

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 6, inclusive, answered orally.

Agrifood Sector

7. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the supports available to operators of country markets to encourage and assist with ensuring the survival of the Irish country market. [31012/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department has recently invited all rural Local Authorities to submit applications for funding under the CEDRA Rural Innovation and Development Fund for innovative agri-food tourism projects, which advance rural and coastal economic development. Proposals for these agri-food tourism projects may also include support for local food and artisan markets.

My Department proposes to allocate a range of funding between €50,000 and €100,000 (excluding VAT) for each successful application. The Department's financial contribution will not exceed 70% of the total eligible costs of the proposal. Capital expenditure will not be eligible. Submissions from Local Authorities must be received by my Department by Monday 7th November in order to be considered.

Applications will be considered on a competitive basis against the other proposals received, the award criteria, the overall objectives of the CEDRA Fund to energise the rural economy and, where possible, to align proposals with the environmental sustainability goals of my Department's strategy - Food Wise 2025.

The evaluation process will take account of the following criteria:

- Collaboration: the number of Local Authorities participating in each application.
- The focus of proposal with regard to facilitating the establishment, continuation and enhancement of agri-food tourism.
- Costings of the proposal, value for money and timetable.
- Evidence that the proposal has the support of the local community and stakeholders, and has the capacity to stimulate rural community regeneration and further generate community interaction.

In addition, other supports for local markets are provided for by Bord Bia through the provision of information, assistance and publicity via their website to local food, country and farm-

ers markets that include:

- A list of Farmers and Country Markets
- A Guide to Food Markets in Ireland

Furthermore, recognising the need to assist small Irish food and drink start-up producers and traders in developing their market produce and brands, the support of skills and best practice for market organisers is also provided by Bord Bia. One such scheme is the voluntary Good Practice Standard for Farmers Markets that promotes good market governance and food safety and labelling compliance; whilst at the same time encouraging regular farmers markets to be held in local communities that stock a substantial proportion ideally 50% of locally derived or seasonal produce.

A new and important initiative to support Farmer and Country markets, which is starting in November, is the regional workshops designed by Bord Bia to help stall holders sell better at farmers' markets. The workshops aim to give practical solutions to challenges that all market sellers may encounter and covering key areas of the market business and an opportunity for existing and prospective producers to network and share their experiences.

Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland Funding

8. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on whether the provision of loans to farmers at an interest rate of 2.95% represents good value for farmers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32191/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Since taking up office, one of my priorities has been to address the impact on farmers of the sustained period of lower commodity prices. I am conscious that this has caused cash flow difficulties for farmers in several sectors and I am committed to using all efforts to address this issue. The €150 million fund for "Agri Cash Flow Support" announced on budget day is one part of a three pillar strategy being put in place to respond to income volatility. The other pillars concern additional tax measures and farm payments. My objective is to ensure that we continue to have a sustainable and resilient agricultural sector.

In my discussions with stakeholders, one of the main difficulties identified was the absence of low-cost flexible finance. This fund will support highly flexible loans for up to six years, for amounts up to €150,000, at an interest rate of 2.95%. It will be available to livestock, tillage and horticulture farmers. The proposed interest rate will represent a significant saving to farmers when compared with other forms of finance currently available.

Further details of the loan fund will be provided shortly. The Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) will make an open call for lending institutions to participate and I have encouraged the main banks to make this facility available to their customers. Normal lending assessment criteria will apply although the loans will be 'unsecured' in nature, thereby facilitating a more straightforward application process.

This loan fund represents a ground-breaking and innovative approach to delivering support to farmers and it is designed to maximise the leverage achieved on the funding available. The provision of €11.1million in EU funding and €14 million in National funding by my Department enables the SBCI to leverage the total fund of €150 million.

I would encourage farmers to consider their cash flow and borrowings situation now, and if

appropriate to their circumstances, to be prepared to apply for these loans when they become available.

Questions Nos. 9 to 13, inclusive, answered orally.

Beef Industry

14. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to address the growing problem in the beef industry whereby it is reported there are more than 140,000 extra beef animals between 12 and 24 months old; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32198/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I am acutely aware of the downward pressure on beef prices at present. Looking at the market outlook for the remainder of the year it is estimated that the total number of cattle available for slaughter at export plants for the year 2016 is expected to be between 60,000 and 80,000 greater than 2015. Figures for the year so far to the week ending 23rd October 2016 show that approximately 61,000 extra cattle have been slaughtered so far this year compared to the same period in 2015 an increase of 4.9% year to date.

The true impact any increase in the number of cattle in the national herd will have on the beef market will be determined by different factors such as slaughter dates which can vary depending on the system of production on different farms. In addition some of the increased number of cattle will be also be retained as part of the national breeding herd. I am also very much aware of the increase in the national beef herd including beef from the dairy herd.

One of the key elements in coping with an increased supply in Irish beef is ensuring that there is a market for such beef. There is a strong demand for meat globally including beef and figures from the European Commission's most recent Short Term Outlook for meat markets show a projected growth of per capita beef consumption of 2.1% for 2016. Whilst we exported approx 98% of our beef exports in 2015 to the UK and EU I am very conscious of the importance of growing international markets as a valuable outlet for any increased Irish beef production. Indeed this is a crucial component of the Food Wise 2025 strategy. Very significant progress has been made in this context in recent years and my Department is currently in the process of attempting to secure beef access to a range of Third Countries including China, South Korea, Ukraine, Thailand and Vietnam. This is a vital means of providing Ireland's meat processors and primary producers with as many commercial opportunities as possible for Irish beef in addition to our existing European markets.

I am also very conscious of the vital role that live exports play in providing an alternative market outlet for Irish farmers especially in an environment where the number of calf births has increased in the last number of years. The recent opening of the Turkish market for live cattle exports has seen 1,700 heavy bulls make the trip and I note that another load of 3,000 weanlings set sail last week. My Department is also currently actively examining the possibilities of bilateral health certificates for the export of cattle to Kazakhstan, Montenegro and for breeding cattle to Morocco. I remain actively committed to ensuring that Irish beef producers have the option of exporting to as many markets as possible.

One of my priorities now, particularly in the context of Brexit is to further increase the market opportunity for Irish food and drink internationally. We are after all an exporting nation with 90% of our food produce leaving the island. It is for this reason I led a major trade mission to four Asian Countries in September and why I will be leading another one to Algeria and Mo-

rocco next month. It is only through further increasing our footprint internationally that we will help to mitigate the effects of Brexit and develop our agri-food sector to realise its full potential.

I am very conscious of the ensuring that there are sufficient market opportunities to create a sustainable demand for Irish beef and my Department and state agencies such as Bord Bia will continue to work to ensure that any increase in production from the Irish beef herd can deliver a viable return to the Irish Beef sector and the primary producer.

Afforestation Programme

15. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on whether afforestation, particularly the use of native species, is being utilised to its full potential in relation to efforts to maintain and improve water quality and for the purposes of flood mitigation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32335/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Afforestation of both native and non-native species can contribute towards the protection and enhancement of water quality and can also help in reducing the risk of flooding in lower lying areas of the catchment.

In relation to water quality, new, well sited forests help reduce sediment mobilisation and runoff into nearby watercourses thereby protecting the quality of the water for fisheries and other aquatic life. These forests also help reduce nutrient runoff and contribute towards stabilising the banks of rivers and streams. Forests also play an important role in reducing the risk of flooding through canopy interception, the use of water by the trees themselves, and the higher infiltration rates and greater storage capacity within forest soils. While these different mechanisms vary depending on the type of forest and the season, they underline the importance of forest land use as part of any wider solution to floodwater control.

My Department operates a Forestry Programme that provides funding for the creation and management of a wide range of forest and woodland types, in order to realise the variety of environmental, economic and social benefits and services forest development brings. Various measures under the programme can be used strategically as part of a wider response to water management within a catchment. These include the following:

- The Afforestation Scheme, which can be used to deliver appropriately sited, and well-designed and managed forests and woodlands ranging from more productive-focused forests to agro-forestry plantations to more biodiversity-focused native woodlands. Grant aid under the scheme is designed to cover the cost of establishment, and annual premiums are payable for up to 15 years. The Afforestation Scheme can deliver a range of forest and woodland types in both upland and lowland areas, delivering floodwater management as one of many 'eco-system services'.

- The Native Woodland Conservation Scheme, which can be used to convert conifer forests alongside watercourses, into native woodland. This scheme provides grant aid (along with a 7-year premium, for private woodland owners) to undertake the appropriate restoration of existing woodlands, and also, the conversion of conifer forest into native woodland. Converting existing conifer forests into native woodland at strategic points along watercourses, accompanied by drain-blocking and other site restoration measures, can help reduce the risk of flooding and sedimentation of nearby watercourse by providing areas for inundation during periods of high flow. This type of development is a key action in the protection of the freshwater pearl mussel where the improvement of water quality is of critical importance.

New forests established under the afforestation scheme located within uplands and elsewhere are subject to a variety of silvicultural and environmental checks and standards, including cultivation and drainage standards, to ensure that any new afforestation does not pose an undue risk to the environment and does not exacerbate floodwaters. In addition, native woodlands must be included alongside aquatic buffer zones in water sensitive sites such as aquatic Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and sensitive fisheries areas when establishing new forests. This will provide a filtration buffer zone slowing down runoff from upland areas and helping to prevent sediment reaching rivers and streams.

Targets for afforestation over the period 2015 – 2020 are set out in the forestry programme. While the planting of native woodlands is less than the level expected, afforestation overall in 2015 was higher than the target set. In relation to 2016, early figures indicate that the Department is on target to reach its targets for 2016.

Afforestation Programme

16. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to expand national forestry coverage as a measure to battle climate change; the role of Coillte Teoranta in these plans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21592/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The National Forest inventory of 2012 estimated forest cover at 731,650ha or 10.5% of the total land surface of the country. In terms of total forest cover the target is 18% by 2050. The inventory is repeated every 5 years and the 2017 inventory is currently underway.

The current Forestry Programme, covering the period 2015-2020, ensures continued state support for the two key objectives of increasing forest cover and wood mobilisation. Almost €500 million of investment over the six year programme period will facilitate an increase in forest cover by almost 44,000 hectares over the period of the Programme. The level of afforestation grant and premiums, allied to the tax treatment of income from forests provide good incentives for land-owners to plant a proportion of their holding. Forests established in the period since 1990 are forecast to remove up to 4.5m tonnes per annum of carbon dioxide over the period 2021–2030.

Climate change mitigation also occurs when forest-based biomass replaces fossil fuels for heating or power generation. This helps to reduce the dependence on imported fossil fuels. The new Forestry for Fibre scheme allows landowners to plant fast growing species for fuel supply into local heating markets and for CHP and other energy uses. Support for thinning and forest road building will also help mobilise forest-based biomass for heat and power uses.

Coillte will also work with my Department in implementing a viable afforestation model which will contribute towards meeting this objective. Furthermore Coillte will continue its programme of reforestation following harvest, thereby contributing to carbon sequestration over the longer term.

Employment Rights

17. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine regarding the raids conducted by gardaí and Workplace Relations Commission, WRC, staff on fishing vessels, as reported in the media on 5 October 2016, if the Marine Survey Office shares intelligence with the Garda Síochána and the WRC regarding the optimum manner in which to target

their raids in order to best uncover suspect abuses of non-EU undocumented migrant fishing crew; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32202/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department does not have a role in the enforcement of employment or immigration law and therefore did not participate in the recent multi-agency inspections led by the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) with the assistance of An Garda Síochána.

The report of the Government's inter-Departmental Task Force on Non-EEA Workers in the Irish Fishing Industry recommended the establishment of a sector-specific Atypical Worker Permission system in order to provide a structured and transparent framework for the employment of non-EEA workers within defined segments of the Irish commercial sea-fishing fleet.

This system is an extension of the existing Atypical Worker Permission schemes administered by the Department of Justice and Equality (Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service - INIS).

My Department's role in the Department of Justice and Equality Scheme is limited solely to hosting the Central Depository, the purpose of which is to register the eligible contracts and supporting documentation required under the Scheme and to ensure that the ceiling of 500 contracts is not exceeded in any 12 month period.

As recommended by the Task Force, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) has been put in place by the relevant State enforcement bodies to provide a rigorous and effective inspection system. The Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation has the lead role in this group. My Department is a party to the MOU only insofar as the Central Depository is concerned.

TAMS Data

18. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of applications received in total under TAMS II tranches 1, 2 and 3; the total number of approved applications to date; the total number of applicants who have received payments to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32322/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Last year a suite of six measures were announced under the Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme known as TAMS II. These measures were launched under the new Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 and are co-funded under the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD).

The measures announced were the:

1. Young Farmers Capital Investment Scheme
2. Dairy Equipment Scheme
3. Organic Capital Investment Scheme
4. Animal Welfare, Safety and Nutrient Storage Scheme
5. Low Emission Slurry Spreading, and the
6. Pig and Poultry Investment Scheme.

The Scheme was opened in three month tranches. The total number of applications received

under Tranches 1, 2 and 3 of TAMS II was 2,952 under Tranche 1, 2212 under Tranche 2 and 1,999 under Tranche 3. A total number of applications under the first three Tranches of the Scheme of 7,163. This represents a significant level of interest in investing in the sector.

Approvals have now issued in respect of a total of 4,285 applications across the six measures under the TAMS II Scheme. The online payment claim system has been open for the submission of payment claims in relation to approved works completed in accordance with the Terms and Conditions of the Scheme since July 2016.

To date, 274 fully completed claims for payment have been received, of which 38 have been approved for payment. However, a significant number of payment claims submitted have minor issues that need to be resolved before payment can issue. Officials from my Department have been in direct contact with the applicants in these cases to progress claims towards early payment. The number of payment claims is expected to increase significantly over the coming weeks. Approved applicants have been reminded that the payment claims system is open, including by text.

I would encourage all applicants who have completed approved works in accordance with the Scheme Terms and Conditions to submit their payment claims as soon as possible so that they can be processed for payment.

Question No. 19 withdrawn.

Fisheries Offences

20. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the measures he will put in place to ensure fishing gear belonging to crab and lobster fishermen is not towed away by foreign factory trawlers off the west coast, as happened in 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32190/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Under Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013 (the Common Fisheries Policy basic regulation), changes to fisheries policy involving access or restriction to fishing opportunities or fishing areas come within the sole competency of the EU. Only the EU Commission may propose changes and any such proposal must be adopted under the co-decision process by the EU Parliament and EU Council. Member States, in consultation with the Commission, Member States affected and stakeholders are permitted to introduce non-discriminatory measures for the conservation and management of fish stocks within the 12 mile zone subject to compliance with policy and procedures set down in CFP Regulation. However, access to the 12 mile zone is set down in the CFP Regulation and may not be changed by an individual Member State.

All foreign fishing vessels, on the north-west coast, other than Northern Ireland vessels in respect of the 6 mile fishing zone, are precluded from Ireland's 12 mile fishing zone, other than for transit purposes and all foreign pelagic fishing vessels, including pelagic factory vessels, are also precluded from Ireland's 12 mile fishing zone on the west coast. In addition, Irish fishing vessels equal to or greater than 36.58 m (120 ft) in length, are precluded from Ireland's 12 mile zone.

The monitoring and control of fishing vessels within Ireland's Exclusive Fisheries Zone are matters for the Irish control authorities. Under the Sea Fisheries and Maritime Jurisdiction Act, 2006, all operational issues of this nature concerning sea fisheries control are, as a matter of law, exclusively for the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority and the Naval Service. As Minister I am precluded from getting involved in operational matters including in relation to law

enforcement.

The SFPA and the Naval Service through the Fisheries Monitoring Centre have monitored the movements of these vessels when in our Exclusive Fisheries Zone, using the Vessel Monitoring System Automatic Identification System and declared catches through Electronic Reporting System. The SFPA is reliant on the seagoing fishery patrol activity of the Naval Service to verify compliance of vessels not landing into Ireland.

Food Harvest 2020 Strategy

21. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which he remains satisfied of achieving the targets set in Food Harvest 2020 and Food Wise 2025; if he has identified the need to review any such targets; if he foresees the need for positive incentivisation in any areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32283/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The main targets set out in the Food Harvest report published in 2010 were, by 2020, to increase the value of primary output by 33% and agri-food exports by 42% (both from a 2007-09 average baseline); and to increase value added production by 40% (from a 2008 baseline). In addition to these value increases, the dairy industry targeted a 50% increase in milk production by 2020, to be progressed following the abolition of milk quotas in April last year.

Progress on those targets was monitored and reviewed on an ongoing basis. The fourth annual report “Milestones for Success 2014”, published in September 2014, showed that the sector had achieved very significant progress on these targets and illustrated the manner in which the Food Harvest 2020 vision of ‘smart, green, growth’ is being attained. The latest data available show growth of 34% and 32% for primary production and exports, respectively, versus the baseline period.

Food Wise 2025, the new ten year strategy for the agri-food sector published in July last year, is the successor to the Food Harvest strategy. It identifies the opportunities and challenges facing the sector and provides an enabling strategy that will allow the sector to grow and prosper. Food Wise includes more than 400 specific recommendations, spread across the cross-cutting themes of sustainability, innovation, human capital, market development and competitiveness; as well as specific sectoral recommendations.

If these recommendations are implemented, the expert committee which drew up the Food Wise 2025 Strategy believes that the following growth projections are achievable by 2025: increasing the value of agri-food exports by 85% to €19 billion; increasing value added in the sector by 70% to in excess of €13 billion; and increasing the value of primary production by 65% to almost €10 billion. With regard to employment, Food Wise foresees the creation of 23,000 additional jobs in the agri-food sector all along the supply chain from primary production to high value added product development. Realising these growth projections will be challenging, but I am confident that they can be achieved.

The implementation process for any strategy is vital for its success. I chair the Food Wise High Level Implementation Committee (HLIC), with high level representatives from all the relevant Departments and State agencies. The committee reviews progress on detailed actions on a quarterly basis, in order to identify and solve problems quickly. Stakeholders regularly present to the committee meetings on their priorities for particular sectors or themes and by the end of this year, the HLIC will have reviewed in detail progress on the five cross-cutting themes

and the twelve individual sectors outlined in Food Wise 2025.

The agri-food commitments in the Programme for a Partnership Government align closely with Food Wise 2025. My Department has 65 detailed commitments in the Programme for Partnership. The Food Wise strategy for the sector contains detailed recommendations aimed at improving value added and productivity at farm and food industry level through a focus on sustainability, efficiency, knowledge transfer and innovation.

In July this year, I launched the first annual progress report of Food Wise 2025: Steps to Success 2016. Food Wise Steps to Success showed that, of the 330 detailed actions which were due to commence in 2015 or 2016, 28% have been achieved or substantial action has been undertaken; and a further 67% have commenced and are progressing well. I believe that this is a good start and I will press on to get as many actions as possible completed within the next year.

Brexit Issues

22. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the immediate actions being taken to alleviate the initial effects of Brexit, particularly in the area of horticulture, an area that has already seen significant job losses due to Brexit. [31806/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The UK's decision to leave the EU has undoubtedly given rise to enormous challenges for the Irish agri-food sector. We have seen that the most immediate impact has arisen from changes to Euro-Sterling exchange rates, and that the horticulture sector has been particularly affected.

A number of actions are being taken to try to mitigate these immediate impacts.

Bord Bia and Enterprise Ireland have been providing practical guidance to SMEs. Bord Bia recently announced a number of measures, covering areas such as managing volatility impacts, providing consumer and market insight, deepening customer engagement and extending market reach, which are aimed at helping companies to maintain their competitiveness. Similar support is being provided by Enterprise Ireland.

In addition, I announced a number of measures in Budget 2017 that will financially underpin my Department's Brexit mitigation efforts through strategic investment in key areas of the Department, its agencies and in the agri-food sector. In particular, funding for capital investments in the commercial Horticulture sector will be increased to €5 million in 2017. The Horticulture sector will also have access to the €150m low interest cash flow support loan fund, providing access to highly flexible loans for up to six years, for amounts up to €150,000, at an interest rate of 2.95%.

I will continue to keep the situation under review, including through discussions with the recently-established Consultative Committee on Brexit, which includes representatives from the horticulture sector. This Committee met for the second time last week, and will continue to facilitate an ongoing exchange of dialogue with my Department as the situation in relation to Brexit unfolds.

Food Labelling

23. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he is satisfied with the level of compliance by Irish beef vendors with EU Parliament and Council Regulation 1760/2000 and SI 435 of 2000; if these labelling regulations apply to loose cuts of

beef as well as pre-packaged beef; the measures carried out to enforce these regulations with regard to individual butchers; if his attention has been drawn to any incidents of false labelling of beef in the past year, or the concerns of consumers regarding the origin of the beef they are buying; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32197/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Compulsory beef labelling rules have been in place for many years and require food business operators to be able to trace fresh or frozen with specific information to enable the product to be traced back to the batch of animals from which it was derived. This applies to pre-packaged and loose beef sold in the State.

Under mandatory beef labelling rules, food business operators (FBOs) are required to label beef products with the country of the slaughterhouse and its approval number, the country of the cutting hall and its approval number and the origin of the beef, or the countries in which it has been born, reared and slaughtered, if these activities have not taken place in the same country. This information must be present up to and including the point of sale to the consumer.

Operators may supplement the mandatory information on place of rearing and slaughter (and origin) with additional information concerning the provenance of the meat, provided it is not contradictory to the mandatory indications and is not misleading.

The Minister for Health has overall responsibility for general food labelling legislation but my Department plays a role in the labelling of food together with the Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) and Environmental Health Officers. Under EU law primary responsibility for the safety and traceability of food placed in the market place lies with food business operators.

Authorised officers enforce the Beef labelling Regulations at different stages of the food chain under service contract to the Food Safety Authority of Ireland. Officers are authorised by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (veterinary inspectors in export-approved meat plants), by local authorities (veterinary inspectors in abattoirs and meat processing plants producing solely for the domestic market), by health boards (environmental health officers in retail butcher shops and meat distribution centres and other officials appointed by the appropriate authority). Environmental Health Officers are also authorised under the General Labelling Regulations.

My Department has a permanent veterinary presence at all its approved slaughter plants. Controls at stand-alone secondary processing plants are carried out at a frequency which is based on an annual risk assessment for each plant. An annual audit of imported products is carried out in each Department approved meat plant. In addition, labelling and documentary checks form part of the routine checks conducted by Department officials.

I understand that HSE has reported to FSAI that in 2015 Environmental Health Officers of the HSE carried out 2, 214 assessments for compliance with the beef labelling legislation S.I. 435 of 2000 as amended. I am also informed that in June 2016 FSAI took a successful prosecution for six offences related to breaches of food legislation. These included falsely declaring Irish origin for beef imported from Poland, Lithuania or Germany; the application of false Irish slaughter and cutting plant codes used on packaging labels and having an inadequate beef traceability plan. The FBO was found guilty of six charges, fined a total of €16,000, with €10,000 as an agreed contribution to costs.

During 2015 and 2016 to date I understand that the FSAI has issued three prohibition orders citing breaches of legislation related to meat labelling and traceability were. Prohibition Orders are issued if the activities (handling, processing, disposal, manufacturing, storage, distribution or selling food) involve or are likely to involve a serious risk to public health from a particular

product, class, batch or item of food. The effect is to prohibit the sale of the product, either temporarily or permanently.

Competition Law

24. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will address the serious concerns in the beef industry following a takeover by a company (details supplied), in view of the fact the primary producers may now find themselves selling into a less competitive market; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32210/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I am very much aware of the crucial importance of competition in the beef and lamb sectors. In this context, it is critically important to have a robust and transparent legal basis for the evaluation of proposals for mergers and acquisitions. This helps maintain the continuing viability of the beef farming industry in Ireland.

I note the outcome of the European Commission's recent decision on this particular case. The proposal has been scrutinised in accordance with the well-established procedures under competition law rules, and amongst the factors taken into account by the European Commission was the impact this merger would have upon competition in the beef and lamb sectors. My Department wrote to the Competition and Consumer Protection Authority in relation to the matter referred to by the Deputy some time ago and provided statistical industry data in response to a questionnaire which came from DG Competition.

In this particular case the analysis and decision was undertaken by the Commission as per EU competition law on the basis of the combined turnover of the parties involved.

