

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 4, inclusive, answered orally.

Questions Nos. 5 to 21, resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 22 to 30, inclusive, answered orally.

Apprenticeship Programmes

31. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the measures his Department is taking in conjunction with other Departments, to address the skills deficit in the construction sector and the measures being taken to encourage more young persons into apprenticeships or on incentivising businesses to get involved in apprenticeship training. [28636/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Following a number of years of decline, registrations in the 27 craft trades are rising as the employment and economic situation improves. At the end of 2014, registrations were up 40% on 2013. In 2015 there were 3,153 registrations in the existing trades which represents a further 17% increase in registrations on 2014. SOLAS has recently completed its forecasts for registrations up to 2020 and numbers are predicted to grow to 5,587 over the period. It is important to note that the craft apprenticeships are essentially demand-led with the State providing off-the-job training for all apprentices taken on by approved employers. SOLAS and the Higher Education Authority will continue to plan and fund provision in the light of forecast registrations. The strong growth in apprenticeship numbers will assist the construction sector in meeting its skill needs.

SOLAS is also in discussion with the Construction Industry Federation to evaluate construction skill needs across a range of non-apprenticeship areas. As a result SOLAS is targeting specific construction related skills shortages in its service planning with the Education and Training Boards.

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 apprentices, their families and for employers and it will cover both existing apprenticeships and the new apprenticeships now coming on stream.

Questions Nos. 32 to 35, inclusive, answered orally.

Institutes of Technology Funding

36. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the HEA financial review of institutes of technology; if the financial deficits uncovered will have an impact on services and courses provided by the institutes; his plans to assist these institutions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35025/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The purpose of the Financial Review of the Institutes of Technology (IoTs) by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) was to provide an overview of the financial health of the sector, to consider capacity issues and to examine the challenges for the institutions given their respective plans for the future.

It examined the impact of decline in the State grant in the years since 2008 and looked at projections assuming a static State funding environment. It has made a number of policy recommendations which will feed into the work on developing a sustainable funding model for the sector.

The HEA has been closely monitoring the financial position of all of the IoTs and in particular are working closely with those Institutes operating in deficit to ensure appropriate mechanisms are put in place to eliminate the deficit as quickly as possible.

The HEA has a policy framework in place for engaging with vulnerable IoTs which requires Institutes to submit a three year plan to return them to a balanced budget situation. If the Institute is unable to demonstrate how a return to a balanced budget can be achieved within this timeframe, or if actual performance deviates significantly from the plan, then the HEA will seek the appointment of an independent financial expert to work with the Governing Body and Executive Management Team to agree a revised plan and programme of remedial action.

My Department and the HEA are aware of the financial difficulties being experienced by a number of the IoTs. The Financial Review of the Institutes recently published by the HEA was based on the assumption that static Exchequer funding coupled with continuing growth in student numbers could make a number of Institutes unsustainable. The Report recognised the need to examine the underlying sustainability issues that existed across the sector and highlighted the need for a review of how funding is being allocated given the significant changes that are occurring in the higher education sector. It makes a number of recommendations on how some of the issues which contribute to funding problems in the IOT sector can be addressed.

The Report clearly identified the need for a review of the present funding model and I have asked that this be completed as a matter of urgency. Among the other recommendations is the need for a sectoral voluntary redundancy package and I understand that this being developed for submission to the HEA who are working closely with my Department to address all the recommendations.

Funding overall for the higher education sector is a key concern for me particularly in light of the additional pressure that will fall on the system over the next decade or so . In seeking to address the issue in the short term, I have for the first time in nine years secured as part of Budget 2017, additional funding for the sector. In 2017 additional funding of €36.5m will be made available with €160m additional over the next three years.

The Report of the Expert Group on Future Funding for Higher Education, published in July, clearly outlines the funding challenges and offers a number of approaches and recommendations for consideration for the medium term. As committed to in the Programme for Government, the report has been referred to the Oireachtas Education Committee and this consultation will form part of the process of formulating a plan for the future of the sector.

In Budget 2017 the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform and I, announced a policy

review with the aim of designing and implementing a sustainable and predictable multi-annual funding model for higher and further education and training involving increased Employer and Exchequer contributions from 2018. The review will be undertaken as part of the overall response to meeting the anticipated skills needs in the economy over the coming years, in line with the policy framework set out in the National Skills Strategy.

It will include an analysis of the business case for enhanced investment in the higher and further education and training sectors. In this context it will identify key elements of the new funding model and of the expected impacts including those on employers. The review will include consultation with stakeholders.

The policy review will be published by the end of April 2017, and will complement the ongoing work by the Oireachtas Committee in relation to the Cassells report.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

37. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to reduce class sizes and build on the measures to reduce class sizes in the previous budget. [34873/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Reducing class sizes has been a target of successive Governments. Budget 2016 provided for an improvement in the staffing schedule in primary schools by one point, from 1 teacher for every 28 pupils to 1 teacher for every 27 pupils for the 2016/17 school year. The Programme for Government has a commitment to reduce class sizes at primary level and it is my intention to make further improvements to class sizes over the life of the Government.

My focus in Budget 2017 was on obtaining additional funding to provide for demographic growth, additional special education and school leadership resources for our schools.

Budget 2017 sets out the resources available for schools for the 2017/18 school year. This Budget represents the start of a major reinvestment in education, and the first phase of implementation of the Action Plan for Education, aimed at becoming the best education system in Europe within a decade. The budget provides for over 2,400 additional teaching posts for our primary and post primary schools next year. The 2017/18 school year will see a significant increase in teacher numbers (almost 4,700) in our schools compared to the 2015/16 school year.

There is no change in relation to the staffing schedule of 27:1 that will apply to primary schools for the 2017/18 school year. However, it should be noted that the current staffing schedule of 27:1 for primary schools has restored it to the position it was at prior to the fiscal crisis.

In considering any approach to the restoration of posts, it is important that there is a fairness in the restoration and that a balance between primary and post primary is achieved in future budgets. At second level there is still a substantial degree of restoration to be made.

Industrial Disputes

38. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his efforts to resolve the pending industrial relations disputes involving members of the ASTI; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31004/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I and my Department has

been engaging with ASTI bilaterally in relation to issues of concern over a period of several months.

I welcome the decision by ASTI last week to suspend its two industrial actions i.e. their one day strikes and their withdrawal from Supervision and Substitution duties. I also welcome the fact that a process has started under the auspices of the Teachers Conciliation Council (TCC) aimed at finding a resolution to this dispute.

Discussions are taking place under the auspices of the TCC, to which the Department, school management and teacher unions are all party. As the proceedings of the TCC are confidential, it would not be appropriate for me to make any further comment.

I hope that this process will be successful in resolving all of the issues involved.

Teachers' Remuneration

39. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the principle of equal pay for equal work; if he will implement this principle in the education system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35178/16]

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. These included pay reductions since 2010 and also reductions to the pay of new entrant public servants including teachers, since 2011. Collective agreements reached between the Government and the public service unions provided vital industrial peace during this very difficult period for the State.

Equality and fairness are at the heart of everything this Government is trying to do, particularly in the area of education where I am especially focused on creating better opportunities for people from disadvantaged areas in our education system. Indeed, the recent budget secured funding to deliver on a wide range of measures to support this objective.

The Haddington Road/Lansdowne Road Agreement has allowed a programme of restoration to start. I have used this to negotiate substantial improvements in pay for new teachers. The agreement reached with TUI and INTO will see pay rises of between 15-22% (between €4600 and €6700) for new entrant teachers.

In education, there is a well-established increment system. Teachers are not paid equally. For example, the pay scale for teachers appointed prior to 2011 ranges from €32,009 to €60,155 depending on the date that the individual began teaching.

Part of the negotiation to date has secured a convergence of the scales of recruits at different periods. Any further negotiation on new entrant pay cannot focus on just one sector.

A broader assessment of pay and new entrant pay will be informed by the analysis of the Public Service Pay Commission.

Teachers' Remuneration

40. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on whether supervision and substitution are the core duties of a teacher; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35181/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Supervision and substitution duties are core duties for all teachers since the Haddington Road Agreement. A limited group of teachers were allowed to opt-out of the duties in return for a pay reduction. Department Circular 0006/2014 states that with effect from the beginning of the 2013/14 school year, participation in the Supervision and Substitution scheme will be compulsory for all teachers, save for those who avail of the opt-out arrangement.

Industrial Disputes

41. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will report on discussions being held with the Association of Secondary Teachers in Ireland regarding the pay and conditions of employment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35182/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department has been engaging with ASTI bilaterally in relation to issues of concern over the last few months.

I welcome the decision by ASTI last week to suspend its two industrial actions i.e. their one day strikes and their withdrawal from Supervision and Substitution duties. I also welcome the fact that a process has started under the auspices of the Teachers Conciliation Council (TCC) aimed at finding a resolution to this dispute.

Discussions are taking place under the auspices of the TCC, to which the Department, school management and teacher unions are all party. As the proceedings of the TCC are confidential, it would not be appropriate for me to make any further comment.

I hope that this process will be successful in resolving all of the issues involved.

School Transport Provision

42. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will examine the school transport scheme, which has been proven not to be adequately working in view of the recent number of children who were not accommodated en route to a school; if he will make available additional funding to allow operators use higher capacity vehicles in order to alleviate this problem; if he will provide an update on the work of the cross-party forum to deal with transport issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35158/16]

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

Currently over 113,000 children, including some 10,000 children with special educational needs, are being transported in approximately 4,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually.

In general, children are eligible for school transport if they are attending their nearest school and satisfy the requisite distance criteria. Bus Éireann plans routes and bus sizes based on eligible children who have applied and submitted payment details on time.

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

Transport on a concessionary basis is subject to a number of conditions which are detailed

in the School Transport Scheme such as the existence of spare seats on the bus after all eligible children have been catered for and payment of the school transport charge. Routes will not be extended or altered, additional vehicles will not be introduced, nor will larger vehicles or extra trips using existing vehicles be provided to cater for children who have no eligibility for school transport and are only travelling on a concessionary basis.

The review of the concessionary charges and rules element of the School Transport Scheme committed to under the Programme for Government has been completed and is under consideration. As announced in July, a cross party group was established to feed into this review. A meeting with this group has taken place and subsequently submissions on the school transport scheme generally were received by my Department. These are now being examined.

Given that the cost of school transport provision will exceed €175m in 2016 there are no plans to increase the size of the school transport fleet to accommodate children who are not eligible for school transport.

Residential Institutions Statutory Fund

43. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will direct Caranua to expand the range of services covered by the fund in view of the publication of Caranua's annual report for 2015 and the report of the appeals officer. [34881/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Subsection 8(1) of the Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Act 2012 sets out the classes of services from which Caranua can determine the approved services to be provided. Those classes of services comprise:

- mental health, counselling and psychological support services
- health and personal social services;
- educational services; and
- housing support services.

Following its establishment, Caranua determined the approved services to be provided by it and determined the criteria by reference to which it would make decisions on applications made to it. Caranua has recently expanded the approved services it provides and amended its criteria. The additional approved services now include support towards the cost of household goods such as cookers, fridges, floors and home decoration as a housing support and the provision of a contribution towards funeral costs and a contribution to the cost of reconnecting with family members and home place as health services.

While subsection 8(3) of the Act provides that Caranua can recommend to the Minister that an additional class or service be prescribed and the Minister can consult with the Board on the inclusion of additional classes of services, I am satisfied that the current arrangements provide an appropriate and flexible framework to enable Caranua to meet the emerging needs of former residents. Accordingly the issue of invoking the power provided in section 8(3) does not arise at this point.

School Admissions

44. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will work with the Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skills so that it can produce its report on the baptism barrier earlier in order that any proposed reforms can be included in the Equal Status (Admissions to Schools) Bill and be enacted for the school year 2017/2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35018/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I included a specific action in the Action Plan for Education that expresses my commitment to working with the Committee to deliver changes in this area.

The Government proposed and the Dáil agreed that the Equal Status (Admissions to Schools) Bill proceed to second stage in June 2017. This will allow parents, patrons and other stakeholders to have their say and to ensure that that the right balance can be struck between competing rights and that there would be no unintended consequence that would create an adverse impact on the schools of minority denominations.

I believe that this matter requires time to allow adequate scrutiny and debate in order to ensure any new approach is reasonable, fair and workable.

I believe that the work of the Education and Skills Committee will be invaluable in that regard.

The Education (Admission to Schools) Bill 2016 does not propose any changes to section 7(3)(c) of the Equal Status Act and I propose to advance the Bill separately from the issues before the Committee.

As I have said previously, I believe that this is the correct way to proceed. In this way, we can ensure that the important pragmatic changes contained in the Education (Admission to Schools) Bill can be implemented as quickly as possible, and not be tied up with contentious issues that could end up in the Courts. At the same time, we can in this way give the time and space for the complex issues involved in the Equal Status Bill to be properly teased out.

