

Written Answers.

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

Questions Nos. 1 to 3, inclusive, answered orally.

Employment Support Services

4. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the steps she will take to ensure that any company supported by her Department, or other State agency under her influence, that creates jobs in the coming period does not use schemes such as JobPath; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33150/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The JobPath scheme falls under the remit of my colleague, the Minister for Social Protection, Leo Varadkar TD. The conditions of the various Government supports under JobPath are therefore a matter for the Department of Social Protection.

Conditions attached to the grants made by my Department's agencies do not preclude participation in JobPath; agency client companies are therefore open to accessing DSP data on persons on the Live Register who may be suitably qualified for job opportunities within their companies.

Under Pathways to Work 2013, which is led by DSP, a Protocol on co-operation between the Department of Social Protection (DSP), my Department and the enterprise agencies was agreed. This includes IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland (EI), the Local Enterprise Offices (or LEOs) and Údarás na Gaeltachta. The aim of the Protocol is to maximise the recruitment of suitably skilled personnel from the Live Register by the enterprise agencies client companies.

IDA Ireland works with DSP, EI and other agencies to help provide job opportunities for unemployed people in IDA client companies. Areas of cooperation include participation in jobs fairs, sharing information on job announcements and Skillnets initiatives in areas like med tech, bio pharma and engineering.

Co-operation between employers and the education and training system is crucial in developing effective responses to skills needs. This co-operation is being strengthened through the new Regional Skills Fora to connect employers, enterprise development agencies and education and training providers.

My Department's agencies do not collate data on the number of persons taken on by client companies under JobPath – these statistics are collated by DSP.

I would therefore suggest that the Deputy make contact with DSP for any further detailed information on the JobPath scheme.

Questions Nos. 5 to 15, inclusive, answered orally.

Economic Competitiveness

16. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the actions the Government is taking to increase competitiveness in view of the increased competition from the UK as a location to establish a business compared to Ireland; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33007/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): As Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, my focus is on improving Ireland's competitiveness performance. Ensuring Ireland is a competitive location to establish and run a business is essential for job creation. Brexit means we must do more across a wide range of policy areas to enhance our attractiveness as a location to start and locate a business relative to the UK. The most recent data from the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business shows that Ireland is ahead of the UK in terms of ease of starting a business and paying tax but is behind the UK in the overall rankings.

To improve business competitiveness we must consolidate Ireland's traditional strengths and address those areas where we lag behind the UK.

We are stepping up investment in infrastructure and SMEs access to finance is improving. We are reforming our tax system to encourage enterprise growth. We are driving the implementation of our research strategy Innovation 2020. As part of the Budget my Department secured additional resources for our enterprise agencies to put more people on the ground in foreign markets to attract investment and to help Irish business who export to the UK and helping others diversify into new markets. I have asked that Enterprise Ireland intensify its work with clients exporting to the UK by providing support to improve their competitiveness in the market through its management capability and development programmes such as LEAN. I will ensure that the 2017 Action Plan for Jobs provides a sharp focus on specific aspects of the competitiveness agenda, particularly in the area of costs and ease of doing business.

Jobs Data

17. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if she will ensure that when her Department is recording job figures from IDA or Enterprise Ireland supported companies, that the numbers of such jobs that are supported by the Department of Social Protection, such as JobPath and so on, are separately reported; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33002/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): My priority is to deliver on the Government's goal to help create 200,000 additional jobs by 2020, including 135,000 jobs outside Dublin. I am working closely with the Minister for Social Protection to ensure we can provide every opportunity for those unemployed to secure a job.

In September 2013, in the context of maximising the employment of appropriately skilled people from the Live Register by enterprise agency clients, a protocol was agreed for co-operation between the Department of Social Protection and my Department, EI, IDA and the LEOs.

'Pathways to Work' contains a commitment for my Department and the enterprise development agencies to continually monitor recruitment from the Live Register, working with the CSO.

In relation to the recording the jobs figures in firms supported by the enterprise agencies, my Department undertakes an Annual Employment Survey of client companies of EI, IDA and Údarás na Gaeltachta. The survey, in existence since 1972, is a census of employment in the agency supported firms. It is a voluntary survey and elicits the limited necessary employment numbers in response to two short questions, with minimum administrative burden for the 8,000 companies surveyed. It is not designed to report on jobs supported by the activities of other Government Departments.

Research and Development Funding

18. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the immediate contingency steps she is taking with European colleagues to ensure EU research and development funding is not reduced following the decision by the UK voters to leave the EU. [32996/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen) : On 24 July the Government adopted a Contingency Framework identifying key policy issues to be managed by Government Departments arising from the referendum vote in the UK to leave the EU.

In that Framework we commit to undertaking a full assessment of the opportunities and threats arising from the future disengagement of the UK from the EU, including in relation to Horizon 2020 funded research. This will include an assessment of the possibility of a reduced overall fund if and when the UK's contribution to the EU is withdrawn at some point. This work is being led by my Department in association with other Government Departments and relevant state agencies which fund research.

In addition, I have secured €162.5 million for Science Foundation Ireland in 2017, an increase of €5.5 million over 2016 levels.

The full impact of the UK's departure on the EU Research and Innovation budget will depend on the conclusion of negotiations between the UK and the EU.

My officials continue to maintain regular contact with the European Commission and Member States to maximise the commitment of EU funding to Research and Innovation. The importance of budgets for these Framework Programmes in supporting economic growth and jobs is recognised by the European Council, the European Commission and the European Parliament.

Credit Guarantee Scheme

19. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation her views on the current drawdown levels issued under the credit guarantee scheme; the total value of approvals on the same dates; if she will provide a county breakdown of each drawdown and approval; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33011/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen): Since inception in 2012 to 21 October 2016 (the latest available confirmed data from the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland, the scheme) 384 SME loans to a total of €61,867,894 have been approved under the 2 existing Credit Guarantee Schemes.

I will send the Deputy separately the breakdown of the value of approvals by county.

SBCI has also advised that approximately €17 million of approvals had been drawn down, but it is not possible to provide a breakdown of drawdowns by county, for data protection and confidentiality reasons.

A loan under a Credit Guarantee Scheme is one with a higher degree of risk, because the SME in question has already tried and failed to get a bank loan before applying under the Scheme. Once a loan is approved, it is important to note that it is entirely a commercial matter for the SME to decide whether or not the loan will actually be drawn down in whole or part.

While the benefit of a guarantee is offered to a borrower under the scheme, some borrowers do not proceed with the guarantee. A significant number of cases are listed as 'Pending' by the participating lenders, and the operator only holds partial information on such cases.

The Government is committed to ensuring that our SMEs have access to appropriate finance for their business needs either from banking or non-banking sources, which will ensure that they continue to grow and develop.

The CGS is a central element of those supports which when combined with other Government initiatives such as Microfinance Ireland, the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland, the Credit Review Office and the Prompt Payment Code should enable companies to expand, service new markets and grow employment.

CGS 2012 - County split

County	Total €
Carlow	1,770,000
Cavan	350,000
Clare	732,000
Cork	4,008,000
Donegal	197,000
Dublin	26,963,000
Galway	2,366,500
Kerry	960,000
Kildare	4,565,000
Kilkenny	295,000
Laois	2,306,950
Leitrim	1,100,000
Limerick	4,520,344
Louth	1,460,000
Mayo	933,100
Monaghan	250,000
Offaly	640,000
Roscommon	80,000
Sligo	57,000
Tipperary	1,071,000
Waterford	750,000
Westmeath	1,057,000
Wexford	1,266,000

County	Total €
Wicklow	1,551,000
County to be confirmed by Participating Lender	2,619,000
Total	61,867,894

EU Directives

20. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the steps she has taken to date to transcribe directive 2014/104/EU on antitrust damages actions into Irish law; and if she will confirm that the directive will be fully transcribed by 27 December 2016 in order to ensure that Irish businesses will be able to fully recover damages suffered as a result of infringements of EU competition law such as price fixing. [33014/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): Some provisions of Directive 2014/104/EU on certain rules governing actions for damages under national law for infringements of competition law provisions already exist in national legislation or in existing court rules. The other provisions of the Directive that need to be transposed are being addressed in the transposing legislation and by amending certain court rules.

My Department is working closely with the Office of Parliamentary Counsel, the Department of Justice and Equality and the Courts Service to ensure the Directive will be transposed by the deadline of 27 December 2016.

Industrial Relations

21. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation her views on whether an employer labour conference type body should be re-established to facilitate good industrial relations throughout the economy; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32890/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen): I agree with the underlying premise of the Deputy's question that good industrial relations practices and a good IR environment are critically important for workers, for businesses, and the general public. Both I, as Minister, and the industrial relations institutions of the State will continue to strive for improvements in this area.

It is not current Government policy to create a new body to intervene in industrial relations disputes. The Programme for Partnership Government states that the Government will respect the Workplace Relations Commission and the Labour Court as the proper forum for state intervention in industrial relation disputes and will ensure that both bodies are supported and adequately resourced to fulfil their roles

I consider that the creation of a Labour Employer Conference as previously existed to intervene in protracted industrial relations disputes runs the risk of undermining the role of the WRC and the Labour Court. While high profile disputes can lead to such calls, there are very many other disputes each year resolved by the WRC and Labour Court without disruption. Parties to many of these disputes might feel that they had not exhausted the IR process or done the utmost for their members if they did not have the matter considered in some way by this type of higher body.

There has been significant progress made in recent years in improving, reforming and en-

hancing both the industrial relations institutions of the State and the industrial relations legislative framework utilised by workers and employers. I consider that these are working well as evidenced by the resolution of many difficult and protracted disputes in recent times and the flexibility displayed.

Film Industry Development

22. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the consultation and decision-making processes that were employed by Enterprise Ireland in making the decision to sell the shareholding in a studio (details supplied); the reasons conditions were not placed on the sale to ensure that the studio remains a film making studio in the long term; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32984/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): Ardmore Studios is a commercial concern owned 68.33% by private shareholders. Enterprise Ireland's 31.67% stake in the ownership of Ardmore Studios is a legacy shareholding acquired as a result of an equity investment and a loan by Nadcorp (a predecessor State Agency) under an Agreement that dates back to 27 August 1986.

The sale of the Ardmore Studios is a commercial decision by the owners of the Studios.

As a passive investor, Enterprise Ireland has not been involved in the day-to-day business of running Ardmore Studios. Furthermore while Enterprise Ireland offers supports to exporting companies involved in film and the creative sector, policy responsibility for the development of the film industry rests with my colleague, Ms Heather Humphreys, T.D., Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.

Ardmore Studios is being placed on the market for sale as a going concern. Enterprise Ireland has not placed any pre-conditions on the pending sale of Ardmore Studios due to the existence of planning restrictions on the site which safeguard its use as a film making studio into the future.

At the appropriate time, a proposal for decision on the sale of Enterprise Ireland's shareholding will be reviewed by Enterprise Ireland from a commercial and legal perspective to ensure receipt of fair market value and return for the taxpayer.

Brexit Issues

23. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the extent to which she remains satisfied of the ability of Ireland to attract sufficient foreign direct investment and indigenous investment to compensate for any geopolitical changes that might occur in the European Union; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32992/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): There is a whole of Government approach in place focusing on Brexit issues and my Department and its agencies are to the forefront of this effort. We are very much at the start of a process that will lead to the UK renegotiating its relationship with the EU and it is unclear how, or when, this will be finalised.

What is clear is that any changes in the UK's relationship with the EU will present both challenges and opportunities for the Irish economy.

In Budget 2017, I secured the largest capital provision made to my Department over the past fifteen years. This increase will be used to fund additional measures to support companies impacted by Brexit, as well new competitive funds for the Regions focused on job creation.

I also secured additional Pay monies which will provide for 50+ new posts for the Department and its agencies to respond to Brexit and to work with companies to help them respond to the challenges and opportunities of Brexit.

In terms of FDI, IDA Ireland is constantly engaged with clients across its entire portfolio and in the months leading up to the UK referendum it engaged with clients and prospective clients in relation to the potential impact of BREXIT. IDA Ireland believes there are potential FDI opportunities for Ireland as a result of the UK vote to leave the EU. These opportunities are likely to be found along differing timelines, partially influenced by sector. I am confident that Ireland is well positioned to maximise any opportunities that Brexit may present from an FDI perspective.

However, of particular concern to me right now are the immediate challenges being faced by Irish SMEs due to a weakened sterling. Many of the sectors particularly exposed, such as food, construction, retail, tourism and traditional manufacturing, have deep roots across the regions and they provide significant employment.

From a strategic perspective Enterprise Ireland is assisting companies to maintain and grow UK exports and extend their international reach, as well as helping companies to enhance their competitiveness. The Local Enterprise Offices are also working closely with those clients likely to be impacted by Brexit.

I am working across Government to ensure that as Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, any actions that are taken in response to Brexit are tailored, targeted and evidence based.

Trade Agreements

24. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation her views on the refusal of Wallonia to sign off on the EU Canada Comprehensive Economic Trade Agreement, CETA; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32944/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): CETA was discussed at the Informal Trade Council meeting in Bratislava on 23 September 2016. Member States highlighted the high quality of the Agreement reached with Canada and reaffirmed their desire to work towards signature.

To meet the political concerns of certain Member States, the European Commission and Canada have agreed a Joint Interpretative Instrument to provide further assurances in relation to public services, labour rights and environmental standards and investment.

At a further extraordinary meeting of the Trade Council on 18 October 2016 Trade Ministers did not agree to sign the Agreement. CETA was also discussed at the European Council on 22 October where all Member States apart from Belgium were in a position to support the Agreement.

Subsequently, intensive discussions were held between the Commission, Canada and representatives of the Belgium Federal and Regional Governments including Wallonia to address their concerns.

I am pleased to say that these discussions have resulted in all five Regional Parliaments being able to approve the Agreement, as confirmed by the Belgium Prime Minister.

As a result of these latest developments CETA has now be signed, paving the way for provisional application of the agreement.

I believe that the efforts made by the EU and Canada to address the concerns for clarity amongst EU Member States and the Wallonian regional Government are to be welcomed, as I believe the Joint Interpretative Instrument, which has been agreed, provides valuable assurances.

Ministerial Meetings

25. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of interactions and meetings she has had and held with the Irish Congress of Trade Unions specifically concerning Brexit; if she has formally requested that the government working group on Brexit meet with the ICTU on a regular basis; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32943/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): I have met with a wide range of representative organisations since the result of the UK referendum in June

In early October I met with ICTU senior executives and other Union representatives in the context of my preparation of the Action Plan for Jobs for 2017. At that meeting we did discuss the concerns of ICTU in relation to Brexit, and the issues raised are being considered in conjunction with other Departments, and the agencies under the remit of my own Department, in the preparation of the Action Plan for Jobs and other initiatives.

In addition, together with the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, I co-chair the new Labour Employer Economic Forum (LEEF), of which the President of ICTU, Patricia King is a member. The LEEF held its first meeting in early October which was opened by the Taoiseach, and of course a number of Brexit related issues of concern were discussed.

In July I, together with Minister of State Pat Breen, held a meeting with ICTU officials, and the issue of Brexit was also raised in relation to the risk to pay and conditions for workers and the need for Ireland to manage this development.

Taxi Regulations

26. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if she, her officials or any other State agency that she is aware of have been lobbied or approached by a company (details supplied) regarding the present regulations that govern the taxi industry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33000/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): Since taking office neither I nor my officials have been specifically lobbied by the company referred to in relation to the regulations that govern the Irish taxi industry. I should make clear as well that my Department has no function or responsibilities in relation to the regulation of that industry in this country.

It is well known that the company in question has established a Customer Support Centre of

Excellence in Limerick, to handle some of their worldwide activities. This project will employ about 300 staff when fully operational, which represents a significant and welcome investment for the city and the wider region.

In developing its investment plans for Limerick, the company would, of course, have had significant engagement with IDA Ireland in connection with its plans for the Customer Support Centre here. I would expect as well that the Agency will be in continued contact with the company, as it is with all of its clients who have a presence here in Ireland.

Tax Code

27. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the status of her proposal to offer a lower rate of tax to returning emigrants; if she has discussed her proposals with the Minister for Finance; and her views on whether such a proposal complies with European Union law on the freedom of movement of workers. [33016/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The goal of this Government is to support the creation of an additional 200,000 jobs by 2020 with 135,000 outside Dublin, achieve sustainable full employment and attract back 70,000 emigrants. The Action Plan for Job is delivering on these targets.

There is demand for a range of skills and experienced professionals across the economy. But recent analysis by the Irish Tax Institute highlights that at lower income levels of €18,000, Ireland has the lowest effective personal tax rate of ten countries examined. However, Ireland's ranking is less favourable at salary levels above €55,000. This is a disincentive to attracting talent to Ireland.

I am very pleased that within constrained resources the Minister for Finance has made progress on delivering the Government commitments to reduce personal tax, improve Ireland's competitiveness for talent and Brexit related measures. These measures should also enhance our ability to achieve our target of 70,000 returning emigrants.

I placed a strong emphasis on these areas in my discussions with the Minister for Finance in advance of the Budget, including in our engagements on 10 October in Limerick.

The Minister for Finance has committed to sustaining progress in these areas in future Budgets. I will continue to work with the Minister to enhance the overall the competitiveness of our personal tax regime for all workers and the overall attractiveness of Ireland's offering.

Competition and Consumer Protection Commission

28. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation her views on whether there is inertia in the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission with regard to in-depth investigations into price fixing cartels and bid rigging; her further views on whether there is a lack of prosecutions for offences under the Competition Act 2002; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33013/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) is the statutory independent body responsible for the enforcement of domestic and EU competition and consumer law in the State. Section 9 (5) of the Competition and Consumer Protection Act 2014 provides that the Commission is independent in the performance of its functions, including carrying out investigations

of alleged anti-competitive practices. As investigations and enforcement matters generally are part of the day-to-day operational work of the Commission, I, as Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, have no direct function in these matters.

However, the CCPC has advised that it is currently conducting 5 investigations into alleged anti-competitive practices. Two of these relate to alleged price fixing/bid-rigging activities. In addition, a case that the CCPC has sent to the Director of Public Prosecutions is scheduled to come up for trial in April 2017. Ultimately, it is a matter for the Courts to determine if criminal sanctions are warranted in any specific case.

During 2015, the CCPC received 74 allegations of competition law breaches (both civil and criminal) and opened two large scale investigations in respect of anti-competitive agreements, one of which involved searches at five premises in the bagged cement sector. This is in addition to the opening of a cartel investigation into allegations of a criminal breach of competition law in the aviation sector and the closing of two additional investigations.

I understand from the CCPC that, in addition to a bid rigging cartel case that is currently before the courts, in 2016 the CCPC has already conducted 21 searches of companies suspected of bid-rigging. This investigation is ongoing. In addition the CCPC routinely screens complaints alleging cartel activity and, where there is sufficient evidence, progresses these to investigation stage. While those with evidence can approach the CCPC confidentially, in order for a criminal case to proceed, those with information must be prepared to give evidence in court.

It is important to note that the CCPC investigates other infringements of competition law, not just hard-core cartel activities, which also may restrict competition.

If the Deputy is aware of any alleged anti-competitive behaviour that is being practised (be it price-fixing or bid-rigging), I would urge him to forward details to the CCPC for their attention.

Departmental Agencies Funding

29. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the funding that will be granted by the IDA, Enterprise Ireland or other State agencies under the aegis of her Department to client supported companies in 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33003/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): Through Budget 2017 I have secured an Exchequer Capital allocation of €555 million for distribution across the Department's Vote in 2017. This is the largest capital provision made to the Department over the past fifteen years. It is a 10% increase over the 2016 Revised Estimates Volume capital provision of €503 million.

This capital funding through my Department and Agencies is used to progress the jobs agenda and to further regional enterprise development and Ireland's innovation capacity.

The funding provided through the Enterprise Agencies is a mixture of:

- Grants to, and investments in client companies,
- Research and Development grants to companies and across Ireland's higher education institutions; and
- Infrastructure supports which are used to maintain and develop suitable property and re-

search facilities for Irish based enterprise and scientists.

Currently the enterprise agencies are directly supporting over 411,000 jobs in Ireland across their client companies.

Allowing for the economic multiplier effect, a similar number of jobs, 400,000 plus, are indirectly being supported by the agency clients in services and sub-supply.

In recent weeks we have seen employment In Ireland continue to grow. It now exceeds 2 million people and represents the highest level of employment in Ireland since 2008. All 8 regions of the country have seen employment growth since the beginning of 2015. Recent CSO figures show that unemployment has dropped to 7.9%. The numbers unemployed have dropped to 172,900 – some 24,000 less than a year ago.

The additional €52 million in Capital funding for 2017 that I have secured is strong evidence of the Government delivering on its commitment to continue to deliver new jobs across every region. This additional 10% in capital funding will help us deliver on the Programme for Government commitment to create an additional 200,000 jobs by 2020 of which 135,000 are targeted for the regions.

For the Deputy's information the indicative capital allocations across the Department's Agencies for 2017 are as follows:

IDA Ireland.

- €137 million in 2017
- Up €25 million from its €112 million base this year.
- Representing a 22% increase over 2016 base.

Enterprise Ireland

- €185 million in 2017
- Up €11.4 million from 2016 base figure.
- Representing a 6.5% increase over 2016 base.

Local Enterprise Offices

- €22.5 million in 2017
- Up €4 million from 2016 base figure.
- Representing a 21% increase over 2016 base.

Science Foundation Ireland

- €162.5 million in 2017
- Up €5.5 million from 2016 base figure
- Representing a 3.5% increase over 2016 base.

The Programme for Research in Third-Level Institutions

- €14.22 million in 2017

- Up €4.2 million from 2016 base figure
- Representing a 41% increase over 2016 base.

The remaining €33 million in capital funding for 2017 will be distributed across other Agencies and programmes that span:

- InterTrade Ireland – approximately €5.5 million
- Tyndall National Institute – €4.5 million
- Ireland’s membership of, and participation in, International Research Organisations - approximately €19.5 million.
- The InterReg programme (a North/South collaborative programme) – approximately €3 million.
- The Credit Guarantee Scheme - €0.5 million.
- National Standards Authority of Ireland - €0.5 million.

The definitive distribution of the Department’s 2017 capital allocation will be determined through the 2017 Revised Estimates Volume (REV) process in the weeks ahead. It is expected that the 2017 Revised Estimates Volume will be published by my colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform in early December.

Brexit Issues

30. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to minimise the impact of Brexit in County Donegal; the engagement she has had with the IDA to ensure it secures new investment in County Donegal in view of Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32938/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O’Connor): The outcome of the UK referendum on exiting the EU was not what Ireland hoped for but the Government has been preparing for such a result for over a year. The extent of the impact for all of Ireland, including border counties such as Donegal, will remain unclear until we know the outcome of the EU / UK negotiations.

I wish to assure the Deputy, however, that the Government is determined to meet this challenge and our preparations are currently intensifying at both political and official level. In this context, I secured additional funding in Budget 2017 to provide more than 50 new posts for the Department and its agencies to support a response to Brexit. In addition, I understand that both IDA and Enterprise Ireland already have dedicated Brexit units in place.

Over €1 billion of Enterprise Ireland client exports go to Northern Ireland and I am very conscious of challenges that may be faced by Irish companies operating in close proximity to the border. Enterprise Ireland is working with its 1,500 clients who export to the UK to determine the individual challenges they face, and to identify strategies where possible to help mediate against the potential impact.

IDA Ireland will continue to work to its business development strategy for the North West, which includes Donegal, to help it maximise investment in the Region. Among its targets, this

strategy will see the Agency seeking to secure potential “second site” investments from companies with existing operations in Dublin, as well as pursuing new investments for the region.

Lobbying Data

31. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if she, her officials or any State agency that she is aware of have been lobbied or had representations made to them by any company or firm supported in any way by the IDA or Enterprise Ireland regarding the State’s taxation regulations; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33001/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O’Connor): As Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, I and my officials regularly meet with client companies of IDA and Enterprise Ireland to discuss issues related to our economy, including the State’s commitment to a stable tax regime.

As the Deputy will be aware, legislation providing for the regulation of lobbying came into effect in September 2015. That legislation does not aim to prevent lobbying – which is a normal and important part of the democratic process – but to make it more open and transparent.

The Lobbying Act also provides for a publicly accessible register which obliges lobbyists to provide information about their activities. Any person involved in lobbying is required to register on a website which is maintained by the Standards Commission.

I should also make clear that as Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation I am considered a designated public official for the purpose of the Act. The Secretary-General and Assistant Secretaries General in my Department are also classified as such.

I as Minister, the Secretary General and the Assistant Secretaries of this Department are Designated Public Officials under the Lobbying Act, 2015.

The Act does not aim to prevent or inhibit lobbying. It does aim to make the process more transparent. The Act aims to do this by providing for:

- The establishment and maintenance of a publicly accessible register of lobbying
- The Standards in Public Office Commission (The Standards Commission) to be the regulator of lobbying
- Obligations on lobbyists to register and to provide information regularly about their lobbying activities, including, in the case of professional lobbyists, information about their clients
- A code of conduct on the carrying-on of lobbying activities
- The introduction of a “cooling-off” period during which lobbying activity may not be carried out by some former officials.

Action Plan for Jobs

32. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the way in which her Department and the Government are evaluating the results of the Action Plan for Jobs of her predecessor; the new actions needed to carry forward that action plan; the key actions which remained unfulfilled when the current Government began; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32889/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The Action Plan for Jobs is the Government's key instruments to support job creation. The Action Plan for Jobs is working. More than 176,000 people are at work today than in 2012 when the first Plan was launched. 36,000 new jobs were created in the first six months of 2016.

While the Action Plan is a whole of Government approach to support job creation, I am responsible for developing the 2017 Plan. My priority is to deliver on this Government's goal to help create 200,000 additional jobs by 2020, including 135,000 jobs outside Dublin.

The Action Plans are monitored on a quarterly basis. At the end of March 2016, 14 of 77 measures were delayed. All but 2 have since been completed. The delayed actions are a review of the appropriateness of the sub-minima rates which currently apply by the Low Pay Commission and the publication of the Foreign Languages Strategy by the Department of Education and Skills. It is expected that these actions will be completed by the end of the year.

I will be working with Ministerial colleagues to ensure that the 2017 Plan is ambitious and impactful and keeps us on track to deliver on our 2020 targets.

Trade Agreements

33. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to consent to provisional application of the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement ahead of upcoming EU council meetings and the EU-Canada Summit. [30968/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic Trade Agreement (CETA) represents a modern high standard Agreement which has the ability to set a new global standard for Trade Agreements. It will end limitations in access to public contracts, open up markets for services and offer predictable conditions for investors.

Irish firms will also benefit from the recognition of product standards and certification, thus saving on 'double testing' on both sides of the Atlantic. These are some of the benefits of the trade deal with Canada as well as providing new market opportunities in many sectors for Irish firms.