The vulnerable position of farmers in the supply chain is widely recognised and it was for this reason that we legislated earlier this year for the establishment of Producer organisations in the beef sector. I have also proposed to make an amendment to our Rural Development Programme which would introduce support for these organisations to improve farmers' bargaining power in the beef supply chain. Recognition as a Producer Organisation will give farmers the right to bargain collectively with factories outside normal competition rules, strengthening their hand and allowing for a more predictable and stable supply rate, which will be of benefit to both producers and factories.

Through the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission, the State has an existing and well-established infrastructure for the oversight of competition issues and for dealing with allegations of anti-competitive practices or the abuse of a dominant market position. I would like to reiterate that if evidence is available of practices by this or any other entity which are contrary to competition rules, the possibility of the matter being taken up with the relevant Competition Authorities remains open.

Rural Development Plan

25. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the total allocation of funding in the Estimates in 2016 for measures covered by the rural development plan; the amount paid out to date under these measures; the amount anticipated to be expended by the end of 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32194/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The total al-

location of funding in the 2016 estimates for measures covered by the Rural Development Plan (RDP 2014 – 2020) is €494.16 million and expenditure at the end of September 2016 amounted to some €230.6 million.

The majority of the remaining expenditure will take place in December and a full drawdown is expected on most schemes. The scheme where an under-spend is most likely to occur is TAMS where the submission of claims by farmers for completed works is slower than anticipated.

Afforestation Programme

26. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the rationale behind allowing the same level of grant aid and tax relief on forestry-related activity to non-farmers and farmers; if his attention has been drawn to the effect this is having on land prices; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32183/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The current afforestation scheme is governed by the European Union Guidelines for State aid in the agricultural and forestry sectors and in rural areas 2014 to 2020 which themselves must be consistent with the Rural Development Regulation 2014 -2020. The current Rural Development Regulation does not provide for a reduced premium payment for non farmers, a condition which existed under the preceding regulation covering the period 2007 -2013.

Under the previous afforestation scheme forest premium rates were significantly greater for farmers than non farmers, both in annual rates and in the duration of payments. Consequently the uptake of afforestation by non-farmers was relatively low, 4% in 2013 and 2014. At the time the Forestry Programme 2014-2020 was being drafted it was decided to introduce a single premium rate now that the EU rules had changed in this regard. The reason for introducing this change was to attract more landowners into the afforestation scheme and increase planting levels in line with the targets set in the forestry programme.

It should be borne in mind that farmers still enjoy a significant advantage over non-farmers in that farmers can draw down their Basic Payment and Forestry Premium on the same land at the same time.

With the introduction of the single rate the percentage of planting undertaken by non farmers has increased to 15% in 2015 and 34% so far in 2016. However, it remains the case that the vast majority of planting is still carried out by farmers.

The total area planted increased in 2015 over the previous year and the 2016 figures indicate an increase over the 2015 figure.

With regard to the equal treatment of farmers and non farmers with regard to tax relief, it is not entirely accurate to say that this is the case. Individuals are exempt from Capital Gains Tax (CGT) on standing timber while companies are not. Furthermore, the removal of forestry income from the 'High Earners Restriction' which was included in Budget 2016 concerns active foresters and farmers only. Section 140 of the Tax consolidation Act excludes from this exemption 'Distributions out of profits or gains from stallion fees, stud greyhound services fees and occupation of certain woodlands'. Institutional investment funds in forestry fall under Section 140 and therefore the removal of forestry from the 'High Earners Restriction' does not apply to this group.

The value of land is of course governed by the laws of supply and demand and for those

selling land this is of course a positive development. There are many reasons why lands are put up for sale which can include such lands which are viewed as marginal for agriculture or indeed the restructuring of farm holdings following retirement, death or inheritance. Therefore the movements in all land prices cannot be attributed solely to changes in the rules of the afforestation scheme.

Question No. 27 withdrawn.

Fish Quotas

28. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the efforts that have been made in formalising the allocation of herring for the north west; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32189/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The International Council for the Exploration of the Seas - ICES, determined that there were two herring stocks in the north western waters and, correspondingly, two separate ICES Total Allowable Catch or TAC areas. In previous years, ICES gave separate advice for herring in 6A North and 6A South. Since 2015, ICES has found that while there are two separate herring stocks it was not possible to provide definitive, separate scientific advice and better scientific information is needed in order to provide advice on the separate stocks.

In order to provide for the collection of scientific data, the EU Council set a TAC of 1,630 tonnes for Area 6A South and 4,170 tonnes for Area 6A North involving an Irish quota of 1,482t for 6A South and 630t for 6A North.

In order to support carrying out a scientific acoustic survey to help inform the state of the Area 6A North herring stock, Ireland transferred 630 tonnes to the UK as our contribution towards carrying out this survey. In addition, a small available quota in Area 6A North, transferred from 2015, was distributed in accordance with Ministerial policy. This is intended to cover by-catches of herring in other pelagic fisheries.

In relation to 6a South herring, the Marine Institute prepared a scientific sampling methodology for data collection. In addition, the industry proposed an acoustic survey in Area 6A South, similar to that already undertaken in Area 6A North.

The industry representatives on the Quota Management Advisory Committee comprising Producers Organisations and the Inshore Forum reached an agreed compromise regarding the allocation of available quota to meet the sampling requirements set down by the Marine Institute.

I issued the proposal for public consultation which ended on 20 October 2016. There were eight written responses received. It was clear from the submissions that there was strong support for the Quota Management Advisory Committee proposal, which I have now adopted. My Department has advertised seeking expressions of interest by Tuesday 1st November. If numbers in any category are over-subscribed, a lottery for the authorisations will take place in the Department Offices on Wednesday 02 November. It is intended that the Marine Institute will work closely with operators to support the collection of the necessary samples in the specified areas. In addition there will be an allocation to allow for the acoustic survey to be completed in Area 6A South. This will be carried out by 1 or 2 vessels in line with the survey work already completed in Area 6A North.

GLAS Payments

29. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when 2015 GLAS payments will issue to persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32201/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Some 25,800 farmers are actively participating in Tranche 1 of GLAS. Of these, some 1,500 have a contract commencement date of 1 January 2016 and a further 2,000 with a contract commencement date of 1 October 2015 did not select any actions qualifying for a 2015 part year payment leaving 22,300 participants entitled to a part year payment.

Under the general scheme the maximum part year payment is €1,250 and the average payment to date for 2015 is €640. To date 18,800 applicants have received their full 2015 payment, a further 2,700 have received up to 85% of their part year payment while some 800 applications are yet to receive any part of their 2015 payment due.

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, have to be completed before any payment can issue.

There are a number of different reasons for outstanding 2015 payments such as applications not meeting all regulatory checks due to errors identified during the Basic Payment Scheme cross checks, inspection cases that are currently being finalised, changes in Land Parcel Identification System numbers and changes in areas from those approved.

Officials in my Department are working on all outstanding applications on a case by case basis with the intention of processing payments which meet all required regulatory requirements as soon as possible.

My Department recognises that some payments for 2015 have yet to be completed but it must also be recognised that in the first year of the GLAS Scheme over 95% of GLAS farmers due a 2015 payment have received up to 85% of this payment.

This has represented a significant commitment in terms of resources, including IT development resources, within the Department and when viewed in the context of the Department also rolling out the new Basic Payment Scheme and a number of other schemes as part of the new Rural Development Programme such as TAMS II, Beef Genomics, Knowledge Transfer Schemes, it represents a significant amount of work.

As I have indicated, my Department continues to process the remaining 2015 part year payments as well developing the systems to support the third tranche of GLAS and systems to support 2016 GLAS payments for GLAS 1 and GLAS 2, which are the first full year payments under the Scheme. These 2016 payments will begin issuing before the end of the year for applications which pass all the required regulatory checks.

Fish Quotas

30. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his Department has made an application to the Commission for bluefin tuna quota to enable the development of a catch and release angling business in the north west; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32188/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Ireland has received unequivocal advice from the EU Commission that a recreational angling fishery, even on a catch and release basis, in Ireland for bluefin tuna is not legally possible in the absence of a national bluefin tuna quota. We do not have such a quota and it is extremely unlikely that we could obtain one as it would involve reducing the share of the Total Allowable Catch of those EU Member States that do have quota and for whom bluefin is an important commercial fishery.

A small bluefin by-catch quota is available to Ireland for our Northern Albacore Tuna fishery and Celtic Sea herring fishery where there is a Bluefin tuna by-catch. This bycatch quota is also available to other Member States of the European Union. It cannot be used for recreational and/or sport fisheries, even in the context of a catch and release programme, as it does not allow the direct targeting of Bluefin tuna.

However, I am glad to be able to inform the Deputy that I have recently made funds available to allow my Department and the Marine Institute, with the support of the European Commission, to actively engage in developing Ireland's involvement in the ICCAT (International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas) Atlantic wide research programme for bluefin Tuna. Ireland is currently participating in an ICCAT sanctioned scientific 'tag and release' research programme on bluefin tuna in the waters off the North West coast using experienced local vessel operators.

This is a scientific research project only to assess the abundance and distribution of bluefin tuna in the waters off the Irish coast.

Ireland is committed to improving the scientific knowledge base for the stock of bluefin tuna in the waters off Ireland and I would be hopeful that the gathering of sufficient information could help build a case that would allow for a future angling catch and release fishery. Any such proposal would have to be based on a scientific assessment from the Marine Institute and would also need to be developed in conjunction with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment and Inland Fisheries Ireland who have responsibility for recreational fishing. Any such case will require the support of the EU Commission and approval of ICCAT.

Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland Funding

31. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide operational details on the new SBCI agri fund; the details of funding sources and financial providers that will lend moneys to farmers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32324/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): In view of the sustained period of lower commodity prices and the cash flow difficulties this has caused for farmers in several sectors, I have committed to working with all the stakeholders, both at National and EU level, to address the issues involved and to ensure that we continue to have a sustainable and resilient sector. One of my priorities is to support the provision of lower-cost flexible finance. Therefore I was pleased to announce plans for a €150 million fund for 'Agri Cash Flow Support' on Budget Day.

This fund will support highly flexible loans for up to six years, for amounts up to €150,000, at an interest rate of 2.95%. It will be available to livestock, tillage and horticulture farmers. The proposed interest rate will represent a significant saving to farmers when compared with other forms of finance currently available.

The loan fund is part of a "three pillar strategy" in response to income volatility that I an-

nounced in the recent Budget, along with additional tax measures and farm payments.

Further details of the loan fund will be provided shortly but it is expected that it will be operational as soon as possible in 2017. The Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) will make an open call for lending institutions to participate and I have spoken to the main banks to encourage them to make this facility available to their customers. Normal lending assessment criteria will apply although the loans will be ‘unsecured’ in nature, thereby facilitating a more straightforward application process.

My Department and SBCI are breaking new ground with this innovative approach to delivering support to farmers, designed to maximise the leverage achieved on the funding available. The provision of €11.1million in EU funding and €14 million in National funding by my Department enables the SBCI to leverage the total fund of €150 million.

I would encourage farmers to consider their cash flow and borrowings situation now, and if appropriate to their circumstances, to be prepared to apply for these loans when they become available.

Brexit Issues

32. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the measures he will take to assist farmers with price support in relation to the decline in the sterling exchange rate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32192/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The decline in the sterling exchange rate has been the most immediate impact for our agri-food exporters in the wake of the result of the UK referendum. While this was not unexpected in light of the uncertainty caused by the referendum result, a prolonged period of currency volatility would be of concern.

A number of measures are being taken to deal with this impact.

Bord Bia and Enterprise Ireland have been providing practical guidance to SMEs in areas such as managing volatility impacts, providing consumer and market insight, deepening customer engagement and extending market reach, with the aim of helping companies maintain their competitiveness.

In addition, I announced a comprehensive set of measures in Budget 2017 which tackle many of the underlying issues currently affecting farm incomes, as well as financially underpinning my Department’s Brexit mitigation efforts, through strategic investment in key areas of the Department, in its agencies and in the agri-food sector.

The measures include access to an innovative low interest agri-cash flow fund of €150 million. This loan fund will support highly flexible loans for up to six years, for amounts up to €150,000, at an interest rate of 2.95% and is available to farmers across the livestock, tillage and horticultural sectors. These loans are aimed at strategically alleviating the pressures of income volatility and will help farmers to improve the management of their cash flow and reduce the cost of their short-term borrowings.

Other measures introduced in Budget 2017 include significant additional spending on farm gate schemes through the Rural Development programme, and a set of agri-taxation measures primarily aimed at tackling income volatility, increased funding of Bord Bia and BIM, investment in research & development and innovation, and increased expenditure on the Seafood

Development Programme.

This is an evolving situation, which I am keeping under review. Both I and my Department officials are working with colleagues across Departments to meet the challenges brought on by the currency fluctuations.

Competition Law

33. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on a recent European Commission decision to allow the merger of two Irish companies (details supplied) in view of the fact the new company will have a supply rate above the 15% threshold; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32199/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I am very much aware of the crucial importance of competition in the beef and lamb sectors. In this context, it is critically important to have a robust and transparent legal basis for the evaluation of proposals for mergers and acquisitions. This helps maintain the continuing viability of the beef farming industry in Ireland.

I note the outcome of the European Commission's recent decision on this particular case. The proposal has been scrutinised in accordance with the well-established procedures under competition law rules, and amongst the factors taken into account by the European Commission was the impact this merger would have upon competition in the beef and lamb sectors. My Department wrote to the Competition and Consumer Protection Authority in relation to the matter referred to by the Deputy some time ago and provided statistical industry data in response to a questionnaire which came from DG Competition.

In this particular case the analysis and decision was under-taken by the EU Commission as per EU competition law, based on the combined turnover of the entities to be merged.

The vulnerable position of farmers in the supply chain is widely recognised and it was for this reason that we legislated earlier this year for the establishment of Producer Organisations in the beef sector. I have also proposed to make an amendment to our Rural Development Programme which would introduce support for such organisations to improve farmers' bargaining power in the beef supply chain. Recognition as a producer organisation will give farmers the right to bargain collectively with factories, outside normal competition rules, strengthening their hand and allowing for a more predictable and stable supply rate, which will be of benefit to both producers and factories.

Through the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission, the State has an existing and well-established infrastructure for the oversight of competition issues and for dealing with allegations of anti-competitive practices or the abuse of a dominant market position.

I would like to reiterate that if there is evidence of practices by this or any other entity which are contrary to competition rules, the possibility of the matter being taken up with the relevant Competition Authorities remains open.

GLAS Payments

34. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the average payment to date to farmers for 2015 under tranche 1 of GLAS; the number of farmers who have not received their full payment for this period; the total number of farmers in tranche

1 of the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32193/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Some 25,800 farmers are actively participating in Tranche 1 of GLAS. Of these, some 1,500 have a contract commencement date of 1 January 2016 and a further 2,000 with a contract commencement date of 1 October 2015 did not select any actions qualifying for a 2015 part year payment leaving 22,300 participants entitled to a part year payment.

Under the general scheme the maximum part year payment is €1,250 and the average payment to date for 2015 is €640. To date 18,800 applicants have received their full 2015 payment, a further 2,700 have received up to 85% of their part year payment while some 800 applications are yet to receive any part of their 2015 payment due.

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Officials in my Department are working on all outstanding applications on a case by case basis with the intention of processing payments which meet all required regulatory requirements as soon as possible.

My Department recognises that some payments for 2015 have yet to be completed but it must also be recognised that in the first year of the GLAS Scheme over 95% of GLAS farmers due a 2015 payment have received up to 85% of this payment.

This has represented a significant commitment in terms of resources, including IT development resources, within the Department and when viewed in the context of the Department also rolling out the new Basic Payment Scheme and a number of other schemes as part of the new Rural Development Programme such as TAMS II, Beef Genomics, Knowledge Transfer Schemes, it represents a significant amount of work.

As I have indicated my Department continues to process the remaining 2015 part year payments as well developing the systems to support the third tranche of GLAS and systems to support 2016 GLAS payments for GLAS 1 and GLAS 2, which are the first full year payments under the Scheme. These 2016 payments will begin issuing before the end of the year for applications which pass all the required regulatory checks.

Live Exports

35. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will support the amendment of the Welfare of Greyhounds Act 2011 in order that the export of greyhounds to countries with insufficient welfare standards will be prevented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32204/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Once appropriate animal health and welfare certification requirements are met, dogs, including greyhounds, may be exported internationally. Exporters are also required to comply with the provisions of Council Regulation (EC) No 1 of 2005 on the protection of animals during transport. It is im-

perative therefore to ensure that the transport of greyhounds over long distances is conducted in a manner which safeguards the welfare of animals being transported and minimises the risk of transmitting infectious diseases. Bord na gCon is responsible for the regulation of the greyhound industry and the well-being of greyhounds in Ireland. The Bord has developed a comprehensive Code of Practice on the welfare of greyhounds which sets out specific standards that all individuals engaged in the care and management of registered greyhounds are expected to meet. The code emphasises that owners and keepers take full responsibility for the physical and social well-being of greyhounds in line with best welfare practice.

Officials of my Department have met with representatives of Bord na gCon and the welfare members of the International Greyhound Forum (represented in Ireland by the ISPCA and Dogs Trust) to consider all issues relating to the export of greyhounds. Officials have used the opportunity to emphasise that the well-being of greyhounds, including their physical and social environment, is at the core of Ireland's greyhound industry and the need for the industry to comply with the Welfare of Greyhounds Act 2011 and the associated Code of Practice which sets out clearly specific standards that all individuals engaged in the care and management of registered greyhounds are expected to meet. A number of airlines have also introduced a policy not to transport greyhounds and Bord Na gCon (BnG) has reiterated its advice to all owners involved in the export of greyhounds to only export to destinations that provide the expected levels of care and management as defined in BnG's Code of Practice for the welfare of greyhounds. I fully endorse this view. I have no proposal to amend the Welfare of Greyhounds Act 2011 at this time.

Greyhound Industry

36. Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on calls by animal welfare groups to decrease, if not cease, financing the greyhound industry, which is seeing significant decreasing public interest, and instead invest in industries which do not support cruel treatment of animals in the name of sport. [32206/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Bord na gCon's income is derived from two sources, namely; turnover from racing facilities and financial support provided by my Department from the Horse and Greyhound Racing Fund, under Section 12 of the Horse and Greyhound Racing Act, 2001.

State funding provided from the Fund is pivotal to the survival and continued development of the horse and greyhound racing industries. In accordance with the provisions of the Horse and Greyhound Racing Act, 2001, the level of financial support provided to Bord na gCon is approved by both Houses of the Oireachtas.

In accordance with the Act, 80% and 20% of the monies paid into the Fund each year are distributed between Horse Racing Ireland and Bord na gCon, respectively.

The funding being provided to the greyhound racing sector helps sustain a long standing tradition as the industry is part of the social fabric of our country. This funding is of particular importance to the economic activity of rural areas. It has also contributed significantly to the improved facilities now available at greyhound tracks around Ireland.

The greyhound industry also contributes significantly to tourism in Ireland, having successfully identified and developed a niche market among continental European visitors.

Bord na gCon estimates that the greyhound industry contributes approximately €500 million in economic output, as well as creating a valuable source of employment. Since 2002, over 10

million people have attended greyhound racing meetings.

In addition, I understand from Bord na gCon that in 2015, €5m was raised at Irish Greyhound Board stadia for charitable organisations such as schools, clubs, healthcare charities and community projects. The money was raised through Fundraising/Benefit Nights hosted at the venues in conjunction with race nights.

Given the benefit of the Greyhound Industry to Irish society, I have no plans to reduce funding of the sector.

Fodder Crisis

37. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the provisions that will be made, especially for farmers in the north west, in view of the pending fodder crisis in the area. [32187/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department is monitoring the winter fodder situation. Based on the available information it would appear that there is sufficient fodder available nationally. In relation to the northwest according to Met Eireann data there was less than 1/3 of annual average rainfall in the northwest during October to date. Silage has been made in the northwest region in the last number of weeks that will help to alleviate potential problems. My Department will continue to monitor the situation and has already liaised with Teagasc to ensure it is being kept abreast of current developments.

Departmental Funding

38. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if emergency funding will be available to tillage farmers in view of recent severe weather; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32320/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I am indeed very much aware of the challenges this year for the tillage sector with low prices and challenging harvest weather.

I recently chaired a meeting with the main stakeholders in the tillage sector. This meeting provided a platform for the stakeholders to express their views and concerns on the challenges they are facing but equally to discuss the opportunities that lie ahead for the industry.

At that meeting, I outlined that one of my priorities was to provide low-cost more flexible finance and in this regard I was happy to announce on Budget Day plans for a €150 million Agri Cash Flow Support Loan Fund. Developed in conjunction with the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI), by leveraging EU and Exchequer funding totalling €25m from my Department to deliver a total loan fund of €150m, it will support highly flexible loans for up to six years, for amounts up to €150,000. The interest rate applying is 2.95% and the product will be available to livestock, tillage and horticulture farmers. Loans to tillage and horticulture farmers will be provided in line with agriculture State Aid de minimis requirements. This loan product is aimed at alleviating the pressures of income volatility and will enable farmers to improve the management of their cash flow and reduce the cost of their short term borrowings.

As an additional support to cash flow on farms including Tillage farms, I also confirmed that advance payment would be made this year in respect of Basic Payment and Greening Payment scheme. Advance payment commenced on the 17th October, the earliest possible date by which

payments can commence under the governing EU Regulations. By the end of last week some €735 million had been paid out to 112,922 farmers and these payments are ongoing.

I was also pleased to note that the processing of the Areas of Natural Constraints payment scheme is on schedule and payments have already commenced during the third week in September. It is expected that approx 96,500 will fulfil the scheme eligibility requirements.

I stressed at the meeting also and want to restate my view that in this changing landscape we need to take a fresh look at our tillage industry, to ensure that it is best positioned to withstand possible future threats and to avail of the new opportunities which may present themselves.

Fishing Industry Development

39. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to rejuvenate the fishing industry and fishing communities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21594/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Food Wise 2025 recognises that in common with the broader food sector, the seafood industry will benefit from the projected increasing global demand for food produce over the coming decade. Current FAO estimates are that world consumption of fish will grow by an average annual consumption of 17 kg per person, per annum, resulting in a requirement for an extra 40 million tonnes of seafood by 2030. Seafood will also benefit from the shift in global economic gravity towards the East, where there is a strong cultural preference for seafood.

To avail of this opportunity, Food Wise identifies 6 areas where we need to focus our efforts in the years ahead. We must put sustainability at the heart of everything we do, add value to our raw material, develop scale in our processing sector, upskill our seafood workforce, increase our raw material supply and develop our markets.

In January this year, my predecessor Minister Coveney launched Ireland's new €240 million Operational Programme under the European maritime and Fisheries Fund. This new investment programme will be the source of very significant investment supports for the seafood sector for the period up to 2020. The Programme represents a doubling of previous support levels.

The Programme aims to support the seafood industry in meeting the challenges of the CFP and in sustainably growing production, value and employment in the seafood industry. The Programme will focus precisely on the same 6 areas identified in Food Wise and will be instrumental in our efforts to develop and adapt our seafood industry to take advantage of the economic and employment opportunities to come.

The Programme is providing some €67 million for our fishing sector, €30 million for our aquaculture sector and €30 million for our seafood processing sector. A further €12 million is being made available to significantly grow the Fisheries Local Action Group initiative to foster economic activity in fishing communities and some €10 million is available for blue growth and marine spatial planning initiatives.

The majority of support schemes under the Programme are already underway in 2016, with a small number to follow in early 2017. I expect that in the region of €20 million will be invested under the Programme in 2016 and I have secured a significant increase to €43 million in 2017.

Forestry Management

40. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on whether forests are being harvested too early, as dictated by market prices, rather than there being sustainable forest management and that, as a result, forestry may not be contributing as much as it should to carbon sequestration; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32334/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Rotation length is defined as the length of time between planting the trees and clearfelling the final forest. There are many factors that impact on the rotation length such as: species, site productivity, thinning regime, market requirements and site constraints.

Until recently the majority of clearfelling has been concentrated in the public estate. A significant portion of the private forest estate, particularly conifers, that were afforested in the 1980s and the early 1990s are now approaching a stage where forest owners may be considering the timing of felling operations. In addition the storm damage of February 2014, and strong market demands have led to increased levels of clearfelling in the private estate, where an entire standing group of trees is removed from an area in one operation.