It is also important to note that even if the Education (Admission to Schools) Bill is enacted by the Oireachtas in the coming months it cannot apply in respect of admissions in September next because schools have begun that process already.

Industrial Disputes

45. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on whether the current discussions between the Association of Secondary Teachers in Ireland, ASTI, and the Workplace Relations Commission, WRC, will result in pay equality in the education sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35155/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I welcome the decision by ASTI last week to suspend its two industrial actions i.e. their one day strikes and their withdrawal from Supervision and Substitution duties. I also welcome the fact that a process has started under the auspices of the Teachers Conciliation Council (TCC) aimed at finding a resolution to this dispute.

School Curriculum

46. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress the

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment is making on the implementation of the education about religions and beliefs, ERB and the ethics curriculum proposals; when he expects it to be rolled out to all schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35020/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Advisory Group to the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector recommended in its report that programmes in Education about Religion and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics be developed. The NCCA was asked, by one of my predecessors, in response to the report, to explore the development of such programmes.

The NCCA produced a Consultation Paper in 2015 outlining the proposed rationale, vision, aims and features of a curriculum in ERB and Ethics, and engaged in an extensive consultation process with patrons, education partners, schools, teachers and parents.

I have just received a report on the consultation process from the NCCA, which will be published shortly. The report outlines the key messages arising from the consultation process and emerging directions for the development of a curriculum. I am considering the NCCA's advice on the approach to be adopted in developing curriculum provision for Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics at primary level.

Residential Institutions Statutory Fund

47. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has read the 2015 annual report of the appeals officer appointed under the Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Act 2012; the action being taken by his Department to direct Caranua to address the failings highlighted in that report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34880/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The 2015 Annual Report of the independent Appeals Officer appointed to consider appeals against decisions of Caranua (the Residential Institutions Statutory Fund) was presented by me to the Houses of the Oireachtas on 20 September last in fulfilment of the statutory requirement set out in section 21 of the Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Act 2012. The Report is a summary of the Appeals Officer's work during the reporting period and includes a number of relevant case studies, statistical information, etc. The Report also addresses a number of operational and policy issues that arose in the course of the Appeals Officer's work and it also provided an update on a number of issues that had been raised in his first Annual Report which covered 2014.

As Caranua is an independent statutory body I, as Minister, have no role in relation to its day to day operations. Accordingly, it is a matter for Caranua itself to respond to and address any relevant issues of concern raised by the Appeals Officer.

I note that in his report the Appeals Officer has welcomed the fact that during 2016 Caranua agreed to expand the range of approved services it could support and that it amended its guidelines and application form, thus addressing some of the concerns he had raised in his 2014 and 2015 reports.

Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools Scheme

48. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to include social inclusion, labour market situation and social class composition in the criteria for awarding Delivering Equality of Opportunity In Schools, DEIS, status to schools; and if he will

make a statement on the matter. [34887/16]

63. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he plans to delay the process of identifying new schools to participate in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity In Schools, DEIS, scheme until the publication of the census results in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34886/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 48 and 63 together.

As I have already announced, it is my intention to publish a new Action Plan for Educational Inclusion before the end of this year.

A process to review DEIS – the Action Plan for Educational Inclusion established last year is now nearing completion. The review is looking at all aspects of DEIS, including the range and impact of different elements of the School Support Programme, particularly the scope for increased integration of services provided by other Departments and Agencies, in order to improve effectiveness.

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

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

The Review process also includes the development of a new methodology for the identification of schools in terms of educational disadvantage is nearing completion. This new Assessment Framework will use centrally held CSO and DES data for the identification of schools. The relevant CSO data is based on information drawn from the Census of Population and includes the variables mentioned by the Deputy. It is proposed that the framework will have the capacity to be updated as required to take account of relevant new CSO and DES data.

The Review has also included extensive stakeholder consultation, in particular, engagement with relevant education partners, academics and practitioners to ensure that learning from the implementation to date of DEIS is factored into our plans for a renewed School Support Programme.

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

Further information on the DEIS Review process is available on my Department's website at <http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools-/DEIS-Review-Process-Information-Note.pdf>.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

49. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the supports available for students with autism in both primary and secondary schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35022/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy will be aware that this Government is committed to ensuring that all children with Special Educational Needs, including those with autism, can have access to an education appropriate to their needs, preferably in school settings through the primary and post primary school network.

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

Almost 14,000 students in schools have been diagnosed with autism. My Department invests over €300m annually in providing additional resources specifically to support students with autism in schools enabling:

- 63% of students to attend mainstream schools
- 23% to attend special classes in mainstream primary and post-primary schools, and
- 14% to attend special schools.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) for processing applications from schools for special educational needs supports, including SNA support and resource teachers to support students with Special Educational Needs including Autism.

It is also the role of the NCSE to make appropriate arrangements to establish special classes in schools in various geographical areas as required.

At present, there are 1,153 special classes opened in schools for 2016/17, representing an increase of over 100% in the number of special classes which were available in 2011, which was 548. These comprise of 889 classes for children with Autism; 127 early intervention classes, 525 primary ASD classes and 237 post-primary ASD classes. This represents an increase of approx. 16% on 2015/16 classes for children with Autism.

This year, 12,900 Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) are available for allocation to schools, to the end of 2016, which represents an increase of 23% over the numbers allocated in 2011. Funding is being allocated to provide for the recruitment of 115 additional Special Needs Assistants from January 2017.

There are currently over 12,400 learning support and Resource Teacher posts in mainstream primary and post primary schools, providing additional teaching support to pupils with special educational needs including children with Autism.

Resources which are provided to schools to support children with Autism include the following:

- 2,200 extra teachers in mainstream schools specifically to support children with Autism.
- 889 special classes for students with autism – up from fewer than 80 in 2001.
- 20 special schools specifically for students with Autism
- One teacher and a minimum of two SNAs for every primary special class of six students

with ASD and 1.5 teachers and a minimum of two SNAs for every post-primary special class.

- SNA support – About 69% of all students with ASD access SNA support.
- Assistive technology.
- Professional development for teachers.
- Access to the Special School transport scheme.
- Access to special equipment and furniture where required.
- Enhanced capitation grant.
- Adapted school buildings.
- Access to the extended school year scheme. (July Provision)

The Deputy will be aware that the NCSE has published updated policy advice on the Educational Provision for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders. In developing this policy advice, the NCSE consulted widely with parents, professionals and other stakeholders and interested parties while also conducting research. The report includes 11 key Recommendations which focus on improvements which might be considered to the range of provisions which are currently available for children with Autism in schools.

The NCSE also have a range of Information Booklets available on their website (<http://ncse.ie/information-booklets-pamphlets-2>) for parents of children with special educational needs, which are written for parents to answer key questions they may have about special education, both generally and as it relates to their child.

Educational Disadvantage

50. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the report to identify the barriers to accessing higher education for lone parents and examine measures to increase participation will be published (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35150/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Programme for Government contains a commitment to commission an independent examination to identify the supports and barriers to accessing higher education for lone parents, and examine measures to increase participation.

In line with this commitment, my Department engaged a multi-disciplinary team in NUI Maynooth to undertake the independent review.

The review is being overseen by a steering committee comprising officials from my Department and from the Departments of Social Protection and Children and Youth Affairs, as well as the Higher Education Authority.

The review will examine existing data and describe the supports that are currently available for lone parents with a view to identifying the specific challenges faced by lone parents in accessing higher education. The intention is to identify measures and best practice that will address those challenges in the future.

The review is currently being finalised. This is a complex policy area that involves three

Government Departments. Given the complexity of the issues involved, it is expected that the review will be completed before the end of the year. The publication date will be considered after the completed review has been made available to my Department.

However, the review was sufficiently progressed to inform policy discussions between the relevant Departments in advance of Budget 2017.

In this context, I secured additional funding in Budget 2017 to support more lone parents to participate in higher education. This new funding will be used to respond to the recommendations contained in the review.

This is in addition to the more than €400 million in student supports that are being made available by my Department in the 2016/17 academic year, and which will support more than 80,000 students to participate in higher education.

Further details on the programmes which the extra funding in Budget 2017 will support will be announced shortly.

The additional funding I received for lone parents in Budget 2017 will be complemented by measures announced by my colleague, the Minister for Social Protection, to assist lone parents to return to education. These measures include the reintroduction of the €500 annual cost of Education allowance.

The Minister for Children & Youth Affairs also is introducing a programme of affordable childcare which will be of significant help to lone parents who are using childcare.

Defibrillators in Schools Provision

51. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a school (details supplied) has applied for a defibrillator to ensure the safety of a child at the school; the outcome of that request; if alternative funding is available; his Department's approach to making funding available to children with life threatening conditions in mainstream schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34883/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department provides funding to schools towards the cost of assistive technology, for pupils in Primary, Post Primary and Special schools, for personal computers and specialist software for educational purposes under the Assistive Technology scheme, as set out in my Department's Circular 0010/2013. Equipment is provided under the scheme for children with more complex disabilities who require essential specialist equipment to access the school curriculum, which they do not already have, or which cannot be provided for them through the school's existing provisions.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) is responsible for processing applications from schools for special educational needs supports, including assistive technology. SENOs make recommendations to my Department where assistive technology is required.

Under the terms of the Assistive Technology scheme, a defibrillator could not be considered to be Assistive Technology as it is a device used for medical reasons rather than for educational purposes. Technology required for medical purposes is outside the remit of my Department.

Queries relating to medical aids and appliances should be addressed to the Health Service Executive (HSE). It is open to the school and the child's parents to contact the local Health

Centre in this regard using contact information available on www.HSE.ie .

Teacher Training Provision

52. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department plans to include specific training on the Traveller and Roma community as a compulsory component of teacher education and continuous professional development for primary and post-primary teachers as recommended by advocacy groups (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35029/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Both initial teacher education and continuing professional development for teachers contain elements that are relevant to the Traveller and Roma communities.

Initial teacher education (ITE) programme providers aim to prepare their student teachers to meet the diverse needs of all their pupils.

The compulsory components of ITE are outlined in the Teaching Council's "Initial Teacher Education: Criteria and Guidelines for Programme Providers (2011)". One such component is Inclusive Education (Special Education, Multiculturalism, Disadvantage, etc.) and the "Criteria and Guidelines" also set out learning outcome that are relevant. For example, graduates of ITE programmes are expected to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of:

- Children's rights, including their right to a voice in various matters that relate to their lives
- the factors that promote and hinder effective learning, the impact of pupils' backgrounds and identities on learning and the need to provide for the holistic development of the learner, particularly through differentiated approaches.

A graduate is further enabled to:

- apply knowledge of the individual potential of pupils, dispositions towards learning, varying backgrounds, identities, experiences and learning styles to planning for teaching, learning and assessment;
- apply his/her knowledge of pupils' holistic development to his/her teaching and promote social responsibility;
- foster good relationships with and among pupils based on mutual respect and trust and meaningful interactions;
- communicate effectively with pupils, parents, colleagues, the school principal, school management, co-professionals and the wider community by using appropriate skills, styles and systems to suit the given situation and setting.

Graduates must also practise within the statutory framework for education, including child protection guidelines, and will know and uphold the core values and professional commitments which are set out in the Teaching Council's "Code of Professional Conduct" (2016). This specifically references a number of ethical values, such as respect, trust, care and integrity that underpin standards of teaching, knowledge, skill, competence and conduct, all of which are important in addressing the complex nature of inclusion.

Teachers are life-long learners who are continually adapting over the course of their careers to enable them to support their students' learning. To support life-long learning Cosán, the

framework for teachers' learning, was launched in March 2016 by the Teaching Council. One of the key learning areas identified by Cosán is inclusion. In this regard, teachers are encouraged to engage in learning aimed at "improving their capacity to address and respond to the diversity of students' needs; enable participation in learning, cultures and communities; and, remove barriers within and to education through the accommodation and provision of appropriate structures and arrangements to enable each student to achieve the maximum benefit from his/her attendance at school."

The Deputy will be aware also that my Department provides continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers through a range of short courses, summer courses and post graduate programmes. The Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) is the largest provider of in-service CPD to teachers in primary and post primary schools. Its main aim is to ensure high quality, consistent and cohesive CPD support in response to national priority areas and emerging local needs. The PDST Health and Wellbeing team promote the inclusive methodologies inherent in the SPHE curriculum which emphasise the importance of celebrating diverse cultures and accepting difference.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

53. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will consider changing the way in which pupil-teacher ratio, PTR, is organised to ensure that no class in any school is above the agreed PTR; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35193/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided to primary schools is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30 September.

The staffing schedule operates in a clear and transparent manner and treats all similar types of schools equally. It currently operates on the basis of a general average of 1 classroom teacher for every 27 pupils, with lower thresholds for DEIS Band 1 schools ranging from 20:1 to 24:1 depending on type of school.

