITOR PPC	1
QUALIFIED PHARMACEUTICAL ASSISTANT	1
RECRUIT PRISON OFFICER PPC	1
SERVICE OFFICER FULL PRSI	1
REG. MAP DIRECTOR	1
RURAL G.O. BAND 1	1
RURAL G.O. BAND 2	13
RURAL G.O. BAND 3	16
RO GRADE 3 FPRSI	5
SENIOR ADVISOR PPC	1
SENIOR AUDITOR	1
SENIOR AUDITOR HIGHER SCALE	1
SECOND SECRETARY	1

Questions - Written Answers

GRADE	EMPLOYEES
SEN.INSP.T HR.SCALE	1
SENIOR CHEMIST GRADE 1	5
SENIOR CHEMIST GRADE 1 PPC	1
SENIOR DEVELOPMENT SPECIALIST PPC	2
SENIOR GEOLOGIST FPRSI	1
SENIOR INSP GUID SERV &PSYCH	2
SENIOR INSP GUID SERV &PSYCH - FULL PRSI	4
SENIOR INSP POST PRIMARY	2
SENIOR INSP POST PRIMARY - FULL PRSI	2
SENIOR LAB TECH CLASS 2	1
SENIOR LABORATORY ANALYST	4
SENIOR LABORATORY ANALYST	4
SENIOR CLERK OF WORKS	2
SENIOR INSPECTOR/INSTRUCTOR	1
SENIOR MET OFFICER STAN SCL	7
SENIOR MET OFFICER STAN SCL PPC	3
SENIOR METEOROLOGIST	1
SENIOR PHARMACEUTICAL TECHNICIAN	1
SCI&ART ATT MUS - PPC	1
SEN.P&W OFFICER A1	11
SEN.P&W OFFICER MODIFIED	8
SENIOR ARCHAEOLOGIST	3
SENIOR ARCHIVIST - PPC	3
SENIOR CLERK OF WORKS NON PPC SCALE	1
SENIOR LABORATORY ANALYST	8
SERVICES ATTENDANT FPRSI	3
SERVICES OFFICER	20
SERVICES OFFICER F/PRSI	22
SERVICES ATTENDANT	1
SERVICES OFFICER PPC	3
SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS ORGANISER	2
SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS ORGANISER PPC	5
SHORTENED BASIC CRAFTWORKER PAY- SCALE	26
SOCIAL WORKER	1
STAFF OFFICER	50
STAFF OFFICER - PPC	19
STATE SOLICITOR - FULL PRSI	7
STATE SOLICITOR HIGHER PPC	2
STATISTICIAN 1	1
SURVEYOR MARINE FPRSI	5
STATISTICIAN - PPC 63375	1
STOREKEEPER GRADE 1	1
STOREMAN	1
SURVEY CONTROLLER PPC	1
STOREKEEPER CLERK GRADE 1	1
STORES/OFFICE SUPERVISOR	2
CLEANERS senior edited	1

GRADE	EMPLOYEES
TECHNICIAN SENIOR SPECIAL	7
TELEPHONIST	4
TELEPHONIST SUPER	1
TEACHER 100% (GDA)	4
TAX OFFICER PRE 95	43
TRADES OFFICER	9
TRADES OFFICER (NEW)	34
THIRD SEC STANDARD SCL - PPC	1
USHER	1
USHER FULL PRSI	2
WILDLIFE INSPECTOR GRADE 2	1
WILDLIFE INSPECTOR GRADE 2 - PPC	2
WILDLIFE INSPECTOR GRADE 3 - PPC	1
WATCHER	2
WORK TRAINING OFFICER	101
WORK TRAINING OFFICER PPC	186
TOTAL	5,161

Education Funding

28. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will report on his role with the Minister for Education and Skills in the design and operation of the proposed Exchequer-employer investment mechanism for third level education to operate from 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30777/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As I stated in the Dáil in my speech on the Estimates 2017, the Government are very conscious of the importance of the higher education sector and the vital role it plays in our society and economy. We are also conscious of the pressing need to ensure a more sustainable, long-term funding model for the entire Higher and Further Education sector.

To that end, I announced that the Minister for Education and Skills and I were initiating a policy review and consultation process on the design and operation of such a model to operate from 2018 onwards, to include consideration of an Exchequer-Employer investment mechanism. As well as ensuring sustainable funding, this review is intended to support the ongoing drive for reform, quality enhancement and performance improvement across the Higher and Further Education sector, in line with the objectives of the Action Plan for Education and the National Skills Strategy.

This work will build on the Cassells report published earlier this year, which pointed to the availability of three funding sources: the Exchequer, students and some form of employer contribution.

I will be engaging shortly with the Minister for Education and Skills, with a view to agreeing the specific details for the review and consultation process. I expect proposals for the new funding model to be brought to Government by mid-2017. Further details of the process will be provided when available.

Heritage Sites

29. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will address an issue (details supplied) with regard to Carrigafoyle Castle, Ballylongford, County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30728/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán Canney): The Office of Public Works provides guided services at 70 historic sites nationwide, admitting almost 5 million visitors last year. These sites are operated either on a full-time or a seasonal basis and include nationally and internationally known locations such as Newgrange, Clonmacnoise and the Rock of Cashel. OPW also facilitates public access at about 300 open National Monument sites such as Carrigafoyle Castle where visitors are free to enjoy sites on an unaccompanied basis. Given that these sites are unmanned, it is difficult to be precise about the number of visitors. However there is no doubt that they form an important part of the Cultural and Heritage offering to tourists all around the country.

The cost of presenting Guided Heritage sites represents a considerable commitment by the State, the direct wage costs alone for which will amount to over €7.3m in 2016. Obviously OPW cannot hope to maintain a full Guided presence at all locations. At unmanned sites the objective is to provide site safety so that visitors can enjoy them in their natural state. As the Deputy is aware, the Carrigafoyle Castle site is in a semi ruinous condition and safe access is not feasible to all parts. Additionally, it should be borne in mind that the nature of the location and the underfoot conditions at certain times of the year, and in certain light levels, mean that it is not always feasible for visitors to walk the site. Taking everything into consideration, including staff costs and demands on resources elsewhere, it is not proposed to provide a guide service to this particular Monument at this time.

Question No. 30 answered with Question No. 17.

Public Procurement Regulations

31. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if all provisions from EU directives pertaining to increasing the share of public procurement contracts by small and medium-sized enterprises have been implemented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22785/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Public Procurement is governed by EU and National rules. The aim of these rules is to promote an open, competitive and non-discriminatory public procurement regime which delivers best value for money.

The New EU Directives on Procurement are intended to make it easier for businesses and SMEs to tender for public sector procurement contracts. Specific measures aimed at facilitating SME participation in public procurement include the following:

- financial capacity criterion is now less demanding; it is generally limited to twice contract value;
- electronic methods of communication is now mandated in parts of the award process;
- there is the discretion to divide public contracts into lots, with the proviso that opting not to divide a contract into lots must be explained in the procurement documents;
- there is a provision for “consortia bidding” to encourage SME involvement;

- there is explicit provision for prior discussion with suppliers and independent experts, with safeguards against distorting competition or violating transparency and non-discrimination principles;
- there are reductions in the time limits for receipt of tenders by 30%;
- Member States are required to report back to the Commission every 3 years on SME participation in public procurement

These measures were transposed into Irish law in May of this year by the Office of Government Procurement (OGP). It should be pointed out that a number of these measures had already been accelerated into policy in Ireland by way of Circular 10/14 which issued in April 2014 and which was broadly welcomed by the SME representative bodies at the time.

The Government recognises the importance of the SME Sector to the economy. In this regard, my colleague, Minister of State Eoghan Murphy, chairs the SME Advisory Group. The SME Advisory Group includes representatives from ISME, IBEC, CIF, the Small Firms Association, Chambers Ireland, InterTrade Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission, the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, and the OGP and seeks to develop additional measures to support SMEs in accessing the public procurement market. The OGP continues to engage with industry to ensure that winning Government business is done in a fair, open and transparent manner and that government procurement policies are business friendly.

Public Procurement Contracts Social Clauses

32. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will consider putting in place criteria for the awarding of Government contracts that would ensure these contracts are awarded to those companies that meet sustainability benchmarks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30967/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In addition to achieving value for money and encouraging SME access to procurement opportunities, the Government is also keen to explore to scope for supporting wider policy objectives including social and environmental clauses in public contracts.

Social clauses can be used where they are targeted at factoring into the procurement process consideration of issues such as employment opportunities, equal opportunities, social inclusion and sustainability. In order to be compatible with EU law, these conditions must be made known to all interested parties and must not restrict participation by contractors from other Member States.

However, this is a complex area and challenges arise from the need to ensure that:

- value for money is not adversely affected;
- additional costs are not placed on domestic suppliers relative to other potential suppliers;
- contracts are of a minimum scale to absorb the increased administrative requirements; and
- the targeted benefit is capable of being measured and monitored during execution of the contract.

In this context also, care must be taken not to disproportionately impact on SME's bidding

for public contracts.

The inclusion of social clauses in the procurement process would appear to be most suited to situations where the benefit could be considered a core requirement and can be directly linked to the contracting authority's policy or strategic plan. A further consideration is the ability of contracting authorities to effectively monitor compliance with the social clause. This may be more difficult where some of the work is to be performed in another Member State.

The Deputy may be aware that a revised set of EU Directives governing public procurement was transposed into Irish law last May. There is now greater scope and legal clarity in relation to the use of social criteria in the context of an open, competitive and non-discriminatory public procurement regime which delivers best value for money.

In this context, the Office of Government Procurement is assessing the scope for the use of such clauses and will be developing practical guidance to assist contracting authorities using procurement as a driver of wider public policy goals such as sustainability, where appropriate.

Public Expenditure Policy

33. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his views on the discrepancy in investment in public services between Ireland and other EU countries; his further views on the ratio of public investment to tax cuts in the recent budget, particularly in view of Ireland's ever narrowing tax base; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30761/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Budget 2017 introduced a package of measures which will increase gross voted expenditure by €1.9bn in 2017 to a total of €58 billion. As outlined by the Minister of Finance in his Statement to the House on Budget 2017, this is consistent with an expenditure to tax ratio of greater than 3:1 in favour of investment in public services. This exceeds the commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government in which the Government committed to a split of at least 2:1 and reflects the Government's commitment to rebuilding and investing in public services.

Despite the significant increase in gross voted expenditure outlined above for 2017, Ireland's General Government Expenditure as a percentage of GDP is projected to decrease from 28.3% in 2016 to 27.8% in 2017. It is therefore important when comparing spending in public services relative to the rest of the European Union to take account of the basis for the comparison as this can have a significant impact. The Deputy will appreciate that the recent revisions to Ireland's GDP level published by the CSO highlight that the ratio set out above must be interpreted with very significant caution taking account of the exceptional factors impacting on the measurement of GDP for Ireland. Indeed, the Department of Finance has included an alternate analysis in the Budget 2017 documentation warning against using this inflated figure as a basis for future policy commitments. Furthermore, given Ireland's relatively young population, adjusting for the demographic profile of the population can also impact on the comparisons with other European Countries. This is illustrated on page 14 of the Mid-Year Expenditure Report which shows adjusted public expenditure in Ireland 2014 (as a % of GNI) being above the EU average when account is taken of defence and age-related expenditure.

In Budget 2017, for the third consecutive year, the Government was in a position to allocate significant additional resources to public spending with a €1.9bn increase in Gross Voted Expenditure compared to 2016. As well as including €0.9bn for various expenditure pre-commitments such as demographic related costs and the Lansdowne Road Agreement, there was

€1bn allocated for additional measures including: additional staffing in Health, Justice and Education; progressing the Action Plan for Housing in 2017; the introduction of a new single Affordable Childcare Scheme; and a number of increases to Social Welfare rates.

Labour Employer Economic Forum

34. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the matters discussed at the Labour Employer Economic Forum which he chaired on 5 October 2016. [30638/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The inaugural meeting of the Labour Employer Economic Forum (LEEF) on the 5th of October was chaired by An Taoiseach and attended by the sponsoring Ministers of Public Expenditure and Reform, Finance and Jobs Enterprise and Innovation with representatives of employers and trade unions.

The aim of the LEEF is to provide a forum to discuss areas of shared concern affecting the economy, employment and the labour market such as competitiveness, sustainable job creation, labour market standards, equality and gender issues in the workplace.

An economic and fiscal outlook for Budget 2017 presented by Department of Finance formed the centre piece of the discussion at the first meeting, including the latest growth projections and risks such as Brexit. A wide ranging productive discussion and exchange of views ensued covering a range of topics including housing, childcare, international competitiveness, regional development, labour taxation, female participation, third level education and insecure employment.

Following the conclusion of the discussion, it was agreed that the Forum would prove a useful mechanism for ongoing dialogue on challenges facing the country in which all sides had a shared interest and should meet in future on a quarterly basis.

Garda Investigations

35. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she will issue an apology to a person (details supplied). [30995/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The incident involving the person to whom the Deputy refers took place in 1989 and has been the subject of correspondence with successive Ministers for Justice going back over a considerable period of time, including legal correspondence.

I am informed by the Garda Authorities that the incident in question was the subject of a thorough investigation at the time. The Deputy will appreciate that decisions in respect of prosecutions are a matter for the Director of Public Prosecutions who acts independently in accordance with the law.

Complaints were made by the person to whom the Deputy refers to the Garda Síochána Complaints Board which investigated the matters raised and found no evidence of an offence or breach of discipline on the part of the Garda members concerned.

This case was also among those reviewed as part of the Independent Review Mechanism set up by the Government in May 2014 to consider complaints of Garda misconduct referred to the

Taoiseach and the Minister for Justice and Equality. An independent panel consisting of two senior and five junior counsel was established for that purpose. To ensure that the independence of the process was preserved, I also appointed a retired High Court Judge, Mr. Justice Roderick Murphy, to oversee the preparation of summaries and recommendations in the notification letters of the outcome of the process. His role was to independently vouch for the fact that the summaries of conclusions and the reasoning behind them were a fair reflection of the advice which has been made available to my Department by the Panel.

It was open to the independent counsel of the Independent Review Mechanism to make any recommendation that they saw fit. Having examined this case the recommendation was that there was no further action to be taken by me. The independent counsel's recommendation was accepted and the reasons for this conclusion were communicated to the person referred to by the Deputy in November 2015.

Ombudsman for Children Remit

36. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the date on which she will publish legislation to extend the remit of the Office of the Children's Ombudsman to include cases concerning children residing in direct provision. [31000/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The revised House Rules published by the Reception and Integration Agency in May of last year set out the procedures in relation to the investigation of complaints made by Direct Provision residents and include a provision for an independent appeals officer. I am committed to extending the remits of both the Ombudsman and the Ombudsman for Children to residents in Direct Provision. There are a number of legal considerations associated with this and discussion is ongoing as to how best to proceed.

Any legislative changes will be the responsibility of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform with whom I am in close consultation.

Garda Resources

37. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the cost to the taxpayer of Garda resources used outside Leinster House, including Garda presence and barriers, on budget day, 11 October 2016; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31024/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is the accounting officer for an Garda Síochána with responsibility for the allocation of Garda resources and I, as Minister, have no direct role in these matters.

I have requested the Garda authorities to provide information referred to by the Deputy and will revert to him when it is to hand.

Legal Services Regulation

38. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the appointment procedure in place for the Legal Services Regulatory Authority, in particular

the procedures which were used by the Council of the Bar of Ireland for choosing its nominee to the authority; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31027/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The procedures in place for the appointment of members of the Legal Services Regulatory Authority are laid out in Part 2 of the Legal Services Regulation Act 2015 to which I would draw the Deputy's attention. This Part, comprising sections 7 to 36, deals with the establishment of the new Legal Services Regulatory Authority, its membership, appointment, functions, staffing and other matters including disqualification or removal from membership. The Authority comprises eleven members of whom a majority, including the Chairperson, are to be lay persons.

The selection process is intentionally built around a framework of ten prescribed nominating bodies set out in section 9 of the 2015 Act. This framework was introduced by the Government by way of ensuring the independence of the new Regulatory Authority in terms of both its appointment and its functions. It also seeks to represent a balance of interests, in the membership of the Authority, between legal practitioners and those clients who avail of their services.