In Ireland, it is generally accepted that rotation lengths should be geared towards ensuring that the regional and national growth potential is not reduced and that each forest stand is managed to achieve its maximum production potential. Where there has been a continuous and substantial annual increase in the forest area, only the most exploitative policies will compromise sustained future production and capacity for carbon sequestration. The issue therefore focuses on the general principle of rotation lengths that will provide a good return to the grower, consistent with the principle of sustained yield. Exceptions to normal practice usually involve the replacement of unproductive stands with a more productive crop, and the early felling of stands susceptible to windthrow in order to avoid technical problems and to reduce financial loss.

In February 2016, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine initiated a project to Assess the impact of forest felling age on overall financial return. The purpose of this work is to provide information to make growers and foresters aware of the possible impact of felling age on overall financial return. The results of this work will be made available online through an interactive tool that allows forest owners and managers assess the optimum fell age of their forest. Hardcopy results will also be available. The provision of this information will inform forest owners and managers on the appropriate felling age, with a view to maximising the return on their investment. It is vital that landowners have a positive experience from their forestry investments and that revenue from the first rotation facilitates reforestation to continue the forest cycle.

Bovine Disease Controls

41. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the effectiveness of the badger culling strategy incorporated into the national TB eradication programme in reducing the incidence of bovine TB; his further views on plans by his Department to initiate a badger vaccination programme as an alternative to culling; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32196/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): There is very considerable scientific evidence of a link between badgers and cattle in the context of the spread of bovine TB. Research conducted over the years by my Department and others has demon-

strated that the eradication of bovine TB disease is not a practicable proposition until the issue of the reservoir of infection in badgers, which is seeding infection into the cattle population, is addressed. It is therefore necessary to eradicate TB in both species. In view of this, the comprehensive TB Eradication Programme as implemented by my Department has incorporated a badger removal and population control policy since 2004.

The badger control policy is cost effective and has contributed very significantly to a substantial reduction in the incidence of TB both in cattle and in badgers in recent years: herd incidence in the bovine population has fallen by almost 40% from 5.9% in 2008 to 3.37% in 2015. In addition, the cost of the TB eradication programme has fallen from €57.2m to €30.7m in the same period. This improvement is attributable to a comprehensive range of measures, not least of which is the badger removal programme. It should be noted that the incidence of bovine TB in Northern Ireland, where badger culling is not practised, is approximately twice as high as in this jurisdiction.

The ultimate objective of my Department is to incorporate badger vaccination into the Irish TB eradication programme and the current badger policy, including monitoring and research work, will make vaccination more effective in the future. However, the vaccination strategy can only be deployed when data are available to ensure that this can be done in an effective and sustainable manner. In view of this, various projects, involving vaccine development and oral-delivery techniques are under way (including a collaboration with the United Kingdom), with a view to developing a viable badger TB vaccination strategy.

Afforestation Programme

42. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to ensure the forestry sector realises its full potential in assisting the drive on climate change mitigation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32122/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): In October 2014, the EU agreed on a clear commitment: all sectors, including land use, land use-change and forestry (LULUCF), should contribute to the EU's target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 40% by 2030 compared to 2005 levels. More recently the EU Commission published its ESR (Effort Sharing Regulation and LULUCF) which set out a binding commitment for each Member State and how the land use sector can be accounted. These proposals include the accounting rules which determine compliance.

The LULUCF proposal (Article 4) requires each MS to ensure that accounted CO₂ emissions from specified land use categories are entirely compensated by an equivalent removal of CO₂ from the atmosphere through removals in other categories. This requirement is referred to as the "no debit rule". For example, if a Member State cuts down its forests and does not replant (deforestation), it must compensate the resulting emissions by removals in other land uses in the Irish case this is mainly in afforested lands or by net uptake in managed forest land, managed cropland or grasslands. In this way the "no-debit" commitment incentivises Member States to take actions that increase the absorption of CO₂ in agricultural soils and forests.

Under the proposed ESR there is flexibility for Member States to use net removals from afforested and deforested land, cropland and grassland to meet emissions reduction targets. In Ireland's case the proposal caps this contribution at 2.7 million tonnes/annum.

Within this context the Department's afforestation scheme plays an important role in climate change mitigation. The Forestry Programme 2014–2020 sets out annual planting targets

for the 6-year period where the aim is to establish 43,410 hectares of new forest by 2020. In terms of total forest cover the target is 18% by 2050.

Coillte also has a significant role to play in helping Ireland achieve its emission targets. The company will continue its programme of reforestation following harvest, thereby contributing to carbon sequestration over the longer term. It will also work with my Department in implementing a viable afforestation model. Coillte continues to play a key leadership role in delivering renewable energy solutions to industry by providing long term, secure biomass fuel supply contracts to large energy users through regional biomass supply hubs. The company's biomass sales business thereby contributes to decarbonising the Irish economy by providing a sustainable and natural substitute for fossil fuels. The company is also active in other renewable areas which will contribute to renewable energy targets with the company's land solutions business on track to deliver electricity to over 300,000 homes by 2017.

Meditate SmartPly, Coillte's panels manufacturing business, as one of the largest users of power in the country, has an important responsibility to reduce its reliance on traditional energy sources. Wood-based panels as used in the built environment and elsewhere are an important carbon store in their own right.

Coillte advise that it will take a leadership position in shaping policy around the role that forests and forest products will play in climate change mitigation and will be at the forefront of global and European developments. An example of the company assuming a leadership role in this area was its hosting of the Climate Change and Irish Forestry Conference in Dublin earlier this year, on 29 February, 2016. The conference brought together representatives to address the risks and opportunities that climate change and its mitigation presents to the Irish forest sector.

Crime Levels

43. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if her attention has been drawn to an increase in the number of cars being broken into in the Lusk and Rush area; if the increase in crime in this area will inform the decision to include Rush Garda station as part of the pilot scheme announced in the programme for Government; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32392/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Deputy will appreciate that the investigation of crimes is a matter for by An Garda Síochána and I, as Minister, have no direct role in relation to the conduct of particular Garda investigations. However, I will of course bring the Deputy's concerns to the attention of the Garda authorities.

As the Deputy will be aware, under the Programme for Government the Government is committed to asking the Policing Authority to oversee a review of, amongst other things, both the boundaries of Garda districts and the dispersment of Garda stations in rural areas. In addition, the Government is committed to launching a pilot scheme to reopen 6 Garda stations, both urban and rural, to determine possible positive impacts that such openings will have on criminal activity, with special emphasis on burglaries, theft and public order.

In relation to the proposed pilot scheme, I have requested the Garda Commissioner, while fully cognisant of her statutory functions in relation to the distribution of Garda resources in the State, to identify for reopening 6 stations that were closed under the Garda Síochána District and Station Rationalisation Programme. I have also asked the Authority to initiate the proposed review.

The Deputy will also appreciate that the response to crime and policing services gener-

ally will be enhanced by the major investments in Garda vehicles, equipment and technology which the Government has put in place and which are supporting a number of carefully considered policing strategies such as Operation Thor, which is targeting those involved in burglary and property crime countrywide. Underpinning these strong anti-crime actions and continuing community policing measures, is the Government's commitment to continue the ongoing accelerated Garda recruitment programme with a view to increasing Garda numbers to 15,000, which will benefit policing and community safety in all areas, including those referred to.

Garda Deployment

44. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of additional gardaí to be assigned to Fingal as part of the increase announced in the budget, by station, grade and work pattern and indicating whether they serve on a full-time or part-time basis, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32393/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of resources among the various Garda Divisions and Districts, and I, as Minister, I have no direct role in the matter. I am assured by the Garda Commissioner that the allocation of resources is continually monitored and reviewed taking into account all relevant factors including crime trends, demographics, and security assessments relating to the area in question so as to ensure optimal use is made of Garda human resources.

The area referred to by the Deputy is covered by both the Dublin Metropolitan Region (DMR) West Division and DMR North Division. I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that on 30 September 2016, the latest date for which figures are readily available, the current Garda strength in those Divisions was 671 and 675, respectively. When appropriate, the work of local Gardaí is also supported by a number of Garda national units such as the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation (NBCI), the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau (formerly the Garda Bureau of Fraud Investigation), and the National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau.

This Government is committed to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country in order to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and deter crime. In furtherance of this I recently announced that the Government has approved my proposal for an overall Garda workforce of 21,000 personnel by 2021 comprising 15,000 Garda members, 2,000 Reserve members and 4,000 civilians. In 2017, funding has been provided for the recruitment of 800 Garda recruits and up to 500 civilians to support the wide ranging reform plan in train in An Garda Síochána. Appointments will also be made to the Garda Reserve of approximately 300.

Taking account of projected retirements, reaching a strength of 15,000 will require some 3,200 new Garda members to be recruited on a phased basis over the next four years in addition to the 1,200 that will have been recruited by the end of this year since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014. So far 534 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána of which 50 have been assigned to the DMR West and 41 have been assigned to the DMR North. Another 150 will attest later this year and will be assigned to mainstream uniform duties nationwide.

In order to continue to ensure seamless ongoing recruitment I was very pleased to announce the commencement of a new recruitment campaign on 8 September. The campaign is being organised by the Public Appointments Service on behalf of the Commissioner. The existing recruitment campaign (launched last November) is ongoing and successful candidates will con-

tinue to be called from that campaign this year and into next year. It is expected that successful candidates from the new campaign will enter the Garda College from mid-2017.

This accelerated recruitment of trainee Garda is complemented by substantial investment in resources across the board for An Garda Síochána. The Deputy will be aware of the significant resources that have been made available to An Garda Síochána under the Government's Capital Plan 2016-2021. In particular, some €205 million in additional funding for Garda ICT and €46 million for new Garda vehicles has been allocated over the lifetime of the plan. This investment will facilitate the provision of more effective policing services and I expect that the Garda Divisions within the Fingal area, like all other Garda Divisions will benefit from these new resources becoming available.

Private Security Industry Regulation

45. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality her views on the increased use of private security firms during eviction proceedings in the State; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32395/16]

46. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if a private security company involved in an eviction (details supplied) in County Clare was licensed in accordance with the law; if the company complied with legal procedures during this eviction; if the company presented an execution order to the owner of the property; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32396/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 45 and 46 together.

The matter to which the Deputy refers relates to the execution of a repossession order. As the Deputy is aware, I have no role in relation to executing court orders. The courts are, subject only to the Constitution and the law, independent in the exercise of their judicial functions. It is therefore not open to me to comment or intervene in any way on the conduct or decision of a particular court case which is a matter entirely for the presiding judge.

The County Registrar, acting as Sheriff, is responsible to the Court for the Enforcement of the Court Orders and the law and procedures governing the execution of Court Orders is contained in the Enforcement of Court Orders Acts, 1926 to 1940 and the Rules of Court made thereunder and I have no function in this matter. Any dispute in relation to the enforcement of a Court Order is a matter for the Courts.

The Deputy may also be aware that the Private Security Authority (PSA), established under the Private Security Services Act 2004, as amended, is the regulatory body with responsibility for regulating and licensing the private security industry in the State. The Authority is an independent body under the aegis of my Department and the legislation identifies the following security services as licensable by the PSA: Door Supervisor, Installer of Security Equipment, Locksmith, Private Investigator, Provider of Protected Forms of Transport, Security Consultant, Security Guard and Supplier or Installer of Safes. The execution of repossession orders is not a matter which falls within the remit of the Authority.

Alcohol Sales Legislation

47. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality

her plans to allow alcohol to be sold on Good Friday; if the sale of alcohol Bill contains measures regarding Good Friday licensing laws; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32404/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I had intended that the statutory provisions relating to the sale of alcohol on Good Friday, which have historical origins, would be examined in the context of the forthcoming Sale of Alcohol Bill which will update the law relating to the sale, supply and consumption of alcohol in licensed premises by repealing the Licensing Acts 1833 to 2011, and the Registration of Clubs Acts 1904 to 2008, and replacing them with streamlined and updated provisions. However, drafting of that complex Bill has been delayed due to other priorities and I am not in a position to say at present when it will be published.

Garda Stations

48. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if the six Garda stations to be reopened under the pilot scheme to reopen Garda stations have yet been identified; and if Rush Garda station is to be included in the scheme. [32411/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will be aware, the Programme for a Partnership Government recognises that community policing is the embodiment of An Garda Síochána, providing a means of recognising that every community, both urban and rural, has its own concerns and expectations. It commits the Government to ensuring visible, effective and responsive policing in every community, including the most minimal response times possible.

Under the Programme, the Government is committed to asking the Policing Authority to oversee a review of, amongst other things, both the boundaries of Garda districts and the dispersement of Garda stations in rural areas. In addition, the Government is committed to launching a pilot scheme to reopen 6 Garda stations, both urban and rural, to determine possible positive impacts that such openings will have on criminal activity, with special emphasis on burglaries, theft and public order.

In relation to the proposed pilot scheme, I have requested the Garda Commissioner, while fully cognisant of her statutory functions in relation to the distribution of Garda resources in the State, to identify for reopening 6 stations that were closed under the Garda Síochána District and Station Rationalisation Programme. I have also asked the Authority to initiate the proposed review.

Court Procedures

49. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if her Department examined any process for future legislation whereby the courts would have an appellate function in relation to decisions of the Director of Public Prosecutions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32417/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Director of Public Prosecutions is independent in the performance of her functions and does not come within the remit of my Department. My Department has not examined any process whereby the courts would have an appellate function in relation to the decisions of the Director of Public Prosecutions and there is no provision in the Government's Legislative Programme

for any amendment of the Prosecution of Offences Act 1974.

However, the EU Directive on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime includes a requirement for victims to be informed of a decision not to prosecute, the reasons for the decision and to have the right to seek a review of that decision. The Directive will be transposed by the Criminal Justice (Victims of Crime) Bill which is currently being drafted as a matter of priority.

Legal Services Regulation

50. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality when she will present the report on the establishment, regulation, monitoring, operation and impact of multidisciplinary practices in the State, as per the Legal Services Regulation Act 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32429/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Legal Services Regulatory Authority, which was established earlier this month under S.I. No. 507 of 2016, will be making the reports referred to by the Deputy on the regulation, monitoring, operation and impact of multi-disciplinary practices in the State. The timing and submission procedures for these reports are clearly defined under section 119 of the Legal Services Regulation Act 2015 which will be commenced shortly to facilitate the work which the new Authority is required to do, and to which I would refer the Deputy.

Under section 119(1) of the Legal Services Regulation Act 2015, the Authority shall, not later than six months following its establishment day, make an initial report to the Minister for Justice and Equality which will provide information in relation to MDPs in other jurisdictions and on the likely consequences and impacts of the operation of MDPs in Ireland as set out in section 119(2). The Regulatory Authority will then, under section 119(3) engage in a public consultation process on the matters covered by its initial report and make a final report. The final report will have regard to the information contained in the initial report and any submissions received under the public consultation process and will also set out the recommendations of the Authority in relation to the establishment, regulation, monitoring and operation of multidisciplinary practices in the State. This final report has to be made by the Authority to the Minister not later than six months after the making of the initial report.

Under section 119(5) of the 2015 Act the Minister shall cause copies of the initial report and the final report to be laid before each House of the Oireachtas within 30 days of its receipt - this procedure will be followed when the reports are duly made. The Legal Services Regulatory Authority held its inaugural meeting yesterday which represents a historic watershed in the independent regulation of the legal professions. I am, therefore, confident that the reports on multi-disciplinary practices to which the Deputy has referred will be addressed by the Authority, within the statutory time-frames laid out, as a key component of its initial programme of work.

Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission Investigations

51. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the inquiry she requested GSOC to conduct into events surrounding evidence given to the O'Higgins commission and any attempt to undermine the credibility and motivation of a particular person's testimony; if any legal impediments have arisen that are preventing GSOC conducting its inquiry; if so, the details of same; the action that will need to be taken to over-

come such impediments; and if it is intended to take such action. [32450/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy is aware, on 16 June 2016 I made a referral to the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission under section 102(5) of the Garda Síochána Act 2005 concerning certain allegations which arose following the publication of the final report of the O’Higgins Commission of Investigation.

Obviously I have to be careful not to say anything which might interfere with the investigation currently underway by GSOC. However, I can confirm to the Deputy that the Chairperson of GSOC wrote to me seeking access to certain records of the O’Higgins Commission of Investigation. In view of the provisions of the Commissions of Investigation Act 2004 concerning confidentiality of evidence given before a Commission of Investigation, I sought the advice of the Attorney General on the matter. Having received the Attorney General’s advice I wrote to the Chairperson of GSOC pointing out that access to the records in question can be sought through an application to court for an order directing that the material be provided. It is now a matter for GSOC how to proceed.

While the granting of any such order is a matter for the Courts, I will, of course, comply with any such court order.

So, while there are legal steps to be gone through in order to seek access to the records in questions they are not necessarily legal impediments. Those steps are necessary, as the Deputy will be aware, to protect the integrity of the proceedings of Commissions of Investigation, in particular where evidence is given in private.

Therefore, it seems to me that the best approach at present is to allow the current procedures to continue. If they prove deficient then the issue can be looked at to see how they might be addressed.

Refugee Resettlement Programme

52. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons granted permission to join their families here under the Syrian humanitarian admission programme; and the number who ultimately came here. [32453/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service of my Department that a total of 84 applications were received under the Syrian Humanitarian Admission Programme (SHAP) in respect of 307 family members. Of these applications, 44 were approved in respect of 119 beneficiaries. Detailed guidelines were set down for the Programme including, for example, the key condition that the persons availing of the it should not become a burden on the State. If the family members could not find employment the onus was on the sponsor to support them during their time in Ireland.

Where permission is granted for the family member to enter and reside in the State, the arrival thereafter of the family is a matter for the sponsor and/or the beneficiary to organise. To date 79 passports have been endorsed with the appropriate residence permission under the Programme (SHAP Stamp).

Prison Visiting Regulations

53. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if there have been any changes to visiting hours in Irish Prison Service prisons in 2016; if so, the details of these changes; her plans to change visiting hours in any of the IPS prisons; the details of these planned changes; her plans to provide evening visits; if there have been changes to the visiting schedule in any of the IPS prisons; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32458/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Deputy will be aware that I published a new 3-Year Strategic Plan for the Irish Prison Service in June this year. The Strategy is being implemented by developing and progressing four key actions namely - Staff Support; Prisoner Support; Victim Support; and Enhancing Organisational Capacity.

The Irish Prison Service is making some changes to the visiting timetable across a number of prisons to facilitate the implementation of a number of initiatives that are included in the new Strategic Plan. This includes a new enhanced approach to staff learning and development, increased access to services for prisoners and increased use of video-link for court appearances.

To facilitate these new initiatives a new prison visiting timetable is being introduced across certain closed prisons this month (October). As a result visits will no longer be held in the mornings, Monday to Friday, in Castlerea Prison, Cork Prison, and Limerick Prison. This is now in place in these locations.

Visiting arrangements in the Mountjoy, West Dublin and Portlaoise Campuses will continue as normal with the exception of Tuesday when there will be no visits on that day. This arrangement has already been in place in these location for some time. There will be no change to the current arrangements in Loughan House and Shelton Abbey.

While the timing of visits in Castlerea Prison, Cork Prison, and Limerick Prison will change I can assure the Deputy that there will be no reduction in the number of visits available to prisoners. Prisoners will still be able to avail of all the visits that are appropriate to their incentivised regimes privilege level. The Irish Prison Service has examined the demand for visits and is satisfied that there is sufficient capacity to meet the Monday to Friday demands without the necessity to introduce evening visits; however, should the need arise, I am advised that the Irish Prison Service will consider this on a site by site basis.

Immigration Status

54. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding advancing the case of persons (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32464/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the persons concerned have been granted permission to remain in the State for the period to 14th December, 2016. The decision was conveyed in writing to the persons concerned by letter dated 14th December, 2015. This permission was granted to enable the persons concerned obtain a valid passport or alternatively submit evidence as to what effort they have made to secure a passport. To date no such correspondence has been received. The persons concerned are required to apply in writing for the renewal of this permission in advance of its expiry date and must submit their passports with any such renewal application.

The Deputy may wish to note that queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to the INIS of my Department by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail

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

Immigration Status

55. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the position in the case of a person (details supplied) regarding residency; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32465/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that in accordance with Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999, the person concerned was notified, by letter dated 13th October, 2016, that the Minister proposed to make a Deportation Order in respect of them. They were given the options, to be exercised within 15 working days, of leaving the State voluntarily, of consenting to the making of a Deportation Order or of making representations to the Minister setting out the reasons why they should not have a Deportation Order made against them.

The position in the State of the person concerned will now be decided by reference to the provisions of Section 3 (6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) and Section 5 of the Refugee Act 1996 (as amended) on the prohibition of refoulement. All representations submitted will be considered before a final decision is made.

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

Family Reunification Policy

56. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if a person (details supplied) is eligible to be a dependant of their daughter, who has stamp 4 status; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32466/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person in question was registered in the State on 29 November 2016 as a student and currently has permission to be here on Stamp 2 student condition until 21 January 2018 to allow her the opportunity to find a work permit based employment.

Under the Family Reunification Policy, the details of which are outlined on our website www.inis.gov.ie, the sponsor should familiarise themselves with the qualifying criteria. One of the conditions to be met is that the sponsor will be required to have earned in Ireland, each of the 3 years preceding the application, an income after tax and deductions of not less than €60k in the case of one parent. Also, given the age of the person mentioned, they would not qualify as an Elderly Dependent parent under this policy, as she is in the State in her own right as a student.

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

Immigration Status

57. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the current residency status, or procedure to be followed to update or progress and regularise residency, in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32467/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned made an application for a residence card, under the provisions of the European Communities (Free Movement of Persons) Regulations 2015 on 29 March, 2016.

I understand that INIS has now written to the legal representatives of the person concerned seeking additional information and documentation it considers necessary to process this application. INIS will consider the application further in light of an expected response to the matters raised and will be better placed, upon receipt of same, to indicate when a decision may issue in this case.

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

Naturalisation Eligibility

58. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the residency status and eligibility for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32468/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that there is no record of an application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy, who currently has permission to reside in the State until 2 October 2018.

It is open to any individual to lodge an application for citizenship if and when they are in a position to meet the statutory requirements as prescribed in the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956 as amended. Detailed information on Irish citizenship and naturalisation is available on the INIS website at www.inis.gov.ie. The website also contains an on-line naturalisation residency calculator which individuals may find of assistance in establishing if the residency requirements are met.

The Deputy may wish to note that queries in relation to the status of individual immigration

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

Naturalisation Eligibility

59. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if a person (details supplied), who has been in this jurisdiction for more than five years, now qualifies for extended residency or eligibility for naturalisation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32470/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that there is no record of a person registered, or of an application for a certificate of naturalisation, under the details as provided by the Deputy. A determination on whether an applicant satisfies the appropriate criteria attendant to extended residency or a naturalisation can only be made after an application is received.

It is open to any individual to lodge an application for citizenship if and when they are in a position to meet the statutory requirements as prescribed in the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended. Detailed information on Irish citizenship and naturalisation is available on the INIS website at www.inis.gov.ie. The website also contains an on-line naturalisation residency calculator which individuals may find of assistance in establishing if the residency requirements are met.

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

Immigration Status

60. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if and when an update of stamp 4 will issue in the case of a person (details supplied) while awaiting naturalisation process; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32472/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that correspondence was received on 14 October, 2016 indicating that the person concerned wishes to apply for a change of residency status in the State. The person referred to by Deputy is now seeking permission to reside and work in the State based on their parentage of an Irish citizen child. On the 25 October 2016, the relevant officials of the INIS communicated with the person concerned to advise them of the application process.

The Deputy may wish to note that queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to the INIS by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up-to-date information on

such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from the INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Legal Services Regulation

61. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if there is provision for independent oversight of members appointed to the Legal Services Regulatory Authority in the carrying out of their functions; and the details of the oversight mechanism, if it exists. [32503/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Legal Services Regulatory Authority which has eleven members, including a lay majority and a lay Chairperson, is publicly accountable as a body corporate for the performance of those functions which it is required to carry out under the Legal Services Regulation Act 2015.