The allocation of teaching posts to primary schools on this basis reflects the varying factors in each school, such as classroom accommodation and fluctuating enrolment year to year. School authorities are requested to ensure that the number of pupils in any one class is kept as low as possible, taking into account all of the above factors. The Department also requests school authorities to use their autonomy under the staffing schedule to implement smaller class sizes for junior classes. With over 21,700 classes in over 3,100 primary schools throughout the country, there will always be variations in class sizes at individual school level.

Minor Works Scheme

54. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason for the delay in announcing the minor works grant; when it will be announced; and his views on the difficulty for schools to budget for and plan their maintenance with the uncertainty regarding the minor works programme. [35023/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department is currently determining the likely end-year position on capital expenditure 2016 and I hope to be able to make an announcement regarding the Minor Works Grant 2016/2017 shortly.

School Staff

55. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the reduction in staff numbers at a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35156/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30 September.

The staffing arrangements includes the provision whereby schools experiencing rapid increases in enrolment can apply for additional permanent mainstream posts on developing grounds, using projected enrolment for the following September, in this case September 2016.

On the basis of projected enrolment, the school referred to by the Deputy was allocated 2 developing posts on a provisional basis. The school's actual enrolment in September was sufficient to retain 1 of these developing posts.

The staffing arrangements also include an appeals mechanism for schools to submit an appeal under certain criteria to an independent Appeals Board. The school submitted an application to the October meeting of the Primary Staffing Appeals Board. The appeal was refused by the Appeals Board on the basis that the grounds of the appeal did not warrant the allocation of an additional post under Circular 0007/2016. The Board of Management of the school has been notified in this regard. The Primary Staffing Appeals Board operates independently of the Department and its decision is final.

Capitation Grants

56. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on whether the levels of capitation grants for the primary and secondary school sectors is adequate; and his plans to increase capitation levels in upcoming budgets. [35026/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I do recognise the need to improve capitation funding for primary and post-primary schools having regard to the reductions that were necessary over recent years. Budget 2017 represents the start of a major programme of reinvestment in education, and the first phase of implementation of the Action Plan for Education, aimed at becoming the best education system in Europe within a decade.

The Action Plan outlines hundreds of actions to be implemented over the 3 year period 2016 to 2019. One of the actions as part of the plan is to strengthen the focus on reducing school costs for parents. The plan also integrates with the commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government to increase capitation funding and to set out capitation rates to schools on a rolling 3-year basis, allowing for forward planning by schools.

It was not possible to provide additional funding in Budget 2017 in relation to this element of the Action Plan due to the many competing demands for the available funding. However, this commitment remains a priority for me to address as soon as possible during the lifetime of the Action Plan.

It is important to note that the total allocation to this Department for additional policy measures, after demographics and Industrial Relations commitments, was €130 million and of which all our commitments in higher and further education and primary and secondary schools had to be funded.

Student Accommodation

57. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to address the student accommodation crisis. [28431/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Alleviating the housing crisis is a cross-Government priority. The reality is that dealing comprehensively with this issue will only take place as part of a more general programme to address the major housing and homelessness issue.

Accordingly, my colleague Mr. Simon Coveney T.D., Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, on 19 July 2016 published “Rebuilding Ireland – an Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness”. The full plan can be accessed at: http://rebuildingireland.ie/Rebuilding%20Ireland_Action%20Plan.pdf.

My Department contributed significantly to the development of this Plan and the current position in respect of the specific measures relating to student accommodation as detailed in Rebuilding Ireland is as follows:

1. Rebuilding Ireland details that a national student accommodation strategy will be in place by Q2 2017 and my Department is working on the development of this strategy with a view to meeting this timescale.

2. Rebuilding Ireland details that an initial assessment will be completed during Q4 2016 with a view to bringing on stream proposals capable of delivering an additional 7,000 student accommodation places by end 2019, on or off campus. Officials from my Department are working closely with officials from the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government with a view to meeting this timescale.

3. & 4. The Government approved the publication of the General Scheme of a Planning and Development (Housing and Residential Tenancies) Bill in September and is now prioritising its drafting and full publication. This includes facilitating (for a limited time-period) planning applications for large-scale housing developments and student accommodation developments, being made directly to An Bord Pleanála and facilitating Higher Education Institutes to borrow monies from the Housing Finance Agency for the purposes of financing student accommodation provision.

5. Funding for a Student Housing Officer to work with the Union of Students in Ireland has been agreed for 2016 with a commitment to examine future funding needs going forward. This builds on the funding of €30,000 which was provided to USI by the HEA to fund their 2016 #HomesForStudy campaign.

6. I believe that a borrowing framework for the IOT sector would deliver significant benefits and my officials are in discussions with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to examine ways Institutes of Technology can be facilitated in developing on-campus student accommodation through addressing borrowing capacity and funding constraints.

7. Work is ongoing in the Department of Housing, Planning Community and Local Government on developing a comprehensive database of publicly owned lands in key developable areas with a view to identifying land suitable for housing development. This database will also inform the scope for provision of additional student accommodation.

In addition, I should point out that a number of our Higher Education Institutions have Student Accommodation projects ongoing, or in the pipeline. Maynooth University have 296 new

on-campus bed spaces, and UCD have 350 new on-campus bed spaces, which came on stream in September 2016. Six other Higher Education Institutions are currently engaged in, or going through the planning phases for student accommodation projects, namely National University of Ireland Galway, Trinity College Dublin, University of Limerick, Dublin City University, University College Cork and Dublin Institute of Technology.

The Actions in Rebuilding Ireland in relation to Student Accommodation build on the report, Student Accommodation: Demand & Supply, which was published last year by the Minister for Education and Skills.

School Patronage

58. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will produce the new roadmap on reconfiguration by the end of 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35019/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Programme for a Partnership Government reflects the Government's objective of strengthening parental choice and further expanding diversity in our school system. The desire of parents for diversity in education is primarily being pursued by increasing the number of non-denominational and multi-denominational schools with a view to reaching 400 by 2030.

In addition to the phased transfer of Catholic schools to new patrons already under way, this requires considering new ideas and new approaches to substantially accelerate the changes in school provision in order to achieve greater diversity. By developing new approaches I am convinced that we can significantly increase the number of non-denominational and multi-denominational schools. In this regard, after taking office and in the context of developing my Action Plan for Education 2016-2019, I held meetings with a broad range of stakeholders, including patron and management bodies, as did my officials, to discuss how best this can be achieved.

I am progressing the patronage divesting/reconfiguration programme as a priority. I plan to announce the new approaches which will be pursued in that regard within the timeframe indicated in the Action Plan for Education.

School Closures

59. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to a recent issue in Dublin-Rathdown whereby parents and staff at two schools recently learned of closures and relocations via social media and press reports; if there is a process whereby those impacted by school closures, builds or relocations, namely, parents, teachers, staff, community and local elected representatives, are given up-to-date information on any such closures, builds or relocations before this information is published on social media or the press; if there is a process, the details of same; if it will be followed through in future; if no process is in place, his plans to implement one; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35187/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware, the two schools, referred to, comprise a post-primary fee-charging Catholic Girls' school which is recognised by my Department and a private fee-charging Junior (primary) school. As the junior school concerned is a wholly owned private school that is not recognised by my Department, my Department has no role in relation to the school concerned.

In the case of the post primary school, my Department was advised by the Patron that as the school is no longer viable, it had decided to close the school. The Patron advised that it is intended to close the school on a phased basis in 2019 so as to enable the current cohort of post-primary students to complete their current cycle of Junior Certificate or Leaving Certificate during the wind-down period. In general, the initiative for any school closure may come from a variety of sources, such as parents, staff, Board of Management and Patron(s). A proposal by the Patron to close a school is generally managed in a manner that accommodates the interests of the relevant stakeholders.

I am aware that in the case of any proposed school closure, builds or relocations that there can be significant sensitivities involved and that these, including information for all the relevant stakeholders, are best addressed through a process of local level dialogue. I therefore consider that as in the case referred to by the Deputy it is a matter for each Patron Body concerned to determine how best this local dialogue should be conducted with its school community.

Education Policy

60. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the way he plans to progress the three areas in the education sector that he has identified as his core priority areas of focus in the sector, including assisting children with special needs, supporting schools and building a stronger bridge between education and the workplace; the reason he has prioritised these three areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34875/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Last September, I launched the first ever Action Plan for Education, covering the period 2016- 2019. The central vision of the Plan is that the Irish Education and Training System should become the best in Europe over the next decade. This will be achieved through focusing on five high level goals:

1. Improve the learning experience and the success of learners
2. Improve the progress of learners at risk of educational disadvantage or learners with special educational needs
3. Help those delivering education services to continuously improve
4. Build stronger bridges between education and wider community
5. Improve national planning and support services.

In order to ensure that progress is made in all five of these areas, updated annual Action Plans will be published each year, covering the actions that will be implemented during the subsequent 12 months. As part of this process:

- Actions will be monitored against published timelines
- Each year a new Action Plan will be developed and published to further our goals in consultation with stakeholders
- Responsibility for actions will be clearly assigned.

Furthermore, my Department will publish progress reports each quarter that will evolve and improve from the experience of implementation.

Education Policy

61. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which he expects to be in a position to make adequate provision as required to meet the full pre-school, primary, second, third and fourth level current and future educational needs in all areas throughout the country, having particular regard to demographic trends, overcrowded classrooms, the schools building programme, special needs and the challenge of the varying and increasing demands of the workplace and apprenticeships; if he remains satisfied that the plans in place remain adequate to meet the challenges of an expanding economy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35184/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Action Plan for Education sets out this Government's ambitions for the education system over the coming years, including how we will implement the commitments in the Programme for Government and the Confidence and Supply Arrangement.

The Action Plan sets out hundreds of measures which will be implemented, with a particular focus on disadvantage, skills and continuous improvement within the education and training system.

Budget 2017, announced last month, represents the first phase in implementing the Action Plan and the start of a major programme of reinvestment in education.

Next year, an additional €458 million will be invested in the education system, which represents an increase of over 5% on my Department's allocation for 2016. This will allow us to make significant progress in a range of areas across the education and training sector.

- This will mean over 2,500 additional posts in schools, including more classroom teachers, more resource teachers and more Special Needs Assistants. We will continue to restore guidance posts in schools.

- Funding will be available to make continued progress on curricular reform, including through the allocation of individual professional time for teachers of Junior Cycle.

- We will implement the recent agreement reached with the TUI and INTO on salary increases for new entrant teachers.

- A new package of support is being provided for the critical area of school leadership.

- Resources will be made available to implement the new Action Plan for Disadvantaged Schools which will be launched later this year.

- We are also making the first significant investment in higher education in a number of years, with at least an additional €160 million committed over the next three years.

- We will also carry out a review and consultation with the aim of developing a multi-annual funding model for higher and further education and training from 2018. This will include consideration of an Employer-Exchequer investment mechanism and will complement the Oireachtas Committee's consideration of the Cassells report.

- On the capital side, my Department will spend €690 million which will allow for around 20,000 new school places to be provided.

The investment secured as part of the Budget is an important first step in achieving our ambitions. Over the coming years, I will continue to work in partnership with the Minister for

Public Expenditure and Reform to secure the resources needed to implement in full the commitments set out in the Action Plan for Education.

National Training Fund

62. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the national training fund has a current surplus of €272 million projected to the end of 2017; the reason this surplus is not being applied to the crisis in higher education funding if part of its purpose is to provide skills to prospective employees and to facilitate life-long learning; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35186/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): The National Training Fund (NTF) was established under the National Training Fund Act 2000 to raise the skills of those in employment and to provide training to those who wish to acquire skills to take up employment. It is also used to provide information in relation to existing, or likely future requirements for skills in the economy.

The Act, provides for the imposition of a levy on employers, the main source of income for the Fund. The levy on employers is 0.7% of reckonable earnings in respect of employees in Class A and Class H employments, which represents approximately 75% of all insured employees.

Over a number of years the annual levy income from the NTF was less than the amount expended. The income levy went from a high of €413 million in 2008 to €299 million in 2012. Since 2012 however, the levy income has increased annually due to improved employment levels, to an expected income of €405 million by the end of next year.

€362 million has been made available annually over the last number of years from the NTF for training for employed and unemployed people. The surplus in the Fund at the end of 2015 was €183.762m. This is expected to increase to €217m at the end of this year and to €272m by the end of 2017.

In accordance with the NTF Act the surplus remains in the accounts of the National Training Fund. In the past, the accumulated surplus in the fund has been important in maintaining expenditure levels, particularly in the provision of training for the unemployed, in periods when receipts fell. It should also be noted that NTF funding forms part of the Department's annual overall expenditure ceiling and any increase in NTF expenditure will have to be offset by reductions in expenditure elsewhere.