Given the position taken by Ireland and other Member States, the Commission submitted CETA to the Council for decision as a mixed Agreement. That is one requiring both EU and individual Member States ratification. As this process may take a number of years to complete the Agreement provides for provisional application. However, following a decision by the Council with the consent of the Parliament, it will be possible to provisionally apply CETA.

It is important to note that investment protection and investment dispute settlement provisions have been specifically carved out from the provisional application of CETA. This means these provisions will not come into being until voted for by the Dáil.

In addition to meet the political concerns of certain Member States, the Commission and Canada have agreed a Joint Interpretative Instrument to provide further assurances in relation to public services, labour rights and environmental standards and investment.

Accordingly, the Government supports provisional application as we are keen to see Irish firms enjoy the tariff free benefits and new business opportunities as soon as possible.

Industrial Relations

34. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to ensure companies and firms that are in receipt of State support from the IDA, Enterprise Ireland or any other body comply with the industrial relations laws and protections afforded to workers; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32999/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): All companies operating in Ireland, whether they are clients of IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland or any other State Agency, must comply with applicable employment legislation. Businesses that receive supports from the State therefore have the same obligations as any other company operating in Ireland when it comes to adherence to such legislation.

The Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) is the primary State body responsible for monitoring compliance with employment rights provisions. Its functions include the carrying out of inspections to ensure satisfactory employment conditions and adjudicating disputes in connection with employment legislation. Clients of State Agencies are, like other enterprises in the State, subject to WRC oversight and inspection.

Zero-hour Contracts

35. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the current position of her Department on zero-hour contracts; the action she is taking to eliminate zero-hour contracts and to ensure stable conditions of work for workers here; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32891/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen): My colleague, Minister Mitchell O'Connor, and I intend bringing forward proposals in this area for consideration by Government. In this respect, work is well advanced on developing a policy response to the University of Limerick (UL) study on zero hour contracts and low hour contracts. It should be remembered that the UL study found that zero hour contracts, as defined within current Irish employment rights legislation, are not extensively used in Ireland. It found low working hours can arise in different forms in employment contracts.

The policy response is being informed by the UL study itself and also the extensive material and practical examples provided by respondents to the public consultation conducted by my Department. Our proposals will address the issue of workers on low hour contracts who consistently work more hours each week but whose contracts do not reflect the reality of their hours. The proposals will also seek to ensure that employees are better informed about the nature of their employment arrangements and their core terms and conditions at an early stage in their employment. Furthermore, I intend to include provisions aimed particularly at low-paid, more vulnerable workers.

My Department is currently engaged in a dialogue process with ICTU and IBEC to secure broad agreement before proposals are finalised. This work is being progressed as expeditiously as possible.

Departmental Strategy Statements

36. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if she will report on the recent public consultation by her Department on its statement of strategy

2016-2019; when she expects this strategy to be published; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32888/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): As part of the consultation process to inform the development of the Statement of Strategy for my Department, the Secretary General wrote to a targeted list of key stakeholders seeking input, suggestions and views regarding any strategic and cross Departmental issues that might be considered as part of this process. 52 specific stakeholders were consulted, representing a wide spectrum of areas of interest that are relevant across the broad remit of my Department. A notice inviting submissions from the general public was also placed, and is still available, on my Department's website. The Secretary General also wrote to all other Government Departments, seeking their input. Responses received through these consultations are being considered in the development of the Strategy.

The Statement of Strategy will, of course, be also informed by the Programme for Partnership Government and particularly by priorities in the Programme, where lead responsibility has been assigned to my Department, as well as by other strategic priorities for my Department arising from its statutory remit.

I expect that a final draft of the Statement of Strategy will be submitted to the Department of the Taoiseach shortly, in advance of its formal submission to Government for information. The Statement of Strategy will then be laid before the houses of the Oireachtas, in accordance with Section 5(2) of the PSMA, 1997 and will be published thereafter.

Personal Injury Claims

37. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation her views on the review of the Book of Quantum by InjuriesBoard.ie; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33008/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The revised Book of Quantum was published on 5 October 2016. The publication was compiled by independent consultants and commissioned by the Personal Injuries Assessment Board (PIAB).

The revised Book of Quantum is based on a detailed analysis of 51,000 closed personal injury claims from 2013 and 2014 and includes compensation awards from Court cases, insurance company settlements, State Claims Agency cases and data relating to awards of the Personal Injuries Assessment Board. It also contains more granular detail on injuries and new injury types and more narrowly defined compensation bands. The revised Book of Quantum constitutes solid research on prevailing levels of damages in personal injuries claims.

The Book of Quantum sets out the amounts that may be awarded or assessed in personal injury claims for workplace, public liability and road accidents. It does not set personal injury award levels. It reflects settlements arrived at by insurance companies, PIAB, the State Claims Agency and the Courts so that all stakeholders involved in settling personal injury claims have an independent reference guide when assessing claims. Therefore, this should not have any inflationary effect on insurance costs.

In order for the economy to grow, and maintain competitiveness, it is vital to address insurance costs. The Book of Quantum should allow for earlier settlement of claims and have a stabilising effect on compensation awards across the market. Universal application of the revised Book by all stakeholders will bring consistency in settlements. This should reduce the volume of litigation and help reduce the cost of insurance. This measure supports the work of

Minister of State Murphy on the Cost of Insurance Working Group, aimed at tackling increasing insurance costs.

Interdepartmental Working Groups

38. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of times the working group in respect of the road map on the implementation of the UNCRPD have met; the progress made to date in relation to the implementation process; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33082/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Interdepartmental Committee on the UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was reconvened in September 2014, and met four times to identify all barriers to Ireland's ratification of the Convention and agree on legislative measures to overcome them. The result of this work was a roadmap to ratification, which was published on 21 October 2015 and which outlines the considerable legislative changes to be undertaken to enable Ireland to ratify the Convention, along with the estimated deadline of end-2016 for ratification. The Roadmap to Ratification, which is available on my Department's website, sets out the substantial legislative agenda required for ratification. Since publication of the Roadmap, work has continued on a bilateral basis between my Department and the other relevant Departments to progress each of the specific issues identified.

Considerable progress has already been made to overcome barriers to Ireland's ratification. The Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 was signed into law on 30 December 2015 and is a comprehensive reform of the law on decision-making capacity. The Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Bill 2015 commenced its second stage reading in the Dáil on 5 October. When enacted, the Bill will reform Section 5 of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 1993 to facilitate the full participation in family life of persons with intellectual disabilities and the full expression of their human rights. Achieving the necessary balance between those rights and ensuring appropriate protection is crucial.

Work is underway on drawing up an Equality/Disability (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill to progress miscellaneous legislative amendments necessary to proceed to ratification. It is intended that the Bill will address issues such as the Convention's requirements in relation to reasonable accommodation and deprivation of liberty, as well as removing archaic references in existing legislation relating to mental health. The General Scheme of the Equality/Disability (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill is available on the Department's website. I expect to publish the Bill shortly so as to facilitate ratification of the Convention by end-2016.

Workplace Relations Commission

39. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the reasons the Workplace Relations Commission is currently the agency dealing with cases of discrimination in the private rental market; and her views on the appropriateness of such. [33145/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): As indicated in my previous to the Deputy's Question (Question 138 of 18 October last), the functions of the former Equality Tribunal (both in relation to discrimination regarding employment and in the provision of services) became the functions of the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) on the merger of the Equality Tribunal and other bodies to form that Commission. I regard as appropriate that the WRC should continue to deal with the full range of issues

relating to discrimination. This includes alleged discrimination in relation to the provision of Housing Assistance Payment and rent allowance as provided for in the Equality (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2015. I do not propose to change those arrangements. It is important to understand that there will be no relationship of landlord and tenant between the parties in a case where a prospective tenant alleges discrimination on the basis of being or not being in receipt of either of the payments specified and the Residential Tenancies Board would therefore not be the appropriate body for such cases.

Members of the public may obtain advice from the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission if they feel that they have been discriminated against contrary to equality legislation, including advice on how to take a claim to the WRC, which provides a free and accessible adjudication service.

Property Registration Authority Administration

40. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if the Property Registration Authority has an obligation in registering property titles to ensure that physical property and title documents are at one, that is, that all titles are registered as conclusive rather than an opt-out being used throughout indicating the legal title deed is non-conclusive. [33160/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I can inform the Deputy that the registration of property in the Land Registry is governed by Registration of Deeds and Title Acts 1964 and 2006 and the Land Registration Rules 2012-2013.

Section 85 of the Registration of Title Act 1964 as amended by Section 62 of the Registration of Deeds and Title Act 2006 provides that “*Registered land shall be described and identified by reference to the registry maps concerned in such manner as may be prescribed*” and “*except as provided by the Act, neither the description of land in a register nor its identification by reference to a registry map is conclusive as to its boundaries or extent.*”

Section 31 of the Registration of Deeds and Title Acts 1964 and 2006 states that “*The register shall be conclusive evidence of the title of the owner to the land as appearing on the register ...*”.

Therefore, while the boundaries are not conclusive (Section 85, as amended), the legal title (ownership) of a property registered in the Land Registry is conclusive (Section 31). The existing non-conclusive boundary model has been in operation in Ireland since 1892. I also refer the Deputy to the reply to her Question No. 50 of 20 October 2016.

Garda Deployment

41. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the arrangements she has in place for Dublin Airport and regional airports in the event of the withdrawal of services and labour by An Garda Síochána; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33070/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Deputy will appreciate that I remain hopeful that the threatened withdrawal of service and labour by members of An Garda Síochána does not go ahead tomorrow. In any case, as part of the contingency planning that is being put in place the intention is that Garda immigration units

will continue to operate.

Immigration Data

42. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of adults and children who remain in direct provision after receiving their stamp four leave to remain; if her attention has been drawn to the fact that the Reception and Integration Agency is now threatening these persons with eviction with the potential of them becoming homeless; if her attention has further been drawn to the very real difficulties these persons are having in accessing private rented accommodation; the supports she plans to put in place to assist these persons in making the transition from direct provision; and if she has discussed this matter with the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government in order to coordinate the efforts of both departments to prevent these persons from becoming homeless. [33134/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): The Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) has never threatened to evict any persons from its accommodation centres who have been granted leave to remain or any other form of status.

In terms of the number of persons in RIA accommodation who have been granted some form of status, there are in the region of 500 such persons among the 4,200 residents across the system. This number fluctuates based on the numbers of status grants and the movement of such persons into private accommodation over time. RIA, its centre managers, the Community Welfare Service (including Rent Supplement), Citizens Information and those City and County Councils operating the Housing Assistance Payments link with such persons in accessing the appropriate supports and services, including in respect of sourcing and securing private accommodation.

Following on from the McMahon Working Group Report, the Department of Justice & Equality developed a Guide to Independent Living for persons with status to provide practical assistance for them. The Guide is available in all centres and has been published on the RIA website (www.ria.gov.ie) in a number of different languages. This was published in parallel with information sessions coordinated by the Citizens Information Bureau in accommodation centres which gave an opportunity for such persons to seek assistance and clarification on the services provided.

Once some form of status is granted, residents cease to be ordinarily entitled to the accommodation supports provided through the Reception and Integration Agency. Notwithstanding this fact, RIA have always continued to provide such persons with continued accommodation until they secure their own private accommodation. RIA are particularly mindful of the reality of the housing situation in the State and the pressures on the Community Welfare Service in respect of Rent Supplement or the City and County Councils in respect of Housing Assistance Payments and Housing Lists. That said, the State has been criticised for the length of time persons spend in Direct Provision and accordingly, we must all work together to transition persons granted status out of the system as quickly as possible.

Immigration Data

43. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons currently in direct provision per county, per age group under 18 years of age, 18 to 35, 36 to 50, 51 to 65, 65 and over; the number of persons per country and per age group, who have moved out of direct provision in 2016; and if she will make a statement on the

matter. [33165/16]

44. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons still living in direct provision per county and per age group under 18 years of age, 18 to 35, 36 to 50, 51 to 65, 65 and over despite having being granted official status; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33166/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 43 and 44 together.

The Deputy will be aware that the State has a solemn obligation to protect the identity of those in the protection process as set out in Section 19(1) of the Refugee Act 1996 (as amended). Providing the level of detail that has been requested by the Deputy could lead to individuals in the protection process being inadvertently identified which would result in the State being in breach of their obligations in this regard.

The Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) publish monthly statistics and the latest available statistics (as of the end of September 2016) are shown below.

Approximately 1,900 persons have left State provided accommodation in the year to date. Some have done so because they have been granted permission to remain in the State and some may have done so for personal reasons - there is no obligation on any person to remain in State provided accommodation.

There are in the region of 500 persons resident in State provided accommodation with some form of permission to remain in the State. While such residents cease to be ordinarily entitled to accommodation supports provided by RIA, RIA have always continued to provide such persons with continued accommodation until they secure their own private accommodation. RIA are particularly mindful of the reality of the housing situation in the State and the pressures on the Community Welfare Service in respect of Rent Supplement or the City and County Councils in respect of Housing Assistance Payments and Housing Lists. That said, the State has been criticised for the length of time persons spend in Direct Provision and accordingly, the various relevant State bodies must all work together to transition persons granted status out of the system as quickly as possible.

Accommodation Centres

COUNTY	CENTRE NAME	ADDRESS	OCCUPANCY
Clare	Knockalisheen	Meelick	185
Cork	Ashbourne Hse	Glounthaune	60
	Kinsale Road*	Cork City	181
	Glenvera	Wellington Road	100
	Millstreet	Millstreet	206
	Clonakilty Lodge	Clonakilty, Co. Cork	72
Dublin	The Towers	The Ninth Lock, Clondalkin, D.22	201
	Georgian Court	77-79 Lr Gardiner St. Dublin 1	57
	Staircase	21 Aungier Street, Dublin 2	21
	Hatch Hall	28 Lower Hatch Street, Dublin 2	119
Galway	Eglinton	The Proms, Salthill	166
	Great Western House	Eyre Square	129
Kerry	Atlas House (Killarney)	Killarney	58

COUNTY	CENTRE NAME	ADDRESS	OCCUPANCY
	Atlas House (Tralee)	Tralee	104
	Johnston Marina	Tralee	53
	Park Lodge	Killarney	39
Kildare	Eyrepowell	Newbridge	60
Laois	Montague	Emo, Portlaoise	181
Limerick	Hanratty's	Glentworth Street, Limerick	91
	Westbourne	Dock Road	80
	Mount Trenchard	Foynes, Co. Limerick	64
Longford	Richmond Court	Richmond Street, Longford	64
Mayo	The Old Convent	Ballyhaunis	148
Meath	Mosney	Mosney	579
Monaghan	St. Patricks	Monaghan	164
Sligo	Globe House	Chapel Hill	147
Tipperary	Bridgewater House	Carrick-On-Suir	27
Waterford	Atlantic House	Tramore, Co. Waterford	68
	Ocean View	Tramore, Co. Waterford	61
	Birchwood	Ballytruckle Road	108
	Viking House	Coffee House Lane	64
Westmeath	Athlone	Athlone	207
		Total	3864
	Self Catering Accommodation		
COUNTY	CENTRE NAME	ADDRESS	OCCUPANCY
Dublin	Watergate House	11-14 Usher's Quay, Dublin 8	50
Louth	Carroll Village	Dundalk	43
		Total	93
	Reception Centre		
COUNTY	CENTRE NAME	ADDRESS	OCCUPANCY
Dublin	Balseskin	St. Margarets, Finglas, Dublin 11	252
		Total	252
		Overall Total	4209

Direct Provision System

45. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality her proposed improvements to direct provision services here, including access to services such as legal advice clinics, and so on; when these improvements will be in place; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33167/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Report of the Working Group on Improvements to the protection process including Direct Provision and Supports to Asylum Seekers provides a template for the development and improvement of a wide range of services being delivered to those seeking international protection.

One of the key recommendations of the Report was the introduction of a single application procedure in the protection process. The International Protection Act 2015 provides for such a

procedure. My Department is currently preparing all of the steps necessary to commence the Act which responds to some 26 of the Working Group's recommendations and can be expected to positively address the crucial issue of the length of time that applicants spend in the protection process and by extension in the Direct Provision system.

On this particular point, significant efforts have been made to deal with those who are longest in the system and at this stage the vast majority of those who are over 5 years in the system and who do not have any impediments to progress, such as pending judicial challenges, have now had their cases processed to completion. This has been a key achievement that has had a real impact on many people and families in the protection process.

A transition Task Force was established in 2015 and put in place important supports to facilitate people with status to integrate into the community. The Task Force reported that 87% of people granted status had moved into the wider community within six months.

Tangible progress in improving the daily lives of asylum seekers living in Ireland while their application is being processed is also being made. In January last, the former Tánaiste announced an increase to the Direct Provision Allowance for children, the first such increase since the introduction of the payment some sixteen years ago. Prescription fees for all those in receipt of the Direct Provision allowance, including children, have also been waived. The Minister for Education and Skills has also announced a second year of their pilot support scheme for students in the protection system for the academic year 2016/2017.

The Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) of my Department, which is responsible for the management and administration of accommodation and ancillary services to protection applicants in state provided accommodation, is actively progressing the implementation of other recommendations in the Report around access to cooking facilities and the increase in living space for those who avail of State provided accommodation. Pilot projects are being undertaken in a number of centres to ensure the best approach to realising these objectives and ensuring that those residing in the direct provision system continue to be treated with respect and dignity.

RIA are also working on the development of standards for the provision and maintenance of services in accommodation centres, enhancing the complaints mechanisms for residents of those centres and the provision of ongoing diversity and equality training and awareness programmes across all centres.

In relation to legal advice, all applicants are provided with information in relation to the services of the Legal Aid Board once they have made their claim for asylum and have been admitted to the asylum process. Of course, some persons may prefer to access legal advice independent of the Legal Aid Board and they are free to do so. Accordingly, the establishment of legal clinics in centres does not arise.

Immigration Policy

46. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she is examining other safe and legal channels of migration into Ireland such as humanitarian visas, academic sponsorship, private sponsorship and a humanitarian admission programme; the status of these examinations; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33168/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP) was established by Government Decision on 10 September 2015 to focus Ireland's response to the humanitarian crisis that developed in Southern Europe as a consequence of mass migration from areas of conflict in the Middle East and Africa.

Under this programme, the Government has pledged to accept a total of 4,000 persons into the State by the end of 2017, through a combination of the EU relocation mechanism established by two EU Council Decisions in 2015 to assist Italy and Greece, and the UNHCR-led refugee resettlement programme currently focused on resettling refugees from camps in Lebanon. Persons accepted here under these Programmes will also have an entitlement to family reunification, thereby further increasing the numbers accepted by Ireland.

Significant resources are currently being invested in these humanitarian efforts through the offices of the Irish Refugee Protection Programme, the Office of the Promotion of Migrant Integration and the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner. As a result we have developed mechanisms and associated expertise to deal with resettlement and relocation. Our response to the migrant crisis in terms of accepting refugees is through the IRPP and all available resources are being directed to that Programme in order to meet the commitment entered into and I have no plans, at this point, to introduce any additional admission programmes.

Direct Provision Data

47. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of second level students in the direct provision system; and the number of persons in the direct provision system that have completed second level education here. [33174/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): The specific information requested by the Deputy in relation to the number of current second level students or the number who may have completed second level education while availing of State provided accommodation is not readily available. However at the end of October 2016, there were 163 children aged between 13 and 17 availing of accommodation provided by RIA. The education of these children is mainstreamed i.e. they may access free Primary and Post-Primary education and school transport in the same manner as the general population. Education in Ireland is compulsory from age 6 to 16 or until students have completed three years of second level (post-primary) education, whichever is the later date, under the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000.

Help-To-Buy Scheme Administration

48. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to assist first-time buyers by backdating the help-to-buy scheme to 1 January 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33090/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The commencement date for the Help to Buy scheme of 19 July 2016 was chosen as it was the date of the launch of 'Rebuilding Ireland - Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness', in which the development of such a scheme for inclusion in the Budget was initially announced. The intention to backdate this tax incentive to this date was announced at that time with a view to avoiding any potential interruption in house sales, by purchasers who may otherwise have deferred purchases, pending the commencement of the incentive.

There are currently no plans to extend eligibility for the scheme further back than the date of its initial announcement. To do so would consist entirely of deadweight, as individuals who signed contracts to purchase new homes or who drew down the first tranche of their mortgage in respect of a self-build home, in advance of the original announcement did not need the assistance of the State to fund the required deposit. Such individuals made their purchasing

decisions on the basis of the information available to them at the time of purchase, and could not have expected a subsequently introduced tax relief to be available to them.

As with all time bound reliefs, there will always be those who just miss out on qualification. I do not intend to extend the parameters of this new measure any further as it would become less targeted and more costly.

Tax Code

49. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the valuation the Revenue Commissioners have placed on the Mary Robinson presidential archive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33085/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Section 1003 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 provides for the payment of tax by means of the donation of heritage items. The scheme provides that, where a heritage item is donated to an approved body, a tax credit equivalent to 80% of the market value of the item is available to the donor to be set against any arrears of tax from prior years, any current taxation liabilities, with any remaining balance being available to set against any future tax liabilities.

For the purpose of Section 1003, heritage item means any kind of cultural item including:

- any archaeological item, archive, book, estate record, manuscript and painting; and
- any collection of cultural items and any collection of such items in their setting, which is;
 - an outstanding example of the type of item involved, pre-eminent in its class, whose export from the State would diminish the accumulated heritage of Ireland or whose import would enhance the accumulated heritage of Ireland; and
 - suitable for acquisition by an approved body.

Determinations regarding donations are made by a selection committee consisting of:

- An officer of the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, who acts as Chairperson on the committee;
- The Chief Executive of the Heritage Council;
- The Director of the Arts Council;
- The Director of the National Archives;
- The Director of the National Gallery of Ireland;
- The Director of the National Library of Ireland;
- The Director of the Crawford Art Gallery Cork Limited;
- The Director of the National Museum of Ireland;
- The Director and Chief Executive of the Irish Museum of Modern Art.

Donations may be made to the following approved bodies:

- The National Archives

- The National Gallery of Ireland
- The National Library of Ireland
- The National Museum of Ireland
- The Crawford Art Gallery Cork Ltd
- The Irish Museum of Modern Art

- Any other body owned or funded by the State or by any public or local authority as may be approved, with the consent of the Minister for Finance, by the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.

Following a determination by the selection committee, section 1003 provides that the selection committee shall request Revenue to ascertain the market value of the donation. As part of this process Revenue may seek outside expert advice.

I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that for reasons of confidentiality, they cannot comment on the tax affairs of any individual and this includes valuations on potential donations. However, each year Revenue compile a list of heritage items which have been donated. This list shows the values of donated items and this information is included in Revenue's annual reports, which are published on the Revenue website.

Financial Services Ombudsman Data

50. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the number of complaints to the Financial Services Ombudsman that were deemed to be inadmissible because of the six-year time limit in which complaints can be made for each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33089/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Firstly, I must point out that the Financial Services Ombudsman is independent in the performance of his statutory functions.

To answer the Deputy's question, the Financial Services Ombudsman's Bureau has provided the following information:-

Year	Complaints Closed	Complaints Closed due to 6 year rule	Percentage of Complaints Closed due to 6 year rule
2011	7464	283	4%
2012	7871	739	9%
2013	8639	1002	12%
2014	5878	608	10%
2015	4915	371	8%

Tax Yield

51. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the cost to the Exchequer of section 23 tax relief given as a deduction from rental income each year since its inception in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33104/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by Revenue that the annual

cost to the Exchequer of Section 23 tax relief for 2004 to 2014, the latest year for which data are available, are included in their 'Costs of Tax Expenditures (Credits, Allowances and Reliefs)' table located on their web page at <http://www.revenue.ie/en/about/statistics/tax-expenditures.html>, the relevant row in the table is titled "Rented Residential Relief - Section 23".

The Section 23 tax costs show the estimated tax cost relating to the total allowable expenditure in respect of the claims made. Under Section 23, the full amount of the relief must be deducted from the rental income of the particular property in the first year of letting, so the tax cost is shown by the year the claim was first made, despite the potential carry forward which applied to this measure.

The cost is shown for Income Tax cases only. It should be noted that for 2003 and earlier years, claims for incentive schemes on property were aggregated in tax returns with other claims and could not be distinguished from other reliefs available. Accordingly the Section 23 data for 2003 and earlier years are not available.

Insurance Costs

52. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the soaring motor insurance costs for emigrants returning back to reside here; the efforts his Department is making to ease these costs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33109/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As Minister for Finance, I am responsible for the development of the legal framework governing financial regulation but am prohibited from interfering in the provision or pricing of insurance products. The EU framework for insurance expressly prohibits Member States from adopting rules which require insurance companies to obtain prior approval of the pricing, or terms and conditions of an insurance product.

However, this does not preclude the Government from introducing measures that may, in the longer term, lead to a better claims environment that could facilitate a reduction in claims costs. Consequently, I have established a Cost of Insurance Working Group chaired by Minister of State Eoghan Murphy T.D. The Working Group brings together all the relevant Departments and Offices involved with the process. Its objective is to identify immediate and longer term measures which can address increasing costs, while bearing in mind the need to maintain a stable insurance sector.

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

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

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

tion to motor insurance are also being considered. These include the issue motor insurance costs for emigrants returning back to reside here.

On 28 October, the Working Group provided the Minister for Finance with an update report setting out the recommendations emerging from its work to date. During November and December, the Working Group will be developing an action plan to enable the relevant Government Departments and Offices to commence the implementation of agreed priority actions.

It may be of interest to the Deputy that a person, who is unable to obtain a quotation for motor insurance or who feels that the premium proposed or the terms are so excessive that it amounts to a refusal to give them motor insurance, can contact Insurance Ireland, 5 Harbourmaster Place, IFSC, Dublin 1, Telephone +353 1 6761820 quoting the Declined Cases Agreement.

Equality Proofing of Budgets

53. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to introduce a rigorous process of equality budgeting, whereby equality audits and assessments are carried out prior to a budget being decided upon and announced, in order that the potential impacts of any budget on certain groups, for example lone parents, can be assessed in advance and in order that there can be greater equality and transparency surrounding budget allocations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33117/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Programme for a Partnership Government contains a commitment to develop a process of budgetary and policy proofing as a means of advancing equality, reducing poverty and strengthening economic and social rights and, in this regard, my Department has already made process around the discussion on taxation policy.

For example, in 2016 as part of the reformed budgetary process, option papers were brought to the Tax Strategy Group (TSG) much earlier than was the case in previous years. Included in the 2016 TSG Income Tax & USC paper are details of the distributional burden of these tax proposals, an analysis of potential impacts upon different groups arising from a range of possible reform options and international comparisons. The TSG papers were circulated to the Oireachtas Committees in July, well in advance of the Budget, facilitating the Committee's consideration of the distributional issues which arose. They were subsequently published on my Department's website.