Under section 21 of the Act the Authority is publicly accountable in terms of its making an annual report to the Minister and to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Justice and Equality which is also laid before each House of the Oireachtas. Under section 20 it must prepare three-yearly strategic plans while under section 28 it must submit annual estimates of income and expenditure. The Authority must also submit annual accounts for audit and scrutiny by the Comptroller and Auditor General and those accounts, along with the Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General, must be laid before each House of the Oireachtas. The Legal Services Regulatory Authority will also be held accountable under the specific responsibilities which are conferred in this area by the 2015 Act on its Chief Executive. These arise under the respective provisions of sections 28, 29 and 30 to which I would refer the Deputy. In addition to keeping all proper and usual accounts of moneys received and spent by the Authority, the Chief Executive shall, when requested, attend before the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Justice and Equality to give account for the general administration of the Authority. The Chief Executive will also give evidence, whenever required in writing, to the Public Accounts Committee on the regularity and propriety of transactions, the economy and sufficiency of the use of resources, the systems, procedures and practices employed for evaluating the effectiveness of operations or any other matter relating to these that may be raised in a report of the Comptroller and Auditor General.

I would also point out that section 11 of the 2015 Act sets out the circumstances in which a member of the Legal Services Regulatory Authority may be disqualified from office. Section 12 sets out a number of circumstances in which the Government may decide to remove a member of the Legal Services Regulatory Authority from office by reference to ill health, stated misbehaviour, conflict of interest or being otherwise unfit to hold the office or unable to discharge its functions.

The Legal Services Regulation Act of 2015, therefore, contains an array of oversight and accountability measures of application to public bodies. These apply to the work of the Legal Services Regulatory Authority as an independent statutory regulator including in terms of the functions of its members and of its chief executive. I might add that the Authority will also be subject to the extensive code of practice, under a range of different governance headings, for the Governance of State bodies which has most recently been updated in August of this year.

Carbon Tax Exemptions

62. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding changes in carbon tax; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32349/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): In Budget 2017, I announced the exemption from carbon tax for fuel used to create high efficiency electricity in combined heat and power plants. The dual process of using energy to create usable heat and power is regarded as a highly efficient energy process and makes use of the heat produced in the electricity generation instead of releasing it into the atmosphere. The rationale for providing a full relief from carbon tax for the fuel inputs is to incentivise the use and development of this highly efficient technology, thereby contributing to reducing Ireland's emissions particularly in the context of our binding 2020 emission targets in both the heat and energy sectors. This measure is also designed to facilitate the use of biomass CHP as a renewable power source, further building on the Renewable Energy Feed-in Tariff which has been in place since 2012. The relief will be based on certification by the Commission for Energy Regulation that the fuel used has been to generate high-efficiency electricity.

I also announced in Budget 2017 the commencement of the carbon tax relief for biomass content of solid fuel which was legislated for in Finance (No. 2) Act 2013. The measure is designed to incentivise alternatives to fossil fuel and stimulate the market for low carbon fuel. The introduction of two thresholds provides an incentive to develop blended solid fuels with a higher biomass content. To further the environmental rationale, this relief is available only for low smoke solid fuels.

Foreign Earnings Deduction

63. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the number of persons who have availed of the foreign earnings deductions each year; the total cost each year; the numbers availing of it by relevant state; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32374/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Foreign Earnings Deduction (FED) provides for a deduction from income for income tax purposes of up to a maximum of €35,000 for employees who travel to qualifying countries as part of the duties of their employment. The deduction is proportional in that it is calculated based on the number of days spent abroad, the salary of the employee and the length of the employment. The relief is provided by way of refund after the end of the tax year in which time was spent in the qualifying countries.

I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the following table sets out details by qualifying country, regarding the number of persons that have availed of the FED, and the total estimated cost to the Exchequer for the years 2012, 2013 and 2014 (the latest year for which data are available).

Year	2012		2013		2014	
Country	Cost - €	Claims	Cost - €	Claims	Cost - €	Claims
Brazil	n/a	n/a	89,090	12	90,541	10
China	232,678	35	242,268	35	216,927	31
India	90,140	14	113,293	13	n/a	n/a
Russia	139,386	16	n/a	n/a	7,5032	12
South Africa	187,649	22	173,632	23	266,647	34
Other Countries*	53,855	8	244,844	31	271,273	38

Year	2012		2013		2014	
Multiple Countries**	97,532	13	162,236	21	161,838	19
TOTAL	801,240	108	1,025,363	135	1,082,258	144

* “Other Countries” includes Algeria, Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, Tanzania, Hong Kong and Saudi Arabia.

**Represents those that have claimed the relief from more than one qualifying country within the same tax year.

Due to their obligations in respect of taxpayer confidentiality, Revenue advise that they are not in a position to provide the breakdown for small numbers of taxpayers in respect of certain years or certain countries. These are indicated by “n/a” in the above table and included in the aggregated “Other Countries” category.

VAT Rate Application

64. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the Revenue Commissioners’ view of the VAT classification of the provision of gymnastics lessons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32434/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The VAT rating of goods and services is subject to EU VAT law, primarily Council Directive 2006/112/EC, with which Irish VAT law must comply. The Directive generally provides that supplies of goods and services be chargeable to VAT at the standard rate but that lower rates are permitted in very limited circumstances. The Directive provides that reduced rates may apply to supplies of goods and services set out in Annex III to the Directive. The provision of gymnastic lessons is not specified in the Annex therefore the provision of gymnastic lessons that are purely recreational in nature are liable to VAT at the standard rate, currently 23%.

However, the provision of education is VAT exempt and gymnastic lessons for children or young people that follow school curriculum may benefit from this exemption. Gymnastic lessons that are provided in the manner of vocational training or retraining that may lead to a recognised qualification as a gymnastics instructor may also benefit from this exemption.

Direct Provision Data

65. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of second level students in the direct provision system. [32432/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): All children who are non-Irish nationals and resident in Ireland, including children of asylum seekers, refugees, migrant workers and unaccompanied minors can access pre-school, first and second level education in a manner similar to Irish nationals, until they have reached the age of 18 years.

The Education system does not track whether a child enrolling in a school is in direct provision and does not, therefore, have statistics on the number of second level students who are in direct provision.

Direct Provision Data

66. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of persons in the direct provision system who have completed second level education here. [32433/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): All children who are non-Irish nationals and resident in Ireland, including children of asylum seekers, refugees, migrant workers and unaccompanied minors can access pre-school, first and second level education in a manner similar to Irish nationals, until they have reached the age of 18 years.

The Education system does not track whether a child enrolling in a school is in direct provision and does not, therefore, have statistics on the number who have completed their second level education here.

University Governance

67. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the action his Department will take to deal with the serious issues raised in relation to corporate governance and HR at the University of Limerick (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32373/16]

69. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a detailed response from UL to the Mazars report is expected; when questions (details supplied) will be answered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32376/16]

70. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on whether it is reasonable that after 16 months and having been vindicated by the Mazars review, two staff members are still suspended; his views on this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32377/16]

71. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on whether the events outlined in the Mazars report indicate proper governance and accountability at the public institution in question; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32378/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 67 and 69 to 71, inclusive, together.

Following publication of the Mazars review of the process employed by the University of Limerick (UL) to inquire into allegations made by a number of individuals, the Higher Education Authority (HEA) met with the University to request a full response and an action plan to address the recommendations in the review.

The response from UL was received by the HEA in March 2016 and set out a range of actions to be progressed in response to the recommendations. I have been informed by the HEA that most of the recommendations have been implemented and that they are working closely with the University to ensure that any remaining actions are progressed.

Since the conclusion of the Mazars review the HEA appointed a facilitator to explore the options and see if a basis could be found for a resolution to the dispute.

The HEA has recently submitted a copy of the facilitator's Report to the Department of Education and Skills and it is currently being considered. The issues in this case are complex and careful consideration will need to be given to the options available to reach a resolution.

My Department is continuing to work with the HEA in an effort to seek a resolution of the

issues as speedily and appropriately as possible.

Literacy Programmes

68. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the services available for adults with dyslexia in Dublin 1, 3 and 7. [32375/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): Primary responsibility for the delivery of adult literacy services, including persons with dyslexia, is with City of Dublin Education and Training Board (CDETb).

I have asked CDETb to respond to the Deputy directly.

Questions Nos. 69 to 71, inclusive, answered with Question No. 67.

Student Support Schemes

72. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there is any tax relief or any other support available to working couples who are marginally over the income limit to qualify for student grants and who are struggling with college fees, accommodation and so on; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32381/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Tax relief at the standard rate of tax may be claimed in respect of tuition fees paid for approved courses at approved colleges of higher education, including approved postgraduate courses in EU Member States and in non-EU countries. Further information on this tax relief is available from the Revenue Commissioners at www.revenue.ie.

In addition, students in third-level institutions experiencing exceptional financial need can apply for support under the Student Assistance Fund. This Fund assists students, in a sensitive and compassionate manner, who might otherwise be unable to continue their third level studies due to their financial circumstances. Details of this fund and where applicable, any other college specific benevolent fund, are available from the Access Office in the college attended.

Schools Building Projects Status

73. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status on the provision of a new school building for a school (details supplied); the timeline for the completion of this project; if his attention has been drawn to the condition of the existing school building; the action he will take to improve the facilities for students and teachers in the school until such time as a new building is provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32386/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy will be aware that a project for the expansion and refurbishment of the school, to which he refers, is included in my Department's 6 Year Capital Programme which was announced in November 2015. The project for Portmarnock Community School is scheduled to proceed to tender and construction in 2019-21. My Department is currently progressing the school project brief and once this process is complete, my Department will be in contact with the school concerned regarding advancing the project into the Architectural Planning process.

In the meantime, my Department has advised the school authority that it is open to it to submit an application for the most minimal and urgent works as an interim measure.

School Accommodation Provision

74. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to further invest in the improvement of facilities for national schools in Portmarnock, County Dublin; the current applications his Department has received from national schools in Portmarnock for funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32387/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy will be aware, a number of schools in the area in question have been approved funding for additional permanent school accommodation under the Devolved Initiative Scheme administered by my Department. Details of all successful applications are available on my Department's website, www.education.ie.

It is open to all schools to apply for funding for additional school accommodation for consideration should the need arise. My Department is currently in receipt of one application for additional accommodation from a primary school in the area in question. My Department requested additional information which has now been received and a decision will issue to the school authority shortly in this regard.

School Accommodation Provision

75. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the proposed extension at a school (details supplied); the timescale for a decision to be made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32390/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Board of Management of the school in question was allocated funding under the Additional Accommodation Scheme 2013 to build 2 mainstream classrooms and 2 Resource Rooms.

An application for additional funding has been received in the Department and an examination of this request is nearing completion. As soon as a decision has been made the school will be notified without delay.

Schools Building Projects Status

76. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will bring forward the construction of a new building for a school (details supplied); and the timeline for this project. [32412/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy will be aware, a project for the school referred is included in my Department's 6 Year Capital Programme and is scheduled to proceed to tender and construction in 2018.

Officials from my Department recently advised the school's Board of Management and the Patron's representative that following a technical examination of an alternative site being made available by the School Patron, it has been decided that a new school building will be provided for the school referred to by the Deputy on that site. A Schedule of Accommodation and a

project brief is currently being finalised. My Department will continue to liaise with the school authorities in relation to advancing this school project into the Architectural Planning process.

University Status Review

77. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland is not allowed to describe itself as a university here for marketing and labelling purposes but may do so outside the State; and his Department's reasoning for maintaining this restriction on the RCSI in the Education (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2015. [32437/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Universities Act 1997 provides the legal and regulatory framework for Irish universities. As part of the overall legal framework for the sector, the Act also provides for a limitation on the use of the title "university".

The Education (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2015 provides for the authorisation by the Minister of the use of the description "university" by an education provider in limited circumstances outside the State for specified purposes. Eligibility criteria and requirements which must be met are set out in the Act of 2015.

In line with the provisions of this legislation, RCSI were authorised by the Minister for Education and Skills in July 2015 to be described as a "university" outside of the state only, and only for the purposes clearly specified under the Act having met the eligibility criteria for authorisation set out in that Act.

Third Level Funding

78. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the total amount and the percentage of total income for University College Dublin, Trinity College Dublin, the National University of Ireland, Galway, University College Cork, University of Limerick, Maynooth University and Dublin City University that comes from direct Exchequer sources as well as from indirect Exchequer sources such as research and contracts, in tabular form; and the name of the programme under which each income is derived, for example, HEA grant, tuition fees and so on. [32438/16]

79. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the total amount and the percentage of the income for each individual institute of technology that comes from direct Exchequer sources and from indirect Exchequer sources such as research and contracts, in tabular form; and the name of the programme under which each income is derived, for example, HEA grant, tuition fees and so on. [32439/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 78 and 79 together.

The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the following tables.

Universities - State Income 2011-2012

Questions - Written Answers

Institution	Core Grants	Academic Fees	Research Grants and Contracts	Other	Total	% of Total Income
UCD	€85,902.00	€66,928.00	€66,985.00	€1,059.00	€220,874.00	53%
UCC	€58,080.00	€65,227.00	€58,742.00	€1,704.00	€183,753.00	64%
NUIG	€53,855.00	€55,900.00	€47,561.00	€2,376.00	€159,692.00	71%
TCD	€58,273.00	€52,800.00	€60,102.00	€4,449.00	€175,624.00	57%
NUIM	€25,874.00	€29,979.00	€13,701.00	€2,845.00	€72,399.00	71%
UL	€41,989.00	€46,252.00	€18,630.00	€3,845.00	€110,716.00	62%
DCU	€22,040.00	€33,566.00	€33,798.00	€464.00	€89,868.00	64%

Institutes of Technology - State Income 2011-2012

Institution	State Grants	Academic and Registration Fees	Research Grants & Contracts	Other	Total	% of Total Income
Cork	€39,900.00	€15,207.00	€8,025.00	€4,608.00	€67,740.00	73%
Dundalk	€17,989.00	€11,770.00	€2,495.00	€2,422.00	€34,676.00	77%
Sligo	€18,691.00	€8,554.00	€1,178.00	€2,671.00	€31,094.00	74%
Limerick	€26,512.00	€11,615.00	€3,243.00	€2,934.00	€44,304.00	84%
Waterford	€31,153.00	€17,509.00	€6,888.00	€3,780.00	€59,330.00	73%
Dublin	€77,224.00	€24,022.00	€9,267.00	€8,366.00	€118,879.00	75%
Carlow	€14,647.00	€8,992.00	€644.00	€1,787.00	€26,070.00	80%
Athlone	€19,652.00	€9,218.00	€2,406.00	€1,986.00	€33,262.00	76%
Tralee	€14,371.00	€7,463.00	€1,027.00	€1,630.00	€24,491.00	84%
GMIT	€25,871.00	€13,174.00	€1,383.00	€3,044.00	€43,472.00	78%
Dun Laoghaire	€7,994.00	€5,039.00	€507.00	€1,178.00	€14,718.00	77%
Tallaght	€14,728.00	€7,195.00	€2,715.00	€1,994.00	€26,632.00	78%
Blanchardstown	€8,857.00	€5,631.00	€120.00	€1,121.00	€15,729.00	77%
Letterkenny	€12,860.00	€7,619.00	€713.00	€1,464.00	€22,656.00	87%

Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools Scheme

80. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 164 of 4 October 2016, if the review of the DEIS programme is looking at the need for including new schools and schools whose student intake and demographic profile may have altered since the initial introduction of the programme in 2006; when the last intake of a school into the DEIS took place; and if his Department has estimates for the number of schools currently not in DEIS but which may have a demographic profile that would make them eligible for inclusion should the scheme be expanded. [32441/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As set out in my previous reply, the process to review the DEIS Programme, 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.

As part of the review, a new assessment process is being developed using centrally held CSO and DES data to identify schools for inclusion in a new support programme. This proposed new identification process 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 for assessment.

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:

- School leadership
- School networks and clusters
- Teaching methodologies
- Integration of schools and other State supports within communities
- Greater use of Home School Community Liaison services

Until development of this assessment process has been completed I will not be in a position to estimate how many schools may be included in a new support programme.

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

Further details on the Review process can be found at: <http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools/>.

Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools Scheme

81. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the development of a new assessment framework for the identification of schools for inclusion in DEIS will be completed; the funding that has been allocated for developing this new assessment database to date; and the amount he anticipates will be required overall. [32442/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): A process to review DEIS-Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools 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 the DEIS programme, including the development of a new assessment process for the identification of schools. This work is being undertaken by the DEIS Review Technical Group and is being carried out within the existing resources allocated to my Department.

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:

- School leadership
- School networks and clusters
- Teaching methodologies
- Integration of schools and other State supports within communities
- Greater use of Home School Community Liaison services

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.

Further details on the Review process can be found at: <http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools/>.

Primary Online Database

82. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the roll-out of the primary online database; if he will provide latest statistics on usage by schools; if the Data Protection Commissioner has any outstanding concerns regarding the retention of student records under the new scheme, with the use of students' PPSN or with data-sharing provisions. [32443/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Primary Online Database (POD) has been rolled out to all primary schools in the country, and all schools have now entered their pupils onto the system. Schools are currently in the process of submitting the 2016/2017 National School Annual Census through POD.

The Office of the Data Protection Commissioner has not expressed any concerns about the current retention period for POD data, or about the Department of Education and Skills' proposed sharing of appropriate data with other State bodies. They are satisfied that a legislative basis exists for the use of the student's PPSN on POD.

Further information on the retention period, data-sharing provisions, and the legislative basis for the collection of all POD data can be found in the POD fair processing notice, which is available on the Department's website: <http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/Primary-Online-Database-POD-/POD-Fair-Processing-Notice.pdf>.

Apprenticeship Programmes

83. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills how he plans to increase the number of apprenticeships and traineeships in 2017 and 2018 without any increase in funding for skills in budget 2017. [32444/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): Budget 2017 saw an additional €20 million made available from the National Training Fund (NTF) to provide for increased apprenticeship and traineeship activity in 2017. This has been made available through rebalancing NTF expenditure in 2017 due to reduced demand for training for unemployed people due to the continued economic growth and the improving employment position.

The 2018 allocation will be considered through the budgetary process, taking into account forecast increased participation in existing apprenticeships and traineeships and the costs of development and roll out of new apprenticeship programmes and career traineeships.

SOLAS Training and Education Programmes

84. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the restrictions SO-

LAS places on education training boards, ETBs, in procuring new training providers for traineeships or apprenticeships; and if his Department has any concerns that restrictions on ETBs in procuring new training providers is holding back the expansion of these learning programmes to new skills areas. [32445/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): SOLAS has advised that the scope of contract training and the terms and conditions for both suppliers and buyers are detailed in the procurement documents as published on the Government e-tenders website.

SOLAS informs me that there are no restrictions in relation to the procurement of training providers for traineeships. Delivery of these programmes can be achieved either through contracted training or through the use of in-house ETB resources, on the basis of identified needs as agreed in the context of the annual Further Education and Training Services Plan.

The craft apprenticeship system is a blended alternance training programme. There is no procurement of apprenticeship training as the on-the-job element is delivered directly by employers with the off-the-job element being delivered by trainers in the ETBs and tutors in the Institutes of Technology or Colleges of Further Education.

A wider set of education and training providers are becoming involved in new apprenticeships through participating in consortia of employers and providers responding to calls for proposals from the Apprenticeship Council.

School Closures

85. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the length of time his Department has been in discussions with a school (details supplied) regarding taking over a campus; and if these discussions and negotiations included representatives from both the primary and secondary schools. [32460/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy may be aware the decision to close the schools in question and the timeline for the closures was a decision for the schools' Trustees and not my Department.

The Trustees had approached my Department at an early stage outlining the situation and requesting if the Department was open to acquiring the property as they were seeking to ensure it would continue to be used for educational purposes.

These discussions were taken up again in early 2014 and culminated in the acquisition of the property by my Department in June 2016.

The Trustees have at all times indicated their commitment to the school community and it was on that basis that a phased closure of both the Junior and Secondary schools is being arranged, to ensure an orderly wind-down of the schools.

Motor Tax Exemptions

86. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if exceptions will be granted in relation to motor tax for those who may have been hospitalised for long periods of six months or more; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32418/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Provision is already in place in motor tax legislation to allow a vehicle owner to declare his or her vehicle off the road. A declaration of non-use must be made in the last month of an existing motor tax disc and can be made for any period of between 3 months and 1 year. A further declaration can then be made, if the vehicle is still not in use at that stage.

There is also provision in motor tax legislation for a refund of motor tax where the owner of a vehicle has ceased, because of illness, injury or other physical disability, to use the vehicle. In order to obtain a refund, there must be a minimum period of 3 months remaining on the disc at the time of surrender to the licensing authority. The application for a refund incorporates a declaration of non-use of the vehicle concerned also. If required, a further declaration of non-use can be made in the last month of the period in respect of which a refund has been granted.

Local Authority Finances

87. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if the additional funding of €1 million which his Department has sanctioned to support Sligo County Council, which he referred to in Dáil Éireann on 19 October 2016, is only being made available to Sligo; if his Department will consider providing similar additional funding to Donegal County Council, which, like Sligo, has submitted a financial plan to his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32353/16]

88. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government further to his reply to Parliamentary Question No. 244 of 4 October 2016 and his statement in Dáil Éireann of 19 October 2016 (details supplied), if he will clarify matters and confirm his Department will be providing additional funding to Sligo County Council to pay for the additional six library staff; if he will consider providing similar additional funding to Donegal County Council for staff; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32354/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 87 and 88 together.

Sligo County Council approached my Department in 2012 to highlight its deteriorating financial position. While it is a matter for each local authority to determine its own spending priorities in light of available resources and as part of the annual budgetary process, owing to the particular severity of Sligo's financial situation my Department entered into regular consultations with the Council. This process resulted in Sligo County Council identifying areas where savings could be made and the putting in place of a formal long-term Financial Plan in December 2015.

In support of the work undertaken by Sligo, my Department committed to providing financial support to the Council of €1 million per annum on condition that annual surplus targets were achieved.

Sligo's Financial Plan is subject to periodic reviews by my Department. Review meetings have taken place between my Department and the Council during 2016 and further engagement is envisaged. On 3 October 2016, my Department agreed adjustments to the implementation schedule in respect of the Financial Plan. A reduction in the 2016 savings target has been agreed with related adjustments to be made in respect of later years. These changes, which relate to taxation, enterprise support and the timing of retirements and career breaks, have enabled the local authority to comply with the financial plan. Additional funding of €1 million on an annual basis is made available to Sligo where it demonstrates compliance with the plan in that

year. This additional funding provides Sligo with a greater degree of flexibility and enables it to consider a wider range of resourcing requirements. However, in accordance with section 159 of the Local Government Act 2001, it is a matter solely for Sligo County Council to prioritise and allocate its resources, including any additional funding, to address its requirements, including in relation to the library service. My Department has not been prescriptive in this regard.

In December 2010, following engagement with Donegal County Council as regards its financial planning, my Department sanctioned a loan of €48.6 million to be used by the Council in respect of financial restructuring, subject to the carrying out of periodic financial reviews by my Department. There are no resources available that could be used to provide additional funding to Donegal County Council.

Emergency Accommodation Data

89. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the amount being spent on a monthly basis on emergency accommodation in Dublin from 2011 to 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32361/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department's role in relation to homelessness involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of housing authorities in addressing homelessness at local level. Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of accommodation and related services for homeless persons rests with individual housing authorities. The purposes for which housing authorities may incur expenditure in addressing homelessness are prescribed in Section 10 of the Housing Act 1988. Housing authorities provide additional funding from their own resources. Therefore, the detail requested is not available in my Department and would be a matter for the relevant housing authorities.

Details of the 'Section 10' Exchequer funding provided by my Department to the Dublin Region towards the operational costs of homeless accommodation and related services for the years 2011 to 2015 are set out in the following table. Furthermore, to date in 2016, payments amounting to approximately €39 million have been processed under Section 10 arrangements in respect of the Dublin Region.

Funding Provided under Section 10 of the Housing Act 1988

Year	Amount
2011	€35,732,525
2012	€32,398,290
2013	€31,322,223
2014	€35,322,223
2015	€48,270,201

Tenant Purchase Scheme Eligibility

90. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will consider extending the tenant purchase scheme to cover persons in receipt of carer's allowance or disability allowance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32382/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon

Coveney): The Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme came in to operation on 1 January 2016 and offers eligible local authority tenants the opportunity to buy their homes. To be eligible, tenants must meet certain criteria, including having a minimum reckonable income of €15,000 per annum and having been in receipt of social housing support for at least 1 year.