The ten bodies concerned are, the Citizens Information Board; An tÚdaras um Ard-Oideachas; the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission; the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission; the Institute of Legal Costs Accountants; the Consumers Association of Ireland; The Bar Council; the Legal Aid Board; the Honorable Society of the King's Inns and Law Society. The Law Society has two nominees reflecting the fact that solicitors outnumber barristers being regulated under the 2015 Act by five to one – upwards of 10,000 practising solicitors as compared to upwards of 2,000 practising barristers.

Each of the prescribed nominating bodies puts forward one primary and one substitute nominee for consideration for membership of the Regulatory Authority under the terms and criteria set out in the 2015 Act. This includes by reference to their relevant expertise as set out in section 9(3) and with regard to the objective of there being no fewer than four members who are women and four members who are men under section 9 (6). This is with the exception of the Law Society which, again because of the ratio of solicitors practising in the State which I have just mentioned, puts forward one nominee of each sex.

While members of the new Regulatory Authority are duly appointed by the Government under these procedures, under section 9 (2)(a) of the 2015 Act, a resolution approving such appointment has first to be passed by both Houses of the Oireachtas. Resolutions of both Houses approving members of the Authority were passed in July 2016 with resolutions concerning one remaining alternative nominee passed by the Houses last week. Once the required resolutions of approval have been passed the Government formally appoints the members of the Authority.

The ten prescribed nominating bodies, therefore, put forward their nominees under the procedures set out in Part 2 of the Legal Services Regulation Act 2015, as appropriate to their functions and objectives as may be set out, in each case, under legislation or under common law. It will, therefore, be for each of those bodies, in the first instance, to identify their nominees for membership of the new Regulatory Authority under their applicable internal governance procedures. It is, for example, for the Council of the Bar of Ireland, as a private body, to competently conduct the indoor management of the Council and to oversee the conduct of its own business in accordance with its own rules and procedures.

Work Permits Applications Data

39. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the

number of applications received by her Department from non-EEA fishing crew members who were already working here before the cut-off point under the terms of the permit scheme introduced as a result of the work of the task force on non-EEA workers in the Irish fishing fleet; the total number of applications received with reference to persons outside of the country; the number of applications approved under the scheme; the number of applications which were turned down under the terms of the scheme; the number of applications which are currently being processed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31052/16]

40. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of employers to date who have availed of the terms of the permit scheme for non-EEA crew members for the Irish fishing fleet; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31053/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 39 and 40 together.

Following the establishment of a task force of Departmental, State agency, Industry and Workers representatives, a scheme was put in place to address the overall situation of non-EEA workers engaged in certain sectors of the fishing industry. The issue of an immigration status constitutes a part of the overall scheme which includes new contracts being put in place for the workers concerned. I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that since the Atypical Working Scheme was extended to include non-EEA fishing crew, the period of 15th March to 30th June 2016 was afforded to employers to apply for fishing crew members who were already in the State. During that period, a total of 68 employers made an application for 178 persons. Of these, 162 (91%) have been granted a permission, 12 (7%) have been refused and 4 (2%) are awaiting processing.

I have been further informed that no applications were received after the cut-off date of 30th June, in respect of persons outside of the State.

Divorce Process

41. **Deputy Hildegarde Naughton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the specific legal and constitutional constraints to introducing clean break divorce; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31065/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I understand that the reference to “clean break divorce” in the Deputy’s question refers to a situation in which financial and other orders made by a court when granting a divorce cannot be revisited or varied after the divorce has been finalised.

The institution of marriage is afforded constitutional protection under Article 41.3.1 of the Constitution. Article 41.3.2 (iii) of the Constitution provides that a court may only grant a dissolution of marriage only where it is satisfied that “such provision as the court considers proper having regard to the circumstances exists or will be made for the spouses and any children of either or both of them and any other person prescribed by law”.

The Family Law (Divorce) Act 1996 allows the courts to make proper provision for affected parties by means of orders in areas such as maintenance, property, pensions, periodical payments, lump sums and financial compensation. As the financial circumstances of the parties may change over time, section 22 of the Act provides that any of the parties may apply to court for variation or discharge of previous orders which were made in relation to the divorce.

There are no current proposals to hold a referendum in relation to amendment of Article 41.3.2 (iii) of the Constitution in order to provide for “clean break” divorce.

Insurance Costs

42. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Finance the reason a person who has spent €20,000 modifying a taxi to make it wheelchair accessible is being quoted over €5,000 for insuring the vehicle; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31106/16]

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

The provision of insurance cover and the price at which it is offered is a commercial matter for insurance companies and is based on an assessment of the risks they are willing to accept and the need to provide for adequate provisioning to meet those risks. These are considered by insurance companies on a case by case basis.

My Department has embarked on a review of policy in the insurance sector which is being undertaken in consultation with the Central Bank and other Departments and Agencies. The objective of the Review is to recommend measures to improve the functioning and regulation of the insurance sector.

As part of that Review, I have established the Cost of Insurance Working Group, chaired by the Minister of State Eoghan Murphy T.D. This Working Group is examining the factors contributing to the increasing cost of insurance and identifying what short-term, medium-term and long-term measures can be introduced to help reduce the cost of insurance for consumers and businesses. The Working Group, which is focussing initially on the issues of rising motor insurance premiums, is due to provide me with an initial set of recommendations at the end of this month. From November to December, the Working Group will then develop an action plan to enable the relevant Government Departments and Offices to commence the implementation of these priority actions. It is my view that the implementation of the action plan will also have an impact on other areas of non-life insurance.

The core areas to be examined by the Working Group in the first phase are:

- The motor insurance sector generally, at present and in recent years
- The effects of legal costs and litigation processes on insurance costs
- The current claims compensation arrangements and the cost of claims
- Insurance data and information
- The impact of accident rates
- The impact of unlawful activity on the insurance sector, and
- Other market issues.

A number of additional issues which impact on consumers and the business sector in rela-

tion to motor insurance are also being considered, including the cost of insurance to taxi drivers and hackneys. The Working Group on the Cost of Insurance has met with the National Transport Authority and with taxi driver representatives as part of the consultation process. I am satisfied that issues facing the taxi industry are being considered as part of this cost of insurance review process.

Budget Submissions

43. **Deputy Colm Brophy** asked the Minister for Finance the number of pre-budget submissions his Department received on budget 2017; the number of organisations met with by departmental officials following their submission; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30990/16]

44. **Deputy Colm Brophy** asked the Minister for Finance the procedure his Department follows when engaging with organisations once a formal pre-budget submission is made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30991/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 43 and 44 together.

My Department received in excess of 400 Pre-Budget Submissions relating to Budget 2017 from a wide variety of groups, representative organisations and individuals.

Once a submission is received it is acknowledged by my officials and then passed to the relevant area of my Department for consideration in the context of the Budget and Finance Bill.

While my officials met with more than twenty organisations in the run-up to the Budget it is important to understand that there is no direct correlation between sending in a submission and requesting or having a meeting. Not all submissions received requested a meeting with departmental officials and some meetings which took place did not originate by means of a submission. My Department places a high priority on ongoing engagement with stakeholders and officials are always willing to consider any requests for meetings. However the Deputy will understand that it is not practical for all such requests to be accommodated.

House Purchase Schemes

45. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Finance if he will consider backdating the first-time buyer tax rebate, as announced as part of a new measure of budget 2017, to include first-time buyers who had purchased houses during the previous three months before the announcement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31037/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Help to Buy initiative that I announced in Budget 2017 aims to assist first time buyers in getting their deposit together for their new homes, as required under the Central Bank's macro-prudential rules. This initiative was announced on 19th July, as part of the Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness. The backdating of this incentive to that date was announced at that time with a view to avoiding any potential interruption in house sales, by purchasers who may otherwise have deferred purchases, pending the commencement of the incentive.

It is not clear if the Deputy is seeking a further backdating of the incentive. However, as with all time-limited reliefs, there will always be people who just miss out. Unfortunately, I do not intend to extend the parameters of this new measure any further as it would become less

targeted and more costly.

Revenue Commissioners Resources

46. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding the backlog in the Revenue Commissioners offices in processing forms; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31050/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by Revenue that its published service standards provide that applications to register for tax are processed within 5 working days (10 days for VAT registrations) unless the registration is selected for further checking. Revenue provides an e-registration service, which enables tax agents and taxpayers who are registered with the Revenue On-line Service (*ROS*) or *myAccount* to manage their tax registrations online. E-registration represents a comprehensive alternative option to paper-based applications.

I am advised by Revenue that they are not aware of any particular problems relating to the processing of tax registrations. If, however, the Deputy wishes to supply the details of any particular case giving rise to a delay, Revenue will be happy to examine the matter.

Budget Measures

47. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide for each tax measure announced in budget 2017, the full year cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31051/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The full year costs for the tax measures announced in Budget 2017 are set out in the following table.

1. REVENUE RAISING MEASURES	Yield Full Year €m
EXCISE	
Tobacco Products Tax Excise duty on a pack of 20 cigarettes is increased by 50c, with a pro-rata increase on other tobacco products. It will raise the price of cigarettes in the most popular price category to €11.00 per pack of 20 cigarettes.	65
COMPLIANCE MEASURES	
Section 110 Draft amendments to Section 110 will be made in the Finance Bill to address unintended uses of the section. Further amendments will address other issues arising in relation to Funds and property.	35
Tackling offshore tax evasion A comprehensive programme of targeted compliance interventions against those engaged in offshore tax evasion. (2017 yield estimated at €30m).	–
Increase resources to confront non-compliance Increasing Revenue staff resources on audit and investigation activities as well as enhancing ICT systems capacity.	50

Budget Measures

48. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the details of any impact assessment on the property market carried out by his Department in respect of the help to buy tax rebate for first time buyers; the person or body that carried out such an assessment; if he will publish the assessment; the other analysis that was completed by his Department on this measure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31167/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): A key priority for this Government is to develop a fully functioning housing market that responds adequately to the needs of our citizens. To this end, Rebuilding Ireland- Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, under the direction of Minister Coveney and the Department of Housing, Planning Community and Local Government, with cross Departmental support including from the Department of Finance, was launched in July.

This comprehensive Action Plan takes a holistic approach in addressing the many interacting structural constraints affecting the housing market in areas such as planning and land use, regulation and skills deficits in the construction sector. While the primary focus of the Action Plan is to tackle structural constraints, fiscal supports can play a supporting and time-bound role in addressing the current problems in the housing sector, pending the delivery of the structural elements of the Action Plan.

My officials considered the potential impact of the “Help to Buy” incentive, as part of their analysis of the proposal and the design of the relevant parameters of the incentive. Given the critical nature of the housing crisis and the urgency with which a Governmental response was required, there was insufficient time to commission an independent impact assessment in relation to this measure.

State Examinations

49. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will confirm that students taught by members of the Association of Secondary Teachers in Ireland will not be disadvantaged in the junior certificate examinations in 2017; his contingency plans for these examinations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31001/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy will be aware that teachers of English who are members of ASTI have been directed by their union that, while they are to teach the new Junior Cycle subject specification, they are not to undertake Classroom Based Assessments (CBAs) with their students. CBAs form a key element of the new Junior Cycle. Therefore, students who are taught by a teacher who is a member of the ASTI will not receive a grade for their CBAs and also since the written Assessment Task which is to be completed by students is linked to the second CBA, which is worth 10% of the marks for the final examination, these students cannot complete the Assessment Task, or gain marks for this examination component. Candidates for Junior Cycle English in 2017 who do not complete the assessment task can only be marked and graded based on a maximum of 90% of the available marks.

Given the very unfair position in which the ASTI directive now places teachers and students of English, my Department has been seeking to positively engage with ASTI to find a solution.

It is unprecedented for a second level teachers union to proceed with an industrial action that directly impacts on State examination students in this way. I am sure that this was not the original intention of the directive, but ASTI’s failure to date to lift the directive so that some current third year students of English are not disadvantaged is unacceptable and flies in the face of a longstanding code of honour in respect of the timing and nature of industrial action to avoid disrupting State examination students. ASTI need to immediately suspend their directive to allow these students to complete their Assessment Task. This suspension can be without prejudice to discussions in the meantime between the Department and ASTI on issues of concern that they may wish to have addressed.

My Department has formally requested the ASTI to provide an immediate derogation from their directive regarding the CBAs for current teachers of English, while talks between my Department and the union proceed, in order that some current third year English students are no longer unfairly and unjustifiably disadvantaged

School Accommodation

50. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there is a scheme available where old portacabins previously used in schools are now being leased or given to groups, for example Men's Sheds (details supplied). [31019/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise that a scheme as described by the Deputy is not available. Typically, schools may lease prefabs from prefab suppliers pending the construction of a permanent building. The schools subsequently arrange for the removal and return of the prefabricated units to the prefab suppliers at the end of the rental contract period.

Schools Building Projects Status

51. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the approval of stage 2B for a school (details supplied) in order that this new school building project can proceed to tender stage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31020/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The project referred to by the Deputy has recently been approved to proceed to Stage 3 which involves the tender competition for appointment of the building contractor. The school and its design team have been informed.

Schools Building Projects Status

52. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a proposal submitted by a school (details supplied) to purchase an adjoining site for development to replace prefabs with permanent rooms; when they can expect a decision on same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31028/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm to the Deputy that my Department is currently considering an application for additional accommodation from the ETB in respect of the school referred to. The application, for replacement accommodation and a Special Class provision is currently being assessed and my Department will be in contact with the ETB in the matter shortly.

Schools Building Projects Status

53. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding a school (details supplied) and its place on the school building list. [31029/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The major building project for the school to which the Deputy refers 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 have been authorised to complete Stage 2(b).

Capital Expenditure Programme

54. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the capital funding that will be available for schools to apply for in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31032/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The total capital allocation available to my Department in 2017 amounts to €690m. Under the provisions of the annual capital sanction unitary payments arising in respect of delivered PPP projects are regarded as non-discretionary capital expenditure and must be met from the 2017 capital allocation. These unitary charges and other outlays arising on the PPP programme will cost in the order of €100m in 2017.

The 2017 capital provision for the school sector amounts to almost €530m of which over €400m is assigned to the construction of large scale projects and the devolved additional accommodation scheme. The management of complex capital programmes means ensuring in the first instance that available funding is allocated towards the delivery of large scale projects and the provision of additional accommodation. Details in respect of the large scale projects programme are available on my Department's website. Applications for additional accommodation are received on a continual basis from schools as the need for extra classrooms arises.

The balance of the capital allocation in the school sector will be expended in 2017 on the acquisition of sites, the Summer Works Scheme, the Emergency Works Scheme, ICT infrastructure upgrade and other smaller programmes.

Education and Training Boards Staff

55. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of vacancies his Department sanctioned on the Waterford and Wexford Education and Training Board since July 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31059/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I understand that the Deputy's office has clarified that the question refers to the number of vacancies his Department sanctioned to fill in Waterford Wexford ETB in respect of non-teaching staff whose salaries are funded from the ETB Main-Scheme pay budget since July 2013.

In order to strengthen the senior management team in the ETB sector, my Department sanctioned the filling of a number of Director posts in ETBs which included a Director of Further Education & Training post and a Director of Organisation Support & Development post in Waterford Wexford ETB. These Director posts are being filled through a Public Appointments Service recruitment process.

In relation to administrative vacancies in ETBs, my Department's overall approach is guided by what is affordable within the ETB budget, how does the staffing levels in the ETB compare to similar sized ETBs and what are the staffing pressures in the ETB and what are the ETB priorities re same. In the case of Waterford & Wexford ETB, my Department recently met with the senior management from the ETB to discuss critical vacancies within its Head Office aris-

19 October 2016

ing from retirements etc. Following this meeting, my Department sanctioned the filling of two temporary Grade VII posts (including the associated back-filling) in order to assist the ETB manage its payroll function and to also support and drive the restructuring and streamlining process that is underway in the ETB.

My Department has also sanctioned the filling of an Adult Education Officer on an acting basis in Waterford Wexford ETB.