The Report of the Expert Group on Future Funding for Higher Education, published in July, clearly outlines the funding challenges in the higher education sector and offers a number of approaches and recommendations for consideration for the medium term. As committed to in the Programme for Government, the report has been referred to the Education Committee as part of the process for formulating a plan for the future of the sector.

To address the immediate challenges in the Higher Education sector, I am pleased that in Budget 2017 I secured additional funding for the first time in recent years. In 2017, an additional €36.5 million will be made available with €160 million additional over the next three years. This will allow the sector keep pace with demographic increases and introduce targeted initiatives in areas such as disadvantage, skills, research and flexible learning. Among those who will benefit from the additional third level funding being made available are, students from disadvantaged backgrounds, lone parents and Travellers.

Question No. 63 answered with Question No. 48.

Speech and Language Therapy Provision

64. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the introduction of a new model of in-school speech and language therapy will be established; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35021/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Programme for a Partnership Government states that a new model of In-School Speech and Language Therapy will be established. It commits to investing an extra €500 million in education by 2021, through measures including childcare subventions, HSE Speech and Language Therapists, to bring the number up to 1,102 (a 25% increase).

The Programme for a Partnership Government also contains a commitment to examine the adequacy of the present policies and provision, and their scope for improvement, particularly in relation to speech and language difficulties and early intervention.

As Speech and Language Therapists are currently employed by the Health Service Executive (HSE), officials at my Department are currently engaging with colleagues in the Department of Health and the HSE to develop a plan for the implementation of this commitment. The implementation plan will identify the actions to be taken and the specific timeframe for the delivery of this commitment.

In the interim my Department continues to provide an extensive range of supports for pupils with Specific Speech and Language Disorder (SSLD).

This includes provision for the establishment of special classes for pupils with SSLD in primary schools.

Applications to establish such classes are considered by the school's assigned Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO) and those meeting the criteria for establishment are approved by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE). The criteria for enrolment in a Special Class for pupils with SSLD is set out in my Department's Circular 0038/2007.

Pupils who are not enrolled in a special class for SSLD and who meet the criteria for Specific Speech and Language Disorder, as outlined in my Department's Circular, may qualify for additional teaching support where he/she is enrolled in mainstream school.

Pupils with mild speech and language difficulties may qualify for supplementary teaching support from within the school's general allocation of learning support/teaching support. It is a matter for individual schools to use their professional judgement to identify pupils who will receive this support and to use the resources available to the school to intervene at the appropriate level with such pupils.

School Patronage

65. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 165 of 8 November 2016, if his Department has considered the balance of schools of different ethoi in the Tallaght area; if his Department has considered the lack of an Educate Together secondary school in the Citywest area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35174/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Further to my response to the Deputy of 8 November 2016, Citywest is located within the Tallaght school planning area. There are currently six post-primary schools operating within this school planning area. Four are of a Catholic ethos and the remaining two are non-designated, multi-denominational, Community Colleges, one of which is the new Kingswood Community College which opened in September this year and which when fully developed will provide 1,000 student places. These schools serve the needs of the students in the school planning area, which includes the Citywest area.

There are six school planning areas adjoining Tallaght, with 30 post-primary schools in these adjoining areas:

- Dublin 6W (4)
- Dolphins Barn Dublin 2 (10)
- Firhouse/Oldbawn (3)
- Newcastle/Rathcoole (1)
- Clondalkin Dublin 22 (4)
- Rathfarnham (8)

Of these 30 schools, 25 have a Catholic ethos, one has a Church of Ireland ethos and four have a multi-denominational ethos.

In addition, among the 13 new schools (4 primary and 9 post-primary) announced to open in 2017 and 2018 to cater for increased demographic needs, is a new post-primary school which will open in 2018 in the Firhouse/Oldbawn school planning area, which is adjacent to the Tallaght school planning area. When fully developed, this school will provide 1,000 pupil places, supplementing provision in the greater Tallaght area. The patronage process for this school has recently been completed with Educate Together announced as patron.

As with the other school planning areas nationwide, the demographic data for the Tallaght school planning area is being kept under review by my Department to take account of updated enrolment data and capacity increases in this and adjoining school planning areas.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

66. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the review of the pilot project for the new resource allocation model for children with special educational needs will be published. [34877/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department implemented a pilot of the proposed new Resource Teacher allocation model over the course of the 2015/2016 school year.

A review of this pilot has been completed and a report of the review is currently being finalised.

I understand that the review will indicate that the new model has been positively received by schools and parents.

Throughout the pilot my Department gathered information from the participating schools.

This information was gathered using surveys, information and training days, self-reflective questionnaires and a formal review undertaken by my Department's Inspectorate.

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

In addition schools indicated a belief that they were broadly well supported in meeting the needs of children with Special Educational Needs.

When the full review has been finalised, I will consider its findings and will also consider when the report should be published.

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

Further details regarding implementation of the new model will be announced in the coming months.

School Accommodation

67. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide a progress report on negotiations to secure a site for the building of a new school (details supplied); when construction will commence and be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34885/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware the project in respect of the education campus in Buncrana was announced as part of the Six Year Capital Programme last year.

Officials in this Department have been liaising with officials in Donegal County Council under the Memorandum of Understanding for the acquisition of school sites with regard to the procurement of a suitable site for the campus. A significant number of potential site options were comprehensively technically assessed by officials from my Department in liaison with officials from the Local Authority.

The Deputy will appreciate the importance of a thorough appraisal of site options in order to ensure the achievement of value for money. In this particular case the complexity of the issues associated with the development of the site options under consideration, combined with competing demands on my Department's resources, resulted in a lengthier time for site appraisal than would generally have been the case.

Following on from the site assessment exercise, a preferred site option was identified and officials from Donegal County Council, on behalf of my Department, have engaged with the landowner in question with a view to its acquisition. These negotiations have not yielded a positive result to date but are currently ongoing.

At the request of my Department, Council officials have also engaged with the relevant

landowners in respect of a second suitable site and this may provide an alternative option, if agreement can be reached on a purchase price.

Due to the commercial sensitivities attaching to site acquisitions generally, it is not possible to provide any further information at this time regarding the negotiation process or the site options. Once a suitable site has been acquired my Department will be in a position to progress the project concerned into the architectural planning process.

Education Policy

68. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide a report on the consultation process he has established on a new three-year strategy for education of skills, Strategy for Education and Skills 2016-2018; when he expects the consultation process to finish and the final report to be published; the key priority areas of the consultation process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34872/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Government committed to producing a three year strategy for my Department in the first 100 days and a framework for measuring its progress in consultation with stakeholders. Accordingly, in May 2016, a stakeholder consultation was launched, the purpose of which was to gather views to inform the development of the new Action Plan and Statement of Strategy for Education.

Over 600 submissions were received from a range of stakeholders and the general public. A number of submissions are currently available on the Department's website including stakeholder and Irish language submissions. Further returns will continue to be published in due course.

In September, I launched the first ever Action Plan for Education, covering the period 2016-2019. The central vision of the Plan is that the Irish Education and Training System should become the best in Europe over the next decade. This will be achieved through focusing on five high level goals:

1. Improve the learning experience and the success of learners
2. Improve the progress of learners at risk of educational disadvantage or learners with special educational needs
3. Help those delivering education services to continuously improve
4. Build stronger bridges between education and wider community
5. Improve national planning and support services.

The high level goals will serve as the basis for my Department's high level work programme for the next three years, the aim of which is to provide an education and training system that equips learners with the knowledge and skills that they need to achieve their potential and to participate fully in society and the economy through the delivery of high quality education and training experiences, which will make the best use of resources. It will work towards improving accountability for educational outcomes across the system.

In order to ensure that progress is made in all five of these areas, updated annual Action Plans will be published each year, covering the actions that will be implemented during the subsequent 12 months. Furthermore, my Department will publish progress reports each quarter that will evolve and improve from the experience of implementation.

School Supervision and Substitution Scheme

69. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason for seeking members of the public to undertake supervision and substitution at pay levels higher than existing teachers undertaking this work. [35180/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): ASTI's decision to withdraw, with effect from 7 November, from supervising yards and corridors at breaktimes, lunchtimes and before and after school posed a serious risk for health and safety in schools.

In such circumstances, my Department had an obligation to do everything possible to put in place alternative arrangements for supervision and substitution so as to keep the maximum possible number of schools open.

My Department, in conjunction with the school management bodies – JMB, ETBI and ACCS, implemented contingency plans to support any schools that might have been in a position to remain open during the period when teachers withdrew from S&S duties.

The contingency plans involved schools recruiting external personnel to supervise pupils on the school premises, in classrooms and the school yard.

External Supervisors recruited prior to 1 January 2011 are paid at an hourly rate of €21.31 and those recruited on or after 1 January 2011 are paid an hourly rate of €19.18 - both of which are less than the hourly rate of a new entrant teacher recruited on or after 1 February 2012 who is subject to FEMPI legislation which is €42.19.

Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools Scheme

70. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will report on his Department's review of DEIS which began in 2015; when he will publish a new plan for educational inclusion which was expected to be before the end of 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34878/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): It is my intention to publish a new Action Plan for Educational Inclusion before the end of this year.

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

A new assessment framework is also being developed using centrally held CSO and DES data for the identification of new schools for inclusion. The number of schools to be included in the programme will be determined by this proposed new identification process which will assess all schools in the country.

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

- School leadership
- School networks and clusters

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

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

Further information on the DEIS Review process is available on my Department's website at <http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools-/DEIS-Review-Process-Information-Note.pdf>

Industrial Disputes

71. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the measures he is taking to address the ongoing serious issues which have led to industrial action by the ASTI trade union; when he expects to have these issues resolved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34879/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department has been engaging with ASTI bilaterally in relation to issues of concern over the last few months.

I welcome the decision by ASTI last week to suspend its two industrial actions i.e. their one day strikes and their withdrawal from Supervision and Substitution duties. I also welcome the fact that a process has started under the auspices of the Teachers Conciliation Council (TCC) aimed at finding a resolution to this dispute.

Discussions are taking place under the auspices of the TCC, to which the Department, school management and teacher unions are all party. As the proceedings of the TCC are confidential, it would not be appropriate for me to make any further comment.

I hope that this process will be successful in resolving all of the issues involved.

Teachers' Remuneration

72. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will restore the qualification allowance for teachers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35179/16]

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. These included reductions to the pay of new entrant public servants, including teachers, since 2011.

Significant measures have been taken to reduce the gap between those who entered teaching since 2011 and those who entered before that date. The most recent of these is the agreement reached with TUI and INTO in September, which in effect reverses the decision to withdraw qualification allowances from post-1 February 2012 entrant teachers. This new arrangement will apply to members of the teacher unions which have accepted the Lansdowne Road Agreement i.e. TUI and INTO.

The agreement substantially addresses the current difference in pay between those recruited since 2011 and those recruited since 2012. It will result in increases of up to €2,000 per year for new teachers at the start of their careers. The increase varies depending on the point of scale that a teacher is on - the highest increase being €7,700 and the increase at the maximum of the scale being €4,300. It is estimated that over a teacher's career the value of these increases will be €135,000.

The revised salary arrangement will be implemented in two phases on 1 January 2017 and 1 January 2018.

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 terms of career earnings, this deal in addition to measures already agreed will restore approximately three quarters of the reductions for new entrants put in place since 2011.

The full text of the agreement is available on my Department's website at the following address:

<http://www.education.ie/en/Education-Staff/Information/Public-Service-Stability-Agreement-Haddington-Road/New-Entrant-Pay-Issue-and-Related-Commitments.pdf>

The Government has also 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.

Traveller Education

73. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to restore funding for Traveller education to pre-2008 levels; the measures he has taken or planned to improve educational outcomes for members of the travelling community here, particularly in view of the high drop out rate from post-primary education; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35028/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department's policy in relation to Traveller Education is informed by the Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy (2006), following wide ranging consultation with Traveller representative groups and other relevant stakeholders. The principle of inclusion is at the core of the Strategy. In keeping with this principle, additional resources provided in the education system for all children, including Travellers, are allocated on the basis of identified individual educational need.

The funding for Traveller Education to which the Deputy refers relates to the reduction in funding for segregated Traveller specific programmes, which were phased out in line with the principle of inclusion in the Strategy. To support the transition to mainstream education of Traveller pupils, my Department continues to provide additional resources to schools. This funding currently involves an allocation of €10m.

The challenges faced by Traveller children in education regarding school attendance, par-

ticipation and retention fall within the remit of the Educational Welfare Service (EWS) of TUSLA, who work directly with all families including Traveller families to address Early School Leaving. TUSLA is an agency under the remit of my colleague the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs.