The minimum reckonable income for eligibility under the Scheme is determined by the relevant housing authority in accordance with the detailed provisions of the Ministerial Direction issued under Sections 24(3) and (4) of the 2014 Act. In the determination of the minimum reckonable income, housing authorities can include income from a number of different sources and classes, such as from employment, private pensions, maintenance payments and certain social welfare payments, including pensions, where the social welfare payment is secondary to employment income. At present, as set out in the Ministerial direction on reckonable income, Carer's Allowance is not included as a secondary source of reckonable income. However, Disability Allowance can be included as a secondary source of income.

In line with the commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government and reaffirmed in Rebuilding Ireland - Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, it is intended that a review of the Scheme will be commenced 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.

Departmental Funding

91. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the level of funding provided for programmes undertaken by men's sheds in 2016; the level of funding to be provided in 2017; if this funding will enable additional programmes to be undertaken; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32403/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Irish Men's Sheds Association was funded from 1 July 2014 until 30 June 2016 through my Department's Scheme to Support National Organisations (SSNO). This Scheme aims to provide multi-annual funding to national organisations towards core costs associated with the provision of services. It does not provide programme funding. The organisation in question was allocated €175,950 for the 24 month period to 30 June 2016.

A new round of funding was advertised in January 2016, with applications due for submission by 8 February 2016. I announced the results of this process in June. It is my understanding that no application for funding under the scheme was received from the Irish Men's Sheds Association.

Local Authority Housing Rents

92. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 200 and 226 of 11 October 2016, if he will consider taking out those two sources of income in his deliberations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32446/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): As previously outlined in the reply to Questions Numbers 200 and 226 of 11 October 2016, considerable work has been carried out by my Department in developing a draft framework for a harmonisation of the approach to be taken by local authorities in regard to

various aspects of rent schemes. The proposals are currently being reviewed in light of the broader commitment given in Rebuilding Ireland, the Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness to review the disparate systems of differential rent in place across local authorities. This review, which will include consideration of a common set of income disregards to be applied by all housing authorities in determining a household's assessable income for the purposes of rent calculation, will be completed by the end of Quarter 2 2017.

Local Government Reform

93. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the terms of reference of the recently established committee to review the reports of the Cork local government committee. [32498/16]

94. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the means of selecting the members of the recently established committee to review the reports of the Cork local government committee. [32499/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 93 and 94 together.

The role of the Cork expert advisory group is to review the recommendations of the Cork Local Government Committee report. The group is tasked with examining both the majority and minority reports and underlying material and has a mandate to identify and examine a wider range of options for Cork than might have been considered previously. Full details for their terms of reference are available on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/local-government/expert-advisory-group-cork>.

In considering members for the Cork expert advisory group, consideration was given to suitable candidates meeting the specific skill sets required. Specific professional expertise in strategic planning, local government administration and governance was sought to deal with the complexity of the issues involved.

I chose individuals who, in my view, have the necessary professional expertise in these areas and I included a mix of both national and international experts.

I expect this group, which will report directly to me, to generate a report early in 2017 which will enable me to build consensus and agree next steps to address the issue.

Invalidity Pension Applications

95. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an application for an invalidity pension in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32383/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Invalidity pension (IP) is a payment for people who are permanently incapable of work because of illness or incapacity and who satisfy the pay related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions.

The department received a claim for IP for the lady concerned on the 13 May 2016. She was refused IP on the grounds that the medical conditions for the scheme were not satisfied. She was notified on the 11 July 2016 of this decision, the reasons for it and of her right of review and appeal. She requested a review of this decision and submitted further medical evidence in

support of her request. Following a review of all the information available the deciding officer is satisfied that the medical conditions for the scheme are satisfied.

This lady has been awarded IP with effect from the 19 May 2016. Payment will issue to her nominated post office on the 10 November 2016. Any arrears due from 19 May 2016 to 09 November 2016 (less any overlapping social welfare payment and/or outstanding overpayment) will issue in due course. She was notified of this decision on the 26 October 2016.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Appeals

96. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a person (details supplied) in Dublin 11 will receive a decision in respect of a review of a domiciliary care allowance application, as the estimated completion date for the review has passed. [32397/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): This lady has submitted an appeal of the decision to disallow Domiciliary Care Allowance to the Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO). As part of that appeal process, a review of the decision was undertaken by a deciding officer. She was notified on 21st October 2016 that following a re-examination of the application the original decision was upheld. The DCA application file, together with the additional information she supplied was forwarded to the SWAO on the 25th October 2016 for their consideration, they will be in contact with her in due course.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Jobseeker's Allowance Appeals

97. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a decision has been made on the review of additional information submitted in respect of a jobseeker's allowance appeal for a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32405/16]

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

I am advised that the person concerned has submitted additional evidence, the file has been recalled from the Department and the Appeals Officer has agreed to review the case. The person concerned will be contacted when the review of his/her appeal has been finalised.

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

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

98. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a decision has been made on the review of a carer's allowance application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32410/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I confirm that my department received an application for Carer's Allowance (CA) from the person concerned on 12 May 2016. It is a condition for receipt of a CA that the person being cared for must have a disability whose effect is that they require full-time care and attention.

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

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

The person concerned was notified on 15 August 2016 of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal. She has requested a review of this decision and submitted additional evidence in support of her application. The review is currently being processed and once completed, she will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Money Advice and Budgeting Service

99. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of persons MABS has forwarded to the Phoenix project Ireland for personal or business insolvency advice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32451/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS), under the aegis of the Citizens Information Board, assists people who are over-indebted and need help and advice in coping with debt problems, in particular those on low incomes or living on social welfare payments.

MABS does not maintain data on outward referrals to named organisations, such as the Phoenix Project, if they occur.

MABS provides services itself to those in mortgage arrears free of charge. The role of MABS was expanded last year with the establishment of a Dedicated Mortgage Arrears MABS (DMA MABS) service across the MABS network to help those specifically with mortgage debt. There are now 30 specialist DMA advisors working across 25 locations countrywide, assisting borrowers to assess the options available to them and, where required, negotiating with lenders on their behalf. To date almost 2,400 people have availed of the DMA MABS service.

MABS has also established a national network of court mentors to attend each listed repossession Court hearing nationwide, to provide support to distressed borrowers who are facing loss of their home, and signposting them to appropriate services.

More recently, the Government has put in place a scheme called Abhaile to assist people who are insolvent and in mortgage arrears on their home to access independent expert financial and/or legal advice and assistance free of charge. This scheme is designed to help them find the best possible solutions, with the priority being to support families to remain in their own homes.

MABS acts as the gateway for a person to access the appropriate professional advice under the scheme and operates a voucher system to facilitate that. The scheme has been in operation since 22 July 2016 and almost 2,000 vouchers have been issued to date.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility

100. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the total current weekly payment of jobseeker's allowance and-or disability payment in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32471/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The maximum weekly rate of jobseeker's allowance applicable in the case of the person concerned is €383.70. The person concerned is also in receipt of a Domiciliary Care Allowance payment of €285.22 per month. The person concerned can contact his local office to discuss his payments if he wishes.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Jobseeker's Allowance Applications

101. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if and when jobseeker's allowance will issue in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32473/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): According to the records of this Department, the person concerned has no jobseeker's allowance claim registered and there is no record of a claim being submitted.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility

102. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the maximum payment in respect of disability allowance and disability benefit in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32474/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath) (Deputy Finian McGrath): The maximum weekly personal rate of both disability allowance and illness benefit is €188.00. The maximum personal rate of invalidity pension is €193.50.

The lady referred to has been awarded invalidity pension with effect from the 17 December 2015. Payment will issue to her nominated bank account on the 10 November 2016. Any arrears due from 17 December 2015 to 09 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 25 October 2016.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pension (Contributory) Eligibility

103. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the full extent of entitlement to the contributory State pension based on their contributions in respect of employment and self-employment in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32475/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The person concerned will reach the age of eligibility for State pension (contributory) in April 2017. A claim form has been sent to him. On receipt of his completed application, his entitlement to pension will be fully examined and he will be notified of the outcome without delay. Periods of social insurance from employment and self-employment will be taken into account in the assessment of his pension entitlement.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Appeals Status

104. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a decision will be made on an appeal by a person (detail supplied). [32488/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that the appeal from the person concerned was referred to an Appeals Officer who has decided to convene an oral hearing in this case.

Every effort will be made to hear the case as quickly as possible and the appellant will be informed when arrangements for the oral hearing have been made.

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

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Applications

105. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an application for disability allowance by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32493/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath) (Deputy Finian McGrath): I confirm that my Department is in receipt of an application for disability allowance from this man on 11 October 2016. On completion of the necessary investigations on all aspects of the claim a decision will be made and the man will be notified directly of the outcome.

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

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Leinster House Refurbishment

106. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will report on the proposed relocation of Seanad Éireann to the ceramic room of the National Museum; the planning requirements for such a move; if he will liaise with colleagues in the Upper House on a more suitable location for the duration of the refurbishment works; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32413/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán Canney) (Deputy Seán Canney): Currently, the House of the Oireachtas and the National Museum of Ireland are in discussions regarding the proposed temporary use of the Ceramics Room for the relocation of Seanad Éireann while works are being undertaken at Historic Leinster House. Once these discussions have concluded and the final arrangements are confirmed, the process for the relocation of the Seanad Chamber from its current location in Historic Leinster House will commence, this process taking full cognisance of any and all obligations of prevailing planning legislation.

As the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government has no function in the determination or management of the accommodation requirements of the Houses of the Oireachtas or of the National Museum of Ireland, it would not be appropriate for him to comment on the matter.

Public Sector Staff

107. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he has considered bringing the role of the Director of Public Prosecutions under the Public Service Management Act; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32416/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Section 2(1) of the Public Service Management Act 1997 and Part I of the Schedule to the Act provide for the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) to be subject to the Act, subject to the written consent of the office holder - in this case the Director of Public Prosecutions. Any such consent would be binding in respect of any subsequent holder of the office concerned. Section 2(2) of the Act also provides for a number of exemptions to the Act for the public bodies specified in Part I of the Schedule to the Act, including the DPP's Office.

To date, none of the holders of the position of DPP has consented to the application of the Act to their Office. I understand, however, that the current Director has continued the practice of her predecessor of applying the principles underlying the Act and procedures set out therein, insofar as she can do this, on an administrative basis.

Labour Employer Economic Forum

108. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will report on the inaugural meeting of the Labour Employer Economic Forum. [31700/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I refer the Deputy to my answer to Parliamentary Question No. 34 on 19 October 2016.

National Parks and Wildlife Service Staff

109. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and

Gaeltacht Affairs if she will provide a breakdown of the staff complement of the National Parks and Wildlife Service, excluding personal details; the total number of staff; if she will provide a breakdown of positions held and area of expertise; and the level of qualification in relation to the role held. [32419/16]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I am advised that the total number of staff currently working in the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) of my Department is 283. In addition, my Department recruits a number of seasonal staff each year to meet demand during the busy tourist season at the National Parks. A number of fixed-term contract workers are also employed by my Department at present on two EU LIFE projects - the restoration of Active Raised Bogs and the Kerry LIFE project.

I am advised that all personnel in scientific and technical posts in NPWS meet the requisite qualifications for those posts, and indeed many have acquired additional professional skills and accreditations, both before and since being recruited by my Department. My Department actively supports staff seeking to engage in appropriate further educational and training opportunities and encourages this through its learning and development programme.

The table below outlines a breakdown of the 283 NPWS staff referred to above.

	Administrative staff		Non-Administrative staff
Position Held	No.	Position Held	No.
Principal Officer	4	Divisional Manager	4
Assistant Principal	10	Wildlife Inspector Grade 1	4
Higher Executive Officer	17	Wildlife Inspector Grade 2	7
Executive Officer	17	Regional Manager	7
Staff Officer	3	GIS Manager	1
Clerical Officer	31	Wildlife Inspector Grade 3	6
		Deputy Regional Manager	2
		Divisional Ecologist	4
		District Conservation Officer	17
		Conservation Ranger	64
		GIS Technician	2
		Supervisor Guide	3
		Head Guide	6
		Visitor Guide	11
		Education Guide	1
		Store and Office Supervisor	2
		Storekeeper Grade 1	5
		Storekeeper Clerk in Charge	6
		Craftsman	9

	Administrative staff		Non-Administrative staff
		Craft Foreman	4
		Craft Chargehand	2
		Foreman Grade 1	1
		Foreman Grade 3	4
		General Operative Band 2	21
		General Operative Band 3	8
Total	82	Total	201
Grand Total	283		

Arts Council

110. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if she is satisfied that the mandate for the Arts Council is being fulfilled with regards funding, developing and promoting Irish traditional music, in view of the fact she has responsibility for the appointment of 12 members and a chair to An Chomhairle Ealaíon; and if she is satisfied that representation at board level has the necessary expertise in the art forms of traditional music and song, while recognising an arms-length principle. [32426/16]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Under the Arts Act 2003, primary responsibility for the promotion of the arts at all levels throughout the country is devolved to the Arts Council, which is the main channel of State current expenditure on the arts. The mandate of the Arts Council includes traditional music. The strategic context for the Arts Council's support of artforms and arts practice, including all forms of music, is set out in its Strategy Statement *Making Great Art Work*. This sets out the Council's plans to lead the development of the arts in the decade to 2025.

I was pleased to secure significant additional funding for the Arts Council as part of Budget 2017. This will see an increase in the Arts Council allocation of €5m, or 8%, and will allow the Council to enhance support to artists and arts organisations.

It should be noted that there are currently 6 vacancies on the Arts Council. The process for selecting the new members of the Arts Council, in line with that for all State Board appointments, is being managed by the Public Appointments Service.

Arts Council

111. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs her views on a recent claim that the Arts Council has displayed a remarkable indifference to opera's long-term development. [32449/16]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Arts Council is the primary State agency for funding the arts, and in this regard, I was pleased to secure significant additional funding for it as part of Budget 2017. This will see an increase in the Arts Council allocation of €5m, or 8%, and will allow the Council to enhance support to artists and arts organisations.

The strategic context for the Arts Council's support of all artforms and arts practice, including opera, is set out in its Strategy Statement *Making Great Art Work*. This sets out the Council's plans to lead the development of the arts in the decade to 2025. The Arts Council has also published its policy on opera, which is available at <http://www.artscouncil.ie/Arts-in-Ireland/Opera/>.

I understand that the Council's approach is rooted in supporting and enabling opera artists and practitioners to connect with the public, and that it intends to deliver on this policy by supporting indigenous production and presentation of opera and by direct support of individual opera artists and practitioners. The Arts Council is, of course, statutorily independent in relation to the performance of its functions regarding funding of the arts.

Special Areas of Conservation

112. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if she will consider an extension of the deadline by which notice must be given to lodge an external appeal against the inclusion of lands in the Connemara bog complex proposed special area of conservation, due to the long delay in communicating to turf cutters the process for lodging such an appeal. [32454/16]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Following the completion of a Departmental review of an objection to the proposed designation of a site as a special protection area or special area of conservation, landowners and occupiers may opt to take their cases to the Designated Areas Appeals Advisory Board. This is an independently chaired Board, which makes recommendations to me, as Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, on such cases. The appeals process includes the production of an appropriate scientific report and an oral hearing. I have no input as Minister to the deliberations of the Board.

Appeals against the inclusion of land within the Connemara Bog Complex proposed Special Protection Area are scheduled to be heard by the Board. I understand that the secretary of the Board recently advised all the appellants that the appeals relate to the Connemara Bog Complex Special Protection Area, rather than to the Connemara Bog Complex Special Area of Conservation. The deadline for appeals in relation to the special area of conservation site expired some years ago.

Unless an appellant decides to withdraw an appeal against the proposed inclusion of land within the Connemara Bog Complex Special Protection Area, I understand that the secretary of the Board will again write to all appellants to outline the next steps in the appeals process itself, including in relation to the timeline for the production of the scientific report.

Waterways Issues

113. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if a decision has been approved to increase the extended mooring fee from €278 to €1,260 per annum for the Grand Canal area at Sallins, County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32491/16]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Canals Act, 1986, (Bye-laws) 1988 set out the tolls and charges for use of the Royal Canal, Grand Canal and Barrow Navigation.

Waterways Ireland has developed draft amended bye-laws for the Royal Canal, Grand Canal and Barrow Navigation which propose changes in the charging for moorings in key locations. The maximum charge under the current bye-laws for use of a boat on the canals for a year and for an extended mooring for a year is €278.

The proposed new bye-laws provide for the management of house boats, extended moorings and residential moorings. They will also modernise the charging regime which has remained unchanged for almost a quarter of a century.

My Department is currently progressing within the Heritage Bill 2016 amendments to the Canals Act 1986 so as to allow for the subsequent making of bye-laws to regulate boating on the canals and to manage the use of the canals. The proposed changes would allow Waterways Ireland to make new bye-laws to proactively manage the Royal and Grand Canals, as well as the Barrow Navigation. Once this is complete, Waterways Ireland will bring forward the proposed bye-laws for consideration.

Cúrsaí Gaeilge

114. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Ealaíon, Oidhreachta, Gnóthaí Réigiúnacha, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta an bhfuil cúnaimh ar fáil le ranganna Gaeilge a chur ar siúl in áit (sonraí tugtha); má tá, cén eagraíocht ar cheart teagmháil a dhéanamh léi faoi seo; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [32054/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Seán Kyne) (Deputy Seán Kyne): Tá cuid de na bailte fearainn sa Thoghroinn Cheantair atá luaite ag an Teachta laistigh den Ghaeltacht. Sa chás sin, is féidir go mbeadh cúnaimh nó comhairle ar fáil ó Údarás na Gaeltachta, a bhfuil scéim ar leith acu chun tacú le heagraíochtaí agus le coistí i ndáil le ranganna Gaeilge a eagrú sa Ghaeltacht.

Más ranganna lasmuigh de na ceantair Ghaeltachta atá i gceist, is féidir go mbeadh cúnaimh nó comhairle ar fáil ó Fhoras na Gaeilge agus ó na ceanneagraíochtaí cuí faoina scáth, eadhon, Conradh na Gaeilge, Gael Linn agus Glór na nGael.

Is féidir tuilleadh eolais a fháil nó teagmháil a dhéanamh leis na heagraíochtaí thuasluaite ar na suíomhanna gréasáin seo a leanas: Údarás na Gaeltachta, www.udarasnagaeltachta.ie; Foras na Gaeilge, www.forasnagaeilge.ie; Conradh na Gaeilge, www.cnag.ie; Gael-Linn, www.gael-linn.ie; Glór na nGael, www.glornangael.ie.

Health Services Provision

115. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if he will arrange to have the necessary support put in place for a person (details supplied) in County Cork who is due to be discharged from hospital and convalescence care shortly [32352/16]

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 Appointments Status

116. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appoint-

ment in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32355/16]

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 Waiting Lists

117. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the details of patients on waiting lists for the Royal Victoria Eye and Ear Hospital for outpatient appointments, inpatient procedures and other lists, who have been waiting for six months, 12 months, one year, two years and more than two years, broken down by speciality, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32357/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) is responsible for the collection, collation and publication of Inpatient and Day Case waiting lists. Waiting list information is published on the NTPF website at the end of each month. The information is presented in different report formats, i.e. by National/Trend, by Hospital/Group, and by Specialty on www.ntpf.ie.

In relation to the specific query raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Waiting Lists

118. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the details of patients on waiting lists for Cappagh hospital for outpatient appointments, inpatient procedures and other lists, who have been waiting for six months, 12 months, one year, two years and more than two years, broken down by speciality, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32358/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) is responsible for the collection, collation and publication of Inpatient and Day Case waiting lists. Waiting list information is published on the NTPF website at the end of each month. The information is presented in different report formats, i.e. by National/Trend, by Hospital/Group, and by Specialty on www.ntpf.ie.

In relation to the specific query raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Waiting Lists

119. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the details of patients on

waiting lists for the Mater hospital for outpatient appointments, inpatient procedures and other lists, who have been waiting for six months, 12 months, one year, two years and more than two years, broken down by speciality, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32359/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) is responsible for the collection, collation and publication of Inpatient and Day Case waiting lists. Waiting list information is published on the NTPF website at the end of each month. The information is presented in different report formats, i.e. by National/Trend, by Hospital/Group, and by Specialty on www.ntpf.ie.

In relation to the specific query raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Homeless Persons Supports

120. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the protocols in hospitals to deal with persons who are homeless and, upon discharge, have no home to go to recuperate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32360/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Obesity Strategy

121. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health his plans to improve healthy eating habits in view of the recent findings in the Healthy Ireland survey 2016 that 27% of the population reported eating fruit and vegetables daily compared with 60% eating processed and unhealthy snacks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32364/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): I recently launched ‘A Healthy Weight for Ireland – Obesity Policy and Action Plan 2016 - 2025’. This Obesity Policy and Action Plan is the result of the Government’s desire to assist its people to achieve better health and in particular to reduce the levels of overweight and obesity. It also acknowledges that the solutions are multiple and that every sector has a role in reducing the burden of this condition. The Policy recognises that healthy eating plays a major role in the prevention of overweight and obesity, as well as in other diet related diseases. The Action Plan includes a range of initiatives to encourage healthy eating. The first of these will be the launch of revised Healthy Eating Guidelines next month and the development of a proposal for a Nutrition Policy and Action Plan led by my Department

Other healthy eating priority actions to commence in the coming year include:

- a ‘whole of school’ approach to healthy lifestyle programmes, including nutrition;
- a levy on sugar-sweetened drinks in 2018;
- agreement on food reformulation targets with the food industry to reduce fat, sugar and salt in foods and drinks;
- a code of practice for food and drinks promotion, marketing, sponsorship and product placement;

- legislation for calorie posting to support people to make healthy choices;
- a communications strategy to increase knowledge about the benefits of being a healthy weight and to stimulate healthy behaviour change; and
- targeting socially disadvantaged high-risk groups through community development programmes that support healthy eating and the prevention and management of overweight and obesity.

Home Help Service Data

122. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the number of home help hours provided by the HSE annually since 2011 in the Dublin West HSE region; the total budget allocated by the HSE for home help hours in the Dublin West HSE region; and the number of home help hours provided by private health companies and paid for by the HSE or his Department since 2011. [32365/16]

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.

Home Care Packages Funding

123. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the amount of the €14.6 billion announced in budget 2017 that will go towards the home care packages scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32366/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): I am pleased to say that overall funding for services for older people has increased to €765 million in 2017 - an increase of €82 million since the HSE's 2016 Service Plan. This has focused on additional funding for homecare in particular and is aimed at allowing people to continue to live in their own homes and at facilitating discharge of older people from acute hospitals.

The overall funding for home care in 2016 is approximately €373 million, this includes Home Help, Home Care Packages, Primary Care funded services within the Home Care Package Scheme and Intensive Home Care Packages. The Government has provided a further **€27m** for home care services in 2017. Details of how home care funding will be dispersed will be set out in the coming weeks in the HSE 2017 National Service Plan.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

124. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Health if his Department will provide epi medication pens to primary and post-primary schools as this is standardised medication that needs to be provided to schools where students who require them are attending (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32369/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): There are no plans to provide Epipens to primary and post-primary schools.

Home Help Service Appeals

125. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if he will review a decision on home help in respect of a person (details supplied). [32372/16]

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.

Disabilities Assessments

126. **Deputy Louise O’Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the waiting times for both appointments and assessments in the early intervention and school age psychology services, on a county basis, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32379/16]

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

The particular issue raised by the Deputy is a service matter for the HSE. Accordingly I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Disability Services Provision

127. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Health when services will be provided for a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32388/16]

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

The particular issue raised by the Deputy is a service matter for the HSE. Accordingly I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Appointments Status

128. **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. [32389/16]

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 be-

half, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

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.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

129. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons in receipt of the home oxygen service; the way the service levels are monitored, in view of the importance of equipment maintenance; the frequency at which equipment is being serviced and maintained; if details of checks being carried out will be provided (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32391/16]

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

Medicinal Products Prices

130. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health the action he is taking to address the delay in negotiating a price for the life-saving drug Orkambi; if he will put a cap on the price of newly released drugs in the national interest; the strategy the Government is taking to deal with the issue of overcharging for medication here in general, and for newly released drugs for specific conditions in particular; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32394/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): 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.