A number of new innovations and improved features were included in this year's Budget documentation. These included a description of the "Social Impact and Equality Analysis" in chapter five, of the Budget book, which sets out the stages in the budget process at which equality and distributional issues are explicitly addressed and outlines recent developments in these areas.

My Department, independently and in conjunction with other Departments also conducts a series of analyses to examine the distributional impact of possible Budget options and of the final Budget package. These provide an evidence base on equality issues, which can be integrated alongside other budgetary considerations.

In addition, the Budget book contains a distributional analysis of budget measures on a variety of household types across a range of income levels. Furthermore, the development of average effective tax rates and income tax progressivity issues are also considered in the accompanying material.

As the Deputy may be aware, the new Social Impact Assessment (SIA) framework, developed by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, in order to facilitate a more comprehensive assessment of budgetary policies on household living standards, is described in the 2017 Expenditure Report and accompanying papers. This new SIA framework will complement the existing Department of Social Protection SIA publication which focuses on the effect of income tax and welfare measures using the ESRI's SWITCH model. The new framework expands the assessment to consider the effects of expenditure on public services. The first of the new SIA papers, examining the General Medical Services Scheme and Targeted Childcare Scheme, also accompany the Expenditure Report.

Finally, I would like to reassure the Deputy that this Government takes consideration of equality issues very seriously. This starts with Cabinet procedures requiring a whole range of impacts to be covered in every decision proposed to Government. This ensures that the impact of policy proposals on gender equality, rural communities, North-South/East-West Relations, employment, persons experiencing or at risk of poverty or social exclusion, people with disabilities and industry costs are taken into account.

Property Tax Data

54. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 62 of 26 October 2016, if he will provide a breakdown of the interest paid in the last full year for which figures are available by each of the same local authorities as set out in the reply [33172/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by Revenue that as such interest payments are not separately identifiable on Revenue records, a breakdown of the interest paid as requested by the Deputy is not available.

Departmental Correspondence

55. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he and his Department have received a communication from groups (details supplied) seeking assistance in respect of funding to complete support group archives and voice interviews with former residents to be established; if their request will be considered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33062/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm that the group in question has been in contact with me seeking support with their archive material. As this is not an area that my Department funds, I will be referring them to a more appropriate organization to see if they can be of assistance.

Teachers' Remuneration

56. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the cost to his Department to end the two-tier pay disparity between pre and post-2011 teachers immediately and base all teachers' salaries on the pre-2011 scales. [33086/16]

60. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the costs to his Department if two-tier pay disparity between pre-2011 and post-2011 teachers was ended immediately and all teachers' salaries were based on the pre-2011 scales; and if he will make a

statement on the matter. [33139/16]

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

Subsequently in 2012, following the public service-wide review of allowances, the Government withdrew qualification allowances for new teachers altogether. However, the Government partially compensated for this by deciding that new entrant teachers would henceforth commence on a new salary scale which had a starting point higher than the starting point of the old scale.

The recent agreement reached with TUI and INTO in effect reverses the decision to withdraw qualification allowances from post-1 February 2012 entrant teachers. The estimated value of these increases over a teacher's career is €135,000. This new arrangement will apply to members of the teacher unions which have signed up to the Lansdowne Road Agreement i.e. TUI and INTO.

When other Lansdowne Road increases are also factored in, there will be a 15% increase in the starting pay of new entrant teachers between 31 August 2016 and 1 January 2018 (from €31,009 to €35,602). For an individual TUI/INTO member who started teaching in September 2015, they will see a 22% increase in their pay (including increment) between 31 August 2016 and 1 January 2018 (from €31,009 to €37,723).

In addition to this, it must be borne in mind that the pay reduction for post-2011 entrants to the public service applied to all public servants and not just teachers, and that any restoration of these measures in respect of teachers would be expected to be applied elsewhere across the public service. While I am not in a position to provide an estimate of the total cost of restoring all post-1 January 2011 entrants in all areas of the public service to the pre-2011 pay scale arrangements, I can say that in the case of education and training sector employees, including teachers, the estimated cost would be between €65 and €70 million per annum. Clearly, the cost across the entire public service would be substantially higher.

The agreement on new entrant pay shows what is possible through dialogue and negotiation within the Lansdowne Road Agreement. The Government is wholly committed to the implementation of the Lansdowne Road Agreement as the most appropriate way for progress to be made on pay restoration and reform of our public services into the future.

In addition, the Government has committed to establishing a Public Service Pay Commission to examine pay levels across the public service, including entry levels of pay. The Government also supports the gradual, negotiated repeal of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Acts, having due regard to the priority to improve public services and in recognition of the essential role played by public servants.

Schools Building Projects Status

57. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when an application for a new school (details supplied) will be approved; if the school is on his Department's build-

ing programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33087/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The school referred to by the Deputy has submitted an application to my Department for a new school building. The Deputy will be aware that my Department's current priority is focused on the provision of essential classroom accommodation to meet demographic demand and this will be the main focus for capital investment in the coming years.

As a project for the two teacher school in question was not included in my Department's 6 year Construction Programme (2016 – 2021), it is not possible to provide an indicative time-frame for the progression of a building project for the school at this time.

Third Level Admissions Entry Requirements

58. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will review the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33091/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Universities and institutes of technology, under the Universities Act 1997 and the Institutes of Technology Acts, are autonomous bodies and, as such, have responsibility for their own academic affairs, including issues relating to the admission of students. Therefore it is a matter for the institutes themselves to set admissions requirements for individual programmes of education and training and to ensure that students meet those requirements before commencing their studies. However, I understand from Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) that the following is the position in this instant case.

This case relates to a student wishing to progress onto a level 8 engineering programme following completion of a level 7 programme. The conditions of entry are ratified by Engineers Ireland and stipulations are put in place to ensure that students progressing are likely to succeed in the higher level programmes. To be eligible to progress to the level 8 programme, the prospective student with a Level 7 award, is required to meet one of four conditions, as set out below:

- An Upper Merit or Distinction (60 % or above) in the level 7 graduate award;
- A Lower Merit award (50-59 %) together with 70% or above in mathematics in the award year (Engineers Ireland criterion);
- A Lower Merit award (50-59 %) together with < 70 % in mathematics in the award year and a successful interview before a DIT panel.

Generally, the criterion here is that the applicant should demonstrate by their results in the award year of the ordinary degree and performance at interview that they are likely to succeed in the honours degree. Aspects considered include (i) strong performance in mathematics and / or analytical modules (ii) an outstanding performance (in comparison with their peers) in the design project or electrical distribution and control and (iii) a Merit Upper or Distinction performance in a series of individual modules while not achieving Merit Upper or Distinction in the overall grade;

- For those returning with work experience but with Lower Merit and < 70 % in mathematics advanced entry is allowed provided candidates have (i) a minimum of one year (12 calendar months) post qualification relevant design experience (ii) a report (endorsed by their employer) detailing their experience in the discipline (iii) a successful interview before a DIT panel;

- Based on Level 7 results achieved, formal offers are made to eligible students for places on the level 8 programme during the summer - in 2016, offers were made by 01 July 2016, with acceptance required within two weeks of the offer. Following acceptance of the offer, the students are then invited to register in time for the academic year. In the case of students sitting supplemental exams, notification of such eligibility and offer of a place, where applicable, occurs mid September, i.e. after the commencement of the academic year;

In this specific case, the student did not meet the advanced entry criteria and thus was not offered a place or made eligible to register for the programme in the 2016/17 academic year. Under the conditions of entry of the course the only option available to him was Option 4 as outlined above. Furthermore, the assistance of the Careers Service in DIT has been made available to the student.

Schools Building Projects Status

59. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason there has been a change from the plan to build a two-phase extension to a school (details supplied) to a complete new replacement school; the timeframe for the new building; if there is a revision of the capital plan to ensure that it is delivered in time for the growing population in the area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33096/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware, a major extension project for the school in question, to meet the demographic demands in the area, is included in my Department’s 6 Year Construction Programme (2016-21).

Given the complexities and constraints presented by inter alia the school site and location of existing school buildings, the Department will be proceeding with a single construction project rather than a phased approach in the case of this school.

My Department will continue to liaise with the school, in question, in relation to the project development and is committed to progressing the project as expeditiously as possible.

Question No. 60 answered with Question No. 56.

Teacher Exchange Scheme

61. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding the teacher exchange programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33140/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The provisions of the teacher exchange scheme are set out in my Department’s Circular Letter 0017/2015 the contents of which were agreed under the auspices of the Teacher Conciliation Council (TCC). The scheme is designed to facilitate primary teachers to temporarily exchange their posts for educational purposes. The minimum period for which an exchange may occur is one year and the maximum is five years.

The TCC is part of the scheme of Conciliation and Arbitration for Teachers and was set up to deal with claims and proposals relating to the Terms and Conditions of employment of teachers. The Council is composed of representatives of teachers, school management, the Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and is chaired by an official of the Workplace Relations Commission.

Following further discussion under the auspices of the TCC it was agreed that the teacher exchange scheme is to remain as a temporary measure as in the published circular. Teaching posts are to be filled by redeployment under the current arrangements or in accordance with the recruitment and appointment procedures as set out in the Governance Manual for Primary Schools 2015-2019.

Apprenticeship Data

62. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the targets in place for the number of construction-related apprenticeships in each of the next five years with a breakdown by apprenticeship type; the target for apprenticeship completions in this time period with a breakdown by apprenticeship type; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33175/16]

63. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the estimate by his Department of the number of apprenticeships required to meet construction-related activity here in the next five years with a breakdown by apprenticeship type; if he will detail any deficits identified by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33176/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan) (Deputy John Halligan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 62 and 63 together.

The forecast registrations for existing apprenticeships is set out in the following table.

As the Deputy will be aware, the route to an apprenticeship is through gaining employment with an approved employer. SOLAS has informed me that the forecast for future apprenticeship registrations is strong and the number of apprentices being registered by employers at the end of October 2016 is 19% higher than at the corresponding time in 2015. The increase in apprentice registration is primarily being driven by employers in the electrical, engineering and motor sectors, with modest growth occurring in the construction related apprenticeships.

The Programme for Government commits to providing 50,000 apprenticeship and traineeship places up to 2020. SOLAS and the Apprenticeship Council are preparing a detailed 3 year plan to deliver on this commitment, which will include managing the pipeline of new apprenticeships and setting out the timing and nature of new calls for proposals. This plan will be published shortly and will set out specific annual targets as well as bringing forward a range of specific actions to enable and support the development of new apprenticeships and traineeships.

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

-	Forecast Registrations 2016	Actual Registrations as at October 31st '16	Forecast Registrations 2017	Forecast Registrations 2018	Forecast Registrations 2019	Forecast Registrations 2020
Construction	989	742	1319	1724	2024	2434
Electrical	1194	1241	1554	1659	1709	1754
ENGINEERING	537	392	512	542	577	622

-	Forecast Registrations 2016	Actual Registrations as at October 31st '16	Forecast Registrations 2017	Forecast Registrations 2018	Forecast Registrations 2019	Forecast Registrations 2020
Motor	662	626	750	760	765	765
Print Media	8	2	12	12	12	12
OVERALL TOTAL	3,390	3,003	4,147	4,697	5,087	5,587

Higher Education Authority Administration

64. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on giving the HEA extra powers of investigation in respect of concerns raised regarding the spend in Irish universities funded by the taxpayer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33202/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): There is a Code of Governance in place in the universities whereby universities make annual returns to the Higher Education Authority (HEA) in respect of their compliance regarding a range of issues consistent with the requirements of the Code. As part of the HEA role to promote, monitor and ensure good practice with regard to governance and accountability for the higher education sector, the HEA is required to review and improve processes for monitoring higher education institutions' (HEIs) compliance with codes of governance and take appropriate action where required. In order to discharge this role more effectively, the HEA in conjunction with my Department has instigated a number of changes to governance oversight processes since 2015. This represents the culmination of a process to build on the significant existing governance and accountability infrastructure already in place with a series of new and improved mechanisms which will provide more robust assurance of compliance with legislative and other requirements and more timely and responsive interventions to address any issues arising. It is reflected in a new Governance Framework for Higher Education.

Changes include reviewing the annual governance reporting formats submitted by HEIs with a view to achieving more consistency and depth in returns with any non-compliance to be clearly identified. There is also in place a process of ongoing engagement between the HEA and the C&AG to serve as an early warning system of potential issues. All institutions are required to comply with an annual Financial Memorandum with the HEA that requires e.g. balanced budgets and financial plans, compliance with Government policy on pay and public sector procurement rules. In 2016 the HEA also commenced a series of rolling reviews of corporate governance compliance with relevant Codes of Practice will be conducted across the higher education sector. The first such review into procurement practices has recently been completed.

There is currently no provision in legislation for the HEA to carry out investigations in relation to universities. However the Universities Act 1997 (Sections 19-21 refer) makes provision for the Government, after consultation with the President of the High Court, to appoint a retired judge as Visitor to inquire into any matter giving rise to the opinion that there are reasonable grounds for contending that the functions of a university are being performed in a manner which prima facie constitutes a breach of the laws, statutes or ordinances applicable to the university. If the Visitor is satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for such an opinion, he/she shall report to my Department on the results of his/her inquiry.

Third Level Institutions

65. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he is satisfied with the corporate governance arrangements of Irish universities funded by public funds; if he is aware of a situation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33203/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): There is a Code of Governance in place in the universities whereby universities make annual returns to the Higher Education Authority (HEA) in respect of their compliance regarding a range of issues consistent with the requirements of the Code. As part of the HEA role to promote, monitor and ensure good practice with regard to governance and accountability for the higher education sector, the HEA is required to review and improve processes for monitoring higher education institutions' (HEIs) compliance with codes of governance and take appropriate action where required. In order to discharge this role more effectively, the HEA in conjunction with my Department has instigated a number of changes to governance oversight processes since 2015. This represents the culmination of a process to build on the significant existing governance and accountability infrastructure already in place with a series of new and improved mechanisms which will provide more robust assurance of compliance with legislative and other requirements and more timely and responsive interventions to address any issues arising. It is reflected in a new Governance Framework for Higher Education.

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Section 17 (7) The Universities Act, 1997 contains the following provisions:

7) In the case of the governing authority of Trinity College or a constituent university, the person holding the office of chief officer (by whatever name known) on the commencement of this Part shall be the chairperson of the governing authority of that university under this Act until his or her term of office as chief officer expires, he or she is sooner removed from the office of chairperson in accordance with subsection (6), or the office otherwise becomes vacant.

The Universities Act also makes the following provision in relation to the Chief Officer (Fourth Schedule)

5. A chief officer shall be entitled to be a member of and preside over any and every committee appointed by the governing authority

The HEA continually monitors the governance and budgetary situation of all institutions and particularly engages with those institutions who are projecting deficits. All institutions who have deficits are required to submit 3-5 year financial plans demonstrating return to a balanced/surplus position.

Third Level Staff

66. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to ongoing situations in Irish universities where some staff get permanency whereas others only have recourse to one, two and three year fixed term contracts; if he has correspondence on this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33204/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Following a lengthy consultation process with all stakeholders, the Report of the Expert Group on Fixed Term and Part Time Employment in Lecturing was published in July 2016. The Report contains a number of recommendations that will assist in addressing concerns raised about the level of part-time and fixed-term employment in lecturing in the third level sector. My officials are currently taking steps to implement the recommendations contained in the Report.

Teachers' Remuneration

67. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if surplus pension contributions will be reimbursed to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33207/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): It is a requirement of the secondary teachers superannuation scheme that pension contributions are paid on all pensionable service. A person is therefore liable for contributions in respect of personal pension and lump sum for all service notwithstanding that pension is calculated based on a maximum of 40 years' service.

For the duration of his membership of the scheme the person to whom the Deputy refers was paying modified (or D Class) PRSI and pension contributions comprised of 5% of pensionable remuneration towards his personal pension and lump sum. As the person retired with in excess of 40 years pensionable service there is no provision for the refund of contributions for years in excess of the service required to qualify for a full pension under the scheme. This is a standard feature in occupational pension schemes across the public sector generally.

Schools Building Projects Status

68. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 112 of 1 June 2016, the status of the application to construct a boundary wall between a school and a residential area (details supplied) given that all issues have now been resolved and all requested information has been provided. [33221/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): During the Summer, my Department gave approval in principle for the works in question to be carried out at the school. The nature of the project, however, has many inherent risks and it is important that all of these risks are identified and addressed during the design process. The Department will need to be satisfied that this is the case before final approval can issue for the project. The Department is examining recent information supplied by the school and it will be in direct contact with it again shortly with its views as to how the project should proceed.

Residential Institutions Redress Scheme Data

69. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the details of all cash sums and properties, with their values, transferred to the State by the religious orders under

the institutions redress scheme, in tabular form; the total cash amount outstanding and, in the case of property, the total estimated value of property and the location of each property; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33225/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy will be aware, contributions from religious congregations towards the costs of redress are being made under two separate rounds.

Under the 2002 Indemnity Agreement, the 18 participating religious congregations are contributing €128m in cash, counselling services and property. The cash contributions of €54.42m under the Indemnity Agreement have been received while information has been provided to my Department that confirms that counselling services in excess of the €10m provided for in the agreement have been funded directly by the contributing congregations.

Under the 2002 Indemnity Agreement, my Department agreed, in principle, with CORI that a total of 64 properties would be accepted subject to good and marketable title and agreed valuations. This number was reduced to 61 when the Department accepted and received a cash sum in lieu of three properties where good and marketable title could not be established. 48 Properties have been fully transferred and there are no outstanding issues. A list of these properties is attached. Work is continuing to finalise the arrangements in relation to the remaining properties.

In response to the call for further substantial contributions towards the costs of redress made in the aftermath of the publication of the report of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse (the Ryan Report), many of the congregations that were party to the 2002 Indemnity Agreement made voluntary offers which they valued at €348.51m, including cash, property and other elements. Subsequent offers and the value of a particular property offer amounted to €4.1m, bringing the total contribution offers to €352.61m. The Government agreed to use the €110m in cash contributions to fund the Residential Institutions Statutory Fund (Caranua). To date, some €96.1m, comprising post Ryan Report contributions from congregations, associated interest and cash from property disposals has been lodged to the special investment account opened by the National Treasury Management Agency pursuant to the Residential Institution Statutory Act, 2012. I understand that the remaining cash contributions will be received from congregations between now and 2018. The figure of €96.1m referred to above includes contributions of €94.7m as follows:

-	Amount
Brothers of Charity	€1.5m
Christian Brothers	€20m
Daughters of Charity	€5m
Daughters of the Heart of Mary	€1.5m
De La Salle Brothers	€1m (€0.055m interest)
Dominican Order	€6.5m
Oblates of Mary Immaculate	€20m
Hospitaller Order of St. John of God	€1m
Presentation Brothers	€3.6m
Presentation Sisters	€4m
Religious Sisters of Charity	€2m
Sisters of Our Lady of Charity	€1.5m
Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy	€25.1m (€1.044m interest)
Sisters of St. Clare	€1m
Sisters of St. Louis	€1m

Work is underway on the transfer of those properties offered by the congregations in the aftermath of the publication of the Ryan Report and which were accepted in principle. To date, the transfers of four properties to the State have been fully completed. The properties in question, which are in the course of being valued, are included in the attached list.

Properties which have been fully transferred under the 2002 Indemnity Agreement

	Property	Value
1	Doon, Co. Limerick	€640,000
2	St Coleman's, Rushbrooke, Co. Cork	€571,380
3	Playing Field, Carna, Co. Galway	€175,000
4	Secondary School & Site, Ennistymon, Co. Clare	€980,000
5	Mohill Community School Site, Co. Leitrim	€520,000
6	Terenure Secondary School, Dublin 6	€4,500,000
7	Site at Merrion, Dublin 4	€8,900,000
8	Two Properties at Tuam, Co. Galway	€3,020,000
9	Nursery Buildings, Goldenbridge, Dublin 12	€570,000
10	24 Westcourt, Tralee, Co. Kerry	€184,110
11	Site at Glenamaddy, Co. Galway	€600,000
12	11 Acre Site at Virginia Road, Kells, Co. Meath	€825,000
13	Deenagh House, Killarney, Co. Kerry	€215,265
14	St Anne's Secondary School, Dublin	€2,600,000
15	28 The Woodlands, Celbridge, Co. Kildare	€270,000
16	Vacant Buildings and Land at Rathdrum, Co. Wicklow	€349,200
17	Gate Lodge, Goldenbridge, Dublin 12	€220,000
18	1 Garravogue Road, Raheen, Co Limerick	€228,550
19	23 Woodlea, Tralee, Co Kerry	€152,370
20	Goldenbridge Group Homes	€1,269,700
21	Ballymote, Co Sligo	€38,000
22	15 The Willows, Mallow, Co. Cork	€114,280
23	Presentation Convent, Hospital, Co Limerick	€175,000
24	Traveller Site at Blackrock, Co. Dublin	€3,045,000
25	St Teresa's, Temple Hill, Blackrock, Co. Dublin	€3,045,000
26	Belmullet, Co Mayo	€140,000
27	59 Hollybank Road, Drumcondra, Dublin 9	€570,000
28	Mount St Joseph, Passage West, Co. Cork	€914,210
29	Building & Site at Edgeworthstown, Co. Longford	€598,045
30	Avondale, Waterford Road, Kilkenny	€330,000
31	Site at Longmile Road, Walkinstown, Dublin 12	€325,000
32	Presentation Convent, Hospital, Co. Limerick	€254,000
33	Convent Land at Barrack Street, Limerick	€625,000
34	2 Moyle Crescent, Clondalkin, Dublin 22	€325,000
35	.28 Acre Site at Dolphin Park, Crumlin, Dublin 6	€250,000
36	Holy Cross Gardens, Killarney, Co. Kerry	€1,270,000
37	23 Parnell Square, Dublin 1	€1,270,000
38	Convent at Newport, Co. Mayo	€635,000
39	Ballina, Co. Mayo	€38,000
40	Airne Villa, Rock Road, Killarney, Co Kerry	€221,615
41	6 Mount Vincent Terrace, Limerick	€400,000
42	Gentili, Farahoe, Innishannon, Cork	€228,600
43	Roseboro, 2 Firgrove Gardens, Bishopstown, Cork	€292,100

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	Property	Value
44	4 The Hawthorns, Macroom Road, Bandon, Cork	€215,900
45	5 Avondale Drive, Bandon, Co. Cork	€190,500
46	The Vineyard Centre, Rathdrum, Co. Wicklow	€349,250
47	Lands at Mullaghmonaghan, Co. Monaghan	€825,000
48	Benvon, 5 Bishopstown Road, Bishopstown, Cork	€279,400
		€43,754,475

Post Ryan Report voluntary property transfers which have been fully transferred

	Property
1	Convent and Boarding School, Clonakilty, Co. Cork to the Minister for Education and Skills
2	Old Primary School, Trim, Co. Meath to the Minister for Education and Skills
3	Scoil Fatima, Ballinamore, Co. Leitrim to the Minister for Education and Skills
4	St Joseph's Primary School (former), Abbey Street, Ballyhaunis, Co. Mayo to Mayo County Council

Minor Works Scheme

70. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 110 of 20 October 2016, the position in respect of the minor works grant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33228/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Further to parliamentary question number 110 of 20 October, the position on the minor works grant remains unchanged. It remains the case that the issue of the Minor Works Grant 2016/2017 will be considered in the context of my Department's overall capital position later this year.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

71. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will ensure that a person who returns here and attends college, following the ending of an apprenticeship in football abroad, will be eligible for the maintenance grant (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33236/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Under the terms of the student grant scheme, grant assistance is awarded to students who meet the prescribed conditions of funding, including those relating to nationality, residency, previous academic attainment and means.

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

With regard to residency, in order to be eligible for a grant, a "student", as defined in Section 14 of the Student Support Act 2011, must demonstrate that he/she has been resident in the State for at least 3 years out of the 5 year period ending on the day before the start of his/her approved course of study. This requirement takes cognisance of students who wish to take time out to travel or work abroad. Such students can still meet the residency requirement if they have not been outside the State for more than two of the previous five years. Similar and in some cases

more restrictive residency requirements apply in other EU Member States.

It is also possible for students, who did not meet the residency requirement at the commencement of their studies, to have their eligibility reviewed if they meet the residency requirement during the course of their studies.

Education and Training Boards

72. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the proposals his Department has to provide facilities for Kildare and Wicklow education training board, KWETB, to enable it to carry out its statutory functions to deliver training programmes for Kildare and Wicklow in view of the fact that KWETB is one of five education and training boards nationally that is without a training centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33253/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): The reform of the Further Education and Training (FET) sector involves the future delivery of further education and training in an integrated manner. This involved the transfer of training centres from SOLAS to ETBs. Seven training centres and their staff transferred to four ETBs on 1 January 2014 while a further twelve training centres transferred to seven ETBs on 1 July 2014.

Five ETBs, including Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board (KWETB) did not receive a training centre. The Education and Training Boards Act 2013 makes no distinction between the ETBs which received centres and the ones which did not as all ETBs must ensure the delivery of both education and training.

Having regard to the legislation and to the policy objective of integrating Further Education and Training, the ETB/SOLAS Programme Board established by my Department, which includes representation from the ETB Sector and from SOLAS, decided that each ETB without a training centre should be allocated staffing and resources to deliver contracted and community training and to deal with the management of the apprenticeship employers in its area.

Accordingly, a process which was undertaken to facilitate the transfer of these training functions to those ETBs to which training functions were to be transferred resulted in the formal transfer of training functions to KWETB on 2 November 2015. I am satisfied that as a result of this process and transfer of functions, Kildare and Wicklow ETB is now in a position to discharge its statutory functions.

Repair and Leasing Scheme

73. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the expected timeframe for the introduction of the repair and lease scheme in County Louth as outlined in budget 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33065/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness recognises the important source of potential accommodation vacant private properties present. A new Repair and Leasing Scheme (RLS) has been developed to assist private property owners and local authorities or Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) to harness this potential, and bring these vacant

houses into social housing use to provide homes for families on local authority waiting lists.

The new scheme was launched in Waterford and Carlow on a pilot basis in October, and depending on the take-up from private property owners, will be rolled out to further local authorities early in 2017. The purpose of the pilot is to ensure that the scheme is workable from local authorities' and AHBs' perspectives. It is anticipated that other local authorities will come into the scheme on a rolling basis, with full roll-out expected within 6 months. My Department is engaging with individual local authorities, including Louth County Council, in order to arrange a schedule for the roll-out of the new scheme nationally.

AHBs have a proven record in managing the refurbishment of properties and being good landlords puts them in an excellent position to play a key role in the success of the scheme. Several AHBs will be working together with Waterford and Carlow local authorities to manage the scheme in those particular areas. As the scheme is rolled out in other local authority areas, more AHBs around the country will become involved with local authorities in the delivery of the scheme.