Third Level Costs

74. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the measures he plans in order to deal with concerns regarding third level student support and funding challenges for third level institutions. [34871/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department is investing in a significant programme of student supports in the 2016/17 academic year in order to assist students from under-represented groups to participate in and complete higher education.

In total, my Department will provide more than €408million on student supports in 2016.

This encompasses the student grant scheme which will assist circa 80,000 students in 2016/17. The grant scheme is complemented by the Student Assistance Fund and the Fund for Students with Disabilities, as well as a programme of scholarships and bursaries.

The Report of the Expert Group on Future Funding for Higher Education, published in July, clearly outlines the funding challenges facing the higher education sector. The report also makes a number of recommendations for consideration for the future. As committed to in the Programme for Government, I have referred the report of the expert group to the relevant Oireachtas Committee for its consideration, in order to build political consensus on the most appropriate future funding model for the higher education sector.

While the Cassells report deals with the medium and long term funding needs of higher education we also have to consider the immediate challenges. In that context, I am pleased to have secured additional funding for the sector, in Budget 2017, for the first time in nine years. In 2017, an additional €36.5m will be made available as part of a €160m three year funding package. This will allow the sector keep pace with demographic increases and introduce targeted initiatives in areas such as disadvantage, skills, research and flexible learning. Among those who will benefit from the additional third level funding being made available are students from disadvantaged backgrounds, lone parents, and Travellers.

It is also intended to carry out a policy review in order to implement a sustainable and predictable multi-annual funding model for higher and further education and training involving increased Employer and Exchequer contributions from 2018. This review will be in line with the policy framework set out in the National Skills Strategy and will complement the ongoing work by the Oireachtas Committee in relation to the Cassells report.

Digital Strategy for Schools

75. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of his Department's investment programme to improve information technology in schools; and if his Department has any proposals to improve routine maintenance of information technology in schools. [35024/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The new Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020 (Enhancing Teaching, Learning and Assessment), launched in October

2015, sets out a clear vision for the role of ICT in teaching, learning and assessment in primary and post primary schools. The Strategy is focussed on realising the potential of digital technologies to transform the learning experiences of students by helping them become engaged thinkers, active learners, knowledge constructors and global citizens who participate fully in society and the economy.

Implementation of the Strategy is now underway. Planning, oversight and consultative structures have been established. The Strategy recognises that schools require public investment in their ICT equipment and infrastructure and accordingly a fund of €210m to support the implementation of this Strategy is available beginning with an investment of €30m in the next school year (2016/2017) rising to €50m a year towards the end of the Strategy.

The Strategy provides for investment in teacher training, development of digital content and resources for teaching and the provision of information and guidance to schools. Improving the quality of connectivity at primary level is also a key objective of the strategy.

The funding needs of the Strategy will be considered in the annual budgetary process.

Brexit Issues

76. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Taoiseach when the Cabinet Committee on Brexit last met; and the status of its work. [34892/16]

The Taoiseach: The Cabinet Committee on Brexit has met three times to date, on 8 September, on 19 October and on 7 November, for in depth discussion of the issues arising from the UK decision to leave the European Union.

The Committee will oversee the overall Government response, including both the economic impact and the negotiations at EU level and with the administrations in London and Belfast. The Cabinet Committee will continue to meet on a regular basis to deal with Brexit related issues. Brexit has been a matter of regular and detailed consideration by Government for some time, both in advance of the UK EU Referendum and since.

Brexit Issues

77. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Taoiseach if he will open up negotiations with the British Government on Brexit prior to Article 50 being triggered. [35217/16]

The Taoiseach: Article 50 will frame the negotiations on arrangements for the UK's eventual withdrawal from the EU. We know from PM May that she intends to formally trigger Article 50 no later than the end of March next year. No negotiations will take place until Article 50 has been explicitly triggered.

There is, however, ongoing close political and official engagement, including with the British Government, Northern Ireland and the EU Member States and institutions.

Engagement with the UK has been through existing frameworks and institutions, such as the Joint Work Programme, which I signed with then-Prime Minister Cameron in 2012. Prime Minister May and I reaffirmed our Governments' commitment to this co-operation when we met in July. On 6th October, our most Senior Civil Servants held their 5th Annual meeting on the Joint Work Programme. This served as a valuable vehicle for discussion and exploration of Brexit implications, impacts and options, in addition to providing for consideration of deeper

co-operation in areas not affected by the UK vote to leave the EU. There was helpful engagement on the priority issues for the Irish Government, such as on Northern Ireland, the Common Travel Area and Trade.

We will continue to use existing channels of communication, including summit meetings between the UK Prime Minister and myself to ensure that our interests are protected, though in many cases they will have to be managed through EU-UK frameworks.

The structures established under the Good Friday Agreement for managing relations on these islands, including the North South Ministerial Council and the British Irish Council can play an important role in shaping the Brexit negotiations, and my Government will do all it can to ensure this. In the context of the North South Ministerial Council, the political parties represented in the Northern Ireland Executive have an important responsibility to work together to define, as closely as possible, a shared objective regarding the consequences of Brexit and how best to respond to them, including through discussion with the Irish and British Governments and feeding into the formal negotiation process.

Cabinet Committee Meetings

78. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Taoiseach when the next Cabinet committee on infrastructure, environment and climate action will take place. [35218/16]

The Taoiseach: The Cabinet Committee on Infrastructure, Environment and Climate Action will meet again on 12th December.

As outlined in my response to the House on 25 October, this Cabinet Committee plays a central role in ensuring a whole of Government approach to addressing climate change and the development of critical infrastructure.

Data Protection

79. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the rights of access a person has to original audio recordings that contain their personal data, as opposed to transcripts; and the recourse available to persons in cases where they believe transcripts of audio recordings provided by a data controller are incomplete if that data controller refuses to provide them with the original audio recordings. [35276/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The position is that Article 12 (Right of access) of the 1995 Data Protection Directive requires Member States to ensure that every data subject has the right to obtain from the data controller the communication to him or her of personal data undergoing processing in an intelligible form. The same Article provides that the data subject has the right to obtain the rectification, erasure or blocking of personal data where the processing does not comply with the requirements of the Directive, in particular because of the incomplete or inaccurate nature of the personal data concerned.

The access provisions have been transposed into domestic law in section 4 (Right of access) of the Data Protection Act 1988, as amended by the Data Protection (Amendment) Act 2003. It provides that an individual shall have the information constituting any personal data of which he or she is the data subject communicated to him or her in an intelligible form. The right to rectification, erasure or blocking of personal data is set out in section 6.

Responsibility for oversight and enforcement of data protection law is a matter for the Data Protection Commissioner who is independent in the exercise of his or her functions and powers under the 1988 Act. Any complaints in relation to data protection law should, therefore, be submitted to the Commissioner for investigation and any necessary action.

Visa Applications

80. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the status of a visa application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35355/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the application referred to was received in the Irish Visa Office in New Delhi on 28 October, 2016. The applicant has since been asked to supply additional documentation to support the application. A decision will be made on receipt of this documentation.

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

In addition, applicants may themselves e-mail queries directly to the New Delhi Visa Office (newdelhivisaoffice@dfa.ie).

Property Registration

81. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding the registration of rights of way under the Land and Conveyancing Act 2009; when these will be registered with the Property Registration Authority; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35424/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I can inform the Deputy that Section 35 of the Land and Conveyancing Law Reform Act, 2009 as amended by the Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2011 provides for registration of easements (such as right of way) and profit à prendre acquired by prescription (long use) to be made directly to the Property Registration Authority under Section 49 (A) of the Registration of Title Act 1964, as an alternative mechanism to a court application, for uncontested claims. Alternatively an application can be made to court under Section 35 of the Land and Conveyancing Law Reform Act 2009 and the court can make an order which can be registered in the Land Registry or Registry of Deeds as appropriate.

Rule 46 of the Land Registration Rules 2012, as amended by the Land Registration Rules 2013, provides that an application under Section 49A may be made in Form 68 of the said Rules.

These are complex applications that require a full case to be made out by the applicant for the right to be registered in his/her favour. Certain proofs are required and notices must be served on all interested parties. The PRA's practice in relation to such an application and in relation to the mapping of same is set out in its practice direction's "Easements and Profits à

Prendre Acquired by Prescription under Section 49A” and “Mapping Practice” available on the PRA website www.prai.ie.

A total of 1,014 applications for registration of rights of way/profits á prendre are currently on hand in the Property Registration Authority. I understand that the Authority has recently reorganised how all such cases are handled, with the aim of streamlining the process and generating efficiencies. In addition, I am advised by the PRA that specific cases are sometimes expedited on request from the applicant, generally in anticipation of a sale.

Immigration Status

82. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if stamp 4 will be facilitated in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35248/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that they have no record of the person in question entering or residing in the State.

It is noted that the applicant’s daughter was naturalized as an Irish citizen in May 2013, having been granted refugee status in the State in November 2000. As set out above, however, there is no record of the person concerned having made an application to enter or to reside in the State. Moreover, the Residence Division of INIS does not currently have any application for the person before them.

It appears that the person concerned entered the State without permission and has remained in the State without permission. They should be aware that it is illegal under the Immigration Act 2004 to reside in the State without permission from the Minister for Justice and Equality. A person found guilty of such an offence is liable, under section 13 of the Immigration Act 2004, to a fine not exceeding €3,000 or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months or to both. As the person in question does not have immigration permission to remain in the State, they are not entitled to work. Against this background, the person concerned should attend their local Garda National Immigration Bureau Office as soon as may be.

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

Court Accommodation Refurbishment

83. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to refurbish Swords District Court; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35256/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will be aware, under the provisions of the Courts Service Act 1998, management of the courts, including the provision of accommodation for court sittings, is the responsibility of the Courts Service which is independent in exercising its functions.

However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has informed me that works to repair damage to the ceiling in Swords courthouse were carried out in 2014. The Courts Service have advised that there are no plans at present to carry out any further works or refurbishment, as scope for refurbishing the courthouse to provide the range of services expected in a modern courthouse building is very limited due to space constraints and the conservation status of the building.

UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

84. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality when she expects the Government to ratify the UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; when the necessary legislation disability/equality (miscellaneous provisions) Bill will be published; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35294/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Considerable progress has already been made to overcome the remaining legislative barriers to Ireland’s ratification of the Convention. 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 under way on drawing up the 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. The Bill is at the final stages of drafting and while I am not in a position to give an exact date I expect to publish the Bill very shortly so as to facilitate ratification of the Convention by end-2016.

Restorative Justice

85. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the reason the information note on the restorative justice scheme for survivors of the Magdalen laundries, circulated in October 2014 to local Irish communities by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade through its embassies, did not find its way to the Coalition of Irish Immigration Centers in the United States (details supplied). [35391/16]

87. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if her Department or the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has issued any further alerts to Irish embassies abroad since October 2014; and if not, the reason. [35393/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 85 and 87 together.

I can advise the Deputy that in October 2014 the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, on request from my Department, circulated an information note on the Magdalen Laundries Restorative Justice Ex Gratia Scheme through their embassies around the world to the local

Irish communities. My Department is not aware of the details of every organisation and Irish community group around the world that received this information note. If the Deputy is aware of any group or organisation which would like to have this information note, my officials in the Restorative Justice Implementation Unit will be happy to assist.

On a general point, the Deputy will be aware that the McAleese and Quirke Reports and the establishment of the Magdalen Scheme attracted worldwide media attention. The Irish Women Survivors Support Network also circulated thousands of leaflets in the UK and continue to raise awareness about the Scheme.

The Ex Gratia Scheme remains open to new applications.

The Deputy will be interested to note that, to date, 660 women have received lump sum payments at a cost of over €24.7m. The women are also in receipt of other supports under the Scheme including top up pension type payments and free access to a range of medical services.

Restorative Justice

86. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if the Magdalen restorative justice scheme has now been advertised in a publication (details supplied), as promised by her and as reiterated in her response of 4 February 2016; and if not, the reason. [35392/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I can advise the Deputy that, as I previously indicated and as I reiterated in my response in February 2015, my officials contacted the particular publication on two occasions and discussed the question of an advertisement or article. Following on from this, my officials provided background information and details about the Magdalen Scheme to the publication.

The Deputy will be aware that the McAleese and Quirke Reports and the establishment of the Magdalen Scheme attracted worldwide media attention. The Irish Women Survivors Support Network also circulated thousands of leaflets in the UK and continue to raise awareness about the Scheme.

The Magdalen Scheme remains open to new applications.

The Deputy will be interested to note that, to date, 660 women have received lump sum payments at a cost of over €24.7m. The women are also in receipt of other supports under the Scheme including top up pension type payments and free access to a range of medical services.

Question No. 87 answered with Question No. 85.