These decisions are made on objective, scientific and economic grounds by the HSE. In reaching its decision, the HSE examines all the evidence which may be relevant in its view for the decision and will take into account such expert opinions and recommendations which may have been sought by the HSE, including, for example, advice from the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics.

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 in June 2016. 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 is considering the outcome of these engagements and any other, together with the NCPE recommendation, in making a final decision on reimbursement.

In relation to the cost of new medicines, the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013 sets out the conditions by which new medicines can be added to the reimbursement lists for the community drugs schemes. Before approving reimbursement of a new medicine the HSE is required to consider a number of criteria including: the potential or actual budget impact of a medicine, the cost-effectiveness of the medicine, the health needs of the public and the resources available to the HSE. The HSE therefore undertakes a robust analysis of the pricing points of new medicines and this is factored into negotiations with manufacturers. In the negotiation process the HSE will often seek significant price reductions so that medicines reimbursed are both cost-effective and affordable.

Under the new Framework Agreement on the Pricing and Supply of Medicines agreed between the State and the Irish Pharmaceutical Healthcare Association, medicines are now subject to an annual downward only price realignment. The price realignment is now based on a basket of 14 countries; this has been extended from 9 and also includes more lower cost countries. This will ensure that the State achieves better value for money on the cost of medicines as prices in the other reference countries are adjusted downwards over time. It also ensures that the prices paid by Ireland are not out of line with the other 13 EU Member States.

The issue of affordability and access to new and innovative medicines represents a major challenge to the health service in Ireland and indeed to health systems internationally. I have said previously that I am willing to examine, with the Oireachtas, new ways in which this challenge might be addressed.

Hospitals Data

131. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the number of hospitals throughout the country that have been rebranded with a university status in 2015 and in 2016 to date; the cost of that rebranding in terms of moneys spent on marketing, advertising and media consultation fees in the creation of a new corporate identity; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32400/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Health Services Provision

132. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health if a clinic (details supplied) will continue; his plans to suspend same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32402/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Mental Health Services Funding

133. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the full amount of funding in 2017 for mental health services; the reason the €35 million previously committed for improving mental health services has been reversed and significantly reduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32414/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): As part of Budget 2017 I received approval to initiate €35 million in new mental health services next year. From the outset the Government has been clear that it will not be possible to spend all of this revenue in 2017 due to timing factors. However, I have also received approval for very significant additional capital expenditure on mental health services. This has allowed for the award of the contract to construct a new Forensic Mental Health facility at Portrane. The redevelopment of forensic mental health facilities was a key recommendation in “A Vision for Change: The Report of the Expert Group on Mental Health Policy” which was published in 2006. Some €50 million will be spent on this capital project next year, with the total cost of the project in excess of €150 million.

Key priorities to be addressed in the HSE’s 2017 Service Plan include youth mental health, further improvement to child & adolescent and adult services, older people’s services and further enhanced out of hours response for those in need of urgent services. Recognising the time lag in new staff taking up posts and the completion of preparations for the introduction of these services, it is estimated that the revenue spend in 2017 associated with this increased allocation will be some €15 million. There will also be a further additional revenue spend of €9.7 million in mental health associated with increased pay rates. The revenue allocation for Mental Health in 2017 will be €851.3 million, an increase of €24.7 million, or approximately 3%, over 2016. This will be supplemented by a further €50 million in capital funding. Despite significant increase in the cost of the new National Forensic Mental Health facility since it was originally initiated in 2000, due mainly to price inflation in the construction sector, the capital provision made and the award of the construction contract will secure the long overdue modernisation of these services.

Mental Health Services Provision

134. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the number of children and adolescents on waiting lists to access mental health services across the country, in tabular form; the numbers waiting for up to three months, between three and six months, between six and nine months, between nine and 12 months, and more than 12 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32415/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): As this is a service issue, this question has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Primary Care Centres

135. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health his plans to upgrade the service provision and service offer out of Johnstown Bridge medical centre; the specific timeline and actions required; the services that are to be provided out of the centre for the district; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32423/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this 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.

Psychological Services

136. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Health his plans for the provision of a psychology service for children in north Kildare, as currently no such service is available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32430/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): As this is a service issue, this question has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Home Care Packages Data

137. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the total number of hours provided via the home care package and home help scheme in County Donegal for each of the years 2011 to date in 2016, in tabular form; the number of hours provided by the public sector and the numbers provided by private care providers in each case; the overall amount of moneys provided to private care providers and to the public care provider, as well as the total amounts paid to both sectors, for these services during each of these years in each case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32447/16]

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 Appointments Status

138. **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. [32448/16]

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.

Commissions of Inquiry

139. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 488 of 18 October 2016, the body or person from whom he has sought legal advice in relation to procedural and administrative matters raised regarding the Dignam report; when that advice was sought; and if he has received a preliminary response. [32452/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): When submitting his report, Mr. Dignam drew my attention to two legal procedural and administrative matters which he advised should be addressed before the Report is published. Department of

Health officials discussed the position in relation to these matters with Mr. Dignam and the Office of the Attorney General, following which actions were put in train to resolve the issues in question. These matters, as I have said, were procedural and administrative and did not, in themselves, necessitate legal advice.

Vaccination Programme

140. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding supplies of childhood vaccines; if he is satisfied that the HSE has sufficient quantities to administer the BCG, MMR, Hib MenC and 6-in-1, in particular, in a timely manner; his views on whether the situation regarding these vaccines in the past few years has been satisfactory; and the steps taken to overcome shortages where they have existed. [32456/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The procurement of vaccines for the childhood immunisation programmes is a matter for the HSE.

As Deputies are aware, the HSE has had difficulties sourcing supplies of one of the childhood vaccines which has led to a suspension of the programme until new supplies of the vaccine can be obtained. There is currently a worldwide shortage of BCG vaccine and the vaccine has not been available in Ireland since the end of April 2015. The only one licensed supplier of BCG vaccine to Ireland has had difficulties in the production of the BCG vaccine. The manufacturer has informed the HSE there will be no supply of BCG until 2017. Consequently, BCG vaccination clinics in HSE Clinics and Maternity hospitals have been postponed until new stock arrives.

Since this problem became apparent, the HSE National Immunisation Office has been in regular contact with the manufacturer of BCG vaccine to ascertain when the vaccine might be available. The HSE has also asked the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA), which licenses and regulates all human medicines in Ireland, to source an alternate supplier of the BCG vaccine. Efforts have been made to find a company who can provide the vaccine for use in Ireland which satisfies all the HPRA requirements on safety and efficacy. To date no suitable alternative BCG product has been found. Therefore the HSE has been unable to procure the BCG vaccine from any other source and still awaits the product from the HPRA licensed supplier of the vaccine. When there is confirmation of the date of new supply a decision will be made, guided by the recommendations of the National Immunisation Advisory Committee, on who should be prioritised to receive the vaccine.

I have not been informed of any difficulties in procuring supplies of any of the other vaccines referred to in the question. However, as the procurement of vaccines is a service matter, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Orthodontic Services

141. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive orthodontic treatment. [32457/16]

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

Medical Qualifications

142. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the procedure to be followed to facilitate a person (details supplied) who is an Irish citizen, whose primary degree in medicine was through the medium of French and who is now anxious to obtain a position as a doctor here; the extent to which pre-registration examination is required; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32463/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Recognition of medical qualifications for the purposes of registration as a medical practitioner entitled to work in Ireland is a matter for the Medical Council. I have forwarded your request to the Medical Council for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Appointments Delays

143. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Health the steps he will take to have a person (details supplied) admitted to Tallaght hospital, Dublin 24, for an urgent procedure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32489/16]

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.

Health Services Provision

144. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the planned closure of a centre (details supplied); if his attention has been further drawn to the terrific benefit to families of this centre and the huge loss of its closure to them; his plans for a replacement unit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32492/16]

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.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme

145. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 386 of 4 October 2016, his views on the impact on a person's dignity of allocating daily pocket money under the fair deal scheme, where some persons residing in nursing homes are allocated as little as €6.34 per day; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32502/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): While it is the preferred option to support older people in their own homes for as long as possible, there will

always be a cohort of people who require quality long term residential care. The aim of the Nursing Homes Support Scheme ‘A Fair Deal’ is to ensure that long term nursing home care is accessible and affordable for everyone assessed as needing it, and that people are cared for in the most appropriate settings. My reply to Parliamentary Question number 386 of 4 October 2016 outlined the financial contribution which participants in the Scheme make towards the cost of their care, regardless of whether they choose a public, private or voluntary care facility. An individual financial assessment is carried out for each applicant to the Scheme.

My reply to Parliamentary Question 386 also described the many safeguards contained in the Scheme, one of which is to ensure that an applicant keeps 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. Part 7 of the Health Act 2007 (Care and Welfare of Residents in Designated Centres for Older People) Regulations 2013 stipulates that the registered provider of the nursing home must agree a contract in writing with each resident on their admission to the nursing home. This contract must include details of the services to be provided to that resident and the fees to be charged. Residents should never be charged fees which are not set out in the contract. The Department of Health and the HSE are not a party to such contracts which are concluded between each resident and their nursing home.

Furthermore, registered providers of nursing home care are obliged to provide an accessible and effective complaints procedure. Concerns about additional charges should in the first instance be taken up with the nursing home provider. The Office of the Ombudsman can examine complaints about the actions of a range of public bodies and, from 24 August 2015, complaints relating to the administrative actions of private nursing homes. The Office of the Ombudsman normally only deals with a complaint once the individual has already gone through the complaints procedure of the private nursing home concerned.

A further safeguard contained in the Scheme relates to certain items of expenditure known as allowable deductions which can be taken into account for the financial assessment, such as health expenses, payments required by law, rent payments and borrowings in respect of a person’s principal private residence, maintenance payments, and payments in respect of the maintenance of dependent children.

Importantly, 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 to ensure that a person does not have to sell their home during their lifetime to pay for long term nursing home care.

A list of Nursing Home Support Offices are provided on the HSE website. An applicant’s local Nursing Home Support Office will be in a position to provide information in relation to having a review of their financial assessment. This can take place if 12 months have passed since the initial financial assessment or the most recent review, or if the HSE is satisfied that there has been a material change to the person’s financial circumstances.

Disability Support Services Expenditure

146. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health the annual per capita costs for each of the years 2012 to 2016, inclusive, listed against the names of each of the 72 residential centres for adults with intellectual disabilities reviewed by the working group on congregated settings in 2011, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32505/16]

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

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Disability Services Funding

147. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health if, in conjunction with the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, projections have been made in respect of the level of local property tax increase necessary to ensure the long-term funding of local authorities in respect of the additional demands being imposed upon them consequent to his Department's combined policies of decongregation and implementation of the social care model for adults with a learning disability; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32506/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Minister for Health has no role in relation to the setting of property tax or the funding of Local Authorities.

National policy on decongregation is designed to ensure that people with disabilities are empowered to live independent lives in a place of their own choosing. Under the National Housing Strategy for people with a disability, Local Authorities play a role in relation to providing housing for people moving out of congregated settings in the same way that they are required to provide social housing supports for all citizens who cannot afford to provide a home for themselves.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

148. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the action he is taking regarding the likely increase in methane emissions due to the expanding beef and dairy herds. [32497/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): As part of the Whole of Government approach to climate policy, officials from my Department are working closely with other Departments and in particular, with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment as the lead in this area. We continue to seek an appropriate and consistent policy on climate and agriculture policy that is guided by an approach to carbon neutrality that does not compromise our capacity for food production. This work is overseen by Government through a hierarchy of committees and sub-groups, with independent advice from the Climate Change Advisory Council, as appropriate. These committees and groups include the Cabinet Committee and Senior Officials' Group on Infrastructure, Environment and Climate Action, a Technical Research and Modelling Group and a Domestic Climate Finance Group.

Under the 2015 Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act, a National Mitigation Plan is being prepared. Food Wise 2025 – the strategic plan for the sustainable development of

agri-food sector over the next decade - provides a framework for the agri sector to engage with the national mitigation plan. Food Wise builds on its predecessor and focuses on the continued growth in the value of Irish agri-food including dairy production. While this is likely to mean some increase in dairy numbers, it is not expected that there will be a significant increase in overall cattle numbers.

There is a strong commitment in Food Wise 2025 to measure and monitor the sustainability credentials of the sector. As part of the implementation of Food Wise, an Environmental Sustainability Committee has been established. This implementation process will include evaluation and assessment of the delivery of sustainability and mitigation actions.

In addition, my Department will continue to engage with research initiatives to further assist with the refinement, development and deployment of new and innovative practices to further reduce GHGs that are associated with agricultural production.

Aquaculture Licence Applications

149. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if an application for an aquaculture licence (details supplied) is still being considered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32356/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department is currently examining the legal status of the aquaculture licence application referred to by the Deputy having regard to the requirements of the applicable legislation concerning the matter of Public Notice.

In the circumstances, as the application is under consideration as part of a statutory process it would not be appropriate for me to comment further on the case at this time.

Basic Payment Scheme Payments

150. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment under the 2016 basic payment scheme will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Cork; the reason for the delay in issuing this payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32380/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): In 2015 the person named formed a Registered Farm Partnership with two other individuals. My Department has received three Transfer of Entitlement applications in 2016 seeking the transfer of entitlements out of this Registered Farm Partnership by Division of Entitlements. My Department has also received two Transfer of Entitlement applications in 2016 seeking the transfer of entitlements by merger of two or more holdings into a separate Registered Farm Partnership of which the person named is a member.

These applications are currently being processed and are expected to be finalised shortly. When finalised the person named will be notified in writing with a view to payment issuing shortly thereafter.

Single Payment Scheme Payments

151. **Deputy Michael D'Arcy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment of the single farm grant will issue to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32401/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The application for payment under the 2016 Basic Payment Scheme in respect of the person named has been fully processed and payment will issue in the coming days.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

152. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding agriculture payments for a person (details supplied); when payment will issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32407/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named submitted a 2016 Basic Payment/Areas of Natural Constraint scheme's application on 4 May 2016. EU Regulations governing the administration of these schemes require that full and comprehensive administrative checks, including in some cases on-farm inspections, be completed before any payments issue.

The application of the person named was selected for a ground eligibility inspection. This inspection is currently being processed with the intention of issuing any payments due as soon as possible. In the event that any queries arise officials in my Department will be in contact with the person named.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

153. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding agriculture payments for a person (details supplied); when payment will issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32408/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named submitted a 2016 Basic Payment/Areas of Natural Constraint scheme's application on 12 April 2016. EU Regulations governing the administration of these schemes require that full and comprehensive administrative checks, including in some cases on-farm inspections, be completed before any payments issue.

The application of the person named was selected for a ground eligibility inspection. This inspection is currently being processed with the intention of issuing any payments due as soon as possible. In the event that any queries arise officials in my Department will be in contact with the person named.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

154. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding agriculture payments for a person (details supplied); when payment will issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32409/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): An application under the 2016 Basic Payment Scheme and Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme was re-

ceived in my Department from the person named on 13 April 2016. Full payment has issued to the nominated bank account of the person named in respect of both these schemes.

TAMS Applications

155. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of an application for TAMS II in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32424/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named submitted an application for grant aid under the Animal Welfare, Safety and Nutrient Storage Scheme of TAMSII on 24 June 2016, under Tranche 3 of the Scheme.

The application did not pass all the administrative checks and was therefore rejected. The applicant was notified of this decision on 25 October 2016. The applicant has also been informed of their right to request a review of this decision or to resubmit an application under a future Tranche of the Scheme.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

156. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment will issue under the basic payment scheme and areas of natural constraint scheme for 2016 to a person (details supplied) in County Galway; the reason for the delay in issuing these payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32425/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): An application under the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) and Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) Scheme was received from the person named on 14 May 2016. Payment under ANC has issued directly to the nominated bank account of the person named on 20 October 2016.

The person named also submitted a 2016 Transfer of Entitlements application to my Department seeking the transfer of entitlements by way of sale as Transferee. This application is currently being processed by my Department and when completed the person named will be advised in writing of the outcome and payment under the Basic Payment Scheme will issue shortly thereafter.

Food Prices

157. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which he and his Department have managed to address the concerns raised by the farming community in its various submissions through representative organisations, pre-budget or otherwise; if he remains satisfied regarding the stability of the agrifood sector, with particular reference to its ability to compete on home and international markets and having due regard to the cost of inputs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32476/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Since taking up office, one of my priorities has been to address the impact of the sustained period of lower commodity prices on farmers. I met with a range of stakeholders in advance of the recent Budget and I have been engaged, both at National and EU level, to address the issues involved and to ensure that we continue to have a sustainable and resilient sector. As part of the recent Bud-

get, I announced a “three pillar strategy” to alleviate the pressures of income volatility through:

- Lower Cost Finance: I announced plans for an ‘Agri Cashflow Support Loan’ fund of €150 million, which will support highly flexible loans at an interest rate of 2.95%, for amounts up to €150,000 and for terms up to six years.

- Tax Measures: I agreed with my colleague the Minister for Finance an adjustment to the current ‘Income Averaging’ system, allowing for an opt-out in an exceptional year.

- Farm Payments: Spending on farm schemes through the Rural Development Programme will see €601 million go directly to farmers in 2017, including a new €25 million sheep welfare scheme and increased participation in GLAS, BDGP & TAMS. This is on top of €1.2 billion paid through the Basic Payments Scheme.

Regarding the agri-food sector generally, the Food Wise 2025 strategy contains recommendations aimed at improving value-added and productivity at farm and food industry level through a focus on sustainability, efficiency, knowledge transfer and innovation. Realising the ambitious growth projections set out in Food Wise will be challenging, particularly in the context of Brexit, but I am confident that the strong implementation process for the strategy, led by the High Level Implementation Committee which I chair, will deliver results.

Specifically on the cost of inputs, we will of course remain vigilant in the current market environment but the CSO’s agricultural input price index decreased by 1.0% in August 2016 compared with July 2016 and decreased by 4.7% in the 12 months to the end of August.

Agrifood Sector

158. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the degree to which he remains satisfied regarding the continued level of investment here in the food sector, including all aspects of the dairy, beef, lamb, pig meat, poultry and fish, with particular reference to the maximisation of employment throughout and the need to ensure a reasonable income in the future for those involved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32477/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Food Wise 2025, the ten year strategy for the agri-food sector published in July last year identifies the opportunities and challenges facing the sector and sets out an enabling strategy that will allow the sector to grow and prosper. Food Wise includes over 400 recommendations on cross-cutting themes of sustainability, innovation, human capital, market development and competitiveness; as well as specific sectoral recommendations. Food Wise 2025 foresees the creation of 23,000 additional jobs in the agri-food sector all along the supply chain from primary production to high value added product development. While realising this growth projection will be challenging following the UK referendum, a combination of diversification of markets and identifying opportunities in existing markets can deliver long term growth.

The implementation process for any strategy is vital for its success. I chair the Food Wise High Level Implementation Committee (HLIC), with high level representatives from all the relevant Departments and State agencies. The committee reviews progress on detailed actions on a quarterly basis, in order to identify and solve problems quickly. Stakeholders regularly present to the committee on priorities for particular sectors or themes in enabling and delivering sustainable growth in investment and employment to benefit the agri-food sector.

Opening markets is a priority. In 2015 my Department secured market openings for beef in

USA, Canada, Iran, Oman and the Maldives, for sheepmeat and pigmeat in Oman and the Maldives, for pigmeat in South Africa. Extended access to the Philippines market was also secured for beef, sheepmeat and pigmeat and this work continues in close cooperation with producers and industry.

The launch of the Bord Bia Thinking House in September now offers client companies access to cutting-edge global research and innovation resources. This facility will be supported by an increase in the number of Bord Bia marketing specialists working in the areas of qualitative research, data mining and analysis, brand and innovation. These complement the range of market promotion and quality services, specialist Bord Bia personnel available to companies and talent development programmes with a high retention rate within the industry.

In relation to meat, the Meat Technology Centre, hosted in Teagasc Food Research Centre, Ashtown, now establishes an internationally leading centre of excellence for meat processing research and innovation. It will be market-led and informed by leading meat firm stakeholders and expert meat research capabilities through the technology cycle. Ambitious plans and investment are underway also in relation to fisheries and seafood.

Enterprise Ireland supports food and drink companies to scale through investment, development of management capability, improving competitiveness and innovation. This includes investments in building Dairy industry capability in the form of Food for Health Ireland (FHI), and the recently launched Dairy Processing Technology Centre. Lean manufacturing and leadership programmes also enhance company capability. Enterprise Ireland also works with international food companies as they develop their activities in Ireland, and seeks to attract foreign direct investment (FDI). In the past three years Enterprise Ireland have approved funding of €138m to the industry between 2013 and 2015. This support leveraged an estimated investment of €995m by the industry.

Cereal Sector

159. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine having regard to the return of the 2016 harvest, if he remains satisfied regarding the future of the cereal sector, with particular reference to the need to meet specific targets in return for a reasonable income; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32478/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The tillage sector is an important and integral component of the Agri-food industry. Ongoing commitment to this sector is underlined in the Food Wise 2025 report for the industry. This action plan for the Agri-food sector contains over 400 recommendations and identifies many areas for growth in the tillage sector, particularly in the very important and successful distilling and craft brewing industries, high-end health foods and value-added niche foods and ingredients.

I recently chaired a meeting with the main stakeholders in the tillage sector. This meeting provided a platform for the stakeholders to express their views and concerns on the challenges they are facing but equally to discuss the opportunities that lie ahead for the industry.

In recognition of the challenging environment this year on tillage farms, I informed the meeting that I had directed my officials to prioritise the processing of all payments this year including the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS), the areas of Natural Constraint Scheme, GLAS and AEOS which are in total worth over €1.5 billion annually to the Agriculture Industry.

In relation to the BPS and Greening Payment, I was pleased to arrange for advance payments to commence on 17 October, the earliest possible date by which payments can begin un-

der the governing EU Regulations. By the end of last week, some €735 million had been paid out to 112,922 farmers and these payments are ongoing.

At the meeting with tillage stakeholders, I outlined that one of my priorities was to provide low-cost more flexible finance and in this regard I was happy to announce on Budget Day plans for a €150 million Agri Cash Flow Support Loan Fund. Developed in conjunction with the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI), by leveraging EU and Exchequer funding totalling €25m from my Department to deliver a total loan fund of €150m, it will support highly flexible loans for up to six years, for amounts up to €150,000. The interest rate applying is 2.95% and the product will be available to livestock, tillage and horticulture farmers. Loans to tillage and horticulture farmers will be provided in line with agriculture State Aid de minimis requirements. This loan product is aimed at alleviating the pressures of income volatility and will enable farmers to improve the management of their cash flow and reduce the cost of their short term borrowings.

In addition, the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 contains measures to support the establishment of Knowledge Transfer Groups across the main farming sectors. A Knowledge Transfer Group for the Tillage sector is currently under way.

An amendment to the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 also provides for the inclusion of a Tillage Scheme under the suite of measures provided under the Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme. It is anticipated that the Tillage Scheme will open for applications in the near future.

In addition to these specific recent initiatives, my Department operates ongoing schemes and programmes in relation to seed certification and crop variety evaluation. These schemes ensure that only the best quality seed is available to growers and that Irish cereal yields remain among the highest in the world.

The changing landscape of global arable production requires us to take a fresh look at our tillage industry, to ensure that it is best positioned to withstand possible future threats and to avail of the new opportunities which may present themselves.

Brexit Issues

160. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which he can continue to support producers in Northern Ireland in his capacity as Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine at Council of Ministers' meetings post-Brexit, with particular reference to the need to ensure the minimum disruption to all aspects of the industry on this island; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32479/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Following the UK referendum I have been and will continue to work very closely with my NI counterpart Michelle McIlveen and DAERA to ensure that the best possible outcome is achieved for our agri-food producers that will be of benefit to producers on both sides of the border.

On a more general note, both I and my Department officials are very aware of the potential disruption to the agri-food sector from an all island perspective and have been working closely with our Northern Ireland counterparts since the outcome of the referendum result, with this in mind. At the North South Ministerial Council Plenary Summit in Dublin in July, Ministers agreed on ten specific actions to optimise North-South joint planning and engagement on key issues arising as a result of the referendum. The ten-point plan includes a full audit of key North-South risks and likely impacts and this work is already underway across all Government

Departments. I also held discussions with Northern Ireland Minister Michelle McIlveen at the Plenary Summit in July and this was followed by a meeting of senior officials from DAFM and DAERA, later that month for an initial exchange of views on the implications of Brexit for the agri-food sector.