School Costs

56. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the action he will take to address the disparity in school costs which exist from school to school throughout the country; and the inequality faced by parents by providing funding for a free primary education system as costed by a charity (details supplied) at €103 million. [31062/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am aware of the report referred to by the Deputy.

I strongly support any measures that can be put in place to reduce costs for parents.

All schools must be sensitive to the financial pressures on parents in making decisions, not just about school uniforms or books, but about any matter that has cost implications for parents.

The Action Plan for Education outlines hundreds of actions to be implemented over the 3 year period 2016 to 2019. Some of the actions as part of the plan are to strengthen the focus on reducing school costs for parents by:

- Restoring capitation funding over a three-year period as resources permit
- Increasing the financial support for book rental schemes, in order to reduce or eliminate school book costs for parents
- Issuing a new circular to school authorities and ETBs regarding school uniform policy and other costs and the need to put a greater emphasis on reducing the cost of school uniforms and other costs.

Budget 2017 represents the start of a major programme of reinvestment in education, and the first phase of implementation of the Action Plan for Education, aimed at becoming the best education system in Europe within a decade.

It was not possible to provide additional funding in Budget 2017 in relation to this element of the Action Plan due to the many competing demands for the available funding. However, this commitment remains a priority for me to address as soon as possible during the lifetime of the Action Plan. It is important to note that the total allocation to this Department for additional policy measures, after demographics and Industrial Relations commitments, was €130 million and of which all our commitments in higher and further education and primary and secondary schools had to be funded.

I also intend to introduce a stronger complaints procedure and a charter for parents. It is important that schools should consult parents on matters relating to their children's education, including those matters which have cost implications, and schools should be responsive to the views and concerns of parents. In that regard requiring schools to have a parent charter will ensure that schools will interact better with parent associations and with individual parents.

I plan to make an announcement shortly on draft legislation that will replace Section 28 of the Education Act, 1998 and require every school to publish and operate a Parent and Student Charter in accordance with national guidelines. These guidelines will be published after consultation with the education partners.

I believe that these actions will significantly strengthen the focus on reducing school costs for parents.

Clár Tógála Scoileanna

57. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** den an Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna cén dul chun cinn atá déanta maidir le scoil nua atá beartaithe do Ghaelscoil na gCeithre Máistrí, Baile Dhún na nGall, ón am a fógraíodh an togra seo ar chlár caipitil na scoileanna; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [31080/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Maidir leis an mórthionscadal tógála don scoil dár thagair an Teachta, táthar ag fanacht faoi láthair le ceapadh Foireann Deartha. Táthar ag dúil go dtosóidh an próiseas seo gan mhoill. Déanfaidh Oifigigh de chuid mo Roinne teagmháil dhíreach leis an mBord Bainistíochta faoi na bearta atá díreach romhainn sa phróiseas. Bhí an tionscadal seo san áireamh sa chlár sé bliana le dul ar aghaidh chuig an gcéim tairisceana agus tógála.

Summer Works Scheme Data

58. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the percentage of schools which have received their summer works grant prior to the end of summer term 2015-2016; the number of successful applicants that did not receive their summer works grant before this time; if there has been an additional cost to his Department as a result of delays in the issue of moneys under the summer works scheme leading to increased quotes for tender for works approved for funding; if so, the amount of additional moneys; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31084/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): All schools that have advanced their Summer Works Scheme projects to site under the current Scheme have received all or part of their approved funding, as appropriate, under the terms and conditions of the Scheme. There is no issue with nor has there been any delay in making approved funding available to these schools and, consequently, there are no financial implications for my Department.

The Summer Works Scheme is a devolved Scheme meaning that approved projects are devolved for delivery to schools themselves. Once projects are approved, Boards of Management are free to progress their projects in accordance with that approval. Schools request the first drawdown of their approved funding when they have advanced their projects to site with the final payment being made when the project is completed. The payment of these drawdown requests is a routine matter for my Department to ensure that schools can meet their contractual commitments.

Original Summer Works Scheme grant approvals are based on cost estimates provided by the school at the time the application for funding is made. However, as with all school building projects, the funding ultimately to be made available for each individual project is subject to a tender process outcome.

To date, 197 primary and post-primary schools have been approved funding under by Department's multi-annual Summer Works Scheme 2016/2017. Based on funding drawdowns so far this year, 79 projects are on site, 33 projects have been completed and 74 projects have not yet commenced. 11 schools have requested a deferral of their project until 2017.

Schools Building Projects Data

59. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress under the school construction programme in 2016; the projects that have been progressed; the stage at which each project has progressed to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31085/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The 6 Year Capital Plan (2016-2021), announced last November by the previous Minister O'Sullivan, details the major school building projects that are scheduled to proceed to construction over the lifetime of the Plan.

To date in 2016, a total of 130 major projects are either under construction or authorised to progress to construction and, of these, 28 have been completed.

All other projects in architectural planning are being progressed towards tender stage but are not yet tender ready.

Early Childhood Care and Education Staff

60. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to provide for the upskilling of professionals in early childhood care and education settings following recent inspection reports carried out by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31086/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As part of the collaborative approach towards quality improvement in early childhood education and care in Ireland, my Department is carrying out education-focused inspections in early years services offering the ECCE scheme (universal free pre-school).

As part of the wider remit of my Department relating to the quality of the education system, the Early Years Education Policy unit, that is co-located with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, is carrying out a phased review of the education and training programmes that are available to upskill professionals in the early years sector. A report of the consultation with practitioners on the quality and relevance of their education and training was published earlier this year. Professionals identified some gaps in their preparedness to implement the curriculum and quality frameworks, Aistear and Síolta, and that they were poorly prepared for the education of children with additional needs.

On foot of this, the Department has commissioned a piece of research from an international expert to revise the occupational role profiles that were published in 2002 and are used as the basis for many qualifications in early years. It is expected that this report will be available for further consultation with the sector before the end of 2016. This report and an international literature review of professionalisation will inform further phases of the review in 2017 and we will work closely with education providers to ensure that all qualifications reflect the needs of practitioners in their professional practice. My Department is also collaborating with DCYA to implement the Síolta/Aistear initiative. Two national coordinators are now in place and are

developing and delivering CPD for practitioners which will be rolled out further in 2017.

Another significant development in the upskilling of practitioners and their capacity to deliver a high quality early educational experience for children with a disability is being supported by both Departments. My Department secured funding of €500,000 from the dormant accounts scheme to put in place a national higher education qualification for practitioners to train as Inclusion Coordinators. The programme is being delivered by a consortium led by Mary Immaculate College in co-operation with Froebel, Maynooth University and Early Childhood Ireland. DCYA will fund 900 practitioners per year for four years so that an Inclusion Coordinator can be in place in every setting to coordinate educational provision for children with additional needs in that setting.

I am strongly committed to ensuring that the highest quality education and training including continuous professional development opportunities are in place for early years professionals and my Department will continue to work closely with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs in that regard.

School Accommodation

61. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of inspectorate memos that have been filed with his Department in respect of issues with school buildings or facilities over each of the past ten years; the number of these that are related to health and safety concerns; the number that relate to the need for upgrade or repair; the number that relate to the need for additional buildings or facilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31087/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): It is not possible to provide the type of detailed information requested by the Deputy at this time. The matter requires the collation of data from a number of sources and a further response will be provided as soon as possible.

Minor Works Scheme Data

62. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide a breakdown of the allocation of the minor works grant for each of the past ten years in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31088/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Under the Grant Scheme for Minor Works the following amounts were issued to primary schools in the years 2006 to 2015:

Year	Amount
2006	€27.7m
2007	€27.6m
2008	€26.7m
2009	€29.2m
2010	€28.2m
2011	€28.2m
2012	Nil

Year	Amount
2013	€28m
2014	€28.5m
2015	€28.7m

School Patronage

63. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there are any instances whereby the provision of Irish language education has been decoupled from the current procedure for patronage for the establishment of new schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31089/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Following consideration of feedback from patrons on previous patronage processes, my Department has moved to incorporate the medium of instruction of a proposed new school as part of the assessment process of the patronage process for the nine new post-primary schools which will open in 2017 and 2018.

It is open to all prospective patron applicants to propose provision of Irish-medium education in their application for a new school. Parental preferences for each patron, together with the extent of Irish provision, if any, currently available in the area, are key in relation to the outcome of this process. In this regard, prospective patrons are requested to submit completed parental preferences indicating the language through which parents would prefer their child(ren) to be educated.

The assessment process analyses existing Irish-medium provision in the area and also takes into account existing Irish-medium provision in the adjacent school planning areas. Consideration is given to demonstrated demand and long-term sustainability, including provision of a sufficient range of subjects.

The assessment process for the nine new post-primary schools is at an advanced stage. The final assessment reports will be forwarded for the consideration of the New Schools Establishment Group (NSEG). The NSEG is an external independent advisory group set up to oversee the process. Following the Group's consideration, they will submit a report with recommendations to me for consideration and final decision. I will then announce who the successful patron of each school is. I expect to receive this report in the coming weeks.

Educational Disadvantage

64. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department has conducted any recent studies into the barriers to third level education for young persons from lower socio-economic groups; if he will consider commissioning such research; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31090/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The development of the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education, 2015-19, was informed by the findings from existing research on the barriers to participating in higher education by under-represented groups, including those from lower socio-economic groups. The Plan was also informed by a consultation process which considered the views of the wide range of stakeholders that are active in this policy area.

The National Access Plan contains more than 30 actions that are intended to make higher

education more representative of wider society. There are also specific targets, including a target to increase the proportion of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

My Department is also currently undertaking a review of lone parents' participation in higher education. This review is expected to be published before the end of 2016.

I have secured additional funding of €8.5m for new access measures in Budget 2017. These measures - which will include a new bursary scheme and cash incentives for higher education institutions to attract more students from lower socio-economic groups - will complement existing support measures such as the Student Grant Scheme, the Student Assistance Fund and the Fund for Students with Disabilities.

Educational Disadvantage

65. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the policy initiatives that resulted from the previously established educational disadvantage committee; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31091/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The policy recommendations of the Educational Disadvantage Committee (EDC), which ranged from the methodology for identifying educational disadvantage to teacher supply and staffing and integrating school-based and community interventions, were comprehensively addressed in DEIS - the Action Plan for Educational Inclusion.

A process to review the DEIS Action Plan which began last year is nearing completion and it is my intention to publish a new Action Plan for Educational Inclusion before the end of this year.

The review is looking at all aspects of DEIS, including the range and impact of different elements of the DEIS School Support Programme, the potential for innovation within and between schools and the scope for increased integration of services provided by other Departments and Agencies, in order to improve effectiveness. The latter is an area particularly emphasised by the EDC and achieving a more joined-up way of working for service providers at both national and local levels is a key objective of the Review process.

Implementation of actions arising from the Plan for Educational Inclusion will begin in the 2017/18 school year, and will be a continuing theme in the wider Annual Action Plan for Education.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

66. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the implementation of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 through policy measures; the relevant policy initiatives he proposes to give effect to this Act; the time-frame for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31092/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): A number of sections of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 have been commenced, including those establishing the National Council for Special Education and those promoting an inclusive approach to the education of children.

The following sections of EPSEN were commenced in 2005.

Section 1 – Interpretation

Section 2 - providing for the inclusive education of children with Special Educational Needs

Section 14 – placing certain duties on schools

Sections 19 to 37 - placing the Council on a statutory footing.

Section 39 - placing certain duties on Health Boards

Sections 40 to 53 - amending the Education Act

Schedule 1 – providing for meetings and membership of the Council

Schedule 2 - providing for the Chief Executive Officer of the Council.

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

The Sections of the EPSSEN Act which have not been implemented are those which would have conferred a statutory entitlement to: –

- an educational assessment for all children with special educational needs.
- consequent development of a statutory individual educational plan (IEP).
- the delivery of detailed educational services on foot of this plan.
- an independent appeals process.

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

The NCSE published a Plan for the Implementation of the EPSSEN Act in 2006. This report concluded 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 EPSSEN Act.

My Department's opinion is that the level of investment required could be significantly greater than that envisaged in the NCSE report.

Revised estimates of the amount of additional expenditure required to fully implement remaining sectors of the EPSSEN 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. Accordingly it is not possible to provide an accurate breakdown of the areas in which these costs would be incurred.

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

These reports include the NCSE policy advice on Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Schools, published in 2013, and the Report of the Working Group on a Proposed New Model for Allocating Teaching Resources for pupils with Special Educational Needs, published in 2014.

The alternative model was piloted in 47 schools during 2015/16 school year and the effectiveness of the pilot is currently being reviewed. This review will allow us to take into account the learning experiences of schools, principals, pupils and the views of parents over the course of the pilot.

It is therefore intended 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.

Following the recent Budget I announced that I would be introducing a new model for the allocation of resources to teachers in schools from September 2017. My Department has also introduced measures to provide for educational plans to be prepared for all students accessing Special Needs Assistant support.

Psychological Assessments

67. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 168 of 11 October 2016, if he will indicate of the 7,924 pupils with which National Educational Psychological Service, NEPS, undertook casework, including assessments of, the number that relates to assessments only; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31093/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy will be aware NEPS psychologists, as part of the continuum of services offered to schools, may become directly involved with pupils, offering service to identify need, appropriate intervention, and to monitor and review progress. This may or may not involve direct assessment of the pupil, depending on whether or not an assessment is needed to inform case formulation and appropriate intervention.

With regard to the 7,925 referrals for individual casework undertaken by NEPS psychologists, during the 2015/16 academic year, some 5,765 of these pupils underwent direct assessment as part of the involvement of the psychologist.

The input for the remainder of the referrals, in this period, involved ongoing consultation by the psychologist with school staff, parents and other agencies, case conferences/meetings and onward referral processes with clinical support services in order to address pupil need and ensure improved outcomes for that pupil.

School Transport Review

68. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the outcome of the review of school transport as per the programme for government commitment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31094/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): School transport is a significant operation managed by Bus Éireann on behalf of the Department.

During the 2015/16 school year in the region of 114,000 children, including some 10,000 children with special educational needs, were transported in approximately 4,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually.

As committed to in the Programme for Government, a review of the concessionary charges and rules element of the School Transport Scheme has been undertaken and is being considered.

Disadvantaged Status

69. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the way and when schools can apply for the delivering equality of Delivering Equality of Opportunities in Schools DEIS scheme; if there are to be any pilot schemes under the DEIS programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31109/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy may be aware, a process to review DEIS which began last year is nearing completion and it is my intention to publish a new Plan for Educational Inclusion before the end of this year.

The review is looking at all aspects of DEIS, including the range and impact of different elements of the School Support Programme, the potential for innovation within and between schools and its scope for increased integration of services provided by other Departments and Agencies, in order to improve effectiveness.

Among the measures to be included in the plan are a series of pilot schemes aimed at introducing measures which have been shown to work well in improving results for disadvantaged children and students. The plan is expected to include targeted measures in the area of:

- Supporting School leadership
- Developing Networks and clusters for DEIS teachers and schools
- Supporting new teaching methodologies. There is evidence that, for example changing the way literacy is taught to children who struggle can achieve major improvements in results
- Exploring ways in which the work of schools can be better integrated with other state supports within the community.

The results of mainstreaming will be carefully monitored before any decisions around mainstreaming are considered.

As you know no new school has been included in DEIS since 2009, now a new assessment framework is being developed using centrally held CSO and DES data for the identification of new schools for inclusion. The number of schools to be included in the programme will be determined by this proposed new identification process which will assess all schools in the country, including those not currently participating in DEIS. It will not be necessary for schools to make an application.

Implementation of actions arising from the Plan for Educational Inclusion will begin in the 2017/18 school year, and will be a continuing theme in our wider Annual Action Plan for Education.

70. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans for the special educational needs, SEN, model following budget 2017 and the way it will operate; if it will operate any differently to the SEN model that was in operation prior to budget 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31110/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) has a statutory role under the Education of Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 to provide me with policy advice in relation to matters concerning the education of persons with special educational needs.