Garda Civilian Staff Recruitment

88. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if there are plans to recruit additional civilian staff to perform administrative duties within An Garda Síochána as this would free up additional resources within the force to perform policing duties; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35406/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I was pleased to announce on Budget day that the Government has approved my proposal that by 2021 the overall Garda workforce should comprise a total of 21,000 personnel; to include

15,000 Garda members, 2,000 Garda Reserve members and 4,000 civilians.

I am informed that there are currently in the region of 2,000 civilians undertaking administrative and technical duties within An Garda Síochána. 4,000 civilians will effectively double this figure and represents a medium term target of 20% civilians by 2021. This will bring An Garda Síochána, currently with 14% civilians, more into line with international norms and ensure that trained Gardaí are not engaging in administrative and technical duties which could be done by suitably qualified civilian staff. The Garda Inspectorate, in its 2015 report “Changing Policing in Ireland” has estimated that there may be up to 1,250 Gardaí currently in such posts and the Government’s plan aims to return as many of these Gardaí as possible to front-line duties over the next five years. With this in mind, the Garda Commissioner, in conjunction with the Policing Authority, has been requested to identify posts suitable for redeployment by the end of the year and to prepare a 5 year plan for reaching the 20% medium term target.

The recruitment and appointment of up to 500 civilians provided for in Budget 2017 will facilitate the Garda Commissioner in addressing capacity and critical skills gaps across the organisation including in corporate supports, change management, human resources and financial management at the national, regional and Divisional level. These appointments will make an important contribution to the delivery of the ambitious reform agenda set out in the Commissioner’s Modernisation and Renewal Programme 2016-2021 and will facilitate deeper civilianisation in the coming years.

In addition, and again flowing from the recommendations of the Garda Inspectorate, the Commissioner has commenced the roll-out on a pilot basis of a Divisional model of policing to replace the current District model. The benefit of the Divisional model is that responsibilities will be allocated on a functional rather than geographical basis which will facilitate greater flexibility in the deployment of resources in response to policing needs. It also will have the benefit of reducing duplicate administrative tasks currently done at both the District and Divisional level. In this regard the Commissioner has estimated that 10 Gardaí will be freed up for front-line duties in each Division once the model is fully rolled out. The roll-out will be done on a phased basis and in such a manner as to ensure that the close relationship between Gardaí and local communities is maintained.

Prison Accommodation

89. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality further to Question No. 84 of 8 November 2016, her views regarding the fact that the C division basement in Mountjoy Prison has been closed, with the transfer of prisoners to the newly finished D division (details supplied). [35408/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I can advise the Deputy that as mentioned in my reply to Parliamentary Question No. 84 of 8 November last, the works to replace the C Wing heating coil are expected to complete before the year’s end. The position as at 15 November 2016 is that the basement of Mountjoy Prison C wing remains open. It will be closed in the near future to facilitate the already ongoing works to replace the heating coil in that wing.

The Deputy is correct in saying that there was a leaking tank in the roof area of the prison but it was not located adjacent to the C wing area and did not give rise to any water damage in the C wing. The tank in question was removed several weeks ago and replaced with a ground level water storage facility.

I can further advise the Deputy that there was no cost involved in the relocation of prisoners to Mountjoy D wing from the upper levels of the C wing and that there will be no cost involved when those prisoners currently accommodated in the Mountjoy prison C basement are removed to D wing.

Traveller Community

90. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if it is the formal view of her Department that recognition of Traveller ethnicity by the State is dependent on winning the hearts and minds of Irish society in general and bringing the settled community with us, as stated by the Minister of State for equality in June 2016, rather than on internationally recognised criteria for distinct ethnicity and self-identification by Travellers, as such. [35418/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): As the Deputy is aware from my response to previous questions on this issue, there is a comprehensive consultation process underway (led by my Department) to develop a new National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy to improve the situation for the Traveller and Roma communities in Ireland. Phase 1 (identification of key themes for the new Strategy) and Phase 2 (identification and agreement of high level objectives under each agreed theme) of that consultation process have been completed. The final phase, Phase 3 (identification of detailed actions to achieve each agreed objective, with associated time-scales, key performance indicators, institutional responsibilities and monitoring arrangements), is currently under way. This process will provide a new set of specific, cross-Departmental actions that need to be taken to bring about a real improvement in quality of life for Travellers and Roma. It is intended that the new Inclusion Strategy will run to 2020 and that it will be in place later this year.

The issue of recognition of Travellers as an ethnic group is being considered in the context of the development of the Inclusion Strategy. In September 2015, my predecessor brought a paper to Cabinet Committee on Social Policy on the question of recognising Travellers as a distinct ethnic group within Irish society. This followed a process of dialogue with the national-level Traveller NGOs during 2015, which culminated in the presentation of an agreed position paper by them and confirmation that there are no legal or legislative or expenditure implications arising from such recognition. The key point is that recognition of the distinct heritage, culture and identity of Travellers and their special place in Irish society would be hugely symbolically important to Traveller pride, to Traveller self-esteem and to overcoming the legacy of marginalisation and discrimination that the community has experienced. Such a symbolic gesture - as the Traveller NGO paper argues - could have the potential to create a new platform for positive engagement by the Traveller community and Government together in seeking sustainable solutions based on respect and honest dialogue.

I have had a long standing interest in this area, most notably through my chairing of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice, Defence and Equality when it produced its report on the Recognition of Traveller Ethnicity (April 2014). When I spoke earlier this year at the Traveller Pride awards, I stressed that we need to broaden the discussion on this issue. The debate needs to be taken forward in an inclusive way. My officials and I are currently working to advance this issue with national Traveller organisations in this regard. I might make the point that there are no criteria or guidance set out in this regard in any international instrument to which Ireland is a party.

Traveller Community

91. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to introduce a national early intervention and prevention strategy specifically tailored to meet the needs of Traveller women to address the fact that the risk of Traveller women being imprisoned is 18 to 22 times greater than that for the general population. [35505/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): As the Deputy is aware from my response to previous questions on this issue, there is a comprehensive consultation process underway (led by my Department) to develop a new National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy to improve the situation for the Traveller and Roma communities in Ireland. Phase 1 (identification of key themes for the new Strategy) and Phase 2 (identification and agreement of high level objectives under each agreed theme) of that consultation process have been completed. The final phase, Phase 3 (identification of detailed actions to achieve each agreed objective, with associated time-scales, key performance indicators, institutional responsibilities and monitoring arrangements), is currently underway. This process will provide a new set of specific, cross-Departmental actions that need to be taken to bring about a real improvement in quality of life for Travellers and Roma. It is intended that the new Inclusion Strategy will run from 2016 to 2020 and that it will be in place later this year.

The issue of enhancing services to Travellers who come into contact with the criminal justice system is being considered in the context of the finalisation of the new Inclusion Strategy.

Services for People with Disabilities

92. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Finance the schemes and grants funded by the State that are available to persons with disabilities and the parents of children with disabilities regarding access to transport and financial assistance in purchasing wheelchair-accessible vehicles, or any other State supports available for disabled persons in terms of travel. [35346/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Scheme provides relief from VAT and VRT (up to a certain limit) on the purchase of an adapted car for transport of a person with specific severe and permanent physical disabilities, payment of a fuel grant, and an exemption from Motor Tax.

To qualify for the Scheme an applicant must be in possession of a Primary Medical Certificate. To qualify for a Primary Medical Certificate, an applicant must be permanently and severely disabled within the terms of the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Regulations 1994. The Senior Medical Officer for the relevant local Health Service Executive administrative area makes a professional clinical determination as to whether an individual applicant satisfies the medical criteria. Full details of the provisions of the Scheme and how to apply are available on the Revenue website <http://www.revenue.ie/en/tax/vrt/leaflets/drivers-passengers-with-disabilities-tax-relief-scheme.pdf>.

I am informed by the Minister for Health that due to concerns following on from reports of the Ombudsman in 2011 and 2012 regarding the legal status of both the Mobility Allowance and Motorised Transport Grant Scheme in the context of the Equal Status Acts, the Government decided to close both schemes in February 2013. The Government is aware of the continuing needs of people with a disability who rely on individual payments which support choice and independence. In that regard, monthly payments of €208.50 have continued to be made by the Health Service Executive to 4,700 people who were in receipt of the Mobility Allowance at the

time the scheme closed. The Government decided that the detailed preparatory work required for a new Transport Support Scheme and associated statutory provisions should be progressed by the Minister for Health. The Minister for Health has informed me that work on the policy proposals in this regard is at an advanced stage and he anticipates that this will be brought to Government shortly.

Motor Insurance

93. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Finance his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding car insurance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35363/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As Minister for Finance, I am responsible for the development of the legal framework governing financial regulation. Neither I nor the Central Bank of Ireland, can interfere in the provision or pricing of insurance products, as these matters are of a commercial nature, and are determined by insurance companies based on an assessment of the risks they are willing to accept. This inability to intervene in such matters is reinforced by the EU framework for insurance which expressly prohibits Member States from adopting rules which require insurance companies to obtain prior approval of the pricing or terms and conditions of insurance products.

However, I do accept that it is possible for the State to play a role in helping to stabilise the market. Consequently, I established the Cost of Insurance Working Group and appointed Minister of State Eoghan Murphy as Chair. The initial focus of the Working Group is on the factors that are contributing to the cost and availability of motor insurance and identifying what short-term, medium-term and long-term measures can be introduced to help consumers and businesses. A broad range of issues affecting the cost and availability of motor insurance are being examined by the Working Group.

The Cost of Insurance Working Group has met ten times to date and will continue to meet until the end of the year. The work is being progressed through four subgroups. These subgroups have been meeting on a weekly basis since their establishment on 1st September 2016.

The Working Group and the four subgroups have engaged in a consultation process and has met with and heard from a variety of relevant stakeholders including: Insurance Ireland, individual insurance companies, the Irish Brokers Association, AA Ireland, the Consumers Association of Ireland, the Law Society, the Bar Council, Irish Road Haulage Association, the Car Rental Council, the National Transport Authority and Tiománaí Tacsáí na hÉireann. I have also invited submissions to the Working Group from all interested parties to insurance@finance.gov.ie.

In addition, the Working Group has engaged with relevant insurance companies as part of this consultation process. The views and submissions of insurance companies, and all those from interested parties, are being considered as part of the ongoing work of the Working Group.

The Working Group provided me with an initial set of emerging recommendations at the end of October 2016. Since then, the Working Group has been working to finalise their Report and to develop an action plan to enable the relevant Government Departments and Offices to commence the implementation of agreed priority actions. The report and action plan will detail any legislative or regulatory changes that may be required and will include a detailed timeline for implementation.

From the emerging recommendations presented and the consultations carried out since, it is likely that the report will address nine key areas, with in the region of 40 recommendations

in total.

Vehicle Registration

94. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Finance if he will consider siting another vehicle registration tax registration centre in north Kildare in view of the demand from large population towns such as Leixlip, Celbridge and Maynooth and that the closest centre currently within the county is at Naas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35396/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by Revenue that an increase in the volume of applications to the NCT for vehicle registrations has resulted recently in some increase in waiting times.

In response, by the end of November, nine additional staff will be available for VRT work in a number of NCTS Centres nationally. A VRT function is being added to the Deansgrange NCTS Centre this month to allow for more capacity to assist in the greater Dublin/Kildare area. Also, Applus, the NCT service provider, is sourcing a location in the south Dublin area that will be opened as a dedicated VRT centre. In combination, Revenue believes that these actions will considerably alleviate the problem.

For authorised dealers in the Kildare area there are also two mobile units which operate from Dublin and one mobile unit which operates from Carlow. These are in place to assist dealers to get vehicles pre-inspected at their premises. For more information please refer to the Revenue website: <http://www.revenue.ie/en/tax/vrt/pre-registration-inspections-faqs.html>.

Revenue continues to monitor the level of service being provided by the service provider, Applus, and is satisfied that the service currently provided, while stretched at times, is a reasonable service overall and that customers are normally able to make a suitable appointment. Should the on-going demand for VRT registration services continue to increase, consideration will be given to further expansion of the service.

Ireland Strategic Investment Fund Investments

95. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Finance if he has considered the introduction of a formal ethical investment policy for the taxpayer funds that are currently invested as part of the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund, managed through the National Treasury Management Agency; his views on the appropriateness of holding investment in tobacco companies as part of this fund (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35275/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF) currently operates a Sustainability and Responsible Investment Policy, which is published on ISIF's website. In addition, the Fund operates to high international standards and invests in line with both the UN-sponsored Principles for Responsible Investment (PRI) and the Santiago Principles, which are the globally accepted best practice principles for sovereign investment funds such as ISIF.

ISIF commits to reviewing all of its investments for exposures to sectors and/or companies with potentially controversial business exposures and associated reputational risks. Historically, exclusion has not been part of ISIF's Responsible Investment strategy with the only exclusions from the Fund being mandated by legislation. To date, the Cluster Munitions and Anti-

Personnel Mines Act (2008) is the only relevant legislation and the ISIF operates a prohibited securities list of 19 companies on this basis.