A further meeting was held between the Secretary General of my Department and the Permanent Secretary of DAERA on the 4th October. Following this meeting, both Departments are currently putting together a joint work programme that will form the basis for ongoing co-operation over the coming months.

Dairy Sector

161. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the degree to which he remains satisfied regarding the availability of opportunities for dairy exports in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32480/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I am well aware of the challenges faced by producers in the dairy sector. The last 18 months have been somewhat challenging particularly in the dairy and pigmeat sectors due to a number of factors. These factors contributing to global price volatility in 2015 and 2016 included the Russian Ban and the softening of Chinese demand on one side, coupled with increased production among key global producers including the EU on the supply side.

The UK Brexit referendum is obviously foremost in our minds too and in Government it is very much our number one priority. It is essential that we retain our national competitiveness as much as we possibly can while mitigating the effects of a possible disruptive exit by Britain from the EU. The effects on our agri-food sector are already been felt by exporters hugely affected by the strengthening sterling rate against the Euro lately. I am listening closely to what exporters have to say and as recently as Thursday last I chaired a meeting of a Stakeholder Forum for the agri-food sector which I established to focus on Brexit related issues. This will continue to be my priority in the immediate future.

One of my priorities now, particularly in the context of Brexit is to further increase the market opportunity for Irish food and drink internationally. We are after all an exporting nation with 90% of our food produce leaving the island. It is for this reason I led a major trade mission to four Asian Countries in September and why I will be leading another one to Algeria and Morocco next month. It is only through further increasing our footprint internationally that we will help to mitigate the effects of Brexit and develop our agri-food sector to realise its full potential.

There are a number of other initiatives at industry, national and EU level aimed at mitigating market volatility in the dairy sector. The EU Commission has responded to these difficulties through the deployment of support measures provided for under the CAP. Market difficulties continued into the middle of 2016 and the Commission presented a further package of measures at the Agri-Fish Council in July. The main component is a fund of €500 million, which is in turn comprised of two elements.

The first is a €150 million EU-wide measure that will compensate farmers for reducing their milk output in the final quarter of 2016 compared to the same period in 2015 (at a rate of 14c/kg). In Phase 1 over 99% of available resources in terms of finances and tonnages were applied for. In Ireland, this amounted to approximately 74.2 million kilos from approaching 4,500 producers. If fully utilised, this will be worth over €10m to Irish dairy producers. Phase 2 of the scheme saw approaching 570 Irish suppliers apply for over 6 million kilos of reduction.

At EU level, Phase 2 of the scheme was highly oversubscribed, with approaching 100 million kilos worth of proposed reductions made for the approximate 12 million kilos remaining after Phase 1.

The second element of the EU July 2016 package is a €350 million fund that will be allocated to Member States in the form of national envelopes, which Member States can use in accordance with their domestic circumstances. As part of Budget 2017 I announced a new low cost loan fund for the livestock, including in particular dairy, as well as tillage sectors which will utilise Ireland's €11.1M allocation, in conjunction with national funds, to leverage a greater fund in the region of €150M to provide such a low cost loan model for Irish farmers.

The long-term fundamentals of the global dairy market are strong but there have been significant challenges this year. I am confident that the Irish and EU dairy sector is well placed to gain from the opportunity presented by expanding global demand whilst simultaneously addressing the aforementioned challenges with a particular focus on the challenges of price volatility.

Food Prices

162. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which his Department continues to monitor the margins availability to producers in the pig, poultry, beef and lamb sectors; the extent to which margins have narrowed or are likely to narrow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32481/16]

168. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he proposes any particular initiatives to address appalling returns to producers in the meat and dairy sectors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32487/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 162 and 168 together.

I am well aware of the challenges faced by producers in the Irish meat and dairy sectors. The last 18 months have been somewhat challenging particularly in the dairy and pigmeat sectors due to a number of factors. These factors contributing to global price volatility in 2015 and 2016 included the Russian Ban and the softening of Chinese demand on one side, coupled with increased production among key global producers including the EU on the supply side.

The UK Brexit referendum is obviously foremost in our minds too and in Government it is very much our number one priority. It is essential that we retain our national competitiveness as much as we possibly can while mitigating the effects of a possible disruptive exit by Britain from the EU. The effects on our agri-food sector are already been felt by exporters hugely affected by the strengthening sterling rate against the Euro lately. I am listening closely to what exporters have to say and as recently as Thursday last I chaired a meeting of a Stakeholder Forum for the agri-food sector which I established to focus on Brexit related issues. This will continue to be my priority in the immediate future.

One of my priorities now, particularly in the context of Brexit is to further increase the market opportunity for Irish food and drink internationally. We are after all an exporting nation with 90% of our food produce leaving the island. It is for this reason I led a major trade mission to four Asian Countries in September and why I will be leading another one to Algeria and Morocco next month. It is only through further increasing our footprint internationally that we will help to mitigate the effects of Brexit and develop our agri-food sector to realise its full potential.

There are a number of other initiatives at industry, national and EU level aimed at mitigating market volatility in the agrifood sector. The EU Commission has responded to these difficulties through the deployment of support measures provided for under the CAP. Market difficulties continued into the middle of 2016 and the Commission presented a further package of measures at the Agri-Fish Council in July. The main component is a fund of €500 million, which is in turn comprised of two elements:

The first is a €150 million EU-wide measure that will compensate farmers for reducing their milk output in the final quarter of 2016 compared to the same period in 2015 (at a rate of 14c/kg). In Phase 1 over 99% of available resources in terms of finances and tonnages were applied for. In Ireland, this amounted to approximately 74.2 million kilos from approaching 4,500 producers. If fully utilised, this will be worth over €10m to Irish dairy producers. Phase 2 of the scheme saw approaching 570 Irish suppliers apply for over 6 million kilos of reduction. At EU level, Phase 2 of the scheme was highly oversubscribed, with approaching 100million kilos worth of proposed reductions made for the approximate 12 million kilos remaining after Phase 1.

The second element of the EU July 2016 package is a €350 million fund that will be allocated to Member States in the form of national envelopes, which Member States can use in accordance with their domestic circumstances. As part of Budget 2017 I announced a new low cost loan fund for the livestock, including in particular dairy, as well as tillage sectors which will utilise Ireland's €11.1M allocation, in conjunction with national funds, to leverage a greater fund in the region of €150M to provide such a low cost loan model for Irish farmers.

The long-term fundamentals of the global dairy market are strong but there have been significant challenges this year. I am confident that the Irish and EU dairy sector is well placed to gain from the opportunity presented by expanding global demand whilst simultaneously addressing the aforementioned challenges with a particular focus on the challenges of price volatility.

On the sheep sector, I am also aware profitability at farm level remains a challenge for all sheep farmers, including hill farmers. My Department already has in place a number of schemes, including the BPS, GLAS, ANC and TAMS which make vital contributions to ensuring the continuing viability of hill farming.

The Programme for Government commits to the introduction of a scheme for sheep farmers under the Rural Development Programme with a budget of some €25 million to be provided in Budget 2017. This new Animal Welfare scheme for sheep, in addition to the existing supports available to sheep farmers under the BPS, GLAS, ANC and TAMS, will make a vital contribution to ensuring the continuing viability and sustainability of the sheep sector in Ireland.

In designing the scheme, I am aware of the different challenges facing sheep farmers in which different areas of sheep farming are carried out in Ireland. I believe that this scheme will provide a lasting benefit to sheep farming and demonstrates and acknowledges the contribution sheep farming makes to the Agri-food sector in this country. This scheme has been submitted to the European Commission for formal approval as part of Ireland's proposed second amendment to the Rural Development Programme.

My role as Minister in relation to the beef sector is to create a policy and support environment that allows it to flourish in line with standard market principles and delivers the best possible returns for all participants in the sector. I am guided in this context by the long-term sectoral development strategies as set out in Food Wise 2025 and I am confident that these initiatives, in conjunction with the Rural Development Programme, will lead to continued growth in terms of profitability and efficiency of the sector as whole. The primary determinant of prices in any

market is the relationship between supply and demand. As with any Minister for Agriculture in the EU, I can have no role in beef prices in Ireland.

It is a clear objective of mine to ensure that this sector continues to receive the necessary support to address the challenge of profitability within the sector. In addition to the Basic Payment Scheme, a range of measures introduced under the Rural Development Programme helps to improve efficiency and profitability on farm and to support environmentally sustainable production. This includes programmes such as TAMS, GLAS, Knowledge Transfer Groups and of course the Beef Data and Genomics Programme.

Brexit Issues

163. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which he and his Department expect to be in a position to pursue and secure new markets for Irish exports, with particular reference to the challenges arising from Brexit; if he expects to utilise a multifaceted approach in this endeavour regardless of deadlines associated with Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32482/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Irish food and drink is sold in more than 175 markets worldwide. The value of these exports increased to €10.8 billion last year, which represented a 3% increase on 2015.

The pursuit and development of new markets for Irish agri-food exports is of course an ongoing and central component of the strategic development of the agri-food sector, as evidenced by its placement right at the centre of Food Wise 2025, the industry's strategy for development over the coming decade. Indeed, this is all the more relevant after the UK's decision to leave the EU, which presents significant new challenges for the agri-food sector in particular.

Food Wise 2025 outlines the huge potential for growth in agri-food exports to new and emerging markets, particularly in Asia, Africa and the Gulf region. This is where our efforts will be focused for the foreseeable future, particularly given the need to diversify our markets and to reduce our reliance on traditional destinations such as the UK.

I am following up on this in a very real and practical way through my participation in an ambitious Trade Mission agenda, which is being rolled out in co-operation with Bord Bia and Enterprise Ireland. For example, I led a very successful Trade Mission to China and Singapore in early September, at around the same time that my colleague, Minister of State Andrew Doyle, was leading another very successful mission to Vietnam and Korea. I will also be visiting Algeria and Morocco next week at the head of another very strong Trade Mission, and this will be followed by a visit to the Gulf region at the end of November. It is also my intention to continue this activity through further strategically targeted visits in 2017, and I am of course also ready to respond as appropriate to other opportunities that may arise.

Food Labelling

164. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the numbers of checks in respect of traceability that are made to ensure all food products in the market originating here or elsewhere comply with national and-or EU standards; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32483/16]

165. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine

the extent to which food labelling checks and inspections continue in order to verify compliance with Irish and EU standards; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32484/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 164 and 165 together.

I attach great importance to the food and drink industries exports and their contribution to our economic recovery. Agri food exports account for 7% of GDP and continue to grow year on year.

My colleague, the Minister for Health, has overall responsibility for the general food labelling legislation and new EU food information regulations which were adopted by the Council of Health Ministers in December 2011. However, my Department plays a vital role in the enforcement of this legislation under service contract to the Food Safety Authority of Ireland. Currently my Department has assisted our colleagues in the Department of Health on the drafting of a new Statutory Instrument to bring the labelling of loose pigmeat and poultry into line with the origin labelling rules for packaged meat brought in on April the first 2015. This requires businesses who sell meat loose in their premises to clearly identify the country of rearing and slaughter of the animal from which the meat is derived. The draft SI has been finalised and my Department has placed it on the Technical Regulation Information System for notification to all EU Member States and following on from the obligatory three month standstill period I would be confident that the Minister for Health will be in a position to sign the SI, thereby bringing it into force.

Primary responsibility under EU law for the safety and traceability of food placed on the market lies with food business operators. The role of National Competent Agencies is to verify compliance with this requirement. This is done via a combination of inspecting establishments and auditing the food safety management systems which operators have in place. These controls are applied at different stages in the food supply chain. Regulation (EC) No. 178 of 2002 sets out the general principles and requirements of EU food law and stipulates that food business operators must, at all stages of production, processing and distribution within their business, ensure food law requirements are satisfied. In regard to traceability, the regulations require that food business operators have what is referred to as the 'one step forward, one step backward' traceability system. There are additional requirements for certain fishery and aquaculture products under the Control Regulation (Regulation 1224/2009 and Implementing Regulation 404/2011) from first sale to subsequent stages of production, processing and distribution up to retail.

My Department has a permanent veterinary presence at all its approved slaughter plants. Controls at plants only engaged in secondary processing are carried out at a frequency based on an annual risk assessment. An annual audit of imported products is carried out in each Department-approved plant, including checks on physical identity, labelling and documentary checks for product originating in EU Member States and third countries. Labelling and documentary checks are routinely conducted by the Department.

The import of products of animal origin from third countries is governed by a comprehensive and robust legislative framework laid down at EU level, controlled by Member States in the first instance, and audited by the European Commission's Directorate General for Health and Food Safety (formally the FVO), to ensure compliance with all of the relevant food safety standards. The legislation imposes health and supervisory requirements designed to ensure that imported products meet standards equivalent to those required for production and trade between Member States. Border Inspection Posts are operated by my Department. Import control procedures on products of animal and fish origin are highly prescriptive and strictly audited by

the Directorate to ensure compliance. Inspection finding reports are published on the Directorate General for Health and Food Safety's website.

Brexit Issues

166. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which employment throughout the food industry remains positive notwithstanding the potential of Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32485/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Ireland's agri-food sector is one of our most important indigenous sectors. Employment figures in 2015 show that it accounted for 8.4% of total employment, or up to 166,000 people in 2015. In the context of Brexit, it is important to maintain this important sector to ensure that it continues to grow strongly in overall economic terms.

We have seen that the most immediate impact for our agri-food sector as a result of Brexit has arisen from changes to Euro-Sterling exchange rates, and that the mushroom sector has been particularly affected. A number of actions are being taken to try to mitigate these immediate impacts.

Both Bord Bia and Enterprise Ireland have been providing practical guidance to SMEs. Bord Bia recently announced a number of measures, covering areas such as managing volatility impacts, providing consumer and market insight, deepening customer engagement and extending market reach, which are aimed at helping companies to maintain their competitiveness. Similar support is being provided by Enterprise Ireland through their 5 point plan for exporters to the UK.

In addition, I announced a number of measures in Budget 2017 that will financially underpin my Department's Brexit mitigation efforts through strategic investment in key areas of the Department, its agencies and in the agri-food sector. In particular, funding for capital investments in the commercial horticulture sector has been increased to €5 million in 2017. The horticulture, livestock and tillage sectors, will also have access to the €150m low interest cash flow support loan fund, providing access to highly flexible loans for up to six years, for amounts up to €150,000, at an interest rate of 2.95%.

I am keeping the situation under review, including through discussions with the recently-established Consultative Committee on Brexit. This Committee met for the second time last week, and will continue to facilitate an ongoing exchange of dialogue with my Department as the situation in relation to Brexit unfolds.

Fishing Industry Development

167. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans for the future development and expansion of the fishing industry, with particular reference to fishing families who remain dependent on the sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32486/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Food Wise 2025 recognises that in common with the broader food sector, the seafood industry will benefit from the projected increasing global demand for food produce over the coming decade. Current FAO estimates are that world consumption of fish will grow by an average annual consumption

of 17 kg per person, per annum, resulting in a requirement for an extra 40 million tonnes of seafood by 2030. Seafood will also benefit from the shift in global economic gravity towards the East, where there is a strong cultural preference for seafood.

To avail of this opportunity, Food Wise identifies 6 areas where we need to focus our efforts in the years ahead. We must put sustainability at the heart of everything we do, add value to our raw material, develop scale in our processing sector, upskill our seafood workforce, increase our raw material supply and develop our markets.

In January this year, my predecessor Minister Coveney launched Ireland's new €240 million Operational Programme under the European maritime and Fisheries Fund. This new investment programme will be the source of very significant investment supports for the seafood sector for the period up to 2020. The Programme represents a doubling of previous support levels.

The Programme aims to support the seafood industry in meeting the challenges of the CFP and in sustainably growing production, value and employment in the seafood industry. The Programme will focus on the same 6 areas identified in Food Wise and will be instrumental in our efforts to develop and adapt our seafood industry to take advantage of the economic and employment opportunities to come.

The Programme is providing some €67 million for our fishing sector, €30 million for our aquaculture sector and €30 million for our seafood processing sector. A further €12 million is being made available to significantly grow the Fisheries Local Action Group initiative to foster economic activity in fishing communities and some €10 million is available for blue growth and marine spatial planning initiatives.

The majority of support schemes under the Programme are already underway in 2016, with a small number to follow in early 2017. I expect that in the region of €20 million will be invested under the Programme in 2016 and I have secured a significant increase to €43 million in 2017.

Question No. 168 answered with Question No. 162.

Harbours and Piers Maintenance

169. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the amount of money allocated in the budget to Balbriggan Harbour; the nature of the work to be carried out; the timescale for this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32500/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Balbriggan Harbour is owned by Fingal County Council and responsibility for the maintenance and development of the harbour rests with that Local Authority in the first instance and its parent Department, the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government thereafter. I am unaware of the budgets set aside by those bodies for Balbriggan Harbour.

However, under the annual Fishery Harbour & Coastal Infrastructure Development Programme, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine has in previous years provided funding to assist Local Authorities for small scale development and repair of Local Authority owned harbours, piers and slipways, subject to available Exchequer funding and overall national priorities.

On 13th January 2016, Local Authorities were invited to submit applications under the 2016 Fishery Harbour and Coastal Infrastructure Development Programme. I can confirm that no

application for funding for Balbriggan Harbour was received from Fingal County Council in 2016.

Any application that might be submitted by Fingal County Council in respect of Balbriggan Harbour under future programmes will be considered in the context of available funding and overall priorities.

I trust that this clarifies the position.

GLAS Applications

170. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his Department has approved a GLAS application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Galway; if so, the commencement date of this GLAS plan; when the first payment is due to be paid; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32501/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named was unable to submit an application for the second tranche of GLAS due to an issue with the designation of a parcel as a natura parcel. My Department has and is continuing to review this case with a view to the person named being able to submit a complete application for GLAS 2. GLAS officials will contact the person named when the issue is resolved to allow an application to be submitted.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

171. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to roll out high-speed broadband from Blennerville to Camp, County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32406/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to deliver high speed services to every city, town, village and individual premises in Ireland. The Programme for Government commits to the delivery of the NBP as a matter of priority. This is being achieved through a combination of commercial investment by the telecommunications sector and a State intervention in those areas where commercial investment has not been fully demonstrated. The Programme for a Partnership Government commits to the delivery of the NBP as a matter of priority. The formal procurement process for the State Intervention commenced in December 2015.

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 Kerry.

The map shows that 44% of Blennerville in the townland of Curragraigue (Trughanacmy) falls within the AMBER area and that the areas between the town of Blennerville and Camp in

County Kerry falls largely within the AMBER area and will therefore be included in the State intervention procurement process.

The townland of Camp together with the remaining 56% of Blennerville in the townland of Curraghraigue (Trughanacmy) is included in the BLUE area where commercial providers are either currently delivering or previously indicated that they have plans to deliver high speed broadband services. Individuals can check whether their premises is in a BLUE or an AMBER area by scrolling through the map online or entering their Eircode.

While I cannot compel any operator to provide services to a particular premises, my Department continues to actively monitor the deployment plans in the BLUE area and direct feedback from consumers is important. In this regard, if customers in Camp or Blennerville cannot access high speed broadband services, I would encourage them to contact my Department directly at broadband@dcenr.gov.ie, quoting their address and Eircode, and giving details of providers they have contacted with a view to obtaining services.

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 in the State Intervention Area comprising over 750,000 premises in Ireland including over 51,000 premises in County Kerry 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.

Earlier this year, before I came into office, the Department announced that it would be June 2017 before contract(s) were awarded under the NBP. The bidders in the process have recently indicated that they may need more time to conclude the procurement process. The timing of each stage of the procurement continues to be dependent on a range of factors including the complexities that may be encountered by the procurement team, and bidders, during the procurement process. Bidders need adequate time to prepare detailed proposals and their final formal bids and get the relevant shareholder and funding approvals at key stages of the process. It is also important to ensure that risks in this multi-million euro procurement are carefully managed. I do not propose to comment any further at this juncture, given that discussions are ongoing in the procurement process. I can assure the Deputy, however, that 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. The Government considers the NBP to be one of the most significant investments in rural Ireland for decades, and one which will transform society, akin to rural electrification in the last century.

During the Department's extensive stakeholder consultations in 2015, telecommunications service providers indicated that it could take 3-5 years to rollout a network of the scale envisaged under the NBP. It is however open to bidder(s) to suggest more aggressive timescales as part of their bids.

As part of the competitive process, the Department will engage with winning bidder(s) on the best rollout strategy, in order to target areas of particularly poor service, business needs and/or high demand. This will need to be balanced with the most efficient network rollout plan. A prioritisation programme will be put in place in this regard, in consultation with the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. A detailed rollout plan for the network will be published once contract(s) are in place.

The Programme for Government also commits to measures to assist in the rollout of the network once a contract is awarded. In this regard, Minister Humphreys is leading on the establishment of two regional action groups, working with Local Authorities, Local Enterprise Offices and other relevant agencies to help accelerate the broadband network build in rural

Ireland, once a contract(s) has been awarded.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

172. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to provide better broadband and better broadband coverage in Drumeena, Redhills, County Cavan; the timeframe set out for these works; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32421/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to deliver high speed services to every city, town, village and individual premises in Ireland. The Programme for 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 formal procurement process for the State Intervention commenced in December 2015.

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 maps shows that the 50% of the townland of Redhill Demesne, Co Cavan falls within the BLUE area where commercial providers are either currently delivering or previously indicated that they have plans to deliver high speed broadband services. The remaining 50% of Redhill and the townland Drumeena Co Cavan falls completely within the AMBER area.

While I cannot compel any operator to provide services to a particular premises, my Department continues to actively monitor the deployment plans in the BLUE area and direct feedback from consumers is important. In this regard, if customers in Redhill cannot access high speed broadband services, I would encourage them to contact my Department directly at broadband@dccnr.gov.ie, quoting their address and Eircode, and giving details of providers they have contacted with a view to obtaining services.

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 in the State Intervention Area comprising over 750,000 premises in Ireland including over 24,000 premises in County Cavan, 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.

Earlier this year, before I came into office, the Department announced that it would be June 2017 before contract(s) were awarded under the NBP. The bidders in the process have recently indicated that they may need more time to conclude the procurement process. The timing of each stage of the procurement continues to be dependent on a range of factors including the complexities that may be encountered by the procurement team, and bidders, during the procurement process. Bidders need adequate time to prepare detailed proposals and their final formal bids and get the relevant shareholder and funding approvals at key stages of the process. It is also important to ensure that risks in this multi-million euro procurement are carefully

managed. I do not propose to comment any further at this juncture, given that discussions are ongoing in the procurement process. I can assure the Deputy however, that 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. The Government considers the NBP to be one of the most significant investments in rural Ireland for decades, and one which will transform society, akin to rural electrification in the last century.

During the Department's extensive stakeholder consultations in 2015, telecommunications service providers indicated that it could take 3-5 years to rollout a network of the scale envisaged under the NBP. It is however open to bidder(s) to suggest more aggressive timescales as part of their bids.

As part of the competitive process, the Department will engage with winning bidder(s) on the best rollout strategy, in order to target areas of particularly poor service, business needs and/or high demand. This will need to be balanced with the most efficient network rollout plan. A prioritisation programme will be put in place in this regard, in consultation with the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. A detailed rollout plan for the network will be published once contract(s) are in place.

The Programme for Government also commits to measures to assist in the rollout of the network once a contract is awarded. In this regard, Minister Humphreys is leading on the establishment of two regional action groups, working with Local Authorities, Local Enterprise Offices and other relevant agencies to help accelerate the broadband network build in rural Ireland, once a contract(s) has been awarded.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

173. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the grants or assistance available to help small rural businesses in counties Cavan or Monaghan avail of higher-speed broadband connections to make running a business from home a reality. [32422/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The National Broadband Plan (NBP) represents a very significant capital investment project for the State and aims to deliver high speed services to every city, town, village and individual premises in Ireland. This is being achieved through a combination of commercial investment by the telecommunications sector and a State intervention in those areas where commercial investment has not been fully demonstrated. The Programme for a Partnership Government commits to the delivery of the NBP as a matter of priority.

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@dccnr.gov.ie.

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. Intensive dialogue with bidders is continuing and the three bidders have indicated that they are proposing a predominantly fibre-to-the-home solution. 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.