The NCSE identified that the current model for allocating resource teachers to schools is potentially inequitable, because access to the range of professional assessments required for the diagnosis of low incident disabilities is not always readily available to those who cannot afford to access them privately. The NCSE has also advised that the current model can lead to unnecessary labelling of children from a young age.

The NCSE has proposed a new resource teaching allocation model which will, when introduced, remove the formal requirement for diagnostic assessment to access additional support and which will provide resources to schools based on school profiles.

A pilot of this new model was conducted in 47 primary and post primary schools over the course of the 2015/16 school year.

A review of this pilot has been completed and a report of the review is currently being finalised. I understand that the review will indicate that the new model has been positively received by schools and parents.

Schools indicated that they welcomed the increased flexibility and autonomy provided by the model to allocate resources based on need. Most schools believe the model allows more scope for team teaching, targeted interventions, mix of in-class and group work, with less focus on withdrawal and one to one teaching. Schools welcome the move away from the unnecessary labelling of children in order to secure resources. Schools also welcomed that they no longer need to wait for diagnosis and that this facilitates intervention at an earlier stage based on the schools identification of need. In addition schools indicated a belief that they were broadly well supported in meeting the needs of children with Special Educational Needs.

As part the recent Budget announcements, I therefore announced that following development and piloting over the past number of years, a new model for the allocation of teaching resources for children with special educational needs will be implemented from September 2017.

An additional €18 million will be provided in 2017 to provide for around 900 resource teacher posts. Further details regarding implementation of the new model will be announced in the coming months.

School Accommodation Provision

71. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application by a school (details supplied) in County Wexford for additional accommodation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31179/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that the school to which he refers have been allocated funding under my Department's Additional Accommodation Scheme 2016 to construct an additional Mainstream Classroom to

include en-suite toilets and a WC for assisted users.

Schools Building Projects Applications

72. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application for an extension by a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31180/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has received an application from the school in question for significant funding for major capital works. A decision on the application will be conveyed to the school as soon as the assessment process has been completed.

Voluntary Sector Funding

73. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the steps he will take to ensure that the volunteer centres which have suffered significant decreases in funding of up to 30% between 2009 and 2014, has their funding base increased by at least 10% for 2017 and subsequent years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31183/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I refer to the reply to Question No. 278 of 18 October 2016 which sets out the position in this matter.

Housing Adaptation Grant

74. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if all rights and opportunities in terms of access to housing adaptation grants are extending to those who have been diagnosed with autism or who are on the autistic spectrum, considering that in the disabilities Act it is classed as a sensory disability; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30998/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Housing Adaptation Grant Scheme for Older People and People with a Disability is delivered by local authorities with 80% funding from my Department, along with 20% from the local authorities' own resources. It assists people with a disability in private houses to have necessary adaptations, repairs or improvement works carried out in order to make their accommodation more suitable for their needs. There are no restrictions on the type of disability covered by the schemes and the administration of the available funding is a matter for the local authorities based on their assessment of priority and need at the time.

Local Authority Funding

75. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the amount allocated to Kerry County Council, Listowel Town Council, Tralee Town Council and Killarney Town Council for each of the years from 2004 to 2014 to groups and persons for community events and purposes. [30996/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The precise information sought on funding allocated to Kerry County Council, Listowel Town Council, Tralee Town Council and Killarney Town Council for each of the years from 2004 to 2014 to groups and persons for community events and purposes is not fully clear. It is also the case that information related to community-related funding may not be routinely collated on the basis of administrative boundaries within counties or its compilation would involve a disproportionate amount of time and work.

Nevertheless, the following funding has been identified:

Between 2004 and 2010 my Department provided funding to local authorities under the Local Authority Playground Grants Scheme for the development of playgrounds and under the Community Services Facilities Scheme for capital projects to enhance communities, address disadvantage and improve social cohesion locally. Details of payments made to Kerry County Council under the schemes are set out in the following table.

Community Services Facilities Scheme		
Tralee Town Council for Ragoonane Community Outreach Ctr.	€310,000	19 Nov. 2007
Caherciveen Community Resource Ctr.	€93,805	13 Oct. 2008
Daingean Town	€50,000	12 Mar. 2009
Ballybunnion	€80,000	5 Dec 2005
Ballyheigue	€30,000	17 Aug 2006
Waterville	€30,000	17 Aug 2006
Fenit	€100,000	20 Dec 2006
Ballyheigue	€17,823	14 June 2007
Fenit	€2,177	20 May 2010

€289,699 has also been provided to date (since 2010) under the Tralee Regeneration Programme to deliver a range of projects focused on fostering community involvement, addressing recreational imbalances in the area and increasing participation in sport and physical activities.

RAPID (Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment Programme) is a focused Government initiative to target the most disadvantaged urban areas in the country. Tralee was designated as a priority area for the investment of Government resources in 2002, and an action plan for the development of new initiatives, investment and improved co-ordination between national and local agencies and communities was prepared and implemented under the direction of local Area Implementation Teams (AITs). Details of RAPID funding are set out in the following table.

RAPID Playground	Amount Paid
Tralee Town Council	60,000.00
Tralee Town Council	66,000.00
Tralee Town Council	63,709.82
Tralee Town Council	21,593.00
RAPID Traffic	Amount Paid
Tralee Town Council	22,500.00
Tralee Town Council	41,650.00

RAPID Local Authority Housing Estate Enhancement Scheme (LAHEES)	Amount Paid
Tralee Town Council	20,000.00
Tralee Town Council	23,520.00
Tralee Town Council	21,480.00
Tralee Town Council	37,183.78

In 2014, €12,000 was provided to Kerry County Council as start-up funding for Kerry Public Participation Network (PPN) which was established to enable individuals and community groups in Co. Kerry to have a say on issues that concern them. Public Participation Networks (PPNs) are new structures for public engagement and participation in Local Government in each Local Authority area.

If a more specific question is tabled relating to a particular area of funding from my Department, I will certainly endeavour to provide the information sought.

Tenant Purchase Scheme

76. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will amend the new tenant purchase scheme to allow residents of houses that were build under Part V agreements to be included in the scheme and allow them to purchase their homes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31002/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme came into operation on 1 January 2016 and allows eligible local authority tenants to buy their homes. The Housing (Sale of Local Authority Houses) Regulations 2015 governing the Scheme provides for a number of specified classes of houses to be excluded from sale. The provisions of Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, are designed to enable the development of mixed tenure sustainable communities. Part V units are excluded from the Tenant (Incremental), Purchase Scheme to ensure that units delivered under this mechanism will remain available for people in need of social housing support and that the original policy goals of the legislation are not eroded over time. The continued development of mixed tenure communities remains very important in promoting social integration.

In line with the commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government and reaffirmed in the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, it is intended that a review of the Scheme will be initiated in January 2017 following the first 12 months of operation and any changes to the terms and conditions of the scheme which are considered necessary based on the evidence gathered at that stage will be brought forward.

Foreshore Licence Conditions

77. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will confirm that the additional one year foreshore lease for the Galway bay test site, March 2016 - March 2017 granted and dated 11 July 2016, which was applied for by the Marine Institute, Oranmore, County Galway, to continue to occupy and to utilise the existing facility under the terms and conditions of the original lease granted in 2006

(details supplied), is an extension of time only, and that no other conditions or changes have been made or granted in the one year foreshore lease extension; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31017/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The lease granted for one additional year allows the Marine Institute to operate and utilise the test facility to the extent permitted under the original granted lease, only until such time as a new application to extend the scope and nature of the facility has been determined or March 2017, whichever is the earliest.

Foreshore Licence Conditions

78. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the reason the original foreshore lease document (details supplied) amounts to thirteen pages, while the granted one-year, short-term foreshore lease extension document is sixty pages long in relation to the foreshore lease applied for by the Marine Institute; if he will confirm the substantive differences between the two documents; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31018/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The current Foreshore Lease format is intended to provide a comprehensive set of protections and obligations with a view to providing a clear description of the Lessor/Lessee relationship being entered into. In order to enhance clarity for both parties, the current format lease has naturally become more detailed in the 10 year period between the execution of these two instruments.

Foreshore Licence Conditions

79. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the reason the foreshore lease extension of one year has been granted to the Marine Institute for the Galway Bay test site without environmental impact assessments having been conducted for this lease extension, as required under national and EU legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31072/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): As the one year lease term extension did not require further works or alterations to the physical aspect of the site a further environmental impact assessment of the consented facility was not required.

Vacant Sites Levy

80. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if guidelines have been issued to local authorities on the operation of the vacant site levy; and if he will indicate where these are available to the public. [31083/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department issued general guidance on the implementation of the vacant site levy to planning authorities by way of Circular Letter PL7/2016 on 1 July 2016, entitled Implementation of the Vacant Site Levy as provided for in the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015, which is available on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie>

gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/pl_07-2016_guidance_on_implementation_of_the_vacant_site_levy.pdf.

Energy Schemes

81. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will provide the necessary funding to Dublin City Council to allow the local authority to commence phase two of the insulation programme to provide insulation to the older, single brick housing in view of the serious level of fuel poverty in older council properties. [31098/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Local authorities are continuing with an ambitious programme of insulation retrofitting this year and further funding of some € 33 million for that purpose has been made available to end-2016. This is additional to funding of some €85 million provided from 2013 to 2015 to improve energy efficiency and comfort levels in over 46,000 local authority homes. This Programme benefits those at risk of fuel poverty and is making a significant contribution to Ireland's carbon emissions reduction and energy reduction targets for 2020. The Programme is being implemented in a number of phases. Phase 1 commenced in 2013 and is focused on providing attic/roof insulation and the less intrusive cavity wall insulation in all relevant properties. There are 80,000 social homes to be tackled in that phase and to end-2015, some 46,000 homes had been retrofitted, with further good progress being made under that phase in 2016.

Phase 2 of the Programme will focus on the external fabric upgrade of those social housing units with solid/hollow block wall construction, of which there are 28,000 homes. This phase commenced on a pilot basis in both Fingal and Westmeath local authorities and the outcome of this pilot work will inform the full national roll-out of Phase 2 across all local authorities in 2017. In the mean time, all local authorities, including Dublin City Council, have been informed that funding will be considered for Phase 2 works on a case by case basis.

In 2016, funding of €825,000 has been provided to the City Council to continue with Phase 1, in addition to €140,800 for a pilot Phase 2 project at Cromcastle Court, Coolock. This pilot project involves the external insulation of an apartment complex and the outcome will inform future projects of this nature.

Question No. 82 withdrawn.

State Pension (Contributory) Data

83. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Social Protection the projected savings to the Exchequer as a result of changes in the criteria for qualification for the contributory old age pension since these changes were introduced. [30988/16]

84. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Social Protection the projected savings in 2017 and the number of old age pensioners affected by the changes in criteria for qualification for the contributory pension. [30989/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 83 and 84 together.

The overall concern in recent years has been to protect the value of weekly social welfare rates. Expenditure on pensions, at approximately €7 billion, is the largest block of expenditure

in my Department in the Estimate for 2016, representing approximately 35% of overall expenditure. Due to demographic changes, my Department's spending on older people is increasing year on year. Maintaining the rate of the State pension and other payments is critical in protecting people from poverty.

Each year more people are living to pension age and living longer in retirement. As a result of this demographic change, the number of State pension recipients is increasing by approximately 17,000 annually. This has significant implications for the future costs of State pension provision which are currently increasing by close to €1 billion every 5 years. The purpose of changes to the State pension age is to make the pension system more sustainable in the context of increasing life expectancy.

The conditions for the State pension (contributory) are reviewed on an ongoing basis, and there have been a number of changes over the years which impact upon whether someone qualifies or not. The main such changes in recent years are as follows:

1. The Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2011 provided for the necessary amendments to increase the State pension age in line with the National Pensions Framework as set out in the EU/IMF Programme of Financial Support for Ireland. It provided for an increase in the age for qualification for the State Pension from 66 years to 67 years from 2021, and a further increase to 68 years from 2028. It also discontinued the State Pension (Transition) for new claimants with effect from 1 January 2014.

In 2013, the cost of the State pension (transition) was €137 million. While its abolition would not realise that saving in full, as some people who were affected would alternatively claim working age payments (although at a lower rate than that of the State pension), and some may have claimed an Increase for a Qualified Adult on their spouses' pensions, it is estimated that well over half of that cost may have been saved each year as a result of this measure.

It is estimated that the net saving in 2017 is likely to be in the region of €75-80 million.

2. "Developing the National Pensions System – Final Report of the National Pensions Board" published in 1993, recommended that the number of paid contributions required to qualify for a contributory pension should be increased to 520 (i.e. 10 years) and the necessary legislation to effect these recommendations was contained in Section 12 of the Social Welfare Act 1997 which provided for their implementation in two stages, with the paid contribution requirement being standardised at 260 from 2002, rising to 520 from April 2012.

At the time this measure was introduced, the Exchequer annual savings were expected to be in the region of €6m per annum in the short term, but rising substantially on a cumulative basis in the long term.

As provided for in Budget 2012, from September 2012, new rate bands for State pension (contributory) were introduced, replacing the bands which had been in place since 2000. While this does not impact upon whether someone qualifies for a State pension, it may impact upon the rate new claimants qualify for, and in some cases may result in them claiming an alternative payment. The effect of this was to reduce the rate of State pension (contributory) attracted by those on lower yearly averages.

It is estimated that the exchequer savings arising from the current rate bands (relative to the ones in place from 2000-2012) will be at least €50 million in 2017, and that this will rise at a rate of some €10m annually.

For those with insufficient contributions to meet the requirements for a full rate State pension (contributory), they may qualify for a means tested State pension (non-contributory) which

19 October 2016

has a maximum personal rate of €222, which is 95% of the maximum rate of the State pension (contributory). Alternatively, if a person's spouse or civil partner is in receipt of a State pension (contributory) they may instead qualify for an Increase for a Qualified Adult of up to €209, which is 90% of the maximum personal rate of the State pension (contributory).

There has, in recent years, been a significant increase in the number of people receiving a State pension. It is not possible to state the numbers of people who do not qualify as a result of particular changes in criteria, as a significant number would not, as a consequence, enter the State pension system. Some, for example, might be the spouse of a public service pensioner with a significant income, and might not qualify for a means-tested payment. If such people do not claim a State pension (contributory) or an alternative, their circumstances would not generally be part of the statistics available to my Department.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Question No. 85 withdrawn.

Invalidity Pension Applications

86. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a decision will be made on an application for invalidity pension in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31047/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The lady referred to has been awarded invalidity pension with effect from the 28 July 2016. Payment will issue to her nominated bank account on the 03 November 2016. Any arrears due from 28 July 2016 to 2 November 2016 (less any overlapping social welfare payment and/or outstanding overpayment) will issue in due course. The person in question was notified of this decision on the 17 October 2016.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Jobseeker's Allowance Payments

87. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection when jobseeker's allowance will be restored in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31048/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Jobseeker's Allowance payment of the person concerned has been restored. Payment for the period 14/09/2016 to 18/10/2016 was available for collection on 18/10/2016.

I trust that this clarifies the issue for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility

88. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will review the case of a person (details supplied); if he will resolve this case where an Irish citizen, who is now living abroad, cannot access social welfare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31055/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): In order to qualify for disability

allowance (DA), a person must be aged between 16 and 66, satisfy a medical and means test and be habitually resident in the state. I confirm that this lady was in receipt of DA from 2 November 2005. Payment ceased with effect from 13 April 2015 when she notified the Department of her intention to live abroad.

Her entitlement to social protection while resident in another EU State is a matter for the authorities in that State to determine.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the deputy.

Back to Education Allowance Applications

89. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason a back to education application was not processed for a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31063/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The person concerned made a claim to illness benefit from 5 Aug 2016. Illness benefit is a payment for people who cannot work due to illness and who satisfy the pay related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions. One of the conditions is that a person have a minimum of 39 reckonable contributions paid or credited in the tax year governing the claim. Claims made in 2016 are governed by the 2014 tax year. According to my Department's records the person concerned has no reckonable contributions in 2014 and, therefore, they do not qualify for payment of illness benefit at this time.

The back to education allowance scheme (BTEA) is an educational opportunities scheme for people who are in receipt of certain social welfare payments for a specified period and who wish to pursue second or third level courses of education.