I am informed by ISIF that its senior management and the NTMA Board's Investment Committee agreed to review the current Sustainability and Responsible Investment Policy to examine the potential of adding to the list of excluded investment categories. This process is currently underway and is expected to be completed by the end of the first quarter of 2017.

In relation to investment in tobacco companies, I am informed by the ISIF that on the basis of preliminary and unaudited figures for end Quarter 3 2016 i.e. as at 30th September 2016 ISIF had equity holdings in three tobacco companies with a value of €1.5m or 0.02 per cent of its total assets. Such investments should be considered in the context of ISIF's broader portfolio and the Fund's commitment to responsible investment.

The wider review of ISIF's investment strategy, due to take place 18 months after the establishment of the ISIF, will include an appraisal of the success of ISIF's mandate to date. Work on the review has commenced and is due to be completed by end-2016.

In light of all of the foregoing I am satisfied with the approach adopted by ISIF to date in implementing its agreed investment strategy while taking into account international best practice. Both the NTMA and Government are mindful of the fact that public attitudes and policy are not fixed and can evolve. The ongoing review of exclusions by the NTMA and the wider review of ISIF's investment strategy are opportunities to fine tune the approach in the light of relevant developments both nationally and internationally.

Tax Code

96. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Finance if consideration will be given in future finance Bills which would enable the capital gains tax 33% to be lowered for certain legal separation cases when the sale of a divorcing couple's shared property will have to be used to provide new accommodation for a family member with a disability; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35278/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by Revenue that a capital gains tax (CGT) relief applies in respect of a gain made by a couple who are legally separating on the disposal of their family home together with land occupied as its gardens or grounds up to an area (exclusive of the site of the residence) of one acre. For full relief to apply, the house must have been occupied by the individuals as their family home throughout the period during which they owned the property. Where the house was not so occupied during the whole period of ownership, only the proportion of the gain applicable to the period of occupation is exempt from CGT.

However, the exemption would continue to apply in circumstances where, after the legal separation, the house is occupied by one of the parties as his or her principal private residence.

In any event, the last 12 months of the period of ownership is treated as a period of occupation for the purposes of the relief.

Relief is also available in respect of a gain arising on the disposal of a house or part of a house which, during the period of ownership, was the sole residence of a dependent relative. A dependent relative means a relative of the individual who is incapacitated by old age or infirmity from maintaining himself or herself. For the relief to apply, the house must have been provided rent-free for the dependent relative.

Gains arising in respect of other jointly owned property such as, for example, a property which was held by a divorcing or separating couple as an investment are liable to CGT at the rate of 33%. The first €1,270 of a gain accruing to an individual in a tax year is exempt from CGT.

I do not propose to introduce a relief from disposals of property other than the owners' home in the circumstances outlined by the Deputy. The situation described is very specific and to introduce a relief for it would mean moving towards a situation where tax policy is designed not on general principles of equity and efficiency but for the benefit of specific individuals.

Tax Code

97. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Finance the reason a person (details supplied) does not qualify for inheritance tax. [35289/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): It is assumed that this question concerns the eligibility of the person concerned for Favourite Nephew Relief. Favourite Nephew Relief is provided for in the Capital Acquisitions Tax Consolidation Act 2003 (Schedule 2, Part 1, Paragraph 7). This relief applies to a niece or nephew who has worked substantially on a full-time basis for the disponent for the period of five years ending on the date the disponent ceases to have a beneficial interest in the business, including farming. The relief only applies to assets used in connection with the business.

To qualify for the relief, the beneficiary must have worked a minimum number of hours in the disponent's business, i.e.

- 15 hours per week in a small business, i.e. a business carried on exclusively by the disponent, the disponent's spouse or civil partner and the nephew/niece.

- 24 hours per week in a larger business, i.e. where there are other employees.

I am advised by Revenue that a Capital Acquisition Tax Return (IT38) was made on 1 November 2016. No claim to relief was made, either by the person himself or his agent. The "Additional Information" provided by the agent in the case is not sufficient to make a definitive determination on eligibility for Favourite Nephew Relief. If the person concerned or his agent considers that Favourite Nephew Relief applies, the supporting information should be forwarded to Revenue's BMW Region at the CAT Centralised Office, Government Offices, Millennium Centre, Dundalk, Co Louth.

Insurance Costs

98. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Finance the measures that have been taken to meet and engage with insurance companies here regarding excessive premiums being charged to consumers, particularly in counties Cavan and Monaghan. [35315/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As Minister for Finance, I am responsible for the development of the legal framework governing financial regulation. Neither I nor the Central Bank of Ireland, can interfere in the provision or pricing of insurance products, as these matters are of a commercial nature, and are determined by insurance companies based on an assessment of the risks that they are willing to accept. This inability to intervene in such matters is reinforced by the EU framework for insurance which expressly prohibits Member States from adopting rules which require insurance companies to obtain prior approval of the

pricing or terms and conditions of insurance products.

However, I do accept that it is possible for the State to play a role in helping to stabilise the market. Consequently, I established the Cost of Insurance Working Group and appointed Minister of State Eoghan Murphy as Chair. The initial focus of the Working Group is on the factors that are contributing to the cost and availability of motor insurance and identifying what short-term, medium-term and long-term measures can be introduced to help consumers and businesses. A broad range of issues affecting the cost and availability of motor insurance are being examined by the Working Group.

The Cost of Insurance Working Group has met ten times to date and will continue to meet until the end of the year. The work is being progressed through four subgroups. These subgroups have been meeting on a weekly basis since their establishment on 1st September 2016.

The Working Group and the four subgroups have engaged in a consultation process and has met with and heard from a variety of relevant stakeholders including: Insurance Ireland, the Irish Brokers Association, AA Ireland, Auto Records Limited, the Consumers Association of Ireland, the Law Society, the Bar Council, Irish Road Haulage Association, the Car Rental Council, the Freight Transport Association of Ireland, the National Transport Authority, the Motor Insurers' Bureau of Ireland and Tiomanai Tacsai na hEireann.

In addition, the Working Group has engaged with relevant insurance companies as part of this consultation process. The views and submissions of insurance companies, and all those from interested parties, are being considered as part of the ongoing work of the Working Group.

The Working Group provided me with an initial set of emerging recommendations at the end of October 2016. Since then, the Working Group has been working to finalise their Report and to develop an action plan to enable the relevant Government Departments and Offices to commence the implementation of agreed priority actions. The report and action plan will detail any legislative or regulatory changes that may be required and will include a detailed timeline for implementation.

From the emerging recommendations presented and the consultations carried out since, it is likely that the report will address nine key areas, with in the region of 40 recommendations in total.

State Claims Agency

99. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of money the State Claims Agency has paid out in claims brought against State and public authorities in each of the past three years. [35330/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy will be aware, the NTMA is designated as the State Claims Agency (SCA) when performing the claims management and risk management functions designated to it under the National Treasury Management Agency Act 1990, as amended.

In answer to the Deputy's question, I refer to the material provided by the SCA and which is outlined in the following table. The material provided by the State Claims Agency covers the amounts paid during the period 2013 to 2015, and the report is correct as of 11/11/2016.

This information has been extracted from the National Incident Management System, launched by the SCA in June 2014 as a confidential and secure end-to-end risk management

tool that allows enterprises to manage incidents throughout the life cycle. The information included reflects payments for both resolving and managing active claims, and it includes the total amount paid per year across all Delegate State Authorities and Healthcare Enterprises (excluding Private Healthcare Schemes and Property Damage recovery claims). It should be noted that the amount paid reflects payments made in a given year, and these payments include legal fees, damages and other expert costs.

Table 1: Total amount paid per year*

Transaction Year	2013	2014	2015	Grand Total
Amount Paid	€137,402,681	€130,552,841	€222,763,493**	€490,719,015

* Attention is drawn to the fact that the SCA amended its reporting methodology, at end of Q1 2016, to now recognise transactions on payment date as opposed to transaction date. This adjustment relates to figures for 2014 and 2015 only.

** The notable increase between 2014 and 2015 is due to the following factors:- the SCA's expanded remit with a number of new delegated State Authorities, the maturing of the claims portfolio, catastrophic claims reverting from Periodic Payment Orders (PPO) to lump sum settlements and the outcome of two specific cases during 2015.

Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland Data

100. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of funding allocated by the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland to small and medium-sized enterprises in County Waterford to date; the total number of applications approved nationally; and the amount of funding involved since its launch. [35331/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy will be aware, the Government is committed to supporting the financing needs of SMEs in all regions of the country and ensuring that there is an adequate supply of affordable and appropriate credit to meet their needs. In this regard, the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) is a key initiative that was developed in order to increase the availability of low cost, flexible finance to SMEs.

The SBCI publishes lending figures twice a year and these are available on its website: www.sbc.gov.ie. To the end of June 2016, the SBCI has lent €347 million to 8,619 SMES. More than 80% of loans were for investment purposes and the average loan size is approximately €40,000. The SMEs who received SBCI finance are from a variety of business and economic sectors and are spread across every region of the country. It is encouraging to note that 85% of SMEs supported by the SBCI are based outside Dublin. The SBCI breaks down its lending on a regional basis. The proportion of SBCI loans made to SMEs in the South East Region, which includes County Waterford, is 10.9%. The SBCI continues to make significant funding available to SMEs across Ireland who are seeking finance to invest in and grow their businesses.

Banking Operations

101. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding banks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35417/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy will be aware, operational and strategic management issues in the Irish banks are solely a matter for the board and management of the relevant institution within the constraints imposed by their regulator, the

Central Bank, and the law as it applies. Notwithstanding the fact that the State has a significant shareholding in a number of institutions, I have no function in their day-to-day activities. The Relationship Framework Agreements define the arm's length nature of the relationship between the State and the banks in which the State has an investment; the relationship framework agreement for each institution can be accessed below.

AIB: <http://finance.gov.ie/sites/default/files/Allied-Irish-Banks1.pdf>

Bank of Ireland: <http://finance.gov.ie/sites/default/files/Bank-of-Ireland1.pdf>

Permanent TSB: <http://www.finance.gov.ie/sites/default/files/Relationship%20Frame-works%20for%20the%20Irish%20Banks%20Irish%20Life%20and%20Permanent.pdf>

National Debt

102. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance regarding the recent strong rise in bond yields, a key measure of long-term interest rate expectations, if he has assessed the potential cost of rising interest rates on our national debt and economic growth over the coming years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35425/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): My Department and the National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA) are monitoring, on an ongoing basis, bond market developments. Government bond yields in general including for Ireland have risen in recent weeks and particularly so in recent days. It remains to be seen whether this is a temporary re-pricing or the beginning of a more sustained rise in yields generally.

While the recent increase in government bond yields has no immediate impact on our debt servicing costs, a sustained rise could negatively impact the cost of servicing the National Debt over the coming years.

I am aware of the sensitivity of the economy to changes in interest rates. Indeed, the Risk and Sensitivity Analysis chapter in Ireland's Stability Programme April 2016 Update (SPU) included an illustrative assessment of the impact of a 1 percentage point (pp) increase in interest rates (SPU page 27).

It is important to note that interest rates are influenced by a number of factors including inter alia inflationary expectations, exchange rate developments, saving patterns of firms and households and risk premia. The precise impact of rising interest rates on economic growth will depend on which factors are driving the increase and whether the increase is likely to persist.

The NTMA completed its final bond auction of 2016 on 3 November. That auction received bids of 2.6 times the €750m being auctioned, demonstrating that investor interest was very strong. This represented Ireland's continuing growth and demonstrates confidence in Ireland among the global markets. With the completion of that auction the NTMA has issued €8.25 billion nominal from its stated target range of €6 – 10 billion in the bond markets this year, at a weighted average yield of 0.82 per cent.

The NTMA's debt issuances earlier in the year, a time when Irish Sovereign borrowing yields were at close to record lows, have allowed it to lock in longer maturities at low interest rates, which is positive for debt servicing costs and will be important when interest rates return to normal.

It is important to bear in mind that Ireland's fundamental debt dynamics are improving and debt servicing costs are declining. These improved fundamentals mean that Ireland has now

regained its A-rating with all the major credit rating agencies, following Moody's upgrade earlier this year.

The Exchequer is in a healthy funding position at present. It had €9 billion in cash and other liquid short-term investment balances available to it at end-October and it has limited financing needs in the months ahead. My Department forecasts a 2017 Exchequer Borrowing Requirement (EBR) of €2.2 billion. The next Treasury Bond maturity is not until October 2017.

Looking towards 2017 the NTMA has advised me that next month they will announce their 2017 funding plan which will include a planned bond issuance range.