Separately, my Department's Trading Online Voucher Scheme is specifically designed to support small and micro enterprises to trade online. Small businesses that remain offline are missing out on a huge opportunity to capture some of the €14,000 worth of business transacted online every minute, up to 70% of which goes overseas.

The scheme is administered by the national network of 31 Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) and offers financial assistance of up to €2,500 (subject to match funding), along with expert training and advice. Over 2,600 small businesses including 30 businesses in County Cavan and 42 businesses in County Monaghan have, to date, successfully applied for a trading online voucher. The scheme is activating small businesses and sole traders from across a wide range of sectors including, retail, manufacturing, professional services, food as well as arts, crafts and design.

In May this year, I published an evaluation of the enterprise impacts of the scheme which shows that it is helping small businesses to grow on average by 21%, increase employment by 35%, and 60% export for the first time. Digital trade is contributing to sustainable regional economic development, with both urban and rural based businesses benefitting equally from the online opportunity.

Rollout of vouchers continues nationwide and further details relating to the scheme can be found on my Department's website at www.dccae.gov.ie/tradingonlinevoucher and on the website of individual Local Enterprise Offices at www.localenterprise.ie.

Climate Change Policy

174. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the way he will ensure the national climate dialogue complies with the requirements of the Aarhus Convention. [32494/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The commitment contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government to establish a national dialogue on climate change builds on the Energy White Paper commitment for the establishment of a National Energy Forum which would invite a wide range of stakeholders to consider evidence-based inputs and maximise consensus on broad energy policy measures. The national dialogue will encompass the role set out for the National Energy Forum but with a wider focus to include examination of key issues that need to be addressed in our long-term transition to a low carbon and climate resilient economy. Options are being assessed as to how best to optimise the processes which will underpin the functioning of the National Dialogue, including with regard to the requirements of the Aarhus convention.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

175. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his Department's prediction in relation to the amount by which Ireland will miss its 2020 EU emissions targets; and, apart from budget 2017, the policy changes being explored to reduce the likely overshoot. [32495/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): For each year between 2013 and 2020, Ireland has a greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reduction target under the 2009 Effort Sharing Decision (ESD) No. 406/2009/EC. For the year 2020 itself, the target set for Ireland is that emissions should be 20% below their value in 2005. This is jointly the most demanding 2020 reduction target allocated under the ESD and one shared only by Denmark and Luxembourg. The 2013 target is based on the average of emissions for the years 2008-2010. The target for each of the years 2014 through 2019 is on a straight-line trajectory between the targets for 2013 and 2020, and surpluses in one year can be used to cover deficits in any subsequent year. The average incidence of these targets is a 12% reduction relative to 2005.

Regarding my Department's prediction as to the amount by which Ireland will miss its 2020 EU emissions target, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) are the appropriate body to provide this detail. In this context, in March 2016, the EPA published projected emissions for 2020 which indicate that Ireland's emissions at that stage could be in the range of 6-11% below 2005 levels. On a cumulative basis over the period 2013-2020, Ireland is projected to have a deficit of between 3 and 12 Megatonnes Carbon Dioxide Equivalent (MtCO_{2e}).

The extent of this challenge to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, in line with our EU and international commitments, is well understood by the Government, as reflected in the National Policy Position on Climate Action and Low Carbon Development, published in April 2014, and now underpinned by the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act, 2015 which was enacted in December 2015. The National Policy Position provides a high-level policy direction for the adoption and implementation by Government of plans to enable the State to move to a low-carbon economy by 2050. Statutory authority for the plans is set out in the Act.

In accordance with Section 4 of the Act, and in line with responsibilities assigned to me as Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, I intend to make a draft National Mitigation Plan available for public consultation by the end of the year followed by submission of a final plan to Government for approval by June 2017. Work is well underway on the development of the National Mitigation Plan, the primary objective of which will be to track implementation of measures already underway and identify additional measures in the longer term to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and progress the overall national low carbon transition agenda to 2050. The first iteration of the National Mitigation Plan will place particular focus on putting the necessary measures in place to address the challenge to 2020 but also in terms of planning ahead to ensure that appropriate policies and measures will be in place beyond that.

The ultimate objective of successive National Mitigation Plans is to incrementally achieve the long-term vision of low carbon transition, set out in the National Policy Position, by 2050. In that context, the National Mitigation Plan will have regard to Ireland's obligations under the current 2009 Effort Sharing Decision, the Paris Agreement and any likely future EU and international obligations that may arise, including new national targets to be agreed under the 2030 climate and energy package.

Renewable Energy Generation

176. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and

Environment the efforts being made in relation to bringing to an end the burning of coal and oil and the use of natural gas in our electricity generations stations. [32496/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Energy White Paper, Ireland's Transition to a Low Carbon Energy Future 2015-2030, sets out a long-term vision to guide Irish energy policy and actions to be taken in the energy sector from now until 2030, in order to transform Ireland into a low carbon society and economy by 2050 and reduce our fossil fuel dependency. In 2015, the contribution of coal, natural gas and oil to gross electricity generation stood at 16.9%, 43% and 1.4% respectively. The Energy Policy Paper recognises that key decisions on the future of Moneypoint will have to be taken before 2020 as the station comes to the end of its operating life in its current configuration in 2025.

The Programme for Government commits to reducing import dependency while maintaining energy security, affordability and reducing energy-related emissions. As part of the work being done by my Department, a Working Group has been established to look at the overall fuel mix in the energy sector, including the role of coal and possible replacement fuels, and the role Moneypoint plays in relation to the operation and stability of the electricity grid.

The EU Renewable Energy Directive set Ireland a legally binding target of meeting 16% of our energy demand from renewable sources by 2020. Ireland is committed to achieving this target through meeting 40% of electricity demand, 12% of heat and 10% of transport from renewable energy sources, with the latter target also being legally binding.

The Government has a range of policy measures and schemes to incentivise the use of renewable energy and although good progress towards the target has been made to date, meeting the 16% target remains challenging. In 2015, the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) has estimated that 25.3% of electricity was generated by renewable sources, of which 22.8% was generated by onshore wind.

Analysis by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland show that 9.1% of Ireland's overall energy requirements in 2015 were met from renewable sources and that this avoided €286 million of fossil fuel imports.

Sports Capital Programme

177. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when sports capital funding will be made available in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32367/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): The Sports Capital Programme (SCP) is the Government's primary vehicle to support the development of sports facilities and the purchase of sports equipment. The most recent rounds of the programme were in 2012, 2014 and 2015.

As was confirmed in the 2017 Estimates Statement, a new round of the Sports Capital Programme will be open for applications in the near future with the announcement of allocations expected in 2017. I expect to announce more details in this regard shortly.

Noise Pollution

178. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the posi-

tion regarding making the IAA the regulatory authority over noise levels at Dublin Airport; the resources his Department would allocated to the IAA to allow it to effectively carry out this function; the measures which would be implemented to allow the IAA to effectively penalise the DAA for any breaches of noise regulations; his views on whether the IAA will be able to effectively monitor noise levels at Dublin Airport, ensure compliance, and protect local residents from undue and unacceptable levels of noise pollution the airport and its activities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32384/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): In accordance with EU Regulation 598/2014 establishing rules and procedures with regard to the introduction of noise-related operating restrictions at EU airports, it is required of all EU Member States to designate a Competent Authority to carry out specific functions prescribed in the Regulations. As the Deputy will be aware from my announcement on the 22nd of September, 2016, I am designating the Irish Aviation Authority (IAA) as the Competent Authority in Ireland to carry out those functions.

The new regulatory arrangements for airport noise management in Ireland will be given statutory effect by way of a Statutory Instrument. Officials in my Department are currently engaged with the Office of the Attorney General to settle the precise details of the transposition of this EU Regulation. It is envisaged that resourcing and compliance issues will be addressed in the Statutory Instrument, which it is aimed to complete by the end of this year.

I am satisfied that the arrangements for the new airport noise regulatory regime announced on 22 September last offers the best option for effective implementation of EU Regulation 598/2014 and that the IAA, in its capacity as Competent Authority, will take due account of the interests of local residents. I am also meeting groups of residents to take account of their interests.

Airport Development Projects

179. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to develop a second runway at Dublin Airport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32385/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy will be aware, the daa has statutory responsibility to manage, operate and develop Dublin Airport. In April 2016 daa announced plans to proceed with a second parallel runway; the North Runway project, with the intention of having the runway operational by the end of 2020.

I have welcomed daa's decision to develop this critical piece of airport infrastructure, which will ensure Ireland's International connectivity into the future.

As the development of the North Runway is a matter for the daa, I have forwarded your question to them for their attention and direct reply to you. If you do not hear from the daa within 10 working days, please inform my private office.

Sports Facilities Expenditure

180. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide the necessary funding and operating costs to maintain the current phase one development at the National Sports Campus; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32398/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): Phase 1 of the National Indoor Arena, which is being developed at the National Sports Campus, is scheduled for completion in December 2016. Phase 1 comprises the development of a National Indoor Athletics Training Centre, a National Indoor Training Centre (which will accommodate numerous sports) and a National Gymnastics Training Centre. The facility is scheduled to be in use from January 2017. My Department is currently engaging with Sport Ireland on the allocation of its budget for 2017.

Sports Facilities Expenditure

181. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide the necessary funding to support the roll-out of phase two of the National Sports Campus; if he will provide a timeline for its completion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32399/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport' Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): Similar to many other proposals for capital expenditure' the Estimates process for 2017 did not allocate funding for phase 2 of the National Indoor Arena (NIA). However' Phase 2 of the NIA is a significant and worthy project and will be considered for funding in the context of the Mid Term Review of the Capital Plan as announced in the Budget.

Consumer Protection

182. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to have discussions with sporting organisations in regard to ticket touting and the practice of selling tickets above cost price; his views on whether legislation to address this issue is necessary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32428/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport' Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): Legislation concerning the sale of tickets is primarily a matter for my colleague the Minister for Jobs' Enterprise and Innovation. Nevertheless' I am aware of the public concern about the secondary sale of tickets for major entertainment and sporting events. The issues around ticket resale are not straightforward and it is important that any possible legislative or other response would be based on a thorough examination of the secondary ticket market and its relationship to the primary ticket market. In conjunction with the Minister for Jobs' Enterprise and Innovation' I am currently considering how best such an examination could be undertaken with a view to identifying any measures that would secure fairer access to tickets for consumers.

Traffic Fines

183. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will examine the circumstances whereby a person (details supplied) was deemed to be the liable person for a fixed-charge notice issued on 1 August 2016 notwithstanding the fact they sold their car to a garage on 18 March 2016 and the vehicle was subsequently resold to a third party who committed the alleged offence; if the matter can be rectified, with particular reference to the principle of natural justice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32507/16]

Minister for Transport' Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Change of vehicle

ownership notifications are recorded on the National Vehicle and Driver File (NVDF) at my Departments office in Shannon' Co. Clare.

According to records on the NVDF' on the date of the offence' 1 August 2016' Ms. Lawlor was the registered owner of the vehicle in question' and hence she received the Fixed Charge Notice. Subsequent to this' the Department received notifications of change of vehicle ownership for the said vehicle.

On review of these notifications' and the correspondence sequence' there appears some doubt as to the owner of the vehicle at the time of the offence' so accordingly the matter has been referred back to An Garda Síochána's Fixed Charge Processing Office in Thurles for investigation.

Rail Services Provision

184. **Deputy Colm Brophy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he requested the National Transport Authority and Irish Rail to fund a project (details supplied) as part of their increased allocation for 2017. [32508/16]

Minister for Transport' Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The position regarding the opening of Kishogue Station will be reviewed by the National Transport Authority following the opening of the Phoenix Park Tunnel to passenger services' when service and usage patterns have bedded down.

Works to upgrade the Phoenix Park Tunnel to facilitate train services running from the Kildare line into Connolly' Tara' Pearse and Grand Canal Dock Stations are largely complete. It is expected that commuter rail services will begin using the Tunnel before the end of 2016. The actual service commencement date is a matter for discussion and agreement between the NTA and Iarnród Éireann.

Employment Rights

185. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation her views on whether taxi drivers or hackneys using taxi hailing apps (details supplied) could be considered as workers of these companies under employment law; if her Department has undertaken any reviews of the employment status of taxi drivers using these apps; and the outcome of these reviews. [32350/16]

186. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation her views on the employment status of delivery riders who are contracted by a delivery service (details supplied); and if these workers are considered self-employed or as employed by the company under Irish employment law. [32351/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Jobs' Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen): I propose to take Questions Nos. 185 and 186 together.

It would not be appropriate for me to make a determination regarding the employment status of any individuals or groups as there is an existing mechanism in place for making such determinations.

Ireland's labour inspectorate' now forms part of the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC). Where an issue arises in relation to the employment status of an individual cases are

forwarded to the Revenue Commissioners and/or the Scope Section of the Department of Social Protection for investigation either solely by the recipient' or jointly with the WRC.

In most cases it will be clear whether an individual is employed or self-employed. Where there is doubt in relation to the employment status of an individual the relevant Departments and Agencies will have regard to the Code of Practice for Determining Employment or Self-Employment Status of Individuals. This Code was drawn up and agreed in 2007 by the relevant Government Departments with ICTU and IBEC.

Where an individual believes they are being deprived of employment rights applicable to employees they may refer a complaint to the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) where the matter can be dealt with by way of mediation or adjudication leading to a decision that is enforceable through the District Court. WRC inspectors can also be asked to investigate certain breaches. Complaints can be made on a single complaint form available at the WRC's website www.workplacerelations.ie. The WRC's Customer Service Section' which provides information to both employers and employees in relation to employment' equality and industrial relations rights and obligations' can be contacted at Lo-call: 1890 80 80 90 or 059-9178990.

Consumer Protection

187. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to make ticket touting illegal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32427/16]

Minister for Jobs' Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): I am aware of the public concern about the secondary sale of tickets for entertainment and sporting events. The issues around ticket resale are not straightforward and it is important that any possible legislative or other response is based on a thorough examination of the secondary ticket market and its relationship to the primary ticket market. I am currently considering in conjunction with the Minister of State for Transport' Tourism and Sport how best such an examination can be undertaken with a view to identifying measures aimed at securing fairer access to tickets for consumers.

Work Permits Applications Data

188. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of employment permit applications received by the employment permits section per month and annually; the number of permit applications refused; the number of those refused which go on to appeal; the number of appeals that result in the original decision being overturned; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32431/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Jobs' Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen): My Department's Employment Permits Section administers the Employment Permits system' the broad purpose of which is to supplement Ireland's skills supply by allowing enterprise to recruit non-EEA nationals where those nationals have specific skills or expertise which cannot be sourced within the EEA and where such recruitment may benefit the State's economic sector or social development. In line with employment permit policy' employment opportunities which arise in Ireland should' in the first instance' be offered to suitably skilled Irish and other EEA nationals' and should only be offered to non-EEA nationals where no suitable candidate emerges from within the EEA to fill the vacancy.

All employment permits are processed in line with the Employment Permits Act 2006' as

amended which sets out in legislation the procedures to be applied in the application' grant' refusal and appeal of an employment permit.

I set out hereunder the figures as requested by the Deputy for the years 2014' 2015 and to end September 2016.

2014	Applications Received	Issued	Refused	Appeals Received	Appeals Granted
Jan	412	449	81	31	7
Feb	379	302	55	28	12
Mar	416	353	72	15	14
Apr	456	313	56	16	12
May	710	384	40	18	8
Jun	683	589	51	24	7
Jul	749	888	85	25	32
Aug	529	493	16	24	9
Sep	610	819	26	27	23
Oct	318	7	3	0	0
Nov	568	339	43	15	1
Dec	483	556	60	27	9
Total	6313	5492	588	250	134
2015	Applications Received	Issued	Refused	Appeals Received	Appeals Granted
Jan	635	481	64	22	5
Feb	498	371	61	36	13
Mar	636	472	63	22	19
Apr	636	770	71	23	10
May	809	534	48	32	4
Jun	943	822	36	21	9
Jul	922	692	56	26	5
Aug	710	291	44	26	4
Sep	620	742	118	28	10
Oct	811	918	134	72	18
Nov	987	738	139	45	23
Dec	814	434	72	64	11
Total	9021	7265	906	417	131
2016	Applications Received	Issued	Refused	Appeals Received	Appeals Granted
Jan	799	492	79	31	17
Feb	680	896	111	41	32
Mar	778	773	126	58	32
Apr	957	851	188	64	33
May	1298	850	134	94	42
Jun	1245	1020	159	74	27
Jul	960	1081	138	50	33
Aug	934	1100	273	72	22

2016	Applications Received	Issued	Refused	Appeals Received	Appeals Granted
Sep	820	386	126	80	12
Total	8471	7449	1334	564	250

Local Enterprise Offices

189. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation her views on the case of a person (details supplied) who sought information from the enterprise board; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32504/16]

Minister for Jobs' Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The State support bodies within the remit of my Department' which provide assistance to micro and small businesses in County Kerry are Enterprise Ireland and the Local Enterprise Office (LEO). Kerry County Enterprise Board was legally dissolved on 14th April 2014 and the LEO Kerry was established on the same day.

The LEOs are the 'first-stop-shop' for providing advice and guidance' financial assistance and other supports to those wishing to start or grow their own business. Soft supports in the form of training and mentoring can also be provided to anyone wishing to start or expand their business. The LEOs also provide a 'signposting' service in relation to all relevant state supports available through agencies such as Revenue' Credit Review Office and Microfinance Ireland. The LEOs can also offer advice and guidance in areas such as Local Authority rates' Public Procurement and other regulations affecting business.

Both Enterprise Ireland and LEO Kerry have confirmed that they have had no contact with the person in question or his company. As Kerry County Enterprise Board has not traded since its dissolution in April 2014' the Head of Enterprise in LEO Kerry has suggested that the person in question may have been in contact with one of the Local Development Companies which provides assistance under the LEADER programme which is now within the remit of the Department of Arts' Heritage' Regional' Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.

If the person in question wishes to contact the LEO Kerry for assistance' the Head of Enterprise will be happy to engage with him directly. Contact details: LEO Kerry' County Buildings' Rathass' Tralee 066 7183522 tomas.hayes@leo.kerrycoco.ie.

School Attendance Data

190. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of students reported to be missing school due to truancy from 2011 to 2016 in the Dublin mid-west area, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32368/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla' the Child and Family Agency' under the remit of my Department' has a statutory responsibility to ensure each child attends a recognised school or otherwise receives a certain minimum education. The education welfare services of Tusla' comprising the statutory Education Welfare Service' the School Completion Programme and the Home School Community Liaison scheme are key supports for children who are vulnerable to early school leaving and educational disadvantage.

As required by Statute' schools must report to Tusla on any student missing for more than twenty days. Schools are required to report on the following categories of absence: illness' ur-

gent/family reasons' suspension' expulsion' transfer' other and unexplained. Statistics regarding the analysis of school attendance data are published on the Tusla website.

Tusla has advised me that it does not collect data on truancy.

Child and Family Agency Data

191. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of cases awaiting allocation to a social worker in each Tusla local office area, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32362/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I have been informed by Tusla' the Child and Family Agency' that in August 2016 there were 20'797 children (open cases) who had an allocated social worker. This work involves dealing with issues of assessment' child protection' and children in care. There were a further 4'727 children (open cases) who had been assessed as needing a dedicated social worker' and were waiting for one to be allocated. Some of these cases may have had an allocated social worker. However' maternity leave' sick leave and movement of staff within the service can result in a case being unallocated for a short period of time. I wish to assure the Deputy that all urgent and emergency cases are dealt with immediately. This could involve' for example' cases of abandonment' allegations of physical and sexual abuse' parental ill health and the need to find an immediate placement' or threat to the safety or life of a child by a third party.

Tusla is currently implementing a three-year development plan which includes provision for extra staffing to meet critical service concerns such as addressing children with no allocated social worker. The Government has provided significant additional resources to Tusla' and the Agency have been instructed to expedite the recruitment of staff to address such capacity concerns. During 2016' Tusla has been active in developing its capacity to recruit and retain staff across its multi-disciplinary organisation and this will continue throughout 2017 with a particular focus on areas of highest need.

This Department continues to monitor the number of cases that are reported as awaiting the allocation of a social worker. The additional funding of €37 million which has been secured for Tusla in 2017 will provide increased resources to meet identified risks and service demands. The information requested by the Deputy relating to each local area is detailed in the table.

Number of Open Cases by Allocation Status and Area

Area	No. of Open Cases	No. of Open Cases without an All. Social Worker	% of Open Cases without an All. Social Worker
Dublin South Central	1'179	180	15%
Dublin South East Wicklow	1'032	71	7%
Dublin South West Kildare West Wick- low	1'616	599	37%
The Midlands	1'640	542	33%
Dublin City North	1'850	316	17%
Dublin North	2'916	600	21%
Louth Meath	1'336	236	18%

Area	No. of Open Cases	No. of Open Cases without an All. Social Worker	% of Open Cases without an All. Social Worker
Cavan Monaghan	714	221	31%
Cork	4'821	750	16%
Kerry	505	34	7%
Carlow Kilkenny South Tipperary	1'162	254	22%
Waterford Wexford	1'609	261	16%
The Midwest	1'598	273	17%
Galway Roscommon	1'749	267	15%
Mayo	567	0	0%
Donegal	789	45	6%
Sligo Leitrim West Cavan	441	78	18%
NATIONAL	25'524	4'727	19%

Early Childhood Care and Education Programmes

192. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the cost of providing a third free early childhood care year; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32363/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The costs of the measures described are heavily dependent on uptake - it is estimated that 'at present' 10% of children under three are in formal childcare. To cater for an expansion of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme would require significant capital investment to increase the capacity of the childcare sector. In addition' this is likely to require an enormous volume of additional qualified staff.

Currently the ECCE Programme is available for children from the age of three until they attend primary school' provided they are no older than five years and six months by the end of the pre-school year' (ie. end of June). As all children must be in primary school by the age of six it would be impractical to extend the ECCE Programme beyond the current cut off point of five years and six months. Therefore' if ECCE were to be provided for a third year the programme would need to be extended to children from the age of two. The cost of childcare for children aged between one year of age' and two years of age is considerably higher than for children participating in ECCE' as a significantly higher ratio of staff to children is required (11:1 for current ECCE-age children' 5:1 for children between the ages of one and two-and-a-half in a sessional pre-school service).

Given the complexities described above it is not possible to provide an accurate estimate of cost. The Department is currently in the process of procuring an independent review of the cost of care' following which the data required to enable an answer to this question may be available.

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

193. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to ratify the optional protocol to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child on

the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32436/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department has a co-ordinating responsibility for the implementation of the Convention and its related Protocols. My Department is fully committed to 'and actively working towards' ratification of the Second Optional Protocol at the earliest possible date.

Ratification of the Protocol is pending to ensure that all arrangements are in place to fully comply with the related obligations. The substantive criminal law elements of the Optional Protocol have largely been implemented by the Child Trafficking and Pornography Act 1998 and the Criminal Law (Human Trafficking) Act 2008. Notification of Ireland's transposition of the EU Directive on Preventing and Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings and Protecting its Victims was forwarded in July 2013. The necessary legislation is contained in the Criminal Law (Human Trafficking) (Amendment) Act 2013.

On 23rd September 2015' the Minister for Justice and Equality published the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Bill 2015. The Bill is currently being considered by Dáil Éireann. It includes wide ranging provisions to enhance the protection of children and vulnerable persons from sexual abuse and exploitation.

When enacted' the Bill will comply with the criminal law provisions of a number of international legal instruments including the UN Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children' child prostitution and child pornography. My Department will then be in a position to proceed with its commitment to ratify the Protocol.

While the Second Protocol has yet to be ratified' considerable provisions exist in Irish law to combat the sexual abuse or exploitation of children' including ensuring the necessary flow of information to the relevant authorities about child abuse.

The Criminal Law (Human Trafficking) Act 2008 and the respective Amendment Act of 2013 contain specific provisions to combat the exploitation' including sexual exploitation' of trafficked children. The Criminal Justice (Withholding of Information on Offences Against Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012' which makes it an offence to withhold information relating to the commission of certain arrestable offences (including certain sexual offences) against children' also forms part of the legislative protections for children. Other relevant legislation in the area of reporting is the Protections for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act 1998 and the Children First Act 2015.