To qualify for BTEA illness benefit customers must be getting their payment for two years or more. A combination of illness benefit and another qualifying payment may be used to satisfy the two years rule. One year, however, must be in respect of illness benefit.

The person concerned made an application to participate in the BTEA scheme which was refused on the grounds that they were not in receipt of a qualifying Social Welfare payment for the required two years.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Rural Social Scheme Administration

90. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of the expansion of the rural social scheme following budget 2017; the way the extra places will be spread throughout the country; when this will take place; the funding that is being put forward for the scheme in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31068/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As the Deputy will be aware, the purpose of the rural social scheme (RSS) is to provide income support for farmers and fisherpersons who have an entitlement to specified social welfare payments. The Government, as part of the budget package for 2017, announced 500 additional places on the scheme which will increase the overall number to 3,100. My Department intends allocating these places as soon as possible taking into account many factors including existing places, demand for places in

particular areas, work opportunities available in local areas and the number of farmers in receipt of income support.

The budget allocated to the RSS in 2016 is €44.3m. The level of funding allocated to the RSS for 2017 is expected to be in the region of €47.5m. In allocating the additional places, the Government recognises the valuable contribution the RSS is making to the provision of services to communities across Ireland.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Work Placement Programmes

91. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of his Department's plans for the Tús scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31070/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As the Deputy will be aware, the purpose of Tús is to provide short-term work opportunities for those who are unemployed for more than one year. It helps to break the cycle of unemployment and improves a person's chances of returning to the labour market. My Department is also conscious of the valuable contribution the scheme is making in the provision of services to individuals and communities across Ireland. 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, issues such as the appropriate level of expenditure, the number of places and the criteria for participation on employment schemes, including CE and Tús, are all being considered. I hope to be in a position to bring a Memo to Government by the end of the year.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Jobseeker's Allowance Payments

92. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will reinstate a jobseeker's allowance payment in respect of a person (details supplied). [31076/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The jobseekers allowance payment of the person concerned has been reinstated following the submission of additional information by her in relation to her claim. I hope this clarifies the matter for the deputy.

Back to Education Allowance Applications

93. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason a person (details supplied) has been denied an opportunity to enhance their employability through a masters degree, by the rejection of an application for back to education allowance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31097/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The person concerned applied for a payment under the back to education scheme for a postgraduate course (a Master of Education – Level 9) on 19 May 2016 for the 2016/2017 academic year. As this person already holds a post graduate qualification (a Higher Diploma in Further Education), the application was refused on the basis that a person who holds a Higher Diploma cannot pursue a Masters

qualification under this scheme. I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Support Services

94. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will provide further details on the additional €2 million allocated in budget 2017 to pre-activation supports for persons with disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31115/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The objective of the pre-activation support programme for people with disabilities, announced in Budget 2017, will be to bring participants with a disability, who are not work ready, nearer to the labour market through engagement in training and personal development activities. It is anticipated that the focus of such a programme will be on young people with disabilities and will be designed to assist in their transition from school to further education and employment. The processes required for the operation of this programme are currently being worked out and the details in this regard will be announced in due course.

Departmental Agencies

95. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will acknowledge the work that has been completed by the local boards of citizens information and MABS, Money Advice and Budgeting Services, and that their input has contributed significantly to the success of these organisations; his plans to enhance their continued input at the local board level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31182/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Citizens Information Board (CIB) is the statutory body responsible for providing information, advice (including money and budgeting advice service) and advocacy services on a wide range of public and social services. CIB delivers on this remit through a network of delivery partners which includes 51 local Money Advice and Budgeting Services (MABS) and 42 local Citizens Information Services (CIS). In 2016, CIB has a budget allocation of €50m from the Department of Social Protection, of which €20.6m is allocated to MABS and €14.8m is allocated to CIS. I want to reassure the Deputy that the Government is committed to maintaining and, where appropriate, strengthening the local services delivered by the CIS and MABS. I acknowledge the cooperation of MABS in implementing the recently extended range of supports and services available to borrowers in serious mortgage arrears under a series of Government initiatives, most recently through ABHAILE, the Mortgage Arrears Resolution Service. Similarly, I want to acknowledge the developments on the CIS side in relation to advocacy. These MABS and CIS developments are funded and supported by my Department, including through the provision of additional staffing and other resources where required. This demonstrates my ongoing support for MABS and CIS, and my commitment to investment in local, enhanced service availability for citizens.

While local CIS and MABS services are well regarded in their respective communities, particularly by those who need and use their services, there is nonetheless a need to streamline and improve the governance arrangements for this large number of companies, which will include a reduction in the overall number of Boards of Management. The existing structure comprises 93 independent local companies (51 MABS and 42 CISs), under the remit of CIB, each with separate voluntary Boards of Management, comprising an average of 9.2 members serving. This results in a governance structure of over 850 people, with 93 companies operating indi-

vidual administration systems and processes, such as payroll and financial systems. There is a significant administrative and resource effort required to continue to support such a model, and opportunities for greater efficiencies in the use of public funds and staff resources exist, including the delivery of enhancing frontline services for citizens.

An independent report in 2014, followed by consultation with the services and work by a design group resulted in a restructuring proposal for a regional model for MABS, reducing the number of companies from fifty one to six, and for CIS, reducing the number of companies from forty two to six. The proposal has recently been considered by the Board of CIB which has decided to establish a Restructuring Sub Committee comprising a number of CIB Board members, a number of staff of CIB, and representatives of the service delivery partners CIS and MABS, to develop an optimal regional structure for the network of companies together with an implementation plan. The Sub Committee is due to report back to the Board of CIB in early 2017.

I can assure the Deputy that, irrespective of the regional structure chosen, there will be no diminution of locally provided services to the public, no closure of service locations, and no staff redundancies. In fact, the aim of this Board restructuring is to ensure that any efficiencies and savings achieved in governance arrangements can be used to expand and enhance local service delivery.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Undocumented Irish in the USA

96. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status of illegal Irish immigrants in the US; if discussions have taken place with the US authorities in regard to same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31130/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Achieving relief for undocumented Irish migrants in the US and agreement on a facility for future legal migration between Ireland and the US remain key objectives for the Government. Our Embassy in Washington and Consulates elsewhere in the US are very active in advocating for immigration reform, while the issue is also regularly addressed in high level political contacts between Ireland and the US Government.

The Taoiseach discussed the prospects for immigration reform with Vice President Biden during his visit to Ireland in July. While in Washington for St. Patrick's Day, the Taoiseach and I met President Obama, Vice President Biden, Speaker Ryan, Senator Chuck Schumer and other key Congressional contacts from both sides of the aisle. During these meetings we emphasised the plight of the undocumented Irish in the US and encouraged both Houses of Congress to work on a bipartisan basis towards a comprehensive package of immigration reform measures.

I also availed of my visit to New York for the United Nations General Assembly last month to meet Irish community leaders in the United States, to discuss with them the prospects for achieving immigration reform and to reassure them of the Government's commitment to the issue. In addition, Minister of State McHugh met representatives of the Coalition of Irish Immigration Centers, representing a broad group of Irish centres across the United States, in New York on 20 September. That meeting was also attended by Senator Billy Lawless of Seanad Éireann.

The Government, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and our Embassy in Washington continue to work closely with Irish American community leaders in actively pursuing all

viable opportunities to advance immigration reform. While there is little prospect of comprehensive reform being achieved within the lifetime of the current Congress, our Ambassador and Embassy staff are working with their contacts on both sides of the political aisle to prepare the basis for a renewed initiative once a new Administration and Congress have been established in Washington DC.

Flood Relief Schemes

97. **Deputy Ciarán Cannon** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide a map outlining the geographic extent of the region described as the Gort Lowlands by the OPW recently. [31030/16]

98. **Deputy Ciarán Cannon** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent of the funding being provided to Galway County Council to facilitate it in becoming the lead agency in the delivery of flood relief solutions for the Gort Lowlands. [31031/16]

99. **Deputy Ciarán Cannon** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to ensure that a sufficient level of engagement occurs between the team of engineers and the local community for his approval of the establishment of a team of engineers to deliver flood relief solutions to the Gort Lowlands. [31033/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán Canney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 97 to 99, inclusive, together.

The Office of Public Works (OPW) and Galway County Council (GCC) have been working together in relation to the flooding issues in South Galway, which incorporates the Gort Lowlands, and on how best to advance a possible flood relief scheme for the area. GCC wrote to the OPW in September 2016 setting out its proposals in this regard. The OPW, in reply, confirmed its agreement in principle to the advancement of a potential scheme for South Galway and to provide any technical assistance that the Council may require as the Council will be the Contracting Authority in this case. Specific funding arrangements have not been set out as it is too early in the process. Once the tendering process for the required consultants has been completed the Council will revert to the OPW in relation to specific funding requests before entering into any contractual agreements. If approved, funding will be provided to the Council for the appointment of the consultants to examine options and develop potential solutions to deal with the problem and to undertake any surveys which may be required. Due to the particular geological and ecological characteristics of the area, the development of a possible scheme will be more complex than is normally the case with a flood relief scheme. The study area has yet to be defined and agreed and so a map of the area cannot be provided at this time. The Council will prepare a map outlining the extent of the study area as part of the procurement process for consultants. Subject to a viable scheme emerging which is both cost beneficial and environmentally acceptable and which meets with general public acceptance, the Council may request confirmation of funding arrangements from OPW to undertake its construction.

As part of the investigation into the problem there will be significant consultation with statutory bodies and the general public during the course of the scheme development where input and knowledge from the local community will be considered very important. If a viable solution emerges it will have to be brought forward through planning either under the provisions of the Arterial Drainage Acts or the Planning and Development Regulations at which stage the public will have every opportunity to make further submissions on the proposals.

Flood Prevention Measures

100. **Deputy Ciarán Cannon** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to ensure that the OPW's social media page (details supplied) last updated in 2013 and will become an effective tool for communicating with communities which have been affected by flooding. [31046/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán Canney): I am advised by the Commissioners of Public Works that the social media page referred to in the Question was not created and is not operated by the Office of Public Works (OPW).

The OPW communicates with the public, including those affected by flooding, through various fora, including through its websites *www.opw.ie*, *www.flooding.ie*, *www.waterlevel.ie*, *www.floodmaps.ie* and through Twitter and public notices, and publications.

Coast Guard Services

101. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the reason the contract for the construction of a coastguard station was terminated at Greystones, County Wicklow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31057/16]

102. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the OPW supplies funding for projects such as the construction of a coastguard station; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31058/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán Canney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 101 and 102 together.

The Coast Guard is a Division of the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (DTTAS) and is responsible for the coordination of maritime search and rescue in Ireland including oversight and the funding of all Coast Guard projects. OPW manages projects for the delivery of Coast Guard buildings on behalf of the Department and the Coast Guard Service.

On 20th September the Department and the Coast Guard Service decided that the project could not be funded at the level of cost within the tenders received. The OPW have been asked to advise on more affordable alternatives.

Public Sector Pensions

103. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform further to Parliamentary Question No. 885 of 16 September 2016, the reason he has no plans to review the spouse's and children's payment scheme; and if he has satisfied himself with the operation of the scheme as it stands, including its mandatory nature regardless of marital status. [31061/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The public service operates a Spouses' and Children's Contributory Pension Scheme. This provides benefits to Spouses or Children of deceased members. In summary, when a member dies after retirement, a spouse's pension of one-half of the former member's pension is payable. Dependent children are also entitled to a child's pension of one-third of the spouse's pension for each of the first three eligible children.

The original pre 1984 scheme did not allow for the payment of a pension to a spouse who married or had children post retirement. Thus, the scheme allowed a refund of contributions if the individual had not been married up to the point of retirement.

In 1984, a revised Scheme which extended eligibility for benefits to spouses who married or had children after retirement was introduced and members of the original scheme and certain retirees were given the option of transferring to the revised Scheme.

One of the benefits of the Revised Scheme was that the spouse of a post retirement marriage was eligible for a spouse's pension. The disadvantage of the Scheme was that there was no facility for repayment of contributions on retirement if the individual concerned did not have a spouse and would not therefore be in a position to avail of any benefit under the Scheme.

For members who remained in the original Scheme there was an entitlement to claim a refund of contributions in the event that the member remained unmarried at the date of retirement. Many members of the scheme availed of this option and received a refund.

Members of the Spouses' and Children's Contributory Pension Scheme regardless of their marital status i.e. persons in civil partnerships or those in opposite or same sex marriages are not discriminated under any aspect of the public service pension schemes.

Public service spouses' and children's schemes are structured on a group insurance basis and the member contribution rates take account of the fact that payment of benefits will not arise in respect of all members. On that basis I have no plans to review the scheme at present.

Drainage Schemes

104. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform further to Parliamentary Question No. 169 of 26 May 2016, if he will arrange for the OPW to reassess a river (details supplied) in County Donegal, in view of the fact that the local authority has stated the river is not under their remit; if there is any support available from his Department to assist private landowners should the OPW or the local authority not take responsibility for the river; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31077/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán Canney): The Office of Public Works (OPW) has maintenance responsibility only for those Catchment Drainage Schemes and Flood Relief Schemes completed by the OPW under the Arterial Drainage Acts 1945 and 1995.

The River Bulba, Co. Donegal does not form part of an arterial drainage scheme under the auspices of this Office and as such we have no responsibility for its maintenance.

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.

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 at <http://www.opw.ie>. It is open to Kerry County Council to submit a funding application under the Scheme. Any application received will be considered in accordance with the overall availability of resources for flood risk management and the scheme's eligibility criteria, available on the OPW website.

Public Expenditure Policy

105. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which he remains satisfied that public expenditure projections remain on course and are likely to remain on course throughout the current year; the specific areas of a vital infra-structural nature which might require extra expenditure; if such expenditure remains possible while maintaining prudent management principles and objectives; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31169/16]

106. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which the economy continues to benefit from public sector and general reform over the past number of years; if he expects the benefits from such reforms to continue to accrue into the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31170/16]

107. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the degree to which he continues to take account of and have regard for the impact of wage restraints and cost cutting throughout the public sector with particular reference to the impact on individual public service at all levels in view of the impact of the ongoing economic situation; if he envisages any particular areas that might offer some relief in this area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31171/16]

108. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will identify the most effective policies pursued by his Department over the past five years in terms of addressing the economic needs of the country with a view to identifying the most likely and effective strategy to be followed in terms of public expenditure and reform for the future and the future economic needs of the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31172/16]

109. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which he remains satisfied regarding the adequacy of the budget for each Department to meet its requirements over the next 12 months; if any particular measures are required to address specific issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31173/16]

111. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which reform, as a component in economic strategy, continues to achieve savings in line with projections; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31175/16]

112. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the degree to which ongoing analysis takes place throughout each Department and its subsidiary bodies to identify where any adjustments might be possible to encourage economic growth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31176/16]

113. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which he expects to be in a position in the course of the next year to address increased expenditure requirements where infrastructural deficits have been identified which might require capital expenditure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31177/16]

114. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which he expects to be in a position to reward or incentivise Departments or authorities, State or semi-State bodies that have achieved particularly satisfactory results over the past four years to date in respect of targets set to achieve savings or cuts in public expenditure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31178/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to

take Questions Nos. 105 to 109, inclusive, and 111 to 114, inclusive, together.

Reviewing voted expenditure for the current year, gross voted expenditure of €39,836 million to end-September was €439 million (1.1%) below profile, with gross voted current expenditure €364 million (1.0%) below profile and gross voted capital expenditure €76 million (3.4%) below profile. In relation to specific areas of an infrastructural nature which might require extra expenditure, as set out in the Expenditure Report 2017, it is estimated that an additional €200 million of capital funding will be required for necessary repair work to transport infrastructure arising from flood damage at the start of the year and for expenditure arising from the rescheduling of school building works. This was signalled in the Mid-Year Expenditure Report in July and the inclusion of this capital expenditure in the revised expenditure ceiling for 2016 was set out in the Expenditure Report published last week.