The scheme is targeted at owners of vacant properties who cannot afford or access the funding required to bring them up to the standard for rental property. Subject to the suitability of the property for social housing, and the agreement of the property owner, the cost of the necessary repairs will be met up-front by the local authority or the AHB. This allows for the property owner to sign-up to a lease arrangement for a length that is linked to the value of the repairs, subject to a minimum of 10 years. The value of the repairs will then be offset incrementally against the agreed rental payment over a defined period within the lease.

A property owner can either choose to arrange a contractor to carry out the repairs themselves, or the local authority or AHB can arrange this instead. Property owners will not be required to take on landlord responsibilities and the local authority or AHB will have on-going management and maintenance responsibilities in respect of the properties.

The local authority will determine the eligibility for the scheme having regard to the location and the suitability of the property for social housing and also taking into consideration the extent of the repairs that may be required. The maximum costs of repairs allowable under this initiative will be €40,000.

Early estimates are that at least 150 units will be secured in 2017 and up to 3,500 properties will be targeted over the next five years. I have provided €6 million in capital funding in 2017 for the cost of the repairs, and €140 million over the lifetime of the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan.

Homeless Accommodation Provision

74. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of wet and dry hostels in Dublin; and the location of same. [33120/16]

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. In accordance with section 37 (2) of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009, statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of homeless services, including accommodation, rests with individual housing authorities. My Department has no function in relation to operational issues, such as those outlined in the Question, which are a matter for the relevant housing authorities.

Tenant Purchase Scheme Data

75. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of local authorities which excluded from their scheme tenants who do not occupy every bedroom in their house, with regard to the current tenant purchase scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33127/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The new Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme came into operation on 1 January 2016. The Scheme is open to eligible tenants, including joint tenants, of local authority houses that are available for sale under the Scheme and applies to all existing local authority houses, other than those classes of houses excluded under legislation. To be eligible, tenants must meet certain criteria, including having been in receipt of social housing support for a minimum period of one year and having a minimum reckonable income of €15,000 per annum.

The Housing (Sale of Local Authority Houses) Regulations 2015 governing the Scheme provides for a number of specified classes of houses to be excluded from sale. Housing authorities may, within the provisions of the Regulations, exclude certain houses which, in the opinion of the authority, should not be sold for reasons such as proper stock or estate management. It is a matter for each individual housing authority to administer the Scheme in its operational area in line with the over-arching provisions of the governing legislation for the scheme, and in a manner appropriate to its housing requirements. The Department does not hold any records relating to exclusions from the scheme by Local Authorities.

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 undertaken 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.

Local Authority Boundaries Review

76. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the amount spent to date or the funding approved by his Department for the process by which a three man boundary review commission was established to examine the boundary between Kilkenny and Waterford, from establishment in 2015 to date. [33129/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The review referred to is one of 4 boundary reviews which were initiated together. The overall estimated cost to the Department in relation to all 4 boundary reviews is some €87,500. To date, some € 41,316 has been paid .

Emergency Accommodation Provision

77. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if additional funding is available to provide emergency accommodation in South Dublin County Council; if he and his Department has been in discussions with officials in South Dublin County Council to identify potential sites for this emergency accommodation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33132/16]

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

Coveney): My Department provides funding to housing authorities towards the operational costs of homeless accommodation and related services under Section 10 of the Housing Act 1988. Under 'Section 10' funding arrangements, funding is provided regionally and on a delegated basis whereby responsibility for decision-making in relation to particular services rests with the Statutory Management Group of the respective regional Joint Homelessness Consultative Forum. The funding needs of the various regions are kept under review on an on-going basis.

The four Dublin housing authorities have agreed that Dublin City Council acts as the lead local authority with regard to the provision and oversight of homeless services in the Dublin region and the Dublin Region Homeless Executive carries out these functions under a shared service agreement with the authorities. Accordingly, my Department primarily liaises with the Dublin Region Homeless Executive in relation to funding and service needs across the Dublin Region, and such liaison occurs on an ongoing basis. In addition, my Department also engages with all four Dublin authorities directly on a range of social housing and homelessness issues as necessary and, in that context, is continuing to engage with the authorities to explore a range of homeless accommodation options in the Dublin area.

Direct Provision System

78. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the large number of persons who remain in direct provision following receipt of their stamp four visas and the threat of these persons and families being made homeless by the Reception and Integration Agency; if with his responsibility for homelessness policy he has raised this matter with the Minister for Justice and Equality to put in place housing solutions that will prevent persons becoming homeless in the transition from direct provision. [33133/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): As the Deputy will be aware, matters relating to direct provision and the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) are a matter for my colleague, the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality.

In terms of the number of persons in RIA accommodation who have been granted some form of status, I am advised that there are in the region of 500 such persons among the 4,200 residents across the system. This number fluctuates based on the numbers of status grants and the movement of such persons into private accommodation over time.

RIA, its centre managers, the Community Welfare Service (including Rent Supplement), Citizens Information and those City and County Councils operating the Housing Assistance Payments Scheme link with such persons in accessing the appropriate supports and services, including in respect of sourcing and securing private accommodation.

I am further advised that following on from the McMahon Working Group Report, the Department of Justice and Equality developed a Guide to Independent Living for persons with status to provide practical assistance for them. The Guide is available in all centres and has been published on the RIA website (www.ria.gov.ie) in a number of different languages. This was published in parallel with information sessions coordinated by the Citizens Information Bureau in accommodation centres which gave an opportunity for such persons to seek assistance and clarification on the services provided.

While it is the case that once some form of status is granted, residents cease to be ordinarily

entitled to the accommodation supports provided through the RIA, such persons are not threatened with eviction and, in fact, continue to be supported in accommodation until they secure their own alternative accommodation.

Tenant Purchase Scheme Administration

79. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if a tenant of 30 years of Tipperary County Council can purchase their home from the council with a lump sum which is not a loan and the lump sum is not secured against the property; if not, the reason; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33158/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The new Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme came into operation on 1 January 2016. Under this Scheme, the tenant is responsible for raising the money to finance the purchase of their home and they can do so from savings, a lump sum or a mortgage loan etc. The tenant must pay the purchase money in full at the time the house purchase is completed. If they can afford it, the tenant can buy the house without a mortgage loan as long as they meet all the eligibility criteria including having sufficient reckonable income to cover the cost of maintaining the property over the longer term.

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

In determining reckonable income, the income of the tenants of the house, including adult children that are joint tenants can be included, as can the income of the spouse, civil partner or other partner-cohabitant of a tenant who lives in the house with them.

Reckonable income is calculated as gross income. Income from social welfare payments is included in the reckonable income but only where these payments constitute a secondary source of income.

In order to ensure the sustainability of the scheme, it is essential that an applicant's income is of a long-term and sustainable nature. This is necessary to ensure that the tenant purchasing the house is in a financial position, as the owner, to maintain and insure the property for the duration of the charged period. This ensures compliance with the conditions of the order transferring the ownership of, and responsibility for, the house from the local authority to the tenant.

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 undertaken 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.

Unfinished Housing Developments

80. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will address the crisis in estates around the country that are not completed to the satisfaction of the local council to allow them to be taken in charge where the development

company are no longer in business and the council have not been provided funding by Government to complete the work as these estates are deteriorating and in some cases do not have completed public lighting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33162/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Section 180 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, provides that, as soon as possible following a request by the developer or by the majority of the house-owners, a planning authority must initiate procedures to take in charge a residential housing estate completed to its satisfaction in accordance with the planning permission.

Section 180 also provides that, following a request by the majority of the house-owners, a planning authority must initiate procedures to take an unfinished estate in charge where the authority has not commenced enforcement proceedings in respect of the estate within seven years of the expiry of the planning permission concerned.

In the case of an unfinished estate, where the planning authority has commenced enforcement proceedings within seven years of the expiry of the planning permission or considers that enforcement proceedings will not result in the satisfactory completion of the estate, section 180 provides that, following a request by the majority of the house-owners, the authority may at its absolute discretion initiate procedures to take in charge the roads and some or all of the other services in the estate. A planning authority may, for the purposes of section 180, hold a plebiscite to ascertain the wishes of the house-owners.

My Department, by way of Circular letter PD 1/2008 dated 26 February 2008, issued updated policy guidance to planning authorities on Taking in Charge of Residential Developments/Management Arrangements. This advised each planning authority to develop or update, as appropriate, its policy on taking in charge by the end of June 2008, based on the following principles (among others):

- Certain core facilities/infrastructure to be taken in charge on request
- public roads and footpaths, unallocated surface parking areas, public lighting, public water supply, foul and storm water drainage and public open spaces;
- The procedures for taking in charge to begin promptly on foot of a request by the majority of the residents in the development or by the developer, as appropriate. Protocols, including time frames, must be set out by planning authorities to respond to requests for taking in charge.

Each planning authority's policy on taking in charge is required to be made available to the public and published on its website, and the policy is reported on to the elected members on a regular basis, and at least once annually.

In addition, my Department has launched in April 2016 a National Taking in Charge Initiative (NTICI) with a pilot scheme funding of €10 million. The aim of the NTICI is to accelerate the taking-in-charge process of housing estates and to develop new working methods from the pilot funding that can be deployed in tackling further taking-in-charge requirements into the future.

The initiative draws upon data gathered from each of the 31 local authorities and collated by my Department in December 2015, following which funding was allocated for a number of developments on the basis of proposals submitted to my Department by the local authorities.

The information collated in December 2015 indicated that of the 5,566 developments yet to be taken in charge, there are approximately 914 estates with developer-provided infrastructure (DPI) and work is continuing on finalising this figure.

Under the terms of the NTICI, only those developments subject to valid taking-in-charge applications were eligible for inclusion in the call for proposals for pilot funding, but it is my Department's intention that the knowledge and experience gained under the Initiative will be applied to deal with further estates to be taken in charge over time.

Further information on NTICI can be found on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/search/archived/current?query=Taking%20in%20Charge>

Social and Affordable Housing Data

81. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the funding set aside in 2016 and 2017, respectively, for the social housing investment programme with a breakdown by the constituent elements; the projected number of units and bed spaces to be delivered via this funding in each of these years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33173/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): To support the implementation of Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, I have secured €5.35 billion in exchequer investment to deliver 47,000 social housing units through build, refurbishment, acquisitions and leasing, over the period 2016 to 2021. This €5.35bn investment comprises some €4.5 billion in capital funding and €844 million in support of programmes funded from current expenditure.

The funding available in 2016 for social housing programmes comprises an Exchequer investment of almost €821 million across a range of housing programmes. In addition, local authorities will fund a range of housing services from surplus Local Property Tax receipts to the value of over €112 million, bringing the total housing provision in 2016 to €933 million. The specific amounts allocated to individual housing programmes in 2016 are available on the website of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform at the following link: <http://www.per.gov.ie/en/rev/>

The 2016 funding provision will provide for the housing needs of over 17,000 households to be met under a range of social housing initiatives, details of which are available on my Department's website at the following link:

<http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/finance/2016-funding-social-housing> .

The corresponding delivery target for 2017 is over 21,000, supported by the €1.2 billion allocated to housing programmes under Budget 2017. This will be supplemented by €92 million which local authorities will self-fund from surplus Local Property Tax receipts, bringing the total 2017 housing provision to €1.3 billion.

The 2017 funding provision will support the delivery of 4,450 social housing units which will be supplied via my Department's capital programme, including 2,350 units to be delivered by local authorities through construction activity (i.e. new build and refurbishment/regeneration), 75 units to be acquired by local authorities, with the equivalent figures for approved housing bodies being 550 and 1,175. It is expected that some 300 additional new units will be built and made available for social housing via Part V mechanisms and will be owned by either local authorities or approved housing bodies. A further 150 units will be secured for social housing using the new Repair and Leasing Scheme and around 450 units will be leased directly by local authorities or AHBs from private property owners and developers under longterm lease arrangements.

In addition, 15,000 additional tenancies will be supported by the accelerated roll-out of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP), and an additional 1,000 households will transfer into units supported by the Rental Assistance Scheme (RAS) during 2017.

Housing Data

82. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the causes of and cost factors associated with the very high cost of developing new homes here; his views on the costs published by the Society of Chartered Surveyors in May 2016 entitled, *The Real Cost of New House Delivery*; the costs he would dispute; the actions he is taking to secure a reduction in the costs of house building here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33178/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The costs associated with developing new homes and the factors influencing those costs are numerous and vary depending on the location and scale of development. The Society of Chartered Surveyors Ireland report on the *Real Cost of New House Delivery*, published in May 2016, outlined the costs of delivering a 113 square metre 3-bed semi-detached house to the market based on a study of a number of projects in the Greater Dublin Area.

In addition to measures such as reduced development contributions, a development contribution rebate scheme, changes to the Part V regime and new apartment guidelines, the *Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness* published on 19 July 2016, sets out a broad range of further measures to tackle, among other things, some of the costs associated with the provision of housing in the interests of reducing construction overheads in order to facilitate an increased level of housing output into the future.

In particular, a €200 million Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF) will provide much needed enabling infrastructure on key sites to open up lands for development from early 2017 onwards. In addition, the NTMA, through the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF), is developing proposals to offer competitive financing on a commercial basis, and in line with ISIF's statutory mandate, to meet other infrastructure requirements on large development sites.

The Action Plan also contains a commitment to undertake a detailed analysis, in conjunction with the construction sector, to benchmark housing delivery input costs in Ireland. A working group, chaired by my Department, will begin work on this task over the coming weeks with representatives from the Construction Industry Council.

In the context of social housing provision, my Department undertakes analysis in respect of the average costs associated with the delivery of a range of differently sized social housing units, both in terms of construction costs and 'all-in' costs. These costs are based on an analysis of returned data from local authorities on social housing schemes.

My Department has also input into work led by the Department of Finance in relation to construction costs which was undertaken under the *Construction 2020 Strategy*. In addition, costs are examined in the context of proposed legislative changes, particularly in relation to *Building Regulations* and a cost benefit analysis and regulatory impact analysis is carried out on any proposed amendments.

Departmental Funding

83. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the progress to date on the creation of an NTMA fund or other special fund to finance the building of housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33179/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Work on developing the new funding vehicle is underway within the NTMA. Potential models for the structure of the vehicle are being examined and bilateral engagement is ongoing between the NTMA and my Department. A critical factor in the delivery of the action will be that the funding vehicle is ‘off balance sheet’ from a Government accounting perspective. Consultation involving EUROSTAT and the Central Statistics Office to address considerations affecting the potential balance-sheet treatment of the vehicle is ongoing.

Housing Data

84. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his estimate of the number of vacant dwellings currently under the control of banks, investment companies and NAMA in tabular form with a breakdown by location, institution type and bed spaces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33180/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department does not have the detailed information requested by the Deputy. However, in May 2016, the Housing Agency presented a paper in relation to vacant homes in Ireland to the Special Oireachtas Committee on Housing and Homelessness which – on the basis of the 2011 Census – indicated there were 230,056 unoccupied residential properties (excluding holiday homes) across the State. This figure includes all vacant homes in the State but no breakdown of this figure is available in respect of vacant dwellings under the control of the banks, investment companies and NAMA. The Housing Agency paper is available at : <http://www.housing.ie/our-publications/latest-publications.aspx>.

The 2016 Census conducted last April will provide more up-to-date information on the number of vacant units in Ireland, but initial published summary returns from the enumerators indicate a figure of 198,358 vacant residential properties, excluding holiday homes. My Department and the Housing Agency are liaising with local authorities and with the Central Statistics Office in order to obtain a better understanding of up-to-date numbers, characteristics and reasons why such homes are vacant.

Action 5.1 of the Government’s Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness undertakes to develop a National Vacant Housing Re-Use Strategy by early 2017. To this end, the Housing Agency, which has lead responsibility for co-ordinating the development of the Strategy, has established a working group to inform the Strategy, with senior representatives from my Department, local authorities and from the Housing Agency itself. It has met twice so far. A number of local authorities have commenced, or are planning to commence, pilot programmes to identify vacant homes and bring them back into use; these pilot programmes will inform the Strategy. In addition, the Strategy will be informed by international best practice and experience, and research is being undertaken in this area.

Housing Data

85. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of single person applicants on the housing list in each county in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33182/16]

86. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of single bedroom self-contained units available for persons on the housing list in each county in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33183/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 85 and 86 together.

Details on the number of households on waiting lists in each housing authority area, including the number of single person households in each area, are provided in the statutory summary of social housing assessments. The most recent figures available are the results of the 2013 summary which was carried out on 7 May 2013. These are available on my Department's website at the following link, and information on single person households is contained in Table A2.5 of the document:

<http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/DevelopmentandHousing/Housing/FileDownload,34857,en.pdf> .

In accordance with a commitment given in the Social Housing Strategy 2020, the summary will be prepared on an annual basis from 2016 onward. Preparation of the 2016 summary, which will provide up to date figures of national housing need, is well advanced and will be available shortly.

Data on local authority rented housing stock is available on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/house-prices-loans-and-profile-borrowers/local-authority-rented-sector-activity>.

Details of stock for 2014 and 2015 are available by clicking on LA rented stock by area 2014 to date. The stock figures are broken down by house type and local authority area. However, the number of bedrooms in each property is not included in the data collected by my Department.

Repair and Leasing Scheme

87. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the terms and conditions of the new renovation scheme to bring uninhabitable residential properties onto the market; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33213/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness recognises the important source of potential accommodation vacant private properties present. A new Repair and Leasing Scheme (RLS) has been developed to assist private property owners and local authorities or Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) to harness this potential, and bring these vacant houses into social housing use to provide homes for families on local authority waiting lists.

The new scheme has just been launched in Waterford and Carlow on a pilot basis, and depending on the take-up from private property owners, will be rolled out to further local authorities early in 2017. The purpose of the pilot is to ensure that the scheme is workable from local

authorities' and AHBs' perspectives. It is anticipated that other local authorities will come into the scheme on a rolling basis, with full roll-out expected within 6 months.

AHBs have a proven record in managing the refurbishment of properties and being good landlords puts them in an excellent position to play a key role in the success of the scheme. Several AHBs will be working together with Waterford and Carlow local authorities to manage the scheme in those particular areas. As the scheme is rolled out in other local authority areas, more AHBs around the country will become involved with local authorities in the delivery of the scheme.

The scheme is targeted at owners of vacant properties who cannot afford or access the funding required to bring them up to the standard for rental property. Subject to the suitability of the property for social housing, and the agreement of the property owner, the cost of the necessary repairs will be met up-front by the local authority or the AHB. This allows for the property owner to sign-up to a lease arrangement for a length that is linked to the value of the repairs, subject to a minimum of 10 years. The value of the repairs will then be offset incrementally against the agreed rental payment over a defined period within the lease.

A property owner can either choose to arrange a contractor to carry out the repairs themselves, or the local authority or AHB can arrange this instead. Property owners will not be required to take on landlord responsibilities and the local authority or AHB will have ongoing management and maintenance responsibilities in respect of the properties.

The local authority will determine the eligibility for the scheme having regard to the location and the suitability of the property for social housing and also taking into consideration the extent of the repairs that may be required. The maximum costs of repairs allowable under this initiative will be €40,000.

Early estimates are that at least 150 units will be secured in 2017 and up to 3,500 properties will be targeted over the next five years. I have provided €6 million in capital funding in 2017 for the cost of the repairs, and €140 million over the lifetime of the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan.

Development Contributions

88. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the levels of outstanding and unpaid development levies owed by developers to Fingal County Council for each of the years 2011 to 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33217/16]

89. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the levels of outstanding and unpaid development levies owed by developers to Dublin City Council for each of the years 2011 to 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33218/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 88 and 89 together.

Development contributions allow local authorities to recoup some of the costs to public funds of servicing land for private development. They provide a mechanism by which developers can contribute to the cost of providing public infrastructure and facilities that benefit development in the area and are expended on public infrastructure defined under the Planning Acts. These include the provision of open spaces, recreational and community facilities, roads, some

water services, public transport, schools, school sites, broadband and flood relief works. The adoption of these schemes is a reserved function of the locally elected members of each planning authority. It is a matter for the members to determine (i) the level of contribution and the types of development to which they will apply and (ii) the expenditure of contributions within the confines of their scheme-conditions.

Arising from the Government's effort to meet commitments in relation to the general government deficit limit, the local government sector's impact on the General Government Balance (GGB) is currently required to deliver a neutral position each year. The precise manner in which capital and current accounts are managed in order to achieve the overall balance necessary is a matter for individual local authorities themselves. However, within these overall limits, there is additional capacity for new non-mortgage borrowing and the expenditure of capital balances on hand by local authorities, which must be sanctioned by my Department. In reviewing requests for sanction, consideration is given to ensuring that priority infrastructural investment can proceed; that contractual commitments and on-going projects can proceed; and that development contributions already collected and aligned to specific capital projects can be utilised efficiently.

Local authorities are obliged to include data on current and long-term development contribution debtors in their Annual Financial Statements. As the audited figures for 2015 are not yet available, figures from the audited Annual Financial Statements for 2011 to 2014 are set out in the table below.

Current debtors are debts due within a year and are shown before any adjustment for bad debt provisions in the Annual Financial Statements. Total bad debt provisions for all current debtors are reported within the notes to the Annual Financial Statements but do not separately identify the portion relating to current development contribution debtors. Long term debtors are debts due in respect of periods greater than one year. Long-term development contribution debtors are matched in the Annual Financial Statement by deferred income. This acknowledges that the debts of long term debtors are not income in the current period, and are thus deferred to future periods and may or may not become due depending on the progress of individual developments.

It should be noted that local authorities operate on an accrual accounting basis and therefore recognise income as earned or billed and not just as cash received. Audited data in relation to 2015 should be available later this year.

-	2011	2012	2013	2014
Fingal County Council	€	€	€	€
Current Development Levy Debtors *	115,144,987	101,864,648	50,058,710	53,678,246
Long Term Development Levy Debtors **	642,274	834,106	30,881,531	5,455,117
Dublin City Council	€	€	€	€
Current Development Levy Debtors *	38,470,033	35,165,301	22,227,479	17,966,035
Long Term Development Levy Debtors **	48,456,370	35,289,748	15,155,717	15,161,373

* Current Development Levy Debtors – Source: audited local authority Annual Financial Statements, Note 5

** Long Term Development Levy Debtors – Source: audited local authority Annual Financial Statements, Note 3

Invalidity Pension Appeals

90. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will address an issue with regards an invalidity pension in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33061/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): 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 this lady on 1 September 2016. She was refused IP on the grounds that the medical conditions for the scheme were not satisfied. She was notified on 22 September 2016 of this decision, the reasons for it and of her right of review or appeal.

As this lady has appealed the decision to the independent Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO), a submission has been prepared by the department and was forwarded to the SWAO on the 28 October 2016 for determination. The SWAO will be in touch with her directly in due course in relation to the progress of her appeal.

Supplementary Welfare Allowance (SWA) provides a basic weekly allowance to eligible people. This lady may make an application for SWA through her local community welfare service so that her eligibility may be determined.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Family Income Supplement

91. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Social Protection his plans to amend family income supplement application forms to allow applicants to nominate a post office as their choice of financial institution for the purpose of receiving payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33083/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Department currently has 56,163 customers in receipt of Family Income Supplement (FIS). I would like to outline to the Deputy that the Family Income Supplement (FIS) payment is a weekly payment for families at work on low pay. As the Family Income Supplement is an in-work payment the department considers that payment through an account in a financial institution better facilitates those who are in work.

Payments at Post Offices are actively encouraged by my Department as per the Programme for a Partnership Government subject to the necessary control measures.

I hope that clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Back to Work Family Dividend Scheme Administration

92. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Social Protection the process involved should a person wish to have a back to work family dividend payment made into the post office; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33084/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As outlined in my previous

response to an earlier question from the Deputy, unfortunately there is no provision for the back to work family dividend (BTWFD) scheme to be paid to customers via the post office.

It is important to note that my Department facilitates customers to have their social welfare payments made via the post office. This is subject to overall control requirements. Under my instruction, a circular was issued to staff some months ago stating that, where possible, payments at the post office should be actively encouraged as per the Programme for a Partnership Government.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Rent Supplement Scheme Eligibility

93. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason FIS is assessed as income when applying for rent supplement, but not when applying for other housing supports, such as HAP or RAS; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33118/16]

94. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason parents in full-time education or in receipt of one-parent family payments or jobseeker's transition payments are not entitled to rent supplement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33119/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 93 and 94 together.

Rent supplement plays a vital role in housing families and individuals, with the scheme currently supporting some 49,700 recipients for which the Government has provided €267 million for in 2016.

Rent supplement is subject to a means test that is normally calculated to ensure that a person, after the payment of their rent, has an income equal to the rate of supplementary welfare allowance (SWA). The means test also ensures that the amount of rent supplement payable is appropriate to their family circumstances, less a minimum contribution that recipients are required to pay from their own resources. The current weekly minimum contribution is €30 for a single adult household and €40 for coupled households. Many recipients pay more than this amount because recipients are also required, subject to income disregards, to contribute any additional assessable means that they have over and above the appropriate basic SWA rate towards their accommodation costs.

The rent supplement assessment provides for a gradual withdrawal of payment as hours of employment or earnings increase. Income from employment and family income supplement

(FIS) in excess of the standard SWA weekly rate of payment attract an additional income disregard and are assessed as follows; the first €75 of such additional income together with 25% of any additional income above €75 is disregarded for means assessment purposes.

Persons in receipt of the One-Parent Family or Jobseeker's Transitional payments are not excluded from receiving rent supplement, however restrictions do exist in respect of persons engaged in full-time education. In general, persons engaged in full-time education are excluded from receiving rent supplement. It is the case that those participating in approved courses under the back-to-education allowance (BTEA) or the vocational training opportunities scheme (VTOS) may retain entitlement to rent supplement, subject to meeting all other conditions of the scheme.

My Department's overall policy direction is to return rent supplement to its original purpose as short-term income support by transferring responsibility for persons with long-term housing needs to the local authorities under the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) under the auspices of the Department of Housing, Planning, Community & Local Government.

Policy regarding the assessment of means under the HAP or the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) as operated by the local authorities is a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Employment Support Services

95. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason a person (details supplied) has not received any communication or engagement with SEETEC regarding a programme in which the person has been placed; if the person can be transferred to another community employment scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33125/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): My department will contact the person concerned and make arrangements to meet with her to clarify her situation and to determine the most suitable support available to assist her in gaining sustainable employment.

JobPath Implementation

96. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Social Protection if his Department can investigate delays in transferring a person (details supplied) to a Tús position they have been selected for; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33131/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): JobPath is a new approach to employment activation which caters for people who are long-term unemployed (over 12 months) to assist them to secure full-time paid employment or self-employment. Two providers are contracted to deliver JobPath for this Department— Seetec Limited and Turas Nua Limited.

The person concerned was referred to JobPath on 21 May 2016 and agreed a Personal Progression Plan with Turas Nua Limited on 30 May 2016. It is not open to him to pursue a Tús placement as he must continue to engage with Turas Nua Limited for a 12 month period. However, if he is not successful in securing employment at the end of his engagement with Turas Nua Limited, he would then be eligible to be referred to other employment schemes.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits Waiting Times

97. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Social Protection the current waiting times for the processing of carer's allowance and domiciliary care allowance; the measures he is taking to ensure applications are processed as soon as possible; his views on the matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33154/16]

99. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Social Protection the current waiting times for the processing of carer's allowance and for domiciliary care allowance; the measures

he is taking to ensure applications are processed as soon as possible (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33170/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 97 and 99 together.

The Department is committed to providing a quality service to all its customers. This includes ensuring that applications are processed and that decisions on entitlement are made as quickly as possible.

The current processing times for Carers Allowance (CA) applications is 14 weeks and for Domiciliary Care Allowance (DCA) applications is 16 weeks. Both schemes have seen a considerable increase in applications in recent years. Applications for DCA in 2015 were 33% higher than in 2013. Applications for CA in 2015 were 25% higher than in 2013. These increases, together with the need to introduce new revised decision making processes in early 2014, to demonstrate compliance with a High Court decision, have impacted on the volumes of applications processed within the set target.

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

In addition, staffing needs are regularly reviewed, having regard to workloads and the competing demands arising, to ensure that the best use is made of all available resources. Where additional staffing is deployed to a scheme, such as has happened for carer's allowance, there is a time-lag involved while those staff are trained and build up expertise. The Department has seen a significant reduction in CA processing from 22 weeks at the end of May to 14 weeks at the end of September and expects the processing times for both schemes to reduce further, as recently assigned staff get up to speed with the work involved in claim processing.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

98. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the progress to date in the determination of an application for carer's allowance in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33155/16]

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 5 October 2016.

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

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Question No. 99 answered with Question No. 97.

100. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of persons currently on the live register with construction-related skills and or experience; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33177/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): At the end of September there were 286,490 people on the Live Register

(published by the Central Statistics Office at www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/lr/liveregisterseptember2016/).

My records show that 55,075 (19.2%) of those people stated at the time of making their Live Register claim that their principal skills and/or experience related to Construction, Woodwork, Metal and Related Industries.

Organised Crime

101. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has had recent discussions with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland or with members of the Northern Ireland Executive regarding the provision of funding to address paramilitarism and tackle organised crime as provided for in the Fresh Start Agreement; if agreement has been reached on the level of funding; the source of such funding and the timescale for the proposed drawdown of these funds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33098/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Fresh Start Agreement of November 2015 saw the two Governments, in Dublin and London, and the Northern Ireland Executive agree a way forward to ending paramilitarism and tackling organised crime.

This was a recognition that while great progress has been made in Northern Ireland more needed to be done to complete the transformation of society. In addition to measures to tackle paramilitarism, criminality and organised crime through enhanced police and justice cooperation, the Agreement recognised that community engagement and support for change would be required. This included a commitment to develop a strategy on disbanding paramilitary groups.

Progress on implementing the provisions of the Fresh Start and Stormont House Agreements are considered at quarterly review meetings. These are attended by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the First and deputy First Ministers and, where relevant to her portfolio, the Northern Ireland Minister for Justice. I represent the Government at these meetings. The last review was held on 29 June 2016, with dates for the next meeting under active discussion.

The June quarterly review meeting discussed the report of a three-person panel, established on foot of the Fresh Start Agreement to recommend the elements of a strategy for the disbandment of paramilitary groups. This panel, comprising Lord John Alderdice, Monica McWilliams, and John McBurney, made over forty recommendations. The Northern Ireland Executive updated the review meeting on its then draft Action Plan to take these recommendations forward. In July, the Northern Ireland Executive published its Action Plan on Tackling Paramilitary Activity, Criminality and Organised Crime.

The Northern Ireland Executive is committed to carrying out research into the social costs and implications of paramilitarism; to undertake a public awareness campaign on the harms done by paramilitarism and organised crime; and to report on efforts to tackle paramilitarism which will be linked to wider cross-Departmental and statutory agency work programmes aimed at reducing community divisions and the causes of sectarianism.

Under the Fresh Start Agreement, the UK Government committed to providing an additional £25 million over five years to tackle continuing paramilitary activity, with the Northern Ireland Executive to match this amount. I understand that the Northern Ireland Executive has already begun its drawdown towards implementation of the Action Plan and related commitments.

On 13 September, I signed an international agreement with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to establish the Independent Reporting Commission (IRC), which the Fresh Start Agreement states will report annually on the progress towards ending continuing paramilitary activity connected with Northern Ireland. These reports will inform future Northern Ireland Executive Programme for Government commitments through to 2021.

The Government will shortly bring forward legislative proposals before the Oireachtas to establish the IRC in law. The aim is to get the IRC established and up and running as soon as possible.

International Agreements

102. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if Ireland has signed the Council of Europe treaty on the banning of organ trafficking in view of the widespread concerns regarding human rights violations due to organ harvesting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33137/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Ireland signed the Council of Europe Convention against Trafficking in Human Organs on 8 October 2015.

The purposes of this Convention are to prevent and combat trafficking in human organs, to protect the rights of victims of the offences and to facilitate co-operation at national and international levels on action against the trafficking in human organs.

Human Rights

103. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the practice of organ harvesting from members of a group (details supplied) and other prisoners of conscience in China; the actions he has taken to address this disturbing practice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33159/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Government follows closely reports of human rights violations against Falun Gong practitioners, including renewed allegations of organ harvesting. On 27 October 2016, officials from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade met with a representative of the Irish Falun Dafa Association and two human rights defenders during which the issue of organ harvesting was discussed.

Human rights issues are discussed on a regular basis with the Chinese authorities during both bilateral and multilateral meetings, including during the visit of Premier Li Keqiang to Ireland in May 2015.

Through the formal framework of the EU-China Human Rights Dialogue, which was established in 1995, the EU continues to share with China its experience in the field of human rights protection and promotion, and to urge China to take clear steps to improve the human rights situation. The latest session of this dialogue took place on 30 November and 1 December 2015, and provided the EU with the opportunity to express its concerns about a wide range of human rights issues in China, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities, freedom

of religion or belief, freedom of assembly and association, arbitrary detention, torture and the death penalty. The individual case of Gao Zhisheng, a human rights defender detained for denouncing the persecution of practitioners of Falun Gong, was also raised at the dialogue. Most recently, human rights issues were discussed at the 18th EU-China Summit which was held in Beijing on 12-13 July 2016. The next session of the EU-China Human Rights Dialogue is scheduled to take place before the end of 2016. The matter of alleged organ harvesting in China is due to be among the range of topics which will be discussed.

It should be noted that the Chinese Government denies accusations of human rights abuses against those who practice Falun Gong. It should also be noted that China has embarked on reforms in the area of organ donation with a view to stamping out illegal and unethical practices. However, the Embassy of Ireland in Beijing, in cooperation with our EU partners, is monitoring the Chinese reform efforts in the area of organ donation.

Trafficking of human organs is a deplorable activity which has developed into a global problem which violates the fundamental human rights and dignity of individuals. International cooperation is the only way to combat this crime, prosecute those behind it and protect vulnerable citizens who may be at risk of becoming victims of trafficking in human organs. In 2015 Ireland signed the Council of Europe Convention against Trafficking in Human Organs.

The Irish Government, together with our EU partners, will continue to address human rights issues with China, in frequent and regular dialogue, through our contacts in both Dublin and Beijing and through the relevant multilateral channels.

Departmental Staff Remuneration

104. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the steps he will take to address the discrepancy in pay between temporary clerical officers and permanent staff in the shared services organisation in the Civil Service that has taken over much of the work done by local HR sections. [33143/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I can confirm that the pay of Temporary Clerical Officers “TCO’s” and Clerical Officers “CO’s” in my Department, which includes the National Shared Services Office, is controlled by the relevant circulars issued by my Department. As with all civil servants, their pay is subject to Government pay policy and the two most recent circulars, 2/2014 and 17/2015 have been applied. I am not aware of any discrepancy and the current pay of TCO’s and CO’s reflects the appropriate pay scales and pension schemes.

Departmental Staff Data

105. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the role of temporary clerical officers; the pay scales for this role; the options for permanency in this role; if the pay scales are in line with permanent clerical officers; if not, the difference in scales and when this will be rectified; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33164/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Temporary Clerical Officers (TCOs) are generally recruited to cater for short term, seasonal staff absences in Departments, particularly in the Department of Social Protection, the Passport Office and the Revenue Commissioners or where particular roles require additional staff over a limited period. The TCO payscale ranges from €419.29 to €715.62 which is equivalent to the Clerical Officer

payscale.

The TCO is a temporary position with no option for permanency. It is however open to TCOs to apply for full time Clerical Officer positions as and when they are advertised.

Flood Relief Schemes

106. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will sanction works to alleviate silting and subsequent flooding of homes and agricultural working land at a location (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33209/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán Canney): The Cashen estuary forms part of the River Feale Catchment Drainage Scheme, which was constructed by the Commissioners of Public Works under the 1945 Arterial Drainage Act. Construction commenced in 1951 with completion in 1957. An estimated 21,275 acres is deemed to have benefitted from the implementation of the scheme. OPW is statutorily obliged to maintain the scheme in proper repair and effective condition, in accordance with Section 37 of the 1945 Arterial Drainage Act.

Ballyduff is not part of the benefitting land of the above scheme and this Office is not aware of any properties flooding recently at this particular location.

I wish to advise the Deputy that earlier this year, tenders were invited for main design consultant to assess and develop a project to improve drainage outfall to the Cashen Estuary from low-lying lands protected by OPW flood defence embankments and to bring a viable scheme forward through environmental assessment, detailed design, tender and construction, subject to available funding. This Office is currently finalising the appointment of the consultant for this project.

Departmental Staff Careers

107. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to revise the terms of employment for temporary clerical officers in the Civil Service in order to secure better pay and conditions; his plans to introduce a measure whereby clerical officers in the Civil Service who are on a temporary contract for three years or more will automatically be made permanent; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33211/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In my role as Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, I have overarching responsibility for recruitment to the Civil Service.

All such recruitment is governed by the Public Service Management (Recruitment and Appointments) Act 2004. Under the Act, the method of appointment to a permanent Civil and Public Service post is as a result of being successful in a competition run by the Public Appointments Service (PAS) or by another licence holder such as the head of a Department or Office. Selection processes are open to all eligible applicants who meet minimum entry criteria.

In the main, vacancies in the Civil service are filled on a permanent basis. However, temporary vacancies arise from time to time to cover such absences as maternity leave or shorter working year, and where a permanent vacancy will not exist. Temporary Clerical Officer (TCO) positions in the Civil Service are filled by an annual competition conducted by the PAS which

is usually advertised in February of each year.

It is a matter for Human Resource Units in all Departments and Agencies to have procedures in place for dealing with the recruitment and employment of fixed-term employees and the management of their contracts. My Department issues Guidelines on “Best Practice for the Recruitment and Management of Fixed-term Employees in the Irish Civil Service”. These are revised from time to time as required. The most recent version issued in April 2014 and took account of changes arising as result of the Single Pension Scheme and the Haddington Road Agreement. The Guidelines can be found on my Department’s HR Management website <http://hr.per.gov.ie/>.

Temporary officers in the civil service are entitled to the same pay and pension rights and can apply for internal promotion competitions while in a temporary position if they satisfy the qualifying criteria in each case.

Hedge Cutting Season

108. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the current time limits for hedge cutting and any changes that were made in recent times; the dates that will apply for 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33095/16]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Section 40 of the Wildlife Acts 1976, as amended, prohibits the cutting, grubbing, burning or destruction of vegetation, with certain strict exemptions, from 1 March to 31 August.

Following a review of Section 40, which involved, inter alia, consideration of submissions from interested parties, I announced proposals in December 2015 to introduce legislation to allow for managed hedge cutting and burning at certain times within the existing closed period on a pilot two year basis. The legislation required to allow for these pilot measures was included in the Heritage Bill 2016, which was published in January 2016 and subsequently completed Second Stage in Seanad Éireann.

It is proposed to commence Committee Stage of the Bill in Seanad Éireann on 9 November. In the meantime, the existing provisions relating to Section 40 of the Wildlife Acts are still in operation.

Commemorative Events

109. **Deputy Colm Brophy** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs when the National Famine Commemoration day will be held in 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33093/16]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Deputy will be aware that the 2016 National Famine Commemoration, led by President Michael D. Higgins, was held in Glasnevin in September. As in previous years, this was a solemn and dignified event. Also, in October, I was pleased to attend the International Famine Commemoration, which this year was held in Philadelphia.

Arrangements for the 2017 events will be considered by the National Famine Commemoration Committee, which I chair, and details of the venue and location will be announced early in

the New Year.

CLÁR Programme

110. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the amount of the €3 million allocated nationally for the CLÁR programme that is designated for County Tipperary; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33108/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Michael Ring): I announced the reopening of the CLÁR Programme on 6 October 2016, with funding of €3 million available for this year. The programme will provide funding for small scale infrastructural projects in disadvantaged rural areas that have experienced significant levels of de-population.

The reopening of CLÁR is part of the Government's programme to support rural development, which has also recently seen the launch of the Town and Village Renewal Scheme, a new phase of the REDZ (Rural Economic Development Zones) initiative, and funding for rural recreation infrastructure under the Rural Recreation Scheme.

CLÁR 2016 will see funding provided for three measures: Safety Measures for Schools and Community/Sports Facilities, Playgrounds and Multi-Use Games Areas, and Local Access Roads. Local Authorities have been invited to submit proposals for funding, with a closing date of 4 November for applications.

All funding will be dependent on Local Authorities having the capacity to implement the proposed projects immediately. Specific amounts of funding have not been assigned to either individual counties or individual measures, and Local Authorities are not limited in the number of project proposals they can submit for consideration.

Local Authorities have been notified that priority will be given to safety measures for schools and community/sports facilities, outdoor play facilities enhancements and local access roads measures in that order. In this context, Local Authorities have been asked to prioritise their proposals based on outlined need and on how the proposed project fits in with broader planning at a local level.

I have secured an allocation of €5 million for CLÁR for next year as part of Budget 2017. This funding will build on the 2016 scheme and further support the development of areas of particular disadvantage in rural Ireland.

Thatching Grants Expenditure

111. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if funding will be made available for re-thatching in the Kildare area; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33147/16]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My role, as Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, with regard to the protection and management of our architectural heritage, is set out in the provisions of relevant legislation, as are the role of local authorities and the responsibilities of owners as regards heritage assets.

As the Deputy can appreciate, the scope for funding for the conservation of the built heri-

tage is currently constrained by the significant demands on public finances within the context of a recovering economy that is facing a challenging national and international environment.

My Department operates a Structures at Risk Fund to enable conservation works to heritage structures, in both private and public ownership, that are protected under the Planning and Development Acts and are deemed to be at significant risk of deterioration. This fund is administered through the local authorities and seeks to encourage the regeneration and reuse of heritage properties and to help to secure the preservation of protected structures which might otherwise be lost. The scheme for this year is now fully allocated.

I launched a new €2 million scheme - the Built Heritage Investment Scheme - for the repair and conservation of protected structures on 21 October 2015. This scheme is operating in 2016, via the local authorities, on the same model as the very successful Built Heritage Jobs Leverage Scheme, which ran in 2014. It is supporting a significant number of projects across the country and creating employment in the conservation and construction industries, while helping to regenerate urban and rural areas. The scheme for this year is also fully allocated.

While no decision has been made on schemes for 2017, announcements, if any, will be made towards the end of 2016 or early in 2017 and are again likely to operate via the Local Authorities. The Conservation or Heritage Officer in the local authority will be able to advise regarding funding available for projects such as thatching, and it is advisable for interested parties to remain in contact with their local authority on an ongoing basis.

The Heritage Council, which my Department funds, also provides grants for the protection and preservation of the built heritage. It is a matter for the Heritage Council to decide how its funding should be allocated across the range of research, education and conservation programmes it supports annually having regard to competing priorities for limited resources. In 2016 the Council awarded funding of over €880,000 to 171 heritage projects nationwide under its 2016 Heritage Management Grant Scheme. Further details of grant schemes available from the Heritage Council can be found at www.heritagecouncil.ie.

Primary Medical Certificates Eligibility

112. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the reason a condition (details supplied) is not classed as a disability when trying to obtain a primary medical certificate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33063/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): This issue is a matter for the Department of Finance. The Revenue Commissioners operate a tax relief scheme for the purchase of adapted vehicles for disabled drivers and disabled passengers, which falls under the remit of the Department of Finance. To be eligible to apply for tax relief under the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Scheme, the applicant must be in possession of a Primary Medical Certificate. To qualify for a Primary Medical Certificate, an applicant must be permanently and severely disabled within the terms of Scheme and satisfy a range of conditions. The assessment process for obtaining a Primary Medical Certificate is undertaken by Senior Medical Officers (SMOs) for the relevant local Health Service Executive (HSE) administrative area, on behalf of the Department of Finance and the Revenue Commissioners. An unsuccessful applicant can appeal the decision to the Disabled Drivers Medical Board of Appeal, an independent body, which is under the auspices of the Minister for Finance.

The HSE SMOs have no role in setting or amending the criteria for a Primary Medical Certificate, as these are set out by the Department of Finance. Further details about the scheme may

be found at www.revenue.ie.

HSE Legal Cases

113. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Health if he will request the HSE to expedite a case (details supplied) brought against the executive and other companies, for damages for negligence, breach of statutory duty and breach of contract, in respect of a surgical procedure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33064/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): It is not appropriate for me to intervene in legal cases which are in progress before the courts. I do not have a role in the management of clinical claims.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

114. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an application for specialised shoes in respect of a person (detail supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33067/16]

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 Aids and Appliances Provision

115. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health the status of the provision of an art assist machine in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Mayo [33068/16]

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 Card Administration

116. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if a medical card can be reactivated while an application is processed for a person (details supplied), as a change of address resulted in their review form not having been received; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33074/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the legislation, determination of eligibility for a medical card is the responsibility of the HSE and, I have no role in this process, it would be inappropriate for me to interfere.

The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information was issued to Oireachtas members.

Hospital Appointments Administration

117. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive an appointment at Galway University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33075/16]

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.

Patient Transfers

118. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be transferred to the National Rehabilitation Hospital, Dún Laoghaire; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33076/16]

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.

Hospital Appointments Administration

119. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal will receive an appointment at Crumlin Hospital following a referral from another hospital on the instruction of the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33077/16]

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.

Hospitals Funding

120. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the funding allocation for sequential cochlear implants for 2017; if he will confirm that this funding will not be reduced or removed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33079/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Beaumont Hospital is the national centre for delivering Ireland's national cochlear implant programme, with surgical procedures for children under 6 carried out in Children's University Hospital, Temple Street. €3.22M was provided in the 2014 National Service Plan to provide sequential and bilateral implants, and the 2015 and 2016 National Service Plans provided for the continuation of development of the service.

The 2016 level of funding and service will continue in 2017.

Hospital Services

121. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health his department's plans for the provision of additional physiotherapy services at a district hospital (details supplied) in County Mayo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33088/16]

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.

Ministerial Meetings

122. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if he will meet with Members of the Oireachtas from County Laois and Laois county councillors on 9 November 2016 to discuss the future services of Portlaoise General Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33097/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Dublin Midlands Hospital Group has recently produced a draft plan which sets out a proposed service design for a new model of clinical service delivery at Portlaoise Hospital. The draft plan has been discussed with the Department and is currently the subject of further work and consideration within the HSE with a view to finalising it for submission to the Department. I will then be briefed in advance of further necessary consultations with stakeholders, including GPs, Consultants and Councillors.

Therefore, no decisions have been made in relation to Portlaoise Hospital at this stage, but once the work I have outlined is completed I would be happy to meet with the Laois Oireachtas members and members of Laois County Councillors in the context of the consultation process.

Hospital Appointments Status

123. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health further to previous parliamentary questions if a person's appointment and hip replacement will be expedited (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33099/16]

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

Orthodontic Services Provision

124. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite orthodontic treatment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33101/16]

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

Alcohol Pricing

125. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the status of discussions with his counterparts in Northern Ireland on the introduction of minimum unit pricing there; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33106/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): Minimum Unit Pricing (MUP) is one of a package of measures to be implemented in the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill. MUP sets a minimum price per gram of alcohol, where the minimum price is based on the number of grams of alcohol in the product. This is a targeted measure, aimed at those who drink in a harmful and hazardous manner, and designed to prevent the sale of alcohol at very cheap prices. MUP is able to target cheaper alcohol relative to its strength because the minimum price is determined by and is directly proportional to the amount of pure alcohol in the drink.

My Department is in contact with its counterparts in the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety on the matter. MUP is one of the issues which will be discussed at the upcoming North South Ministerial Council.

Hospital Services

126. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding the old community hospital in Dingle, County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33110/16]

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.

Hospitals Expenditure

127. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide a breakdown of the costs in maintaining and securing the old community hospital in Dingle, County Kerry (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33114/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Your question has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply as the management of the healthcare property estate is a service matter.

Questions - Written Answers
Health Services Provision

128. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Health the status of the national clinical programme for rheumatology's pathway for fibromyalgia; the way this will impact on persons (details supplied) with fibromyalgia; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33115/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Appointments Administration

129. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be called for surgery. [33121/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The National Waiting List Management Policy, *A standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, January 2014*, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

Hospital Appointments Administration

130. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite an operation in respect of a person (details supplied), in view of a serious decline in their condition. [33128/16]

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.

Occupational Therapy

131. **Deputy Colm Brophy** asked the Minister for Health if he will address the anomaly where older persons and persons with a disability who are resident in one HSE area (details supplied) are being charged for occupation therapist reports for local authority housing adaptation and mobility grants whereas residents of adjoining HSE areas are not charged; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33153/16]

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 Administration

132. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33156/16]

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.

Orthodontic Services Provision

133. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will have their braces fitted as they have been assessed by the HSE. [33161/16]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

134. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the status of a person (details supplied) who has been on a waiting list in Beaumont hospital since 31 December 2015 and has been informed that waiting time to see a consultant is 24 months [33163/16]

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

135. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health the services available to the population of Wexford in respect of a person who experiences myocardial infarction; and if he is satisfied with the services. [33171/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is an operational matter I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy with the detailed information required. However, on the more general issue, I can confirm that the population of Wexford have access to a Catherisation Laboratory in University Hospital Waterford (UHW), or St James's or St Vincent's Hospitals in Dublin.

The Deputy will, of course, be aware that an independent clinical review of the need for a 2nd Catherisation Laboratory in UHW was published recently. That review, which was undertaken by Dr Niall Herity a Belfast based cardiologist, looked at the population of the South East and examined hospital admissions for cardiac catherisation and percutaneous coronary intervention, by county of residence. The report indicates that some 69% of patients from Wexford, who require coronary procedures, attend UHW. In that context, the Deputy may wish to note that implementation of the recommendations of the Herity Report will enhance the cardiology services for patients in the region, by increasing the number of weekly sessions currently provided in UHW which will address waiting times and provide improved access. The additional investment required to implement the report is being considered in the context of the National Service Plan 2017.

Hospital Appointments Delays

136. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health when a hospital appointment will be provided for a person (details supplied); the reason for the delay in issuing a date for this appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33181/16]

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.

Public Procurement Contracts Data

137. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the length of contract awarded to the UK company whose rostering software system is currently being used at Letterkenny university hospital; the cost of attaining this for the HSE; the objectives of this software and the

benefits accrued to date: if this contract applies only to Letterkenny university hospital or every hospital across the state; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33184/16]

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

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

138. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of HSE equipment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33205/16]

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

HSE National Service Plan

139. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding a hospital name change; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33206/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): With regards to the specific queries raised by the Deputy, as these are service matters, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

140. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33210/16]

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

Hospital Services

141. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if his Department and the HSE consider the use of a hospital (details supplied) as a step-down facility in respect of the winter initiative; if not, if consideration has been given to alternative uses for this complex; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33212/16]

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.

Hospital Appointments Administration

142. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive a hospital appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33214/16]

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.

Mental Health Act Review

143. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health his plans for reform of matters pertaining to involuntary admissions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33215/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): The Deputy may be aware that in 2015 an Expert Group Review of the Mental Health Act 2001 was published. The review contains 165 recommendations, most relating to proposed changes to our mental health legislation. The previous Government agreed with the broad thrust of the recommendations and approved the preparation of the general scheme of a bill to amend the Mental Health Act 2001 to reflect the recommendations of the review in revised legislation. Work is progressing in my Department on the draft and I expect that it will be finalised by mid-2017.

The Deputy can find the full text of the report on my Department's website at the following link: <http://health.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Dept-Health-Report-Expert-Group-for-website.pdf>. The report contains recommendations relating to revised criteria for detention, revised definitions of mental illness and treatment, a greater role for Authorised Officers where involuntary admissions are being considered, improved safeguards for involuntary admission to approved centres, improved safeguards for change of status from voluntary to involuntary patient and shorter times for Tribunal hearings. These changes and others, when included in revised mental health legislation, will further improve the protections available to involuntary patients in this country.

Home Help Service Provision

144. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE west has the necessary funds to replace equipment (details supplied); if not, when they will be provided with the funds; the specific time span for the provision of the equipment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33216/16]

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

Mental Health Services Funding

145. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide a breakdown of the increase in the mental health budget for 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33219/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): The allocation for Mental Health in 2017 will be €851.3 million, an increase of €24.7 million, or approximately 3%, over 2016. In addition, a further €50 million will be provided for the construction of the new national forensic mental health service in Portrane.

I am initiating €35 million in new services in 2017. 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 spend of €9.7 million in mental health associated with increased pay rates.

Services for People with Disabilities

146. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health when he will visit a home (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33220/16]

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.

In June 2011, the Report "Time to Move on from Congregated Settings" was published by the Health Service Executive (HSE), which identified that in 2008 approximately 4000 individuals with disabilities lived in congregated type settings. These are places where ten or more people reside in a single living unit or are campus based. It found that, notwithstanding the commitment and initiative of dedicated staff and management, there were a significant number of people still experiencing institutional living conditions where they lacked basic privacy and dignity, and lived their lives apart from any community and family.

Currently, 2725 people live in congregated settings and our objective is to reduce this figure by one-third by 2021 and ultimately, to eliminate all congregated settings.

St John of God Services in Kerry has been identified as one of the priority sites for de-congregation. The HSE is committed to working with St John of God Services to transition 17 residents in ward style accommodation from the current unsuitable accommodation on campus to more appropriate settings in the local community. Comprehensive transition plans will ensure that there is extensive engagement with the person themselves, their families, carers and advocates, as well as the service provider, to ensure successful and sustainable transitions into the community.