Over the last number of years, my Department had a key role in ensuring Ireland met or exceeded its key fiscal targets in each year of the EU/IMF programme of financial support resulting in a successful exit from the programme in December 2013 and from the Excessive Deficit Procedure at the end of 2015. Sustainable public finances will remain essential for continued economic and social progress. The reformed Stability and Growth Pact will also be an important aspect of budgetary planning in the future, ensuring a closer alignment of expenditure growth with the medium-term potential growth rate of the economy.

There is an ongoing requirement to implement reforms that improve how public services are delivered, and that achieve savings which can be reinvested in frontline services. The Public Service has delivered significant productivity gains and service improvements over the last number of years, as set out in the Annual Progress Report on the Public Service Reform Plan (published April 2016). We must build on this progress, and it is essential that targeted recruitment and investment in public services is done in tandem with further public service reform measures. This includes, for example, more digital delivery of services, improved customer service and business processes, and greater use of shared services. When Departments identify savings arising from such reform measures, such savings are in general made available to Departments to reinvest in the delivery of services. It is also very important to ensure that the public service workforce operates in a manner which maximises the positive impact on public service provision of the increased numbers announced in the Estimates for 2017.

In my Statement on the Expenditure Estimates on Budget day I announced that a spending review will take place in advance of Budget 2018. It is anticipated that this review will provide more policy options on a number of Government priorities. As set out in the Expenditure Report 2017, between 2014 and 2017, gross voted expenditure is forecast to grow by 9%. This is in comparison to three year expenditure growth figures of between 26% and 57% experienced in the 1999 to 2008 period. A return to such unsustainable levels of increase is not possible. Therefore, with an ongoing requirement for cost restraint, the systematic examination of baseline expenditure is required to ensure that resources are directed towards emerging and agreed public service priorities.

Policy decisions for a wide variety of expenditure items are informed by an ongoing level of analysis. An example of this is the work carried out by the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES). Several policy papers were published alongside Budget 2017 and are available on the Budget.gov.ie website. Furthermore, a review of the Capital Plan will take place in 2017. While the final details of the process for the review are currently being put in place, previously this type of process has involved rigorous analysis, both internally in my Department as well as in other Government Departments, on how best to allocate our scarce capital resources in order to achieve the best value for money while also meeting the Government's priorities for economic and social progress. As set out in the Mid-year Expenditure

Report, the Government is committed to investing a further €5.14 billion in the period 2017 to 2021, over and above the amounts included in the Capital Plan published in September last year. The first part of this additional amount is reflected in the allocations for 2017 set out in the Budget Estimates.

Regarding the issue of Departmental allocations being sufficient, Budget 2017 represents the third consecutive year in which the Government was in a position to allocate additional resources to public spending. Gross voted expenditure in 2017 is to increase by €1.9 billion compared to 2016. As well as including €0.9 billion for various expenditure pre-commitments such as demographic related costs and the Lansdowne Road Agreement, there was €1 billion allocated for additional measures including: additional staffing in Health, Justice and Education; progressing the Action Plan for Housing in 2017; the introduction of a new single Affordable Childcare Scheme; and a number of increases to Social Welfare rates.

The Deputy will appreciate in light of the foregoing, that a series of important measures are in place or being planned in order to ensure that, for the future, that is an intensified ongoing focus on the totality of resources allocated to current and capital public spending, rather than on the proportionately small volume of additional new resources available for funding service developments announced at budget time.

Departmental Operations

110. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which voluntary retirements, ordinary retirement or redundancies throughout the public sector have impacted particularly on the ability of some Departments to deliver their services; the extent to which he expects to be in a position to address this issue in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31174/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Moratorium on Public Service Recruitment and Promotion was removed by the previous Government in 2015, and there has been considerable recruitment across many areas of the Public Service since then. In 2015, Public Service numbers increased by just over 8,500, and up to mid-point this year numbers have increased by a further 4,000. Also since 2015, Government Departments have been operating under delegated sanction arrangements, giving them authority to make staffing and resource allocation decisions according to their business needs, within agreed overarching pay ceilings. As part of this, Departments have also made significant investment in enhancing internal strategic HR capacity and have adopted a workforce planning framework to plan over the medium term for the impact of staffing and operational changes, including the impact of losing experienced staff to retirement. These are the mechanisms that allow Government Departments to plan and manage their business needs in a more stable and strategic manner.

With regard to the impact of redundancy, it should be noted that instances of redundancy in the Public Service are small, and where it occurs it takes place on a voluntary basis and is always informed by business related decisions aimed at improving service efficiency and/or effectiveness. The Government introduced scope for voluntary redundancy in late 2012 to support its ambitious programme of Public Service Reform, which included proposals for shared services and increased use of online services, but it has not been a significant feature of change in the Public Service. The number of people who have left the Public Service under a voluntary redundancy scheme is of the order of 1,000, out of a total staffing level of more than 300,000.

Questions Nos. 111 to 114, inclusive, answered with Question No. 105.

Wildlife Conservation

115. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if he will request a wildlife officer to visit the property of a person (details supplied) to investigate and deal with serious erosion of 150 m of the bank of the River Feale on their property; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31036/16]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): At the request of the landowner concerned, an official from my Department's regional staff recently examined the area referred to in the Deputy's Question, to consider works that the landowner proposed to carry out to protect his lands on the banks of the River Feale. Consent was granted to the landowner, subject to some conditions, for repairs to be carried out to rock armouring, as well as for the cutting back of scrub, in accordance with Regulation 30(3) of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011.

National Parks and Wildlife Service

116. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if she will request that the National Parks and Wildlife Service re-erect boundary fences where the national park backs up onto the properties in an area (details supplied) as there are serious issues with deer entering the properties, which is causing damage and is a health and safety issue; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31040/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Michael Ring): Officials from my Department's regional staff have examined the area in question. If a contact name and address for a representative of the residents could be provided, my officials will be happy to meet with that representative to discuss the matter.

Rural Development Programme

117. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs when she will release the €10 million available to local authorities under the town and village renewal scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31066/16]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): On 9th August this year, I launched the Town and Village Renewal Scheme as part of the Government's programme to support rural development. I have allocated €10 million in capital funding for the scheme this year. Local Authorities, in conjunction with local communities and businesses, were invited to submit proposals to my Department by the end of September for approval. My officials are currently assessing the 172 applications received under the scheme and these assessments will be completed by the end of October. Funding will be released to all approved projects once the assessments are complete.

The Town and Village Renewal scheme is just one of a range of measures in the Programme for a Partnership Government which will support rural development. Some of the other initiatives which have been announced by my Department recently include:

- the new 2014-2020 LEADER programme which has a budgetary allocation of €250 million over the lifetime of the programme;

- a new round of Rural Recreation project funding, with total approvals of €4.5 million to

75 projects across the country;

- the re-opening of the CLÁR programme, with funding of €3 million for this year;
- the launch of a new round of the REDZ (Rural Economic Development Zone) initiative with €5 million in funding for this year; and
- the establishment of two Regional Broadband Action Groups, involving all of the Local Authorities in the country, to prepare for the roll-out of broadband under the National Broadband Plan once contracts are awarded in 2017.

It is my intention to build further on these initiatives next year, as reflected in the €18 million increase in funding for rural programmes announced for my Department in Budget 2017.

Údarás na Gaeltachta Funding

118. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs given the importance of job creation in helping to retain sustainable communities in Gaeltacht areas and given Údarás na Gaeltachta's confirmation that an increase in its capital budget to €12 million per annum would enable it to create an additional 1,000 new jobs over three years, if she will commit to this funding request; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22913/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Seán Kyne): The Deputy will be aware that job creation in the Gaeltacht, through Údarás na Gaeltachta, is recognised as a key priority in the *Programme for a Partnership Government*. The programme also includes a commitment to an additional €300m, over the 5 year period 2017- 2021, for Enterprise Ireland and Údarás na Gaeltachta. I wish to reiterate that as Minister of State with responsibility for the Gaeltacht, I very much appreciate the importance of job creation in retaining sustainable Irish speaking communities in Gaeltacht areas. In that context, I wish to acknowledge the very important enterprise and employment function of Údarás na Gaeltachta as the regional economic agency for the Gaeltacht. In that role, Údarás na Gaeltachta, in conjunction with Enterprise Ireland and the IDA, will continue to work towards attracting investment to the Gaeltacht, in addition to supporting micro-enterprises and developing the skills base in the Gaeltacht.

In order to enable Údarás na Gaeltachta to fulfil its job creation and job retention role in the Gaeltacht, capital funding of €6.687m has been provided by the Exchequer to Údarás in 2016, in addition to its own resources from the sale of assets and investments. I have also secured €2.4m in additional capital to an tÚdarás in 2016. This additional funding will allow an tÚdarás to progress a number of capital projects on hand, thereby protecting existing jobs and assisting in the creation of new jobs in the Gaeltacht. As announced in Budget 2017, a capital funding baseline of €6.687m will be provided by the Exchequer to Údarás in 2017.

I am, of course, well aware of Údarás na Gaeltachta's proposal to increase its capital budget over a period of time to €12m per annum. I am also very aware and supportive of the case advanced by the organisation that such an increase in funding would enable it to create an additional 300 jobs per annum. I can assure the Deputy that I will be continuing to seek additional capital funding for an tÚdarás in the future.

Nursing Staff Remuneration

119. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if he has given approval to the restoration of the incremental credit for the 36-week clinical placement undertaken by graduate nurses between 2011 and 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31112/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Approval has been given to the restoration of incremental credit for all nurses in respect of the 36 week clinical placement undertaken by 4th year student nurses in the context of the 2017 Estimates. This decision means that all nurses and midwives will have incremental credit for the 36 week placement restored from 1 January 2017, restoration of the credit to 2016 and future graduates having been approved earlier this year. It is estimated that the inclusion of 2011 to 2015 graduates will benefit around 4,000 nurses who graduated between 2011 and 2015 and are currently working within the public health service and potentially another 3,000 who may wish to return to the public system in the future.

Services for People with Disabilities

120. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the status of the task force that was to be established within three months of the formation of the Government to examine the issue of personalised budgets; if this task force has been established; if so, if it has met; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31114/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The establishment of a Task Force on Personalised Budgets is key to progressing the Government's objective of providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide them with 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. I am pleased to inform the Deputy that I established the Task Force on 20 September last.

The Task Force has two components - a Strategy Group and an Advisory & Consultative Group - and its remit will be to make recommendations on a personalised budgets model which will give people with disabilities more control in accessing health funded personal social services, giving them greater independence and choice in accessing services which best meet their individual needs. The Task Force comprising both the Strategy Group and Advisory & Consultative Groups met in plenary session on 13th October. The Strategy Group and Advisory & Consultative Groups also met separately on 20th September and 6th October respectively and I attended the commencement of both meetings to impress upon the participants the importance I attach to their work and to wish them every success in their endeavours.

Medicinal Products Prices

121. **Deputy Colm Brophy** asked the Minister for Health his plans to reduce the cost of drugs required by sufferers of Crohn's disease; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30993/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In recent years a number of new initiatives have been implemented to reduce the cost of all medicines paid by the State and patients.

The implementation of pricing agreements with the pharmaceutical industry has delivered lower prices. Most recently, the new four year Framework Agreement on the Supply and Pricing of Medicines with the Irish Pharmaceutical Healthcare Association provides for an annual downward only price realignment which will ensure that the prices of medicines in Ireland

continue to reduce in line with price reductions across the reference countries. This Agreement is expected to deliver savings of €600 million from IPHA companies, with an additional €150 million expected to be delivered by non-IPHA suppliers of branded medicines.

The implementation of generic substitution and reference pricing has also contributed to significant price reductions. The prices of reference priced products are generally of the order of 70% - 80% lower than the prices paid when medicines were on patent. The implementation of generic substitution and reference pricing delivered savings of €47 million in 2014 and €94 million in 2015. This ensures that generic drug prices in Ireland will continue to fall towards European norms.

As a result of these measures, the average price of an item dispensed on the General Medical Services Scheme has reduced to below the price paid in 2001 and the average Drug Payment Scheme price is below the price paid in 2000.

The State also provides a number of supports for persons with the cost of medicines. Under the provisions of the Health Acts, medical cards are provided to persons who are unable, without undue hardship, to arrange health 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. Crohn's disease sufferers aged over 70 will also benefit from the prescription charge changes outlined in Budget 2017. The Government intends to reduce the per item prescription charge by 50c, from €2.50 to €2.00, and reduce the monthly cap by €5, from €25 to €20. This initiative will require changes in primary legislation and pharmacy payments systems. Subject to the enactment of the necessary legislation, the Government intends that the reductions will take effect on 1 March 2017.

Patients may also be able to claim tax relief on the cost of certain medical expenses. This includes medicines prescribed by a doctor, dentist or consultant. Relief is at the standard rate of 20%.

The Programme for Partnership Government also includes a commitment to reduce the cost of medicines by reducing the annual required co-payment on the Drugs Payment Scheme and further reducing prescription charges for medical card holders.

Hospital Appointments Status

122. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive an appointment for surgery at Letterkenny University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31003/16]

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.

National Treatment Purchase Fund Payments

123. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Health when the HSE will start releasing money for privately funded operations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31022/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) previously arranged for the provision of hospital treatment to classes of persons determined by the Minister. Since 2011 this function has been suspended.

The NTPF supports the management of in-patient, day-case and outpatient waiting lists, by working with the HSE to assist hospitals in developing local demand and capacity planning and providing technical guidance materials to ensure the highest standard of data quality and practice. The expertise amassed by the NTPF in respect of waiting lists has proven invaluable in assisting the HSE to administer previous waiting list initiatives and in carrying out smaller-scale targeted initiatives in areas such as endoscopy.

The *Programme for Partnership Government* emphasises the need for sustained commitment to improving waiting times for patients, with a particular focus on those patients waiting longest. At my request, in August, the HSE developed an action plan to reduce, by year end, the number of patients currently waiting 18 months or more for an inpatient / daycase procedure. Also within current resources, the NTPF is currently implementing an Endoscopy Initiative which aims to ensure that, by year end, no patient will be waiting 12 months or more for an endoscopy procedure.

In line with the Government priority, the Budget 2017 provides for the treatment of our longest-waiting patients. Funding of €20m is being allocated to the NTPF, rising to €55m in 2018. Planning of this initiative is at an advanced stage by the NTPF, my Department and the HSE.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Eligibility

124. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Health the status of the fair deal scheme and the way such scheme applies to farmers (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31034/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): The Nursing Homes Support Scheme (NHSS) is a system of financial support for those in need of 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. The Scheme aims to ensure that long-term nursing home care is accessible and affordable for everyone and that people are cared for in the most appropriate settings. A financial assessment is carried out by the HSE to determine how much a participant in the Scheme will contribute to the cost of their care.

Participants in the Scheme contribute up to 80% of their assessable income and a maximum of 7.5% per annum of the value of assets held. In the case of a couple, the applicant's means are assessed as 50% of the couple's combined income and assets. The first €36,000 of an individual's assets, or €72,000 in the case of a couple, is not counted at all in the financial assessment. The capital value of an individual's principal private residence is only included in the financial assessment for the first three years of their time in care. This is known as the three year cap.

The Scheme has a number of important safeguards built into the financial assessment which ensures that:

- Nobody will pay more than the actual cost of care;
- An applicant will keep a personal allowance of 20% of his/her income or 20% of the maximum rate of the State Pension (non-Contributory), whichever is greater. This is in recognition of the fact that, although the NHSS covers core living expenses, residents can still incur some costs in a nursing home, such as social programmes, newspapers or hairdressing;
- If an applicant has a spouse/partner remaining at home, he/she will be left with 50% of the couple's income or the maximum rate of the State Pension (non-Contributory), whichever is greater;
- If both members of a couple enter nursing home care, they each retain at least 20% of their income, or 20% of the maximum rate of the State Pension (non-Contributory), whichever is greater;
- Certain items of expenditure, called allowable deductions, can be taken into account for the financial assessment, including health expenses, payments required by law, rent payments and borrowings in respect of a person's principal private residence;
- A person's eligibility for other schemes, such as the Medical Card Scheme or the Drug Payment Scheme, is unaffected by participation in the Nursing Homes Support Scheme or residence in a nursing home.