Some of the existing residents will benefit from greater opportunities to participate in local communities and will, over time and with proper planning, move to living in the community. It is important to point out that it is Government and HSE policy to move on from these congregated settings in the best interests of patients but this will be done in a planned and phased way and with due regard to the personal choices of every individual. The welfare and dignity of residents is absolutely paramount, and the needs of the individual will be the first consideration.

The focus of the HSE has been on enhancing the quality of life of residents and highlighting the residents who would most obviously benefit from the opportunity to move to community living. In doing so, the HSE are recognising that for some individuals with significant disabilities, this move presents greater challenges and will not be considered for some time.

The Chief Officer has arranged to meet in early November with St John of God management to ensure that communication and engagement with families is improved and that the appropriate discovery processes are in place in advance of plans for any individuals to move to community living, and with the family representatives group to ensure their concerns are being heard and that there is a process in place to work together with them and the service provider into the future in the best interests of the residents.

I am satisfied that the appropriate level of engagement is now underway between St John of Gods and the HSE with the residents, their advocates, and their families. It would be appropriate to allow this process to conclude before considering a visit to the Beaufort campus.

As the HSE is responsible for leading out on the recommendations on “Time to Move on from Congregated Settings - A Strategy for Community Inclusion”, I have arranged for the Deputy’s question to be referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy.

Health Services Provision

147. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his views on correspondence concerning a company (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33224/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath) (Deputy Finian McGrath): As the Deputy’s question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Ambulance Service Provision

148. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the status of the review into paramedic services in the mid-west; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33226/16]

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

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149. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of home help hours for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33233/16]

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.

Respite Care Services

150. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details sup-

plied) in County Galway has been issued with a hospital bill for respite care; if he will confirm that persons availing of this service are entitled to 30 days respite free of charge; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33235/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Long stay charges for in-patient services apply to the further provision of inpatient services, other than acute services and nursing home services in public nursing homes supported under the Nursing Homes Support Scheme (Fair Deal) to persons who have already received at least 30 days of in-patient services during the immediately preceding 12-month period, irrespective of where those 30 days of in-patient services have been received.

Charges for the maintenance element of long stay inpatient services - which may include inpatient respite care services - are provided for under the Health (Amendment) Act 2005 and the Health (Charges for Inpatient Services) Regulations 2005, as amended.

The Regulations provide for two different classes of income-based charges in respect of the maintenance element of the in-patient services provided:

- Class 1 relates to charges for those receiving in-patient services on premises where 24-hour nursing care is provided, subject to a current maximum of €175 per week for a person whose income is €208 or more; and

- Class 2 charges apply where 24-hour nursing care is not provided, subject to a current maximum of €130 per week for a person whose income is €194 or more.

- Affordability and the avoidance of financial hardship are built-in features of the charging provisions under the 2005 Act and Regulations:

- Firstly, the Act caps the amount which may be charged – at 80% of the non-contributory State Pension weekly rate. At present, that means an upper limit of €177.60 per week.

- Secondly, the charges are structured to ensure that those paying them retain a reasonable income for personal use: at least €33 per week for those paying Class 1 rates and at least €64 per week for those paying Class 2 rates.

- Thirdly, the Act provides that the HSE may reduce or waive a charge imposed on a person if necessary to avoid undue financial hardship.

To assist in the fair application of the provisions of the 2005 Act and Regulations, the HSE has developed national guidelines for the determination of long-stay charges for inpatient services. These include the need to have regard to the individual circumstances of each service user and his or her dependants. The guidelines ensure that the applicable charge is determined taking account of each person's income and necessary outgoings while receiving care, including reasonable regular financial commitments. This avoids any unfair burden on the service user or his or her dependants.

As the issue raised by the Deputy relates to an individual case, this is a service matter for the Health Service Executive. I have asked the HSE to look into the particular matter raised and to reply directly to the Deputy. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my private office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Accident and Emergency Services Provision

151. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if there are plans in place to re-

duce opening times and services provided at the emergency department in Our Lady's, Hospital Navan [33249/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Our Lady's Hospital Navan is part of the Ireland East Hospital Group. Hospital Groups must increasingly focus on networks of service provision with smaller hospitals managing routine, urgent or planned care locally, more complex care managed in the larger hospitals and better linkages with primary, continuing and social care.

A number of developments at the hospital have been funded in recent years including the refurbishment of the Emergency Department and upgrade of general theatres and Central Sterile Services. There has also been an increase in day surgical activity, with surgeons from the Mater Misericordiae University Hospital carrying out day surgery in Navan. Further developments in relation to surgery and other clinical services are being considered by the Group. There is significant potential for enhancing the hospital's role as a constituent hospital within the Hospital Group. As a smaller hospital, the challenge is to make sure that Navan provides more of the right type of services, which can safely be delivered, so that we maximise the benefit to patients.

Any proposed change to services provided at Navan Hospital, will need to take account of existing patient flows, demands in other hospitals and the need to develop particular services in the context of overall service reorganisation in the Hospital Group.

Medical Card Data

152. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of medical cards as of 1 October 2016; the number of general practitioner cards on the same date; and the number for each type of card issued on a discretionary basis on that date [33250/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The following are Medical Card and General Practitioner Visit Card figures as of 1 October 2016, as requested by the Deputy:

Card Type	Total Cards
Medical cards	1,705,791
of which granted involving discretion	111,904
GP Visit cards	463,901
of which granted involving discretion	44,320

Hospital Services

153. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health his views on the recent admission that three out of four of the country's rehabilitation hospitals are unable to provide stroke patients with the recommended level of therapy needed. [33251/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

National Stroke Programme Implementation

154. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health his views on the recent national

stroke audit and the action his Department and the HSE will take to address the deficiencies identified in it. [33252/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): The National Stroke Audit of Rehabilitation Units (2016) acknowledged that the care of people with stroke in Ireland has improved since the HSE established its National Clinical Programme for Stroke in 2010. The audit noted that stroke deaths in Ireland have reduced by more than 15% and that the emergency care for stroke patients provided in most Irish acute hospitals is now quite good.

In effect:

- Less stroke patients are dying in hospital;
- Less stroke patients are being discharged to nursing homes;
- More patients are being discharged home directly from acute hospitals;
- Emergency thrombolysis is provided now to patients in all regions of the country;
- Since the commencement of the National Clinical Programme for Stroke, nine new stroke units have been opened. This brings the total number of stroke units in acute hospitals to twenty one representing good progress from the single unit available that was reported in 2008.

This is good news for stroke services and the findings from this particular audit would suggest a number of recommendations including:

- Dedicated stroke rehabilitation beds should be increased;
- Increasing the number of Health and Social Care Professionals to ensure patients receive appropriate levels of therapy to achieve the best recovery outcome;
- Investing in psychology services;
- Increasing the number of Early Supported Discharge (ESD) /community rehabilitation teams to ensure appropriate patients do not remain in hospital/rehabilitation units longer than is necessary. (Three ESD pilot sites are already in operation at the Mater, Tallaght and Galway University Hospital)

This audit from the HSE's National Clinical Programme for Stroke and the Irish Heart Foundation, along with its suggested recommendations, are now available to the HSE for review when framing its National Service Plan for 2017 in the context of the resources available to it. Some of these suggested recommendations were also considered as part of the Estimates process.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Payments

155. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a person (details supplied) received a ANC payment in the years 2011 and 2012. [33069/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I can confirm that payments under the 2011 and 2012 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme were processed on 16 November 2011 and 19 November 2012 respectively. Debts due to my Department arising under a number of schemes were offset against these payments.

Agriculture Scheme Appeals

156. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when an appeal in relation to the non-valuation aspects of reactor schemes (details supplied) will be resolved. [33078/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Agriculture Appeals Office provides an independent appeals service in accordance with the provisions of the Agriculture Appeals Act 2001 and the Agriculture Appeals Regulations. I am advised that an appeal was received by the Agriculture Appeals Office for the person concerned on 2 December 2015 in relation to non-valuation aspects of the On-Farm Valuation Scheme for TB and Brucellosis Reactors. An oral hearing was held on 25 May 2016 and the person named was notified in writing on 14 July 2016 that the appeal was partially allowed. Following that decision my Department requested a review of the Appeals Officer's decision. Under the provisions of the Appeals legislation, the independent review may only be performed by the Director of Agriculture Appeals. There are a number of appeals currently requiring independent review by the Director and I am informed that every effort is being made to ensure the expeditious finalisation of such reviews.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

157. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 503 of 25 October 2016, if he will clarify the testamentary documents included in this particular case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33094/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): In Inheritance related cases where there is no will involved, the Inheritance Enquiry Unit of my Department requires a Grant of Representation for the deceased person in order to release payments outstanding.

Officials from the Inheritance Enquiry Unit of my Department have written to the legal personal representatives of the deceased applicant requesting the usual testamentary documents and bank account details to which the payments should be released. This information was requested in a letter issued to the solicitor administering the estate on 4 May 2016. The requested information has not been received to date. My Department has now contacted the Solicitor again with a view to expediting the case. When all outstanding documentation is received the outstanding payments can issue to the estate of the deceased applicant.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments

158. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 282 of 7 July 2016, when he will issue payment to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33122/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named commenced her AEOS contract on 1 May 2015. 2015 payments issued on 15 December 2015 and 17 December 2015.

Under EU Regulations, 2016 scheme year payments cannot issue before 16 October at the earliest. Comprehensive administrative checks including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System must also be completed. In a similar timeframe to last year, 2016 scheme

year payments will be processed once these checks are finalised.

Forestry Grants

159. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 1548 of 16 September 2016, the status of an appeal by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33126/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The appeal by the person named, under the Afforestation Grant and Premium Scheme, which was received in late July, is ongoing. The file is currently with an inspector for review. The Appellant will be notified of the final decision.

Fishing Industry Development

160. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if there are plans to establish a sentinel fishery for the north west herring; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33199/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): In 2011, the Minister of the day asked the fishing industry and other interested parties to make proposals on the future management arrangements for all Irish herring fisheries, including the North West stock. The objective of the review was to deliver a policy which would ensure an economically and biologically sustainable fishery. As a result 20 sets of proposals and comments in relation to herring stocks management were received. It was very clear from this that there was no agreement within the industry as to how the future herring fishing opportunities should be managed. Taking account as far as possible of the views of stakeholders, a draft policy document was prepared and published for consultation. 49 submissions were received, again often conflicting and a further meeting with those who had made submissions was held in February 2012 regarding the draft policy, again there was no consensus.

Having considered all views and having regard to the sustainability of the fisheries, the Minister came to a decision setting down a detailed policy, which I believe provides for the proper and effective management and conservation and rational exploitation of the herring stocks. In order to provide for the needs of inshore herring fishers, which did not have the required track record under the policy, smaller vessels under 20m in length have access to an open herring fishery in the North West of up to 5% of the Area 6A South adjusted quota.

Periodic allocations are made available for operators covered by these arrangements. When there is a commercial TAC set for the area, each month I would expect to receive recommendations from industry representatives at the Quota Management Advisory Committee in relation to the monthly amounts available to the small boat herring fisheries.

The International Council for the Exploration of the Seas - ICES recommended a Zero Total Allowable Catch in area 6A South in 2015 and initially in 2016. In order to provide for the collection of scientific data, the EU Council set a TAC of 1,630 tonnes for Area 6A South, involving an Irish quota of 1,482t.

A public consultation took place on a recommendation from the four Producer Organisations and the Inshore Fisheries Forum to provide for the necessary scientific data sampling. Having considered all submissions made, I approved the industry recommendation. Allocations made

on this basis in 2016 are done on an exceptional basis for data collection purposes. If a non scientific TAC is set in future years the arrangements set down in the 2012 herring policy will continue to apply.

Departmental Funding

161. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide full details of the terms and conditions of the new loan scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33208/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The sustained period of lower commodity prices has led to cash flow difficulties for farmers in several sectors. One of my priorities is to support the provision of lower-cost flexible finance so I was pleased to announce plans for a €150 million fund for ‘Agri Cash Flow Support’ as part of the recent Budget.

The provision of €11.1 million in EU funding for milk and other livestock farmers under the exceptional adjustment aid package, will be supplemented by €14 million in national funding from my Department. The €25 million total will enable the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) to leverage a fund of €150 million, thereby maximising the support for farmers from the available public funding. The extra national funding will enable loans to be made available to non-livestock sectors, including tillage and horticulture, under “de minimis” State Aid provisions.

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%, which 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 announced 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. The 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.

Beef Data and Genomics Programme

162. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of farmers participating in the beef data genomics scheme that have completed a beef carbon navigator, on a county basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33229/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The information requested by the deputy is set out in the following table. I have extended the deadline for the completion of the carbon navigators by one month to 30 November to enable all participants to complete the navigator in order that payment can issue to them in December, subject to all other requirements having been met.

County	Carbon Navigators Completed
Carlow	190

County	Carbon Navigators Completed
Cavan	810
Clare	1238
Cork	1393
Donegal	1090
Dublin	17
Galway	2018
Kerry	926
Kildare	243
Kilkenny	428
Laois	483
Leitrim	761
Limerick	509
Longford	439
Louth	186
Mayo	1679
Meath	371
Monaghan	650
Offaly	430
Roscommon	1155
Sligo	795
Tipperary	683
Waterford	316
Westmeath	547
Wexford	459
Wicklow	318
Total	18134

Knowledge Transfer Programme

163. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons who have applied to the knowledge transfer group scheme under the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 to date, in each of the beef, sheep, dairy, tillage, equine and poultry sectors; the targeted number of groups formed; the number of groups finalised to date; the reason for extending the deadline for participation in the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33230/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Knowledge Transfer Programme is included in Ireland's Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020. While the RDP envisages the training of 27,000 farmers over the period to 2020, no specific target was set in relation to the number of groups to be formed. 20,252 farmer applications have now been registered for the scheme. These are broken down between the sectors in the following table:

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-	Total	Beef	Dairy	Sheep	Tillage	Poultry	Equine
Number of Participants Applied	20,252	10,072	4,258	4,310	885	248	479

To date, 1,112 Knowledge Transfer Groups have been approved with a small number deemed ineligible. Staff in my Department are currently liaising with facilitators to finalise outstanding groups and to process a number of query and appeal cases.

Groups will run for a 3 year period from June, 2016. In common with other measures under the RDP, monitoring of targets and associated budgets is ongoing over the life of the Programme, in conjunction with the annual estimates process.

The deadline for registration was extended to 14 July in order to allow further time for facilitators to finalise arrangements for their groups.

Knowledge Transfer Programme

164. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the amount funds allocated to the knowledge transfer group scheme under the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020; the total amount of spend on an annual basis to date in tabular form; the total amount allocated for 2016 and 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33231/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Knowledge Transfer Programme has a funding allocation within the Rural Development Programme, 2014-2020 of €100m for the duration of the programming period. Year 1 of the scheme runs from 1 June, 2016 to 31 May, 2017 with payments commencing thereafter. Accordingly, while there is no allocation in 2016 as payments will not issue until the completion of Year 1, the allocation for 2017 is €25m.

2016 allocation	2017 allocation
€0	€25,000,000

In common with other measures under the RDP, monitoring of targets and associated budgets is ongoing over the life of the Programme, in conjunction with the annual estimates process.

TAMS Funding

165. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the total amount allocated to the TAMS scheme under the Rural Development Programme 2014 to 2020; the total amount of spend on an annual basis to date, in tabular form; the total amount allocated for 2016 and 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33232/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme (TAMS) is a demand led scheme. The suite of six measures under TAMS II was launched under the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 and is co-funded under the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). The total funds allocated under the Programme period is €395m. The total allocation for 2016 is €35.8m

and for 2017 is €50m.

The TAMS II online payment claims system has been available for the submission of payment claims since July 2016. 325 TAMS II payment claims have been received to date and payment has issued in 53 cases. The payment claims submitted are being processed, however a large number of them have minor issues that need to be resolved before payment can be made. Department officials are in direct contact with individual farmers to progress claims towards early payment.

Expenditure to date on TAMS II is as set out as follows:

Expenditure in 2014-20 Programme on TAMS II	2014 (€m)	2015 (€m)	2016 (€m)
Animal Welfare and Nutrient Storage Scheme	€0.000	€0.000	€0.007
Dairy Equipment Scheme II	€0.000	€0.000	€0.227
Low Emission Slurry Spreading	€0.000	€0.000	€0.190
Organic Capital Investment Scheme	€0.000	€0.000	€0.005
Young Farmers Capital Investment Scheme	€0.000	€0.000	€0.262
Pig and Poultry Investment Scheme	€0.000	€0.000	€0.000
Expenditure in 2014-20 Programme on TAMS I			
Dairy Equipment	€ 8.576	€ 19.038	€ 1.285
Sheep Handling	€ 0.773	€ 2.450	€ 0.818
Farm Safety	€ 0.000	€ 3.131	€ 1.706
Rainwater Harvesting	€0.019	€ 0.024	€ 0.034
Loose Housing Sows	€ 7.089	€ 0.187	€ 0.000
Totals	€16.457	€24.83	€4.534

Fisheries Protection

166. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of regulations surrounding extending public and private commercial salmon fisheries for inland areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33198/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Seán Kyne): The Wild Salmon and Sea Trout Tagging Scheme Regulations, made pursuant to Sections 69 of the Inland Fisheries Act 2010, provide for the management of Ireland's wild salmon and sea trout fishery by Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI). Specifically, the Regulations provide for the quotas of fish that can be harvested by commercial fishing engines and rod and line from those rivers identified in the Schedule to the Regulations.

The Wild Salmon and Sea Trout Tagging Scheme Regulations are revised on an annual basis, taking account of advice from Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI), the Standing Scientific Committee for Salmon (SSCS) and any submissions received from the 30 day public consultation.

I will be commencing the 30 day public consultation for the 2017 Regulations later this month in order to facilitate a suite of new secondary legislation regulating Ireland's wild salmon and sea trout fishery being in place for 1 January 2017.

In 2006 the Government affirmed its commitment to manage the wild salmon fishery in line with the scientific advice from 2007 onwards in the interests of conservation of stocks. International best practice for the management of Atlantic Salmon requires the adoption of the precautionary approach and the cessation of indiscriminate mixed stock fisheries. Since 2007, the harvest of salmon, by commercial and recreational (angling) means, has been restricted to

those stocks of rivers that are meeting their conservation limits.

The individual river management strategy is based on the fact that each of Ireland's salmon rivers has its own unique stock of salmon which migrates to sea as juveniles and returns to the same river in adulthood to spawn and create the next generation of fish exclusive to that river. Fisheries are only considered in rivers where the estimated returns are above the conservation limit for the river.

The SSCS is a statutorily independent committee comprised of scientists from IFI, Bord Iascaigh Mhara, the Loughs Agency, the National Parks and Wildlife Service, the Marine Institute, the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (Northern Ireland), and other State bodies and third level institutions. The SSCS provides independent advice to IFI as regards the annual individual stock assessments for Ireland's wild salmon rivers. This independent scientific advice underpins the management decisions and advice of IFI as regards all aspects of the angling and commercial season for salmon on an individual river basis.

The model and processes used by the SSCS are recognised internationally as best practice. Delegations from a number of countries have visited IFI and the SSCS to examine and seek to learn from the Irish approach to Salmon management. The North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organisation (NASCO) also recognises Ireland as a leader in this area.

The commercial (draftnet and snapnet) season commences in May each year and conservation measures for the fishery (including the determination of the number of licences available) will be introduced in advance of the season under the Control of Fishing for Salmon Order and associated bye-laws.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

167. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the roll-out of rural broadband in an area (details supplied) in County Mayo. [33066/16]

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 through 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 townlands of Newtownwhite and Ballysakerry in County Mayo fall within the AMBER area and therefore will be part of the State Intervention procurement process. Individuals can check whether their premises is in a BLUE or an AMBER area by scrolling through the map online or entering their Eircode. The Department also has a dedicated mailbox and anyone with

a query in relation to the Map should email the Department, quoting their Eircode, to broadband@dcenr.gov.ie.

The Department is now in a formal procurement process to select a company or companies to roll-out a new high speed broadband network in the State Intervention Area comprising over 750,000 premises including over 50,000 premises in County Mayo, 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. In the course of this dialogue, 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 1000 Mbps with businesses potentially availing of symmetrical upload and download speeds.

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 roll out 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 roll-out strategy, in order to target areas of particularly poor service, business needs and-or high demand. This will need to be balanced with the most efficient network roll-out plan. A prioritisation programme will be put in place in this regard, in consultation with the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. A detailed roll-out 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 roll-out 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.

Electricity Generation

168. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will intervene to ensure the future of a power plant (details supplied) is protected in view of an announcement by a company and the announcement indicates future closure of the plant in years to come; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33107/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): At the outset I want to say that any loss of jobs and the impact on individuals, households and local communities is a source of real regret.

Tarbert power station, like all such plants, has a physical and operational design life. The power station is a Heavy Fuel Station that commenced operations in 1969 under the ownership of the ESB and was originally scheduled to close in 2010 due to its advanced age, inefficiency and its use of a heavily polluting fuel. Before its closure, it was purchased by Endesa who sought and were granted planning permission to develop and build a modern and efficient electricity power plant fuelled by gas. That company subsequently sold the plant to SSE.

In the liberalised energy market, it is a commercial decision for the company to take in regard to the future of the plant. I am advised that the company, SSE, has stated that the redundancies are required to ensure the plant's continued competitiveness and help safeguard the continued operation of Tarbert Power Plant.

Motor Industry

169. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the policy regarding private car rental companies which operate here; if these companies are required to use cars taxed and registered in Ireland, or can they use vehicles taxed and registered in Northern Ireland and England; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33123/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The policy regarding the operation of private car rental companies in the State is not a function of my Department.

Waste Tyre Disposal

170. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the commencement date for a new end of life waste tyre compliance scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33142/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): On 1 November 2015, Repak ELT were appointed to operate an interim compliance scheme for waste tyres with a view to a full compliance scheme being developed. The main focus of this interim arrangement has been gathering data. A Tyres Working Group was established to advise me in the development of a full compliance scheme. This Group, which is chaired by my Department, consists of representatives of national agencies and industry stakeholders. The Group has engaged in discussions with stakeholders on a range of issues including permitting requirements, the agricultural and haulage sectors and end of waste criteria for tyres. I expect that the Tyres Working Group will meet in the coming weeks to further discuss these matters and, at that stage, I will be in a position to make the remaining decisions regarding the operation of a full compliance scheme for tyres. I expect the new scheme to be in place early in 2017.

Energy Conservation

171. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and

Environment further to previous parliamentary question the reason for the delay in replacing existing local authority public lighting sodium lamps with high efficiency LED units to reduce energy consumption and maintenance costs (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33234/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Further to my reply to the Deputy in April, I am pleased to report that progress on this issue continues to be made through the National Public Lighting Steering Group. This group is chaired by the City and County Managers Association (CCMA) and includes representatives from Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI), the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport and my Department.

Preparation for the physical upgrading of public lighting assets is underway across a number of work-streams. It is necessary to have a standardised and up to date inventory of these assets, and I understand Local Authorities are well advanced on this task. Good progress has also been made on the critical issue of the technical specifications for these upgrades by the CCMA, TII and ESB Networks. This work is allowing the CCMA to proceed with designing a national procurement of energy efficiency upgrades.

The action to which the Deputy refers was part of an earlier, exploratory, phase of the strategy to upgrade public lighting. The strategy has now evolved from this regional project to a coordinated national approach. Such an approach is necessary to develop optimal technical solutions, achieve economies of scale in procurement and ensure that, as one of the largest users of energy in the public sector, Local Authorities make their contribution to the achievement of the target on the public sector to improve its energy efficiency by 33% by 2020.

Airport Development Projects

172. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the action he proposes in relation to the small number of homeowners whose properties are marginally outside the voluntary buy-out area, whose lives will be severely negatively impacted by the development of the new runway, from the perspective of broadening the terms of the scheme and ensuring that these persons are considered for inclusion. [33201/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy will be aware, daa has statutory responsibility to manage, operate and develop Dublin Airport, including the North Runway project which I have welcomed as an essential piece of infrastructure that is in the national interest.

I understand that daa are continuing to engage with local communities on the North Runway project and have held a number of meetings with representative groups and individuals since the company announced that it was proceeding with the North Runway project in April 2016. In addition, daa is engaging with relevant stakeholders on mitigation measures, including voluntary home sound insulation and dwelling purchase schemes which are required as part of the 2007 planning permission for the North Runway project.

Since the management of these schemes is a matter for daa, in consultation with Fingal County Council, I have forwarded the Deputy's question to daa for their attention and direct reply. If you do not hear from daa within 10 working days, please contact my private office.

Ports Development

173. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the due diligence into Dún Laoghaire harbour has been completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33072/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Harbours Act 2015 provides the legislative basis for one of the key recommendations in National Ports Policy, namely that governance of the five Ports of Regional Significance should vest in more appropriate local authority led governance structures. Dún Laoghaire Harbour Company, as a Port of Regional Significance, is designated under the policy for transfer to Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council.

Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council has procured consultants to conduct the due diligence of the port company. While the procurement and management of the due diligence process is a matter for the Council, I understand that the process is almost complete.

I also understand that Dún Laoghaire Harbour Company and Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council have established two transitional teams which are working on the practical issues associated with the transfer.

When the due diligence process is completed, I expect that substantial progress will be made towards finalising the preparations for transfer and the timing of the transfer.

Harbour Authorities Expenditure

174. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has reviewed the anomalies in the finances of the Dún Laoghaire Harbour Company subject to his meeting with the stakeholders; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33073/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I recently met with the Deputy and a number of representatives from the Dún Laoghaire area at their request to discuss issues in connection with Dún Laoghaire Harbour, including possible future developments at the Harbour.

Dún Laoghaire Harbour Company is a commercial state company that operates under the Harbours Acts. The company has a statutory mandate to take all proper measures for the management, control, operation and development of Dún Laoghaire Harbour and is required to conduct its business in a cost-effective and efficient manner. The company is statutorily independent and is not in receipt of any State funding. As Minister, I am not involved in the day-to-day operations or management of the company.

A full annual audit of the 2015 company accounts was undertaken by the company's external auditor and no anomalies were noted. The company's audited annual accounts were then laid before the Oireachtas and made publically available.

I expect to receive the 2016 unaudited annual accounts, which cover the full calendar year of 2016, in early 2017. The final accounts, when received, will then be forwarded to my Department's Financial Advisor for assessment and any issues arising will be followed up. The final annual accounts will then be submitted to Government and laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas in Summer 2017.

Separately, I understand from the Deputy that matters raised by his delegation at our recent meeting are being investigated by the appropriate authorities.

Industrial Disputes

175. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the situation in Irish Rail and Bus Éireann; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33102/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issues in both companies are separate and must be treated as such by all relevant stakeholders.

I am aware that the Labour Court has been asked to consider issues relating to pay in Bus Éireann and aspects of certain working conditions in Iarnród Éireann, while other issues have formed part of previous discussions at the Workplace Relations Commission.

I have been consistently clear since assuming office that issues relating to pay and conditions in any particular State owned company under my Department's aegis are a matter for discussion and agreement between the employer and the employees.

In addition to the above, the National Transport Authority (NTA) and Irish Rail recently submitted the 2016 Rail Review to me. This Review examines the funding parameters required to support our rail network now and into the future, as well as identifying potential for future growth. I have already stated that I will bring the report to cabinet and then immediately arrange for its publication and commencement of a publication process to be conducted by the National Transport Authority. I intend to do so next week.

The Deputy is also no doubt aware that Bus Éireann's Expressway service is loss-making and that the company has engaged consultants to independently review the options available to it as it seeks to address these losses. That process is on-going. The Company has previously indicated its desire to discuss the Expressway issue with trade unions and I am firmly of the belief that difficult issues such as this can only be resolved through open, constructive and realistic engagement between the company and its employees.

Departmental Budgets

176. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the budget allocation for his Department; if it is sufficient to expand the public transport system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33103/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): In light of the many competing priorities within Government and current financial constraints I was pleased that my Department secured additional funding in Budget 2017. I am particularly pleased that funding for the land transport programme will increase next year by €90m to €1.46 billion with a significant portion of this increase for capital and current spending on public transport.

There are a significant number of projects underway and planned to increase capacity on our public transport network. In the near future projects such as the reopening of the Phoenix Park Tunnel, Luas Cross City and 10 minute DART will help manage the increasing demand on the light rail and heavy rail networks in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA). The Luas Cross City project will commence operation before the end of 2017 and will provide for an estimated 10 million additional journeys per annum on the Luas network. Other projects that are being progressed that will improve capacity on the rail network in Dublin and nationally include the City Centre Re-signalling Programme and the construction of a new Central Traffic Control Centre for the commuter and intercity rail network.

Funding is also being provided under the Government's Capital Plan for replacement and expansion of the PSO fleet in the Dublin region and in Bus Éireann, and for the development or upgrading of QBCs in both the GDA and in the regional cities. As the Deputy will be aware, a mid-term review of the Capital Plan is planned to be carried out next year and I will be making the case for increased funding for public transport in that context to cope with increasing demand for public transport as the economy continues to improve and to encourage people to get out of their cars and onto public transport and more sustainable forms of transport.

Road Projects Status

177. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if it is the responsibility of Transport Infrastructure Ireland or the local authority to notify businesses at a location (details supplied) of a lengthy road closure; the timeframe for these works; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33105/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects (including the N2) is a matter for the Transport Infrastructure Ireland (formerly known as the NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects is a matter in the first instance for TII in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act.

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

Sports Capital Programme Administration

178. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when he expects to launch 2016 sports capital grants; and the amount that will be available for it. [33130/16]

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.

Following the conclusion of the 2017 Estimates discussions, a total of €52m has been provided for sports capital projects. This will meet all existing commitments under previous rounds of the Sports Capital and Local Authority Swimming Pool Programme, and also allow for a new round of the of the Sports Capital Programme. In this regard, the new round will be open for applications by January at the latest. Based on previous rounds of the programme, the assessment process takes a number of months to complete so I expect that actual grant allocations will be made some time during Summer 2017. We will be announcing more comprehensive details of the new round shortly.

Tourism Data

179. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the

number of tourists who visited counties Sligo and Leitrim each year since 2011; the benefits the Wild Atlantic Way could bring to these counties into the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33135/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross) (Deputy Shane Ross): Research shows that there is low awareness of Ireland's county boundaries among potential overseas visitors, indicating that expenditure on marketing an individual county to consumers in overseas markets would be unlikely to provide an adequate return on investment. The tourism agencies are instead developing and promoting tourism propositions of scale (e.g. the Wild Atlantic Way), capable of achieving international impact and securing consumer attention.

The collection and publication of official statistics is a matter for the Central Statistics Office (CSO), which is under the aegis of the Department of the Taoiseach. Official overseas visitor statistics can be found in the Tourism and Travel section of the CSO website but are not available at county-level.

Fáilte Ireland publishes its own estimates of overseas and domestic visit numbers and revenue by county. The most recent published statistics go up to 2015 and are available in the Research section of the Fáilte Ireland website at www.failteireland.ie. However, it should be noted that, due to the small sample sizes which breaking out counties leads to, these figures are based on three-year rolling averages, not a given year.

My role, as the Minister with responsibility for tourism, is to develop national tourism policy which is then implemented by the tourism agencies - Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland. Fáilte Ireland is responsible for the development of regional tourism and Tourism Ireland has responsibility for the overseas promotion of the island of Ireland as a tourism destination. On the subject of the benefits of the Wild Atlantic Way for Sligo and Leitrim in the future, this is a matter for the board and management of Fáilte Ireland. Accordingly, I have referred the question to the agency for direct reply. Please contact my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Sports Capital Programme Data

180. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the funding allocations counties Sligo, Leitrim, Cavan and Donegal can expect to receive under the new sports capital funding programme in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33136/16]

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.

Following the conclusion of the 2017 Estimates discussions, a total of €52m has been provided for sports capital projects. This will meet all existing commitments under previous rounds of the Sports Capital and Local Authority Swimming Pool Programme, and also allow for a new round of the of the Sports Capital Programme. In this regard, the new round will be open for applications by January at the latest. Based on previous rounds of the programme, the assessment process takes a number of months to complete so I expect that actual grant allocations will be made some time during Summer 2017. Obviously it is not possible to indicate how much will be allocated to any county at this stage as this will depend on the overall level of applications received. We will be announcing more comprehensive details of the new round shortly.

Rail Services Provision

181. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the electrification of the rail system for the Maynooth line; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33138/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The National Transport Authority's Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) for the period 2016 - 2035, which was approved and published earlier this year, proposes implementation of the DART Expansion Programme which will provide DART services as far north as Drogheda, to Hazelhatch on the Kildare Line, and to Maynooth in the west and to the M3 Parkway.

Funding for some elements of the DART Expansion Programme is included in the Capital Plan which was published in September last year. Specifically, funding is provided for the extension of the DART to Balbriggan on the Northern line.

The extension of the DART to Maynooth and to the M3 Parkway would provide an enhancement to existing services for commuters from the wider catchment areas in Counties Kildare and Meath, including Kilcock and Enfield. The extension of DART to Maynooth would also necessitate the construction of the DART Underground Tunnel. As the Deputy will be aware, the Government decided in September 2015 that the original proposal for the tunnel should be redesigned and work is underway on that at present. The final scheme will, of course, be subject to availability of funding and will likely be considered in the context of the next Capital Plan post-2021.

Insurance Industry Regulation

182. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the fact that insurance companies are using leased taxi plates to drive up driver insurance premiums on the basis that a leased taxi plate remains in the ownership of the licence holder as does the insurance policy attached to it, thus not allowing the lessee to benefit from a no claims bonus on the leaser's policy; the steps he will take in this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33144/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): While I am not aware of the practice mentioned by the Deputy in this question, motor insurance is essentially a private transaction between the insured person and the insurance company. Unfortunately, as such I have no role in the matter.

Bus Services

183. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if details of new licences for the routes 726 and 126 have been finalised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33148/16]

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

Bus Services

184. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans for pricing regulation on bus routes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33149/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Issues relating to the licensing of bus passenger services are matters for the National Transport Authority (NTA). Therefore, I have referred the question to the NTA for direct reply to the Deputy. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

Legislative Measures

185. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a statutory instrument has been brought forward to implement his decision to put the Irish Aviation Authority in charge of aircraft noise pollution monitoring; if not, the timeframe for this and the legislative measures to be put in place; the extra resources he expects to provide to the IAA for this function; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33169/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): On 22 September last, I announced details of the manner in which EU Regulation 598/2014, on the establishment of rules and procedures with regard to the introduction of noise-related operating restrictions at EU airports, is to be implemented in Ireland. This will require the introduction of a Statutory Instrument, which it is envisaged will be completed by the end of this year. Officials in my Department are currently engaged with the Office of the Attorney General on the preparation of this Statutory Instrument.

There is a requirement for regulatory independence in the EU Regulation and its achievement by functional separation is specifically permitted. Accordingly, when announcing that the Irish Aviation Authority (IAA) is to be the competent authority in Ireland to implement the new airport noise management regime, I also announced that a separate unit is to be established by the IAA to deal specifically with that regime.

Insofar as the resourcing of this separate unit is concerned, the framework arrangements to apply will be addressed in the Statutory Instrument currently in preparation. It is not intended however that this will involve funding from the Exchequer.

Airport Development Projects

186. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport with regard to the proposed development of a second runway at Dublin airport, if his attention has been drawn to the concerns of residents in the local area, particularly those in the communities of Portmarnock and St. Margaret's; if he has engaged with the daa to ensure the concerns of residents are fully examined and taken into account by the daa; if he will engage with the daa to ensure they further engage with local residents regarding any further developments at Dublin Airport which may impact upon them; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33197/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware, the daa has statutory responsibility to manage, operate and develop Dublin Airport, including the North Runway project. It is my understanding that daa is continuing to engage with local communities and have held a number of meetings with representative groups and in-

dividuals since the company announced that it was proceeding with the runway project in April.

daa have stated their willingness, which I obviously have encouraged, to provide briefings to groups or individuals on request. daa also have engaged in an extensive information campaign including tailored door-to-door leaflet drops, newsletters, videos, information workshops, and has hosted large-scale information days in the area. A dedicated website and a free-phone number for the project have also been established.

daa have recently consulted with the local community on the ‘Proposal to Change Permitted Operations’ regarding their stated intention to seek to change two of the conditions attached to the planning permission for the runway. As part of this process, public information days were held in June and July to discuss the approach and the contents of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Scoping Document. Further information and consultation events took place last week to provide an update on the EIS process and to assist in selecting between emerging options for future flightpaths. All of the responses that emerged from this consultation with stakeholders are now being reviewed and considered in finalising the assessment methodology and content of the EIS.

All of these initiatives are in addition to daa’s ongoing engagement on mitigation measures, including a home sound insulation scheme and a voluntary dwelling purchase scheme, which are required as part of the planning permission for Runway North.

Also, on 22 September 2016, I published a policy statement about new arrangements that I intend to put in place in relation to determining what operating restrictions are appropriate at Dublin Airport. These arrangements will ensure that the concerns of residents in the area are given due consideration.

I understand that arrangements are underway at present in my office to facilitate a meeting between the Deputy, concerned parties and myself in the coming weeks. This meeting will take place as soon as all parties have had an opportunity to confirm their availability.

Maritime Safety

187. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide a copy of the file and test results carried out by the Marine Survey Office in respect of a vessel (details supplied) from May 2009 until December 2011 in order that the then owners can supply information to the EU petitions committee; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33227/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Inclining experiments, referred as “tests” in this question, are organised and carried out by a vessel owner or a consultant acting on his or her behalf. The Marine Survey Office (MSO) of my Department routinely attends onboard vessels during safety surveys in order to witness such inclining experiments to attest to their conduct being in line with prescribed regulations.

In relation to the vessel in question, the MSO witnessed such inclining experiments carried out by the vessel owner’s consultant in the referred period between May 2009 and December 2011. This attestation is appended to the owner’s consultant Report as provided to the Department by the Deputy.

My Department does not hold any other record of stability related test results relevant to this vessel during the prescribed period.

Cycling Facilities Provision

188. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the progress of a national indoor cycling velodrome; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33237/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): I am advised that the next step for a proposed velodrome would be for Sport Ireland to undertake an appropriate financial appraisal, i.e. a Cost Benefit Analysis, in accordance with the Public Spending Code. Thereafter, any proposal to proceed would also be subject to the availability of capital funding.

Bus Services

189. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the contacts he has had with trade unions representing Bus Éireann staff; his views on the proposal to sell the expressway service; his views that this would have a detrimental impact on the provision of public transport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33255/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): While I have not met trade unions I have received representations submitted by them on behalf of their members.

As discussed at my recent meeting with the Joint Oireachtas Committee I am aware that Bus Éireann is considering options designed to address the financial losses resulting from its commercial Expressway service; the formulation and progression of those plans are a matter for the company. Bus Éireann has engaged consultants to independently review the options available to it as it seeks to address these losses.

I have been consistently clear since assuming office that issues relating to pay and conditions in any particular State owned company under my Department's aegis are a matter for discussion and agreement between the employer and the employees. Bus Éireann has indicated its desire to discuss the Expressway issue with trade unions and I am firmly of the belief that difficult issues such as this can only be resolved through open, constructive and realistic engagement between the company and its employees.

Expressway routes are commercial services which do not receive any Exchequer funding. Last year commercial bus services carried almost 23 million passengers with approximately 7 million of those passengers choosing an Expressway service.

The Deputy is probably aware that the commercial bus market has seen significant growth in recent years with passenger journeys in 2015 13% higher than in 2013. These services are regulated by the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the Public Transport Regulation Act 2009. There have been instances in recent years whereby some commercial services have been reconfigured leaving certain areas without the desired level of public transport provision. In response, the NTA has used its powers under the Dublin Transport Authority Act 2008 to ensure continued public transport services through the provision of subvented Public Service Obligation (PSO) services.

Rail Services Provision

190. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on

the rail review conducted by the NTA and Iarnród Éireann; his further views that rail services should receive increased public investment to maintain, improve and expand on a vital public service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33256/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As I indicated at the Oireachtas Committee on Transport on 5 October last, I have received a copy of the Rail Review conducted by the National Transport Authority and Irish Rail, which examines the funding parameters required to support our rail network now and into the future. I have already stated that I will bring the report to Cabinet and then immediately arrange for its publication and commencement of a public consultation process to be conducted by the National Transport Authority. I intend to do so next week.

The review identifies a funding gap for Irish Rail based on the projected allocations prior to Budget 2017. In the meantime, decisions on Budget 2017 provide for additional funding of over €50 million to Irish Rail next year.

This significant increase in funding for next year allows for increasing investment in maintenance and renewal of the network and the rolling stock, and also to provide more funding for safety projects. It is also encouraging to note that Irish Rail is experiencing business growth with increasing passenger journeys. The re-opening of the Phoenix Park tunnel in the coming weeks for commuter services from the Kildare line to the stations between Connolly and Grand Canal Dock and the expansion of DART services to a ten minute frequency will also help to grow the business.

While there has been much speculation regarding the future of individual rail lines, I want to stress that no decisions will be taken on any of the options identified in the Review in advance of the full process of public consultation. The public consultation will give the public and other interested parties the opportunity to see the analysis on rail funding and to contribute to all aspects of the debate on the future of rail.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

191. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport in view of the fact that the transport strategy for the greater Dublin area plans an increase in carbon emissions, if he is of the view that the strategy is in line with Government commitments to decrease carbon emissions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33257/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I do not accept the Deputy's assertion about the GDA Transport Strategy's impact on carbon emissions. In fact the Strategy - which was prepared by the National Transport Authority and approved by my predecessor earlier this year - commits to promoting transport options that will reduce carbon emissions.

Various policies related to climate change, carbon emissions and associated action plans were still under development at the time of preparation of the Strategy. The Strategy explicitly recognises that the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015 includes provisions for the preparation of a "national mitigation plan" and a "national adaptation framework", which will establish energy related targets and actions to be adopted across the transport sector. The Strategy commits to incorporating relevant targets and actions arising from that Act and related policies in the area of transport energy within its statutory Integrated Implementation Plans. Incorporation of such relevant targets and actions may increase the current forecasted impact of the Strategy in terms of reducing carbon emissions. It is my view, therefore, that the GDA

Transport Strategy is in line with Government commitments to decrease carbon emissions.

Rail Services

192. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on increasing the subvention to the CIÉ group; his views that an increase is needed to improve public transport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33258/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As I discussed with the Deputy at a recent meeting of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Transport I believe that increased subvention funding can assist in the delivery of improved public transport services

Budget 2017 has allocated an additional €31 million to public transport services (PSO and rural transport) when compared with this year's allocation.

It is a statutory function of the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the Dublin Transport Act 2008 to decide upon the exact allocation to each operator. The NTA is currently engaged in discussions with the relevant operators as regards their allocation and the services that are to be provided in return for that allocation.

I expect next year's additional money will provide for much needed improvements to services such as:

- Rolling out 10 minute DART services;
- Extending Kildare Line commuter rail services through the Phoenix Park Tunnel and into the heart of Dublin's city centre;
- Providing for additional services across the bus network;
- Maintaining progress with the bus market opening competitions; and
- Improved rural transport bus services.

It is clear is that the increased funding I have made available for public transport next year will help the NTA and the operators to deliver improvements in our public transport services.

Free Travel Scheme

193. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the representations he has made to the Department of Social Protection regarding the subsidy paid to fund free travel for senior citizens which has not kept pace with demographic changes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33259/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Free Travel Scheme is a non-statutory scheme administered by the Department of Social Protection. It provides free travel for those with eligibility on the main public and private transport services which includes road, rail and ferry. There are currently approximately 853,000 customers with direct eligibility with an annual allocation of €80 million.

In 2012, the Department of Social Protection set up an interdepartmental working group to review the free travel scheme. My Department was represented on that working group. I understand that a report was completed by the Department of Social Protection in November 2014

and that the report considered a number of issues such as funding, operation and eligibility of the scheme.

The Deputy will be aware that the Programme for a Partnership Government contains a commitment to fully protect the free travel pass for all pensioners and work with private and public operators to keep services operating on as many routes as possible.

Clearly the issue of how the scheme is funded is important not just from the perspective of the scheme's administration but also in terms of ensuring that public transport is adequately funded generally. While the administration of the scheme is a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Social Protection, I understand the Deputy's point regarding the changes in demographics and usage which have occurred since the level of funding was last fixed.

The level of funding associated with the Scheme has most recently been highlighted by the National Transport Authority (NTA), as part of the Rail Review 2016 which I intend to publish shortly.

I believe the issue of funding associated with the Scheme to be an important one and I will be in contact with the Minister for Social Protection in an effort to see what progress can be made to make the scheme more effective as regards the sustainability of its funding and the implications for the provision of public transport.

Cycling Facilities Provision

194. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the funding he is making available for the improvement of cycling lanes; his views that there should be a prioritisation of the provision of segregated and continuous cycles lanes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33260/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Funding for the development of cycling infrastructure is provided under a number of different programmes in my Department. In 2016, €23.2m is being provided under the Sustainable Transport Measures Grants (STMG) Programme and a further sum of €13.5m is being provided under the Regional Cities programme for the implementation of sustainable transport measures such as cycling/walking infrastructure, Quality Bus Corridors, safety, integration and traffic management projects. This funding is provided to the NTA for the seven local authorities in the Greater Dublin Area and the local authorities in the Regional Cities for the implementation of such measures.

In delivering cycling infrastructure, the National Transport Authority (NTA) and the relevant local authorities adhere to the recommendations contained in the NTA Cycling Manual (www.cyclemanual.ie) and in particular, the principles underpinning this guidance. A GDA Cycle Network Plan is included in the NTA's GDA Transport Strategy 2016-2035 approved by my predecessor. This plan provides the blueprint for the development of a cycling network in the GDA that includes segregated and continuous cycling infrastructure and I am fully supportive of such measures.

Funding is also provided under my Department's *Smarter Travel* programme for the development of cycling infrastructure including Greenways. Under the Capital Plan, €100 million is committed to smarter travel and carbon reduction measures, including Greenways. The Programme for Government also commits to providing additional capital funding for various tourism projects, including greenways. I will be seeking to deliver this additional funding in the context of the mid-term review of the Capital Plan next year.

Ticket Touting

195. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if she will investigate issues related to ticket touting (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33060/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): While I am not in a position to comment on the specific case referred to in the details supplied by the Deputy, 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 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.

Sale of State Assets

196. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the exact percentage and history of the shareholding that the state has in a studio (details supplied); the reason behind the Government decision to sell that shareholding; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33254/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): Enterprise Ireland has a 31.67% stake in the ownership of Ardmore Studios having acquired its share as a result of an equity investment and a loan by Nadcorp (a predecessor State Agency) under an Agreement that dates back to 27 August 1986 which was amended on 22 September 1987.

The sale of the Ardmore Studios is a commercial decision by the owners of the Studios. The decision to sell its shareholding in Ardmore Studios is a day-to-day operational matter for Enterprise Ireland. The balance is owned by a company that is owned by its shareholders and the decision by that company to sell its shareholding is a matter for the company.

As a passive investor, Enterprise Ireland has not been involved in the day-to-day business of running Ardmore Studios. Furthermore while Enterprise Ireland offers supports to exporting companies involved in film and the creative sector, policy responsibility for the development of the film industry rests with my colleague, Ms Heather Humphreys, T.D., Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.

Enterprise Ireland remains committed to its client companies with global ambition across the creative sector in areas such as animation and digital content. Enterprise Ireland provides these companies with a range of supports appropriate to their stage of business and is committed to supporting these companies internationalise.

Ardmore Studios is being placed on the market for sale as a going concern. Enterprise Ireland has not placed any pre-conditions on the pending sale of Ardmore Studios due to the existence of planning restrictions on the site which safeguard its use as a film making studio into the future.

At the appropriate time, a proposal for decision on the sale of Enterprise Ireland's shareholding will be reviewed by Enterprise Ireland from a commercial and legal perspective to

ensure receipt of fair market value and return for the taxpayer.

IDA Portfolio

197. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the location and the timeframe for the construction of the IDA advanced building in Dundalk as announced in budget 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33100/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): In order to support the achievement of IDA Ireland's target of increasing investment to all regions outside of Dublin by 30%-40%, the Government announced – as part of Budget 2017 – an increase in the Agency's capital funding of 22%, bringing its total capital budget to €137 million. This increased allocation will help the Agency to progress the next three advance buildings as set out in IDA's regional property investment programme. This programme aims to attract further investment into regional locations by ensuring the ready availability of an adequate supply of marketable serviced land, office and industrial/manufacturing buildings in advance of demand by both existing and potential client companies.

The Dundalk facility will be constructed at Finnabair Business Park. The facility is currently at design stage and the Agency is projecting a completion date of Q4 2017.

Company Data

198. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of companies that have been involuntarily struck off by the Companies Registration Office in each of the past three years; the value of assets transferred to the state as a result of this and any amounts that were subsequently reinstated to the organisations concerned as a result of high court proceedings; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33141/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The following is the number of companies that have been involuntarily struck off by the Companies Registration Office in each of the last three years:

Year	Number of companies involuntarily struck off
2015	3072
2014	7077
2013	6840

Information concerning the value of assets transferred to the State as a result of these strike-offs and any amounts that were subsequently reinstated to the organisations concerned is not collected by the Companies Registration Office.

Workplace Relations Commission

199. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation her Department's plans to address the inordinate delays and dysfunction in the workings of the Workplace Relations Commission. [33146/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat

Breen): The Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) was established to reduce inordinate delays of up to 2 years in the hearing of cases in some bodies that it replaced, and remove the dysfunction of having multiple first instance avenues of redress for the same workplace incident. This reform was overdue. Established on 1 October last year, the WRC incorporates the functions of the Labour Relations Commission (including the Rights Commissioner Service), the Equality Tribunal, the Employment Appeals Tribunal (first instance jurisdiction), and the National Employment Rights Authority (NERA). All first instance complaints are now dealt with by the WRC.

The collective and specialist services of the Commission all play a vital role in contributing towards industrial peace, public service reform, maintaining and sustaining enterprise efficiency and productivity and engaging with employers and trade unions on issues of employee pay and rewards. Ensuring fair, impartial, effective employment rights and adjudication services, together with appropriate levels of enforcement are vital and important components of a well-functioning and fair labour market.

It is worth noting that the WRC has been successful in resolving a number of high profile disputes over the past year and that overall the Conciliation Service enjoys a success rate of over 80 per cent.

Furthermore, over the last year:

- the Inspection Services of the WRC has undertaken around 3,400 inspections and recovered nearly one million Euro in unpaid wages for employees;

- the WRC information service has handled 50,000 calls from individuals looking for assistance on specific employment rights;

- the Adjudication Service has received almost 14,000 specific complaints and held over 2,600 hearings with individual complainants about breaches of their employment rights. Complainants are receiving a hearing on average between 12 and 16 weeks of sending in the complaint and a decision on average 8 weeks later. Requests by parties or their representatives to delay the scheduling of a hearing, pending the availability of key witnesses or to facilitate discussions regarding a potential settlement, are outside the control of the WRC, but obviously can impact on timelines for hearings.

- the Service has also reduced by almost a half the number of inherited complaints.

While there has been some comment about initial teething problems with the administration of the Adjudication Service, I am satisfied that overall, stakeholders are very supportive of the WRCs multi-year programme of change approach and that the WRC is fully committed to working through, in a constructive manner any issues that arise as the new structures continue to bed down.

IDA Portfolio

200. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation further to the reply received regarding the advance IDA facility for County Carlow, if she will provide clarification on the construction dates and works schedule (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33157/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): As advised in my response to parliamentary question number 591 last week, the planned advance

facility for Carlow is currently at site selection stage. Site selection is required because IDA Ireland does not currently hold any land in Carlow suitable for an advance facility and therefore needs to first identify an appropriate location before proceeding further.

I am sure the Deputy will understand that due to the commercial sensitivities involved in land acquisition it is not possible to provide any further details at this stage.

Job Creation Targets

201. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the degree to which she expects to be in a position to meet job creation targets in the manufacturing and services sector in each areas throughout the country over the next five years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33185/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The goal of this Government is to support the creation of an additional 200,000 jobs by 2020 with 135,000 outside Dublin. These jobs will be in both the manufacturing and services sector. This is a whole of Government effort and is delivered through our integrated Action Plan for Jobs.

The Action Plan for Jobs is one of the Government's key instruments to support job creation. The Action Plan for Jobs process is working. Since the first Plan was launched in early 2012, there are 176,800 more people at work bringing total employment in the State to 2,014,400 by end of June 2016. The annual jobs target is agreed in the Action Plan for Jobs – the target for 2016 is to help create an additional 50,000 jobs. We are making good progress. There were 36,000 additional people at work in the first six months of the year.

The Regional Action Plans for Jobs aim to have an additional 10% to 15% at work in each region by 2020. The first progress reports on the implementation of the eight Plans, covering the period to June 2016, are being finalised and will be published shortly.

The process to develop APJ 2017 is currently underway. My priority is to deliver a business environment which enhances our competitiveness and supports sustainable enterprise and employment growth in all regions. I will be working closely with colleagues across Government over the coming months to ensure that the 2017 Plan is ambitious and impactful and keeps us on track to deliver on our 2020 jobs targets.

Job Creation

202. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the extent to which innovation and technology is likely to feature in the creation of indigenous jobs throughout the country in the next five years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33186/16]

203. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the degree to which investment in indigenous job creation and job creation through foreign direct investment is likely to avail of innovation, technology and EU support over the next three years; the number of jobs likely to benefit from such supports; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33187/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): I propose to take Questions Nos. 202 and 203 together.