In addition to these safeguards, where an applicant's assets include land and property held in the State, the contribution based on such assets may be deferred and collected from their estate. This is known as the Nursing Home Loan (Ancillary State Support), the purpose of which is to ensure that a person does not have to sell their home during their lifetime to pay for long-term nursing home care. A nursing home resident can apply for this deferral at any stage.

When the Nursing Homes Support Scheme (NHSS) commenced in 2009, a commitment was made that it would be reviewed after three years. The Report of the Review was published in July 2015. Arising out of the Review, 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. I have recently met with the IFA and invited them to present their submission at the next meeting of the Working Group. The Working Group met on the 11 of October and the IFA gave a verbal presentation to the Group. The issue is currently being considered.

The Programme for a Partnership Government has committed to reviewing the NHSS to remove any discrimination against small business and family farms.

Hospitals Building Programme

125. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Health his plans to provide funding for

expansion works (details supplied); the discussions he has held in the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31042/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Funding has been made available in the current Capital Plan to bring the project to the design and planning stage. The expansion of the Intensive Care Unit is currently at design stage. Further funding is dependent on the costing and timing of the project, the availability of resources in the context of many other demands across the country and the future capital envelope for the health service and the overall priorities for future service development in the Dublin Midlands Hospital Group.

Autism Support Services

126. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide a breakdown of the funding provided to the Galway and Roscommon autism spectrum disorder service based in Athenry for 2015 and 2016 to date in tabular form; the criteria used to assign or develop a programme for a person; and when a person (details supplied) can expect to receive some support or advocacy in a school setting. [31043/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): 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.

Obesity Strategy

127. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if there are funds available to assist communities in healthy living initiatives, supports and infrastructure in view of the fact that there is a renewed focus on tackling the issue of obesity in general and in particular childhood obesity; if he can work with a community in an area (details supplied) where an important community facility is at risk of closure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31044/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): My Department does not operate a grant scheme out of which such assistance could be provided.

Medical Card Applications

128. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if the medical card application form can be reopened in the case of a person (details supplied) to consider additional information recently submitted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31049/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible. The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information was issued to Oireachtas members.

Health Services Access

129. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if he will review the case of a person (details supplied); if he will resolve this case, where an Irish citizen, who is now living abroad, cannot access medical services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31056/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I understand my colleague the Minister for Social Protection also been issued with this question and will address the issue regarding social welfare, which falls under his remit.

Entitlement to healthcare services for people who are resident in a member State other than the State that is responsible for the cost of their healthcare is established through the exchange of one of the relevant E Forms, which are used by all countries and covered under Regulation (EC) 883/04.

The person in question should contact the Health Service Executive's Overseas Section to enquire as to her entitlement of the relevant E Form, under Regulation (EC) 883/04.

Hospital Appointments Administration

130. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the waiting times for persons to receive an outpatient appointment at the rheumatology department at Our Lady's Hospital in Manorhamilton, County Leitrim, specifically for those waiting three months, six months, nine months, 12 months or greater than 12 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31060/16]

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 query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

131. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal will have an operation performed at Sligo University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31064/16]

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.

Hospital Appointments Status

132. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the status of the case of a person (details supplied); and when the person can expect an appointment with the audiology department, Health Service Executive. [31069/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for reply to the Deputy.

Home Care Packages Expenditure

133. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the average cost of providing a home care package for each CHO area, in tabular form; the total number of home care packages provided within each CHO; the number of persons currently waiting for home care package allocation within each CHO area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31073/16]

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.

Hospital Waiting Lists

134. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons currently waiting for a colonoscopy in the Lourdes hospital in Drogheda; the number of persons on the waiting list over one year and two years respectively; if the hospital has an adequate number of gastroenterologists to perform such procedures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31078/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the specific queries raised by the Deputy, as these are service matters, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Vaccination Programme

135. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the steps he is taking to address serious concerns of parents of girls who are reporting adverse reactions to the HPV vaccine; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31111/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The immunisation programme in Ireland is based on the advice of the National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC). NIAC is a committee of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland comprising of experts in a number of specialties including infectious diseases, paediatrics and public health. The committee's recommendations are informed by public health advice and international best practice.

Each year in Ireland around 300 women are diagnosed with cervical cancer. The HPV vaccine protects against two high risk types of HPV (16 & 18) that cause 73% of all cervical cancers. Vaccinated women and girls will still be at risk from other high risk types of HPV that can cause cervical cancer and will therefore need to continue to have regular cervical smear tests. NIAC recommended that the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine be given to all girls aged 12-13 in 2009 and in September 2010 the HPV vaccination programme was introduced for all girls in first year of second level schools.

By January 2016, over 200 million doses of Gardasil had been distributed worldwide. In Ireland over 580,000 doses of Gardasil have been administered and over 220,000 girls have been fully vaccinated against HPV since it was introduced in 2010.

No medicine, including vaccines, is entirely without risk, there is therefore on-going pharmacovigilance and monitoring of medicinal products once they are authorised for use. The safety profile of Gardasil has been continuously monitored since it was first authorised. In Ireland, the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) is the statutory regulatory authority for medicines in Ireland. While no medicine (including vaccines) is entirely without risk, the safety profile of Gardasil has been continuously monitored since it was first authorised both nationally and at EU level.

As part of its monitoring of the safety of medicines, the HPRA operates an adverse reaction reporting system, where healthcare professionals and patients are encouraged to report adverse reactions they consider may be associated with their treatment, through the range of options in place for reporting. All reports of suspected adverse reactions submitted to the HPRA are reviewed and followed up as necessary to ensure all relevant information is available, prior to onward reporting to relevant stakeholders, including the European Medicines Agency (EMA). At EU level, regulators continuously monitor this cumulative reporting experience as part of the ongoing assessment of the safety of HPV vaccines. In addition, pharmaceutical companies are obliged, as a condition of the authorisation to market a medicine, to submit reports of adverse reactions received directly, to the HPRA. In accordance with its reporting obligations, the HPRA provides anonymised details of reports received to the EMA, the WHO and to the relevant pharmaceutical companies. The fact that a suspected adverse reaction has been reported does not necessarily mean that the medicine has caused the observed effect, which may have also been caused by the condition being treated, a new condition the patient developed, or by another medicine that the patient is taking. Further data are usually needed to complete the picture.

I am aware of claims of an association between HPV vaccination and a number of conditions experienced by a group of young women. It appears that some girls first suffered symptoms around the time they received the HPV vaccine, and understandably some parents have connected the vaccine to their daughter's condition. It is important to reassure people that anyone who is suffering ill health is eligible to seek medical attention, and to access appropriate health and social care services, irrespective of the cause of their symptoms. The individual nature of the needs of some children may require access to specialist services. The HSE are currently working to put in place a clinical care pathway appropriate to the medical needs of this group.

In November 2015, the European Medicines Agency completed a detailed scientific review of the HPV vaccine. The review, which the HPRA participated in, specifically focused on rare reports of two conditions, complex regional pain syndrome and postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome associated with heart rate increase. The outcome of the review which was carried out by the EMA Pharmacovigilance and Risk Assessment Committee (PRAC) found no evidence of a causal link between the vaccine and the two conditions examined. The European Medicines Agency has advised healthcare professionals that available data does not warrant any change to

the use of HPV vaccines as there are no new safety concerns regarding HPV vaccines. Health-care professionals should therefore continue using the vaccines in accordance with the current product information.

On 12 January 2016, the European Commission endorsed the conclusion of the European Medicines Agency stating that there is no need to change the way HPV vaccines are used or to amend the product information. This final outcome by the Commission is now binding in all member states.

I encourage the parents of all eligible girls to ensure that their daughters receive this important cancer preventing vaccine.

Home Care Packages Data

136. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons in receipt of home care packages in the Dublin South Central constituency. [31116/16]

137. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons in receipt of home care packages in the Dublin West constituency. [31117/16]

138. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons in receipt of home care packages in County Wicklow. [31118/16]

139. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons in receipt of home care packages in County Mayo. [31119/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): I propose to take Questions Nos. 136 to 139, inclusive, together.

As these are service matters they have been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Hospital Appointments Status

140. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be facilitated with required surgery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31120/16]

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.

Hospital Appointments Status

141. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31122/16]

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.

Hospital Appointments Status

142. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal will receive a hospital appointment at Galway University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31125/16]

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.

Hospital Appointments Status

143. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation to be carried out at Cork University Hospital in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31126/16]

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.

Medicinal Products Availability

144. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding funding for medication; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31128/16]

146. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if negotiations with the manufacturer of the drug, Orkambi, have been completed; and the outcome regarding its likely availability for cystic fibrosis patients. [31164/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 144 and 146 together.

The HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines under the community drugs schemes, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013. Prior to deciding whether to reimburse a medicine, the HSE considers a range of statutory criteria, including clinical need, cost-effectiveness and the resources available.

The decisions on which medicines are reimbursed by the taxpayer are made on objective, scientific and economic grounds by the HSE, on the advice of the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE). The NCPE conducts health technology assessments (HTAs) of pharmaceutical products for the HSE, and can make recommendations on reimbursement to assist the HSE in its decision-making process. The NCPE used a decision framework to systematically assess whether the drug is cost-effective as a health intervention.

I am informed that, following a request from the HSE, the NCPE carried out an assessment of the manufacturer's economic dossier submitted in March 2016 on the cost effectiveness of lumacaftor/ivacaftor (Orkambi). This dossier included details on all relevant costs and relevant cost offsets including hospitalisation, disease management costs, intravenous antibiotics, adverse events and any additional costs arising in patients not taking Orkambi.

The NCPE has completed its HTA and submitted it to the HSE. The NCPE determined, following an evaluation of the economic dossier, that the manufacturer failed to demonstrate cost-effectiveness or value for money from using the drug. The NCPE have confirmed that all relevant costs were included in the analysis.

A summary of the HTA has been published on the NCPE website and is available at: <http://www.ncpe.ie/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Website-summary-orkambi.pdf> .

The HSE has since had further engagements with the manufacturer in an effort to secure significant price reductions for Orkambi. The HSE will consider the outcome of these engagements and any other, together with the NCPE recommendation, in making a final decision on reimbursement.

Medical Aids and Appliances Applications

145. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an application for HSE equipment in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31131/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the HSE for reply to the Deputy.

Question No. 146 answered with Question No. 144.

Information and Communications Technology

147. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent of investment in modern technology within the health service over the past six years to date; his plans for investment in this area with particular reference to enhancing the efficiency of services in all hospitals throughout the country to ensure a seamless service is provided to patients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31168/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I presume the Deputy is referring to Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in his question. The potential that technology offers to improve patient safety and to enhance the delivery of health services in Ireland is recognised by the Government. The table below shows the outturn for ICT since 2011 in capital and revenue expenditure. Current expenditure in relation to ICT developments is focussed on a wide range of systems including infrastructural support projects, patient administration systems as well as new critical developments such as the national laboratory information systems (LIMS), the Maternal and New Born Clinical Management System, the Medical Oncology Management Systems and a new financial management system.

HSE ICT	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016 Projected
Capital	€15m	€22m	€39m	€39m	€53m	€55m
Revenue	€86m	€86m	€87m	€95m	€100m	€103m

My Department has undertaken a number of initiatives to enable improvement in the use and application of eHealth and ICT technology in healthcare. In 2013, the Government published an *eHealth Strategy for Ireland* which set out a digital path for health services improvements. The main objective of the eHealth strategy is to ensure a national approach to ICT and eHealth initiatives. As part of that strategy, an Office of the Chief Information Officer has been established along with the entity '*eHealth Ireland*' within the HSE structure to progress the eHealth agenda. The strategy sets out a number of enablers to progress eHealth including the setting up of an eHealth Advisory Committee for the HSE, an Irish eHealth ecosystem and the development of a system of health identifiers underpinned by the Health Identifiers Act, 2014. This Act gives the legal basis for the development and the deployment of identifiers that will cover patients, health care organisations and professionals in the health service. The development and the deployment of the Individual Health Identifier will be a significant patient safety initiative along with being a key enabler for eHealth deployments.

The HSE recently developed a business case for an Electronic Health Record (EHR) for Ireland which is a plan for a consistent and sustained investment over a number of years in

technology across the continuum of healthcare in the acute, primary and community sectors. The aim of this plan is to ensure that the right information, about the right patient is available wherever required, in a safe and secure environment. It is envisaged, if the plan proceeds, that the New Children's Hospital will be the initial site for implementation of an EHR in an acute setting thus providing a paper 'lite' digital hospital. In developing a national electronic health record we must build on the progress to date in ICT deployment but also the lessons learnt from other jurisdictions in developing an optimum solution for Ireland. This programme, if progressed, will require a substantial investment in ICT and it also offers the opportunity for re-configuration of services with the potential of a safer, patient centred and more integrated approach along with significant efficiencies. My Department is currently assessing the EHR programme and engaging with stakeholders on how to further progress this programme of work.

Food Safety Standards

148. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Health his plans for addressing the serious health risks attached to the use of energy drinks; if the dangers or side effects have been brought to the attention of the HSE or his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31181/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): Energy drinks refer to non-alcoholic drinks containing high levels of caffeine and other nutrient which are perceived or actual stimulants like ginseng. Many contain high levels of added sugars. Because high caffeine drinks are not recommended for certain population groups, specific EU labelling requirements apply for beverages exceeding 150mg/l of caffeine. The labelling must specify that they have a high caffeine content, are not recommended for children, pregnant or breast-feeding women and must also state the caffeine content expressed per mg/100ml.

At the request of the Department of Health, Safefood published a review of energy drinks in Ireland in 2016. The review recommended an information awareness campaign for younger adults and a code of practice for retailers to avoid sales to children.

My department is working with the food industry, retailers and advertisers on a code of practice in relation to advertising, promotion and product placement of food and beverages.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

149. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the Statute of Limitations 1957 prohibits, in any way, his Department's ability to retake or penalise any agriculture overpayments which have taken place past a certain period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31026/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Statute of Limitations 1957, as amended, imposes limits on my Department's ability to recoup overpayments. The Act does not prohibit proceedings being initiated but provides a defence in certain circumstances.

Young Farmer Capital Investment Scheme Applications

150. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when approval of funds will be released to a person (details supplied) under the TAMS II young

farmer capital investment scheme. [31079/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named submitted an application as a Registered Farm Partnership for grant-aid under the Young Farmers' Capital Investment Scheme on 22 June 2016, Tranche 3. The application has passed all administrative checks and it will now be put through the ranking and selection process. Once an application is selected under this process it is then checked for technical issues in the local office before approval issues.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

151. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason there was a variance in payments to a person (details supplied) in view of the fact entitlements paid in 2015 were to be based on 2013. [31082/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): In 2013 payment for the person named was based on 2.89 entitlements with a unit value of €309.64 giving rise to a total payment of €894.86 under the Single Payment Scheme. Under the 2013 Single Payment Scheme two sets of entitlements were leased out from the person named to third parties.

Under the Basic Payment Scheme, the number of entitlements to be allocated to an eligible person participating in the scheme is based on the lesser of the eligible hectares declared by them in either 2013 or 2015. However as a 2015 Private Contract Clause was submitted for 28.75 entitlements that were leased out in 2013, these were included in the calculation of the number of entitlements to be allocated to the person named. In this regard 31.64 Basic Payment Scheme entitlements were established.

The total value of all the entitlements owned by the person named in 2014 amounting to €5,533.68 which includes leased out entitlements was used in the calculation of new Basic Payment Scheme entitlements.

This resulted in 31.64 entitlements being established under the 2015 Basic Payment Scheme with a total value, including greening, of €5,395.62. 28.75 of these entitlements with a value of €4,902.79 including greening were leased out to a third party under the 2015 Private Contract Clause. Payment of €492.83 has issued in full to the person named on 1 December, 2015.

Knowledge Transfer Programme

152. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a person (details supplied) can be considered at this stage for the knowledge transfer and innovation scheme in County Sligo as places remain unfilled. [31095/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I understand that this question refers to the Knowledge Transfer Programme. In the eight week period to 14th July, 2016 Knowledge Transfer Facilitators were required to register applications details for farmer participants in their approved Knowledge Transfer Groups. As no application was registered for the person named during this registration period, he cannot be admitted to the scheme.