Innovation support makes a critical contribution to enterprise policy, and to the goal of developing a competitive national economy. By encouraging the development of new economic activities, Research, Development and Innovation policy-measures strengthen Ireland's competitive advantage and build potential new areas of economic activity. The impacts of our investment in innovation and research include increased competitiveness, the creation and maintenance of high-value jobs and the attraction of foreign direct investment.

We know that investment in R&D translates into improved job creation and enterprise performance. Firms that invested in R&D grew employment by 14% between 2000 and 2014 while those that did not invest in R&D saw employment decline by 40%. Similarly, R&D performing companies grew exports by 181% between 2003 and 2014 compared to a loss of 42% in exports for non-R&D performing companies over the same period.

Innovation 2020 the Government's strategy for research and development, science and technology emphasises the importance of innovation and technology in driving productivity growth and fostering competitiveness in a global market place. The strategy also calls attention to the role of innovation in contributing to employment, export and investment growth, as well as to the competitiveness of indigenous enterprise and in attracting and embedding Foreign Direct Investment in Ireland.

Enterprise Ireland (EI) plays a particularly important role in supporting job creation in Ireland. In 2015 EI helped in the maintenance and creation of 300,000 Irish jobs both directly and in-directly. Support for innovation and technology played a crucial role in delivering this result.

Enterprise Ireland offers commercialisation and technology transfer supports directed at generating spinout companies, boosting entrepreneurship and increasing licensing into industry. These supports include EI's Commercialisation Fund and Campus Incubators as well as the Technology Transfer Strengthening Initiative which is overseen by Knowledge Transfer Ireland.

In addition, Enterprise Ireland operates a range of supports to help companies engage with third level researchers to undertake collaborative research for the benefit of companies. These collaborations are delivering impact and creating significant opportunities. A direct correlation has been found between collaboration activities, increased entrepreneurship and quantifiable increases in job creation.

Enterprise Ireland supports collaboration activities through a number of its initiatives - innovation voucher schemes, innovation partnerships, Technology Centres and Technology Gateways. In 2015 Enterprise Ireland supported 896 collaborative projects between business and Higher Education.

Enterprise Ireland has recently launched its Small Business Innovation Research Initiative (SBIR), a mechanism which enables public sector bodies to connect with innovative ideas and technologies, to provide novel solutions for specific public sector challenges and needs. SBIR is particularly suited to small and medium-sized business as contracts are of relatively low value and operate in short timescales.

IDA Ireland's main objective is to encourage investment into Ireland by foreign-owned companies. Investments approved by IDA Ireland in the first half of 2016 will lead to the creation of 9,100 jobs as companies roll out their plans over the coming months and years. This performance is on a par with the first half of 2015 which was one of Ireland's best years for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI).

The area of research, development and innovation (RDI) is of strategic importance to IDA

Ireland. A company decision to invest in RDI may be to support improvement in productivity; to develop a strengthened reputation for quality or to develop new products and services.

IDA Ireland's strategy Winning FDI 2015-2019 outlines a plan to support clients in creating 80,000 new jobs and increase employment in the client portfolio to 209,000 by 2019. Support for RDI will be key to achieving these targets. Research, development and innovation investments not only embed existing FDI operations and employment but pave the way for future investment, job creation and export growth. As the global battle for FDI intensifies, our investment in research and development will become even more critical to attracting and retaining FDI companies.

The increase in RDI investment since 2000 has improved our attractiveness as an FDI location. 60% (just under €60m) of IDA's total grant-aid budget is allocated to RDI projects each year. This investment leverages RDI expenditure of €500m by IDA clients for these approved projects and an overall annual spend by MNCs of €1.4bn per annum on RDI. This has the effect of anchoring FDI clients and securing sustainable employment and related benefits to the Irish economy.

The National Support System for Horizon 2020, the EU Framework Programme for research and innovation, is coordinated by Enterprise Ireland. Horizon 2020 is part of the drive to create new growth and jobs in Europe, has a budget of almost €75 billion and runs over the period 2014-2020. Both Ireland's indigenous and FDI companies are active users of Horizon 2020. Irish companies that compete successfully for funding from Horizon 2020 will boost their innovative capability and competitiveness which in turn will deliver strong national economic impacts, including job creation.

Demand for the Framework Programme from Irish companies has been high. In the first 33 months Ireland's draw down was €336.6 million, placing Ireland on target to meet its goal of securing €1.25bn from Horizon 2020 by 2020. Of this funding, over €104 million went to companies and €73.6 million of this went to SMEs. Ireland has the highest success rate in Europe for the Horizon 2020 SME Instrument with a 16% success rate, compared to a European average of 6%. Innovative Irish SMEs have secured €26.5 million. Enterprise Ireland client companies account for 56% of all company funding with IDA Ireland clients securing 21%.

70% of the Horizon 2020 budget (€52 billion) is to be allocated between 2017 and 2020, which gives Irish companies the opportunity to continue availing of these supports.

The recent national ex-post evaluation of the Seventh Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development (FP7) estimated that the European Commission contribution of €625M to Ireland from 2007 to 2013 would lead to an estimated 2,000 jobs created per year. It is expected that such figures will grow considerably in the context of Ireland's current target to double participation in the period 2014-2020.

Jobs Data

204. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the total number of new jobs created in the manufacturing sector in the past 12 months; her targets in this regard over the next year; the extent to which these jobs are likely to be spread throughout the country; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33188/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The Action Plan for Jobs is one of the Government's key instruments to support job creation. The Action Plan for Jobs process is working. Since the first Plan was launched in early 2012, there

are 176,800 more people at work bringing total employment in the State to 2,014,400 by end of June 2016.

The goal of this Government is to support the creation of an additional 200,000 jobs by 2020 with 135,000 outside Dublin. This is a whole of Government effort and is delivered through our integrated Action Plan for Jobs.

The CSO's Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) is the official source of employment data. The most recent figures available are for Q2 2016. According to the CSO, the numbers employed in the industry sector increased by 9,600 in the year to the end of Q2 2016, bringing total employment to 257,300 people.

The annual jobs target is agreed in the Action Plan for Jobs – the target for 2016 is to help create an additional 50,000 jobs across all sectors and all regions. There were 36,000 additional people at work in the first six months of the year. The 2017 jobs target will be agreed in the context of the 2017 Plan which is currently being developed by my Department.

The Regional Action Plans for Jobs aim to have an additional 10% to 15% at work in each region by 2020. The first progress reports on the implementation of the eight Plans, covering the period to June 2016, are being finalised and will be published shortly.

I will be working closely with colleagues across Government over the coming months to ensure that the 2017 Plan is ambitious and impactful and keeps us on track to deliver on our 2020 jobs targets.

Jobs Data

205. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the total number of new jobs created in the services sector in the past 12 months; her targets in this regard over the next year; the extent to which these jobs are likely to be spread throughout the country; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33189/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The Action Plan for Jobs is one of the Government's key instruments to support job creation. The Action Plan for Jobs process is working. Since the first Plan was launched in early 2012, there are 176,800 more people at work bringing total employment in the State to 2,014,400 by end of June 2016.

The goal of this Government is to support the creation of an additional 200,000 jobs by 2020 with 135,000 outside Dublin. This is a whole of Government effort and is delivered through our integrated Action Plan for Jobs.

The CSO's Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) is the official source of employment data. The most recent figures available are for Q2 2016. According to the CSO, the numbers employed in the services sectors (NACE sectors G to Q) increased by 27,500 in the year to the end of Q2 2016, bringing total employment to 1,394,000 people.

The annual jobs target is agreed in the Action Plan for Jobs – the target for 2016 is to help create an additional 50,000 jobs across all sectors and all regions. There were 36,000 additional people at work in the first six months of the year. The 2017 jobs target will be agreed in the context of the 2017 Plan which is currently being developed by my Department.

The Regional Action Plans for Jobs aim to have an additional 10% to 15% at work in each

region by 2020. The first progress reports on the implementation of the eight Plans, covering the period to June 2016, are being finalised and will be published shortly.

I will be working closely with colleagues across Government over the coming months to ensure that the 2017 Plan is ambitious and impactful and keeps us on track to deliver on our 2020 jobs targets.

Job Creation

206. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the extent to which her Department encourages co-operation between job creation interests in County Kildare and Maynooth college with particular reference to the obvious benefits accruing from such a combination of interests; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33190/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): Collaboration between job creation interests in the private and public sectors, together with the Higher Education Institutions, plays an important role in delivering on new ideas and initiatives to support job creation throughout the regions.

In this context, the Regional Action Plans for Jobs are playing a significant role in the delivery of regional enterprise and employment growth, by driving collaboration between key stakeholders and working in partnership with the enterprise sector to build on local strengths and deliver new ideas.

The Mid East Action Plan was launched in January 2016. The overarching objective of the Plan is to support the creation of an extra 25,000 jobs across Kildare, Meath and Wicklow by 2020. This represents an important step towards the Government's ambition of creating 200,000 jobs across the State by 2020, with 135,000 of these to be outside Dublin.

The Mid-East Action Plan is being monitored and driven by an Implementation Committees, comprising representatives from the Enterprise Sector, as well as the Local Authorities, Enterprise Agencies, and other public bodies in the region, including Maynooth University.

Maynooth University has been involved in delivering several actions in the Plan in partnership with other public and private organisation, including Enterprise Agencies, the Local Enterprise Offices, and local business networks.

Examples of such collaborative initiative include the establishment of a Regional Skills Forum to foster better engagement between education providers, employers and other regional stakeholders, including Enterprise Agencies, on an ongoing basis, to collaborate in building the skills of the region. Maynooth University will also establish a 'top table' advisory forum on linking University and regional employment needs, which will include representation from IDA and Enterprise Ireland.

Other actions included in the Plan cover the Technology Transfer Strengthening Initiative, supported by Enterprise Ireland and Knowledge Transfer Ireland, which focuses on enabling the transfer of commercially valuable research outputs into industry; the New Frontiers Entrepreneur Development Programme - Enterprise Ireland's national entrepreneur development programme for innovative, early-stage start-ups; and the part-funding by Enterprise Ireland of a new campus enterprise and technology hub ('Eolas') at Maynooth University, one of the key aims of which is to foster collaboration with industry and facilitate research commercialisation opportunities.

Knowledge Development Box

207. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the extent to which she remains satisfied that the full benefits from the knowledge development box remain available to the economy; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33191/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): Ireland is the first country world-wide to introduce an OECD compliant Knowledge Development Box (KDB) offering. The certainty, predictability and clear signal that this sends to enterprise – including both Irish owned and foreign owned entities establishing and doing business from here - remains essential. The KDB, introduced in Budget 2016 forms part of Ireland's competitive offering to continue to attract FDI and to support Irish owned companies to innovate and to compete effectively on international markets. The Government and I are satisfied that the benefits of the Knowledge Development Box remain available the Irish economy.

The continuing imperative to establish Ireland as the best place in which to succeed in business is reinforced in our national Enterprise and Innovation strategies. Our aim is that Ireland will be recognised as the place where businesses are innovative, competitive and productive – leading to growth that is sustainable and results in employment opportunities and a higher standard of living for all. These strategies set out the framework for investment over the coming decade to ensure that Ireland remains equally attractive to foreign direct investment and to Irish entrepreneurs and growth businesses in the context of an intensely competitive international environment.

The KDB complements the existing suite of initiatives and supports available to companies that undertake R&D activities in Ireland across the lifecycle of research and development – including R&D tax credits, RD&I grant supports, support for technology acquisition (S291A), significant state investments in National Research Centres and knowledge transfer infrastructures, and advisory supports for accessing Horizon 2020 funding – providing a competitive proposition for business investment.

The OECD nexus approach sets out the principles and guidelines under which income arising from IP assets can qualify for a lower rate of tax under a KDB initiative. Ireland's KDB rate is 6.25 percent (half of the corporation tax rate of 12.5 percent) and is internationally competitive.

I received Cabinet approval last week for the publication of a Bill entitled Knowledge Development Box (Certification of Inventions) Bill 2016 to allow small and medium sized companies to avail of the Knowledge Development Box. Under the new scheme, the Patents Office will be the body certifying applications for inventions under the new certification scheme to check that they meet the criteria of being novel, useful and non-obvious.

The Bill is intended to open up the opportunity for companies across a broad spectrum to pay lower taxes on profits from Irish-based research and development activities. This includes companies in incubation units right through to high-potential start-ups in all industry sectors once they are generating income resulting from research and development activities. The scheme should serve to significantly boost Irish innovation and investment in research and development.

Corporation Tax

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

the extent to which she remains satisfied of retaining the benefits of the 12.5% corporation profits tax to further industrial investment in the economy; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33192/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The Programme for a Partnership Government sets out our clear commitment to retaining the 12.5% corporation tax rate.

At 12.5% Ireland has one of the most competitive headline corporate tax rates in the OECD. Ireland's corporate tax rate of 12.5% on trading income is an important part of the Government's strategy of creating an enterprise friendly environment to support enterprise and entrepreneurship and to attract jobs and investment to Ireland, countrywide. The 12.5% rate is absolutely written in stone.

Ireland's international tax strategy (October 2016) states that the cornerstone of our competitive offering remains the 12.5% Corporation Tax rate. Our 12.5% corporate tax is underpinned by a competitive regime. Our world class research and development tax credit and our best in class OECD compliant knowledge development box are there to make sure that we are competitive. Our low rate applied to a broad base ensures sustainable economic growth which will maintain tax revenues. Our corporate tax trading rate 12.5% applies to a broad base to ensure sustainable economic growth which will maintain tax revenues.

It is important to note that tax is but one part of Ireland's enterprise policy and our ability to attract foreign direct investment, to stimulate entrepreneurship and to support Irish owned enterprises in their ambition to internationalise and to scale. Our investments in developing our RD&I infrastructures, in our education system and in helping to create attractive places throughout Ireland in which to invest, live and work are all part of Ireland's offering. Over the past decades, Ireland has built a comparative advantage in a number of sectors, including ICT, Medical Devices, Biopharma and a strong international reputation in Food, Business Services and Internationally Traded Financial Services. Our national enterprise policy, Enterprise 2025, has set out a clear vision and suite of actions to ensure that future economic growth and investment is sustainable over the longer term – built on the foundations of competitiveness, innovation and productivity.

Brexit Issues

209. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the extent to which she has engaged with investment and job creation interests in Northern Ireland with a view to maintaining the best possible relationship of a mutually beneficial nature with Northern Ireland and the EU in the aftermath of Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33193/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): While Brexit may certainly pose a large number of challenges for Ireland and our economy, it should not prevent us from maintaining a strong relationship with the authorities in Northern Ireland.

My Department is continuing to work closely with its counterpart in Northern Ireland in support of InterTrade Ireland (ITI), the co-funded cross-border trade and business development body. ITI assists businesses, both north and south, to help foster growth and job creation through the provision of various enterprise programmes. ITI will also have an important role to play in the time ahead in helping companies involved in cross-border trade to address and

overcome any hurdles associated with Brexit.

With regard to attracting Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), IDA Ireland and Invest Northern Ireland (INI) do in some instances compete to win new projects, just as they compete with other investment promotion authorities from all over the world. However, both Agencies also have a track record of working together, including cooperating on company visits where both jurisdictions are being considered by foreign companies. Furthermore, given that both our economies have highly educated and talented workforces, the IDA highlights this to prospective investors considering locating or expanding in the border area. In this way, the skills pool available on both side of the border is therefore an advantage for both jurisdictions when it comes to securing new investment on the island of Ireland.

Infrastructure and Capital Investment Programme

210. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the extent to which she has identified any infrastructural deficits in various areas throughout the country which may impede industrial expansion and job creation; her specific proposals to address these issues; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33194/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The future resilience of our economy will rely on the ability of our enterprises to compete effectively in international markets, to anticipate and respond to a changing global environment, and to anticipate and respond to customer demands for new products, services and solutions. Enterprise 2025 set out an ambitious strategy, with the objective of delivering growth that is sustainable, that is led by strong export performance and that is underpinned by innovation, productivity and competitiveness.

Continued investment in competitively priced world class infrastructures, including energy, water, waste, and transport, is crucial to the delivery of our ambition for job creation and growth throughout our regions. Inadequate investment can dampen productivity growth, increase costs and limit regional and sector opportunities for indigenous enterprise development and for FDI. However, investment in infrastructures throughout the country has suffered during the economic downturn and needs to be redressed.

The reality is that we operate within EU fiscal rules and macro-economic stability remains key. Nevertheless and notwithstanding the welcome additional commitment to capital investment in Budget 2017, planned investment over the immediate term remains lower than we would like. In this context, our priorities must focus on the needs of the productive enterprise sector, to:

My Department plays a key role in advocating on behalf of enterprise to ensure that enterprise infrastructure needs are identified and investment prioritised. My Departments and its agencies are continually engaged with relevant stakeholders on the particular infrastructure needs required to support enterprise development and job creation – both nationally and through mechanisms such as the Regional Action Plans for Jobs. The stakeholders include other Government Departments with direct responsibility, regulatory bodies and public and private infrastructure providers. In addition, I am a member of the Economic Infrastructure and Climate Change Cabinet Committee. Officials from my Department are members of the relevant Inter-departmental Committees; on the Interdepartmental Steering Group for the National Planning Framework and its Economic and Demographic technical group.

I will continue to work with Ministerial colleagues to ensure we put in place the right policy

and regulatory framework to meet the future infrastructure needs of a growing economy.

Legislative Programme

211. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation further to the publication of the autumn legislative programme, when legislative proposals regarding protections for workers on insecure, low hour contracts will be published in 2016; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33195/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen): My colleague, Minister Mitchell O'Connor, and I intend to bring forward proposals in this area for consideration by Government. In this respect, work is well advanced on developing a policy response to the University of Limerick (UL) study on zero hour contracts and low hour contracts.

The policy response is being informed by the UL study itself as well as the extensive material and practical examples provided by respondents to the public consultation conducted by my Department. Our proposals will address the issue of workers on low hour contracts who consistently work more hours each week but whose contracts do not reflect the reality of their hours. The proposals will also seek to ensure that employees are better informed about the nature of their employment arrangements and their core terms and conditions at an early stage in their employment. Furthermore, I intend to include provisions aimed particularly at low-paid, more vulnerable workers.

My Department is currently engaged in a dialogue process with ICTU and IBEC to secure broad agreement before proposals are finalised. This work is being progressed as expeditiously as possible.

Departmental Bodies

212. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of times the co-ordination group within her Department met since being established after the Brexit referendum result; the number of meetings planned for the remainder of the year and in q1 of 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33196/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The Coordination Group established within my Department and which consists of relevant enterprise, single market, and trade officials, together with the Chief Executive Officers of IDA and Enterprise Ireland, has met on five occasions to date this year. I chair this Group, and I will continue to do so as part of my Department's ongoing response. A further four meetings of the group are scheduled for the remainder of this year and a schedule of meetings for 2017 is currently being coordinated.

The work of this group will feed into the Cabinet Committee on Brexit which is chaired by an Taoiseach and will also be supplemented by the Senior Officials Group on Brexit, which is being established in my Department and which will monitor developments across the Department on a regular basis at official level.

Trade Agreements

213. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if she accepts that the negotiations between the EU and Canada over the CETA have now ended without agreement in view of its rejection by the Wallonian Parliament; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33261/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): CETA was discussed at the Informal Trade Council meeting in Bratislava on 23 September 2016. Member States highlighted the high quality of the Agreement reached with Canada and reaffirmed their desire to work towards signature.

At a further extraordinary meeting of the Trade Council on 18 October 2016, Trade Ministers did not agree to sign the Agreement. CETA was also discussed at the European Council on 22 October where all Member States apart from Belgium were in a position to support the Agreement.

As a result, the Belgium Federal and Regional Governments including Wallonia, the European Commission, and Canada held further talks to address the concerns of the Wallonian Government. I am pleased to say that these discussions resulted in all five Regional Parliaments being able to approve the Agreement. To meet the political concerns of certain Member States, the EU and Canada have agreed a legally binding Joint Interpretative Instrument to provide further assurances in relation to public services, labour rights, environmental protection and investment.

As a result of these latest developments CETA has now been signed, paving the way for provisional application of the Agreement.

I believe that the efforts made by the EU and Canada to address the concerns of EU Member States and the Wallonian Regional Government are to be welcomed, and I have confidence that the Joint Interpretative Instrument, which has been agreed, provides valuable assurances.

CETA represents a modern high standard agreement which has the ability to set a new global standard for Trade Agreements. CETA and the EU's other trade agreements help to open new markets, break down barriers and provide new opportunities for Irish firms. It will increase access to public contracts, open up markets for services and offer predictable conditions for investors. Ireland stands to gain substantially from this Agreement and I am looking forward to Irish firms enjoying the benefits and new opportunities as soon as possible.

Legislative Programme

214. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to amend the legislation governing the work of the Low Pay Commission so that the minimum wage they recommend falls into line with the living wage; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33262/16]

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

The Commission submitted its first report in July 2015. Its recommendation to increase the minimum wage from €8.65 to €9.15 per hour was accepted by Government and the increase

came into effect on 1 January last.

The Commission's second report was submitted to Government in July and the recommendation made by the Commission for an increase to €9.25 per hour was approved by Government on 11 October. I signed the Order on 13 October to effect the increase from 1 January next.

The Living Wage concept is grounded in the idea that a person's wage should be sufficient to maintain a safe, decent standard of living. At an individual level the resources required to achieve a minimum essential standard of living is very dependent on family circumstances and thus the interaction of individual earnings with household income and State-provided supports such as Child Benefit, Family Income Supplement as well as supports available in relation to housing, education and health all contribute to an individual's standard of living.

It is important that Ireland's statutory National Minimum Wage and the Living Wage concept are not conflated. The Living Wage is a voluntary societal initiative centred on the social, business and economic case to ensure that, wherever it can be afforded, employers will pay a rate of pay that provides an income that is sufficient to meet an individual's basic needs, such as housing, food, clothing, transport and healthcare. The Living Wage is voluntary and has no legislative basis and is therefore not a statutory entitlement. It is different to the National Minimum Wage which is a statutory entitlement and has a legislative basis.

The Programme for Partnership Government contains a commitment to reduce poverty levels by supporting an increase in the minimum wage to €10.50 per hour over the next five years and rely on the annual recommendations of the Low Pay Commission on the level of adjustment each year.

The independence of the Low Pay Commission is firmly established in the National Minimum Wage (Low Pay Commission) Act 2015 (the Act). The Commission can only operate in accordance with that statutory remit and make recommendations to the Minister in accordance with the criteria that are clearly and explicitly set out in the Act.

There are no plans to make any changes to the legislation as it currently stands.

Child Care Services Provision

215. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the reason the new affordable child care scheme announced in budget 2017 ignores professional child minders as is the choice made by many parents for their children as the best child care option as opposed to a crèche setting; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33080/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): In the best interests of children (and families) the scheme intends to make subsidies payable to services that are quality assured. Currently Tusla provides quality assurance for childcare services under the statutory registration and inspection regime.

Childminders who mind three or fewer pre-school children in the childminder's own home are exempt from the Child Care Regulations, and are thus not subject to inspection by Tusla.

In order to meet the needs of parents whose preference is to use a childminder, and to build capacity to cater for increased demand in future years, the Department has commenced talks with Childminding Ireland (CMI) in recent months to explore a number of options around how quality can be assured within the childminding sector.

A Working Group has been established, chaired by CMI, and including officials from Tusla and the DCYA, to make recommendations on reforms for the sector including proposals in relation to quality assurance, whether on a voluntary/non-statutory basis in the short term, or on a mandatory/statutory basis in the long term. These would include recommendations in relation to childminders who are not currently eligible to apply for registration with Tusla (those minding three or fewer pre-school children, or those minding school age children only). The recommendations received are likely to include proposals to be progressed in the short, medium and long term.

Child Care Services Provision

216. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her views on whether the new affordable child care scheme is permissible under the Constitution which pledges to hold the family at its core when the new scheme favours a centre-based scheme with no regard for the parent's choice for a child minder over a crèche setting; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33081/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): In the best interests of children (and families) the scheme intends to make subsidies payable to services that are quality assured. Currently Tusla provides quality assurance for childcare services under the statutory registration and inspection regime.

Childminders who mind three or fewer pre-school children in the childminder's own home are exempt from the Child Care Regulations, and are thus not subject to inspection by Tusla.

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Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries

217. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to concerns raised that an area under current excavation (details supplied) does not include underground cesspits which may also contain remains; if the commission is aware of such concerns; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33111/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I am aware that the Mother and Baby Homes Commission is conducting a test excavation at the site of the Children's Burial Ground/Memorial Garden located in the Dublin Road Housing Estate, Tuam, Co. Galway. The Commission has publicly stated that a sample of the site is being excavated to resolve a number of queries that the Commission has in relation to the interment of human

remains at this location. The Commission has also clarified that only a fraction of the site will be excavated through test trenches, the location of which have been informed by a Geophysical Survey carried out at the site in October 2015.

It is important to stress that the statutory Commission is independent in the conduct of its investigations. It has significant legal powers to assist in these enquiries. Therefore, the precise approach to its investigation is a matter for the Commission to decide and progress. I do not have any role or influence in these decisions.

If the Deputy, or any person, has information which they believe can assist the investigation, then I would encourage them to contact the Commission directly by email at *info@mbhcoi.ie* or on the confidential freephone number at 1800 80-66-88.

Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries

218. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs when the second interim report of the commission of investigation on mother and baby homes will be published; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33112/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I have received a second Interim Report from the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes. Since receiving the Report I have met with the three members of the Commission to discuss the Report and the general progress being made with the investigation.

Given the scope of the Commission's work a number of topics in the Report extend beyond the remit of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. For this reason, I am consulting with Cabinet colleagues and the Attorney General with a view to publishing the Report in conjunction with Government's response to the findings of the Report.

I am sensitive to the expectations of former residents and hope to conclude this process as quickly as possible.

Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries

219. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will consider requesting an audit of adoption records to ascertain the scale of illegal and forced adoption that occurred within the state, particularly those associated with mother and baby homes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [33113/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I do not propose to request that a full audit of adoption records be undertaken.

Defence Forces Recruitment

220. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if there is a mechanism in the Permanent Defence Forces for recruiting medical officers internally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33092/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): For the most part, Medical Officers are recruited as direct entrants into the Defence Forces. As such, there are no

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specific arrangements currently in place for recruiting medical officers internally from within the Defence Forces. However, there is no prohibition on same occurring and the matter is currently under active consideration. In addition, a new scheme for training medical graduates in military medicine is currently being finalised. The Terms and Conditions for suitably qualified members of the Permanent Defence Force to fill Medical Officer positions are currently under discussion within the Conciliation and Arbitration Scheme. The Deputy will appreciate that as discussions under the Scheme are confidential to that process, it would be inappropriate for me to make any comment at this time.