The Knowledge Transfer Programme targets 27,000 farmers over the duration of the Rural development Programme 2014-2020.

Dairy Equipment Scheme Applications

153. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason a person (details supplied) who applied under the TAMS programme has not received correspondence on their application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31123/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named submitted an application for grant-aid under the Dairy Equipment Scheme on 20 June 2016, Tranche 3. The application has passed all administrative checks and it will now be put through a ranking and selection process. If selected the application will be then checked for technical issues in the local office before approval issues. If not selected in this particular tranche and eligible the application will roll over to the next tranche.

GLAS Payments

154. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of an application for a GLAS 2015 payment in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31166/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): An application under Tranche 1 of GLAS was received in my Department on the 15 May 2015 and the person named was approved into the GLAS 1 with effect from 1 October 2015.

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 be completed before any payment can issue.

During the GLAS pre-payment validation checks in respect of the 2015 scheme year an issue was identified in relation to a parcel on which the Chough action was selected. Department Officials are currently reviewing this issue with a view to resolving it and processing the 2015 payment as soon as possible.

Waste Disposal Charges

155. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the legislation that was introduced to take effect of the agreement with regard to the 12-month delay on introducing the pay-by-weight waste collection system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30997/16]

156. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his attention has been drawn to the fact that a waste collection company (details supplied) which operates in County Sligo, is charging its customers by the weight of their waste bins, even after the 12-month period for delaying its introduction was introduced; if this is allowed; the way in which this can be addressed going forward; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31038/16]

157. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to ensure that a mechanism will be put in place by waste companies to identify to customers that their bins are the weight that they are being charged for, as there are fears that the weight of bins will be overstated and there will be no proof to counter this claim;

and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31039/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 155 to 157, inclusive, together.

The charges applied by waste management companies are a matter between those companies and their customers, subject to compliance with all applicable environmental and other relevant legislation, including contract and consumer legislation.

As the waste industry began releasing its proposed prices under pay-by-weight in June, 2016, the Government relayed its concern to the industry regarding the reported escalation of waste bills for customers of certain companies. On foot of this, my Department engaged with representatives of the waste industry to agree a way forward that results in customers paying no more for the same level of service than they were paying in June 2016 for waste collection over the 12 months to 1 July 2017. Legislation (S.I. No. 346 of 2016) was signed on 30 June, 2016 to remove mandatory pay-by-weight charging for household waste collection. However, it is still open to a company to charge on a pay-by-weight basis and if they are charging the same fee for the same level of service then this does not run contrary to the agreement. Indeed, many companies already had a pay-by-weight element to their charging structure before the agreement was reached and their customers are quite happy with this approach.

The responsibility for ensuring the accuracy of the weighing instruments for the purposes of charging for waste collection on a weight basis rests with the National Standards Authority of Ireland's (NSAI's) Legal Metrology inspectors. The NSAI has provided information on its role in this regard, which is available to download at: <https://www.nsai.ie/Pay-By-Weight-bin-charges-system.aspx>

National Broadband Plan Administration

158. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if upgrade works on the national broadband scheme will take place in Stackallen, County Meath. [31023/16]

159. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if upgrade works on the national broadband scheme will take place in Smithstown, Julianstown, County Meath. [31025/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 158 and 159 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 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 aims to identify an entity or entities to build, roll-out, operate and deliver high speed broadband of at least 30 Mbps download and 6 Mbps upload speeds to all premises within the intervention area. Last week, I announced that the three bidders in the procurement process have indicated that they are proposing a predominantly fibre-to-the-home solution for rural Ireland under the National Broadband Plan intervention. Householders and businesses may potentially get speeds not just of 30Mbps but up to 1Gbps with businesses potentially availing of symmetrical upload and download speeds. This is a solution that will

endure for 25 years and beyond and put Ireland to the forefront internationally in terms of connectivity.

The High Speed Broadband Map, which is available at www.broadband.gov.ie shows the extent of the State Intervention area:

- The areas marked BLUE represent those areas where commercial providers are either currently delivering or have previously indicated plans to deliver high speed broadband services.

- The areas marked AMBER on the High Speed Broadband Map represent the target areas for the State Intervention which are the subject of the current procurement process.

The map provides information on a county by county basis with a breakdown of coverage across the townlands in every county including Co 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.

The townlands of Stackallen, Smithstown and Julianstown are included in the AMBER area and are therefore included in the procurement process. Over 750,000 premises are within the State intervention area. This includes over 31,000 premises in County Meath.

The Department is now in a formal procurement process to select a company or companies who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network to the over 750,000 premises in Ireland, covering 100,000km of road network and 96% of the land area of Ireland. Since bidders were invited to participate in dialogue with the Department, there have been approximately 150 hours of meetings, with considerable more interaction to follow over the coming months. The procurement process is being intensively managed, to ensure an outcome that delivers a future-proofed network that serves homes and businesses across Ireland, for at least 25 years and deals conclusively with connectivity issues in rural areas, and areas such as Stakallen, Smithstown and Julianstown.

Waste Disposal Charges

160. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment further to Parliamentary Question No. 540 of 11 October 2016, if he will provide a list of companies that have signed up to this agreement as it appears that not all companies are complying to this agreement and families of disabled persons are now concerned over the unknown cost of disposing of incontinence wear, despite them already paying their refuse bill for the year and many of these families are on a low or social protection income; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31075/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): As set out in the reply to parliamentary question number 540 of 11 October 2016, the waste management industry had committed to providing a full weight allowance for the disposal of non-infancy incontinence wear to patients supplied with such products by the HSE if a pay by weight per kilogramme charging system was introduced for household waste collection on 1 July 2016. As the waste industry began releasing its proposed prices under pay-by-weight in June 2016, the Government relayed its concern to the industry regarding the reported escalation of waste bills for customers of certain companies and it was not implemented. However, my Department engaged with representatives of the waste industry to agree a way forward that results in all customers paying no more for the same level of service than they were currently paying for waste collection over the 12 month period to 1 July 2017. The Irish Waste Manage-

ment Association, Greyhound and CityBin were directly involved in the discussions which led to the agreement.

The charges applied by waste management companies are a matter between those companies and their customers, subject to compliance with all applicable environmental and other relevant legislation, including contract and consumer legislation. In this regard, if a person has concerns regarding changes being made to any contract, advice may be sought from the Competition and Consumer Protection Agency, who can be contacted on 01 402 5500.

National Broadband Plan

161. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding broadband; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31127/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Government's National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to ensure that every citizen and business has access to a high quality, high speed broadband service. This will be achieved through a combination of commercial investments and a State led intervention in areas where commercial services will not be provided. The Broadband Intervention strategy for Ireland available at <http://www.dcenr.gov.ie/communications/en-ie/Pages/Publication/Ireland's-Broadband-Intervention-Strategy-update.aspx>

This sets out a detailed service specification including a requirement that the State-funded network must be capable of delivering high-quality, high speed broadband of at least 30mbps download and 6mbps upload to all citizens; be capable of providing for higher performance in the future so as to keep pace with consumer demand; ensure the availability of high quality wholesale services to allow retail competition to develop.

The Plan envisages public investment in the capital costs of building the necessary infrastructure to support high-quality affordable broadband services similar to those already available in cities and towns. This network will be made available to service providers on a wholesale basis and it is the intention that the wholesale prices charged within the intervention area will be no more than the average published wholesale prices that prevail in other comparable, more competitive areas of the country or the European Union or, in the absence of such published prices, prices already set or approved by the Regulator, ComReg.

The Department is now in a formal procurement process to select a company or companies who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network to over 750,000 premises in Ireland, covering 100,000km of road network and 96% of the land area of Ireland.

Disabled Drivers Permits

162. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if all rights and opportunities in terms of access to disabled parking for carers, and so on, will be extended to those who have been diagnosed with autism, or who are on the autistic spectrum, considering that in the disabilities Act it is classed as a sensory disability; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30998/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): It is not currently my intention to extend the Disabled Parking Permit scheme to the carers of those who have been

diagnosed with autism or who are on the autistic spectrum.

The Road Traffic (Traffic and Parking) Regulations 1997, as amended, provide for the operation of disabled person's parking permits (also known as European Parking Cards) in Ireland. The Permit complies with EU Recommendation 98/376/EC. For the purposes of an EU parking permit, a disabled person is defined as "a person with a permanent condition or disability that severely restricts their ability to walk".

In July 2010, my Department published a Review of the Disabled Parking Scheme which was conducted by the Department in co-operation with the issuing authorities, the Disabled Drivers Association of Ireland (DDAI) and the Irish Wheelchair Association (IWA). One of the conclusions of the Review was that criteria for eligibility for the Scheme should be refocused from the type of disability to actual level of mobility impairment. The medical criteria for issue of the EU parking permit are strict and only persons whose mobility is severely and permanently restricted qualify.

I will however keep the criteria for those eligible under continuous review.

Swimming Pool Programme Status

163. **Deputy Colm Brophy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will expedite the approval for the next stage of a project (details supplied) in Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30994/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): The Local Authority Swimming Pool Programme (LASPP) provides for grant aid to local authorities towards the capital costs of new swimming pools or the refurbishment of existing pools. There are four stages in the development of a project under the Local Authority Swimming Pool Programme, namely Preliminary Report, Contract Documents, Tender and Construction.

In January of this year, my Department contacted local authorities and sought expressions of interest in a limited round of swimming pool allocations. There were three expressions of interest received for new pools, two of which were valid and both in Dublin. Having assessed existing commitments and the funding available, it was decided to include the proposal from South Dublin County Council (SDCC) for a new swimming pool in Lucan in the LASPP.

My Department wrote to SDCC in April 2016 advising the Council to undertake the Preliminary Report stage which includes the Feasibility Study, Appointment of Consultants for Preliminary Proposals and Design Brief. Documentation in this regard was received from SDCC in July and is currently under examination by my Department's technical advisor and my officials. In this regard, I have asked that this project would be prioritised in order to progress it to the next stage in the programme, i.e. the Contract Documents stage, as soon as possible.

Obesity Strategy

164. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if there are funds available to assist communities in healthy living initiatives, supports and infrastructure in view of the fact that there is a renewed focus on tackling the issue of obesity in general and in particular childhood obesity; if he can work with a community in an area (details supplied) where an important community facility is at risk of closure; and if he will make a state-

ment on the matter. [31045/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): The Sports Capital Programme is operated by my Department and provides grants to assist in the development of sports facilities and the provision of sports equipment. Grants are available to sports clubs, voluntary and community groups. I understand the facility referred to by the Deputy has previously received €240,000 in grants under the Programme.

It should be noted that the Sports Capital Programme does not assist with the current day to day funding of clubs.

As was confirmed in the 2017 Estimates Statement, a new round of the Sports Capital Programme will open for applications in January with the announcement of allocations expected later in 2017. It will be open to any organisation with a suitable project to apply for funding.

Road Safety

165. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will carry out a safety review of the N5, a national primary route from Tarmonbarry to Balaghaderreen, which has numerous accident black spots and is a vital link to the west, particularly in view of a fatal road traffic collision near Scramogue on the N5 recently; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31067/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects (including the N5) is a matter for the Transport Infrastructure Ireland (formerly known as the NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects is a matter in the first instance for TII in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act. In addition TII has systems in place to analyse collision data and review safety on all of the national road network.

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.

Vehicle Testing

166. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding testing by the RSA; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31081/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): A commercial vehicle, as with any other vehicle must be roadworthy at all times when being used on the public road. Commercial vehicle roadworthiness testing (CVRT) is only one component of the preventative road safety measures we need to have in place in order to ensure safer vehicles on our roads.

I appreciate the requirements to be met are onerous and should be kept under constant review.

Given that the Road Safety Authority (RSA) has statutory responsibility for the CVRT, I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the RSA for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to

contact my office if a response has not been received within ten days.

Sports Capital Programme Administration

167. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide a breakdown of awarded sport grants which have been drawn down by sports clubs, indicating the value of the grant drawn down in each case for the years 2014, 2015 and 2016 to date in tabular form; if he will further provide a breakdown of sports grants awarded to sports clubs which have not been drawn down by sports clubs, indicating the value of the grant not drawn down in each case for the years 2014, 2015 and 2016 to date in tabular form; the reason awarded grants have not been drawn down; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31107/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): Details of all the grants allocated and payments made under the Sports Capital Programme in 2014 and 2015 are published on the Department's website *www.dttas.ie*. Details for 2016 will be published early in the new year.

For a variety of reasons it can take grantees several years to draw down allocations. Some of the more common reasons include problems finalising the necessary legalities, delays in the planning process, delays in construction and difficulties encountered by clubs raising the required own funding.

Sports Capital Programme Administration

168. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if consideration will be given to reviewing the system of sport grants with a view to making it easier for sports clubs to draw down grants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31108/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): My officials and I are mindful of possible opportunities to improve the operation of the Sports Capital Programme. In this regard, a new web portal has been introduced to streamline all aspects of the programme from registration, to application to grant drawdown.

As was confirmed in the 2017 Estimates Statement, a new round of the Sports Capital Programme will be open for applications in January with the announcement of allocations expected later in 2017. The new Programme will include further modifications to the on-line application system to make the whole process even more user-friendly. I expect to announce more details in regard to the new round shortly.

Bus Services

169. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of new bus shelters installed by county for each of the years from 2010 to 2016 to date in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31129/16]

170. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of operational bus shelters in each county as of the end of September 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31165/16]

19 October 2016

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 169 and 170 together.

The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the development of public transport infrastructure including bus stops, bus shelters, bus stations and bus stands in the State.

Noting the NTA's responsibility in the matter, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Workplace Relations Commission

171. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of inspections carried out by Workplace Relations Commission inspectors since the date of the introduction of the new arrangements and classification of non-EEA fishermen as a result of the recommendations of the task force on non-EEA workers in the Irish fishing fleet; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31054/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): Inspectors of the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) have undertaken 94 inspections to date of vessels which come within the aegis of the Atypical Worker Permission Scheme launched by the Irish National Immigration Service (INIS) in February this year. I am advised by the Commission that vessel owners and skippers have in general cooperated fully with WRC inspectors. In addition, the WRC completed a programme of 'Educational' Inspections in the period following the launch of the Scheme on the 15th February 2016. Over 15 days WRC inspectors made direct contact with 46 vessels owners/skippers in 11 locations and briefed the latter on employment rights and employment permit/permissions requirements.

The workplace relations website (www.workplacerelations.ie) has been updated to include details relating to the Atypical Scheme and employment rights legislation affecting fishing vessel workers generally while the WRC's Information and Customer Service Centre, based in Carlow, deals with enquiries from vessel owners, skippers and crews in relation to employment rights generally.

The WRC has made itself available to meet with all stakeholders and has to date met with the Migrant Rights Council of Ireland (MRCI), four Fish Producer Organisations and the International Transport Federation (ITF). The WRC is also represented on the Inter-agency Fishing Vessel Risk Profiling and Inspection Group.

The WRC has also participated in Information Events for the Fishing Industry held by the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority (SFPA) in Dublin (18th May, 2016) and Bantry (12th October, 2016) and has undertaken to participate in future similar events. These events provide useful opportunities to engage with the sector on employment rights and employment permits issues.

The Workplace Relations Commission will continue to work with the industry and other enforcement agencies to achieve compliance.

Youth Work Projects Funding

172. **Deputy Colm Brophy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the way she

intends to spend the additional €5.5 million funding allocated for youth work programmes in budget 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30992/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department administers a range of funding schemes and programmes to support the provision of youth services to young people throughout the country including those from disadvantaged communities. The funding schemes 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.

I am pleased to advise the Deputy that Budget 2017 has provided an additional €5.5m in current funding to my Department to support the provision of youth services. This additional funding will be used for programmes that target disadvantaged young people and to assist national youth organisations in their work to support local voluntary youth services. Following the Budget 2017 announcement, my Department will commence a process with national organisations and local services to identify service development needs for 2017 and to agree the 2017 allocations. Every effort will be made to complete this process as soon as possible.