Corporation Tax Regime

103. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if he has conducted a risk assessment on the potential for a decrease in our corporate tax receipts in view of potential changes to the United States tax code; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35426/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): My department continually monitors potential international tax changes that may have an impact on Ireland. No risk assessment has been carried out into the impact of potential changes to the US tax code. The impact of any US tax reform on Ireland will clearly depend on the exact nature of the reform. Any reforms are likely to be complex and involve broader measures than simply reducing rates. Regardless of the corporate tax rate applied by the US, Ireland's tax offering and Ireland generally will remain very attractive for US and other multinationals. US companies will always need a base of operations in Europe and Ireland continues to be a very attractive place to invest.

Government Deficit

104. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the ESRI's assertion that the structural deficit may be overstated due to a failure to adequately capture housing market developments. [35427/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As we are now all too aware, given the bursting of the property bubble, the interplay between volatile house prices, tax revenues and the impact on sustainability of the public finance has been problematic for Ireland.

I am aware of the May 2015 analysis published by the ESRI 'Assessing the sustainable nature of housing-related taxation receipts: The case of Ireland'. This relies on estimates of fundamental house prices to determine the extent of over/undervaluation, something which is unobservable and problematic. The authors suggest that partly as a result of undervaluation over the years to 2010 to 2014, declines in tax revenue fell below estimated fundamental levels. All else equal, they maintain this may result in an overstatement of the structural deficit.

Given the recovery in house prices since the paper was published, however, the extent of undervaluation is likely to be notably reduced, along with any corresponding over-statement of the structural deficit.

The structural balance is unobservable and must be estimated by statistical techniques. Whilst conceptually, the notion of removing cyclically-sensitive elements from the budgetary position is appealing, its measurement is extremely complex in the context of small open economy such as Ireland.

For the purposes of the Stability and Growth Pact, the structural budgetary position for Ireland along with all Member States is assessed by the European Commission on the basis of the commonly agreed EU-wide methodology. This is provided for in legislation. Whilst the methodology broadly captures the sensitivity of specific taxes to underlying macroeconomic developments, it does not explicitly incorporate housing market developments.

While there are undoubtedly issues with this methodology for Ireland, and these have been highlighted by my Department, work continues at a European level to improve it and make it more applicable for small open economies. Moreover, for domestic purposes, my Department has looked at alternative methodologies directly incorporating inter alia both house price and credit movements, and some work in this area has been published.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

105. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will examine and review the case of a person (details supplied) who has been refused a Student Universal Support Ireland grant by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35263/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As part of a comprehensive customer service and communications strategy provided by Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI), to ensure that all necessary avenues are open to applicants to receive the information they need, a dedicated email and phone line service is provided by SUSI for Oireachtas members. This was established to meet an identified need for applicants who choose to engage the assistance of their public representatives in making enquiries about their grant applications.

This service complements the established channels provided by SUSI which include online application tracking, a dedicated website, a telephone helpdesk, email and social media, including Facebook and Twitter.

Enquiries may be emailed direct to SUSI at oireachtas@susi.ie. Staff in SUSI are responding to email queries within a matter of days.

If an individual applicant considers that she/he has been unjustly refused a student grant or that the rate of grant awarded is not the correct one, she/he may appeal, in the first instance, to SUSI.

Where an individual applicant has had an appeal turned down in writing by SUSI and remains of the view that the scheme has not been interpreted correctly in his/her case, an appeal form outlining the position may be submitted by the applicant to the independent Student Grants Appeals Board within the required timeframe.

Schools Building Projects Status

106. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the urgency of the upgrade of a school (details supplied); if he will prioritise this project for completion and make necessary funding available as a matter of priority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35265/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy will be aware that a building project for the school in question is included in my Department's 6 Year Construction Programme (2019/21). My Department is aware of the school's accommodation

needs and will liaise with the school in due course in the context of progressing the project into the architectural planning process.

Schools Property

107. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will give permission to a school (details supplied) to lease the handball alley on the grounds of the school to the Boherbue parish; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35301/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The property referred to by the Deputy is not in my ownership and therefore any leasing arrangements are a matter for the building owner.

However, in common with other buildings of its kind, where significant grant aid is provided by my Department for the development of school premises, investment is secured by way of a long-term legal agreement known as a charging lease. In that context the property owners sought the consent of the Minister to a proposal to lease the handball alley on the school grounds.

Officials in my Department have recently written to the solicitors representing the property owners stating that my Department has no objection to such arrangements being put in place.

Education and Training Boards

108. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a project (details supplied); the timeframe for provision of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35303/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The project referred to by the Deputy was advocated during consultation meetings surrounding the development of a local authority strategy. The ETB in question is a member of the strategy group established by the local authority and has participated in its public consultation process.

The project is a matter for the local authority in the first instance in line with its strategy. I understand that while the ETB's premises may be part of the consideration for same, no decision to house the project there has been taken.

The ETB, in the context of its training remit, provides IT-related courses and apprenticeships from the location in question.

Schools Refurbishment

109. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there is dedicated funding for schools that would like to enhance safety measures at their facility; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35311/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that it is open to schools to apply to my Department for funding for improvement works to school buildings and grounds under the Summer Works Scheme. It is a matter for the individual school authority to prioritise the project for which funding is being sought. Works such as those

referred to by the Deputy may qualify to be considered for funding under this scheme.

In addition, primary schools may utilise their Minor Works Grant to address improvement works to their buildings and site areas. Schools prioritise the works they wish to undertake within the terms of the scheme.

Minor Works Scheme

110. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the relevant details, including deadlines, that schools need to be aware of with regards to the minor works scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35312/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department is currently determining the likely end-year position on capital expenditure 2016 and I hope to be able to make an announcement regarding the Minor Works Grant 2016/2017 very shortly. The Minor Works Grant issues to primary schools without the need for primary schools to submit an application.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

111. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the pupil-teacher ratio will be reviewed and decreased; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35318/16]

112. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address concerns that children are at a disadvantage where one teacher has to teach four classes due to the pupil-teacher ratio being too high for rural schools in Counties Cavan and Monaghan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35319/16]

113. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the fact that teachers are leaving national schools due to the pupil-teacher ratio which in some schools has one teacher teaching four classes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35320/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 111 to 113, inclusive, together.

The criteria used for the allocation of teachers to primary schools is published annually on the website of the Department of Education and Skills. The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30 September. The staffing schedule operates in a clear and transparent manner and treats all similar types of schools equally irrespective of location.

Improvements to the staffing of schools with four teachers and less were announced for the 2015/16 school year. These improvements are improved retention thresholds for the 2nd, 3rd and 4th classroom teacher and also the improved appointment and retention thresholds for one-teacher schools situated 8 km or more from the nearest school of the same type of patronage and/or language of instruction.

In addition, Budget 2016 announced a 1 point improvement to the primary staffing schedule. The improved staffing schedule has been implemented for the 2016/17 school year and applies to small schools at both appointment and retention levels.

Following a review of the staffing allocation for Small Primary Schools, Budget 2017 announced two adjustments in relation to one teacher schools. Where the school is the sole primary school on an island the school will be able to appoint a second teacher. In relation to single teacher schools generally with an enrolment of 15 or more pupils, the school can apply to the staffing appeals board for a second post where the single teacher has pupils across 6 or more class groups. The detailed arrangements will be set out in the staffing schedule circular for the 2017/18 school year and this circular will be available on my Department's website in mid-January.

Schools Building Projects Status

114. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the technical assessment of a school building (details supplied) will take place with regard to capital works; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35327/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy will be aware that a project for the school to which he refers was included in my Department's 6 Year Capital Programme which was announced last November. The project for the school in question will be progressed with a view to proceeding to tender and construction stages in 2019-2021, as outlined in the programme.

In that regard, my Department will be in contact with the school authorities in the coming weeks for the purposes of arranging a technical site visit to consider the options for progressing the project.

School Accommodation

115. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of prefab units rented by primary and post-primary schools in County Waterford; and the current average rental cost per unit per annum to his Department. [35329/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The information requested by the Deputy is not readily available. My Department will collate the information and it will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Schools Building Projects Status

116. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the stage of the planning process the development of a secondary school (details supplied) at Merrymeeting, Rathnew, County Wicklow is at; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35374/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The school building project for the school to which the Deputy refers is currently at an advanced stage of architectural planning (Stage 2b Detailed Design) which includes the application for Statutory Approvals and the preparation of Tender Documents. Planning Permission has been secured and the Fire Certificate and Disability Access Certificate applications are in progress.

Once all statutory approvals have been obtained and the Stage 2b report is submitted to my Department and reviewed, my Department will contact the Board of Management with regard to the further progression of the project at that time. This project was included in the 6 year

construction programme announced on 17 November 2015.

School Accommodation

117. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the total cost of renting prefabs for a secondary school (details supplied) located on the site at Merrymeeting, Rathnew, County Wicklow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35375/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I take it that the Deputy is referring to a primary school which is listed in the details supplied with the Parliamentary Question. The school in question is currently temporarily located in a property owned by Kildare/Wicklow Education Training Board so the question of prefab rental does not arise.

Schools Site Acquisitions

118. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the 1.7 acre site purchased by his Department for €560,000 at Crinion Park, Wicklow town remains in his Department's possession; if so, his plans for this site; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35376/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department purchased a 1.48 acre site in Crinion Park, Wicklow town in 2002 on the basis of Outline Planning Permission having been granted for an eight classroom primary school at this location. It was intended to provide permanent accommodation for Gaelscoil Chill Mhantáin on the site.

Enrolments at the Gaelscoil have since grown and it now requires a 16 classroom school building. The site at Crinion Park is not technically suitable to provide for such a school and a project to deliver permanent accommodation for Gaelscoil Chill Mhantáin is planned at an alternative location.

The site at Crinion Park remains in my Department's ownership and there are no current plans for development at this location.

Schools Building Projects Status

119. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a secondary school (details supplied) will remain at its current location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35377/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to clarify for the Deputy that a primary school is currently temporarily located in the property to which he refers pending the construction of a new permanent school building for the primary school. The building is owned by Kildare/Wicklow Education Training Board.

As the Deputy will be aware, a building project to provide the new school building is included on my Department's 6 Year Construction Programme. This project is in advanced architectural planning. The school in question will vacate the temporary building when the permanent school is constructed and the building will be used by the Education Training Board for education purposes.

School Equipment

120. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his Department's position regarding school lockers being adapted to accommodate helmets (details supplied); if his Department has discussed this with the Road Safety Authority and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35398/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): My Department does not specify the type of locker to be installed in schools. This is a matter for schools themselves.

This is a local issue for individual schools and each pupil as to how they manage their locker space. This matter can be raised by pupils or their parents with their school authority for advice on locker management or, alternatively, with a view to making other cycle helmet storage arrangements within the school as necessary.

The Road Safety Authority and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport do not have any remit with regard to the day to day running of a school which is a matter for the school authority. Accordingly, this matter has not been discussed with those bodies.

Pension Provisions

121. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the proposal and plans with regard to the IMI defined benefit pension scheme in the proposed merger of the Irish Management Institute (IMI) and University College Cork (UCC) if the entitlements of all of the members of the pension scheme have been secured; if it is ensured that they will receive their entitlements; and if the deficit in the pension fund has been met. [35400/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The IMI is a private institute and the proposed merger between IMI and UCC is in the first instance a matter for the governing body of UCC although approval of the HEA may be required. My officials are awaiting full details of the proposed merger from the HEA.

The pension liabilities of IMI remain the responsibility of IMI and will not become a liability of UCC or the State. It is a matter for the Trustees of the IMI pension scheme, which is a private pension scheme, to make appropriate provision for its members.

Institutes of Technology Funding

122. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding the lack of financial support for the institute of technology in Tralee (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35405/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department allocates recurrent funding to the Higher Education Authority (HEA) for direct disbursement to the HEA designated higher education institutions, including Institutes of Technology (IoTs) such as Tralee Institute of Technology. The HEA allocates this funding to the institutions and the internal disbursement of funding is then a matter for the individual institution.

The HEA has been closely monitoring the financial position of all of the IoTs and in particular are working closely with those Institutes, such as Tralee IT, that are experiencing financial

difficulties in order to ensure appropriate mechanisms are put in place to eliminate any deficit as quickly as possible.

The HEA has a policy framework in place for engaging with vulnerable IoTs which requires Institutes to submit a three year plan to return them to a balanced budget situation. If the Institute is unable to demonstrate how a return to a balanced budget can be achieved within this timeframe, or if actual performance deviates significantly from the plan, then the HEA will seek the appointment of an independent financial expert to work with the Governing Body and Executive Management Team to agree a revised plan and programme of remedial action.

My Department and the HEA are aware of the financial difficulties being experienced by a number of the IoTs. The Financial Review of the Institutes, recently undertaken by the HEA in order to provide an overview of the financial health of the IoT sector, to consider capacity issues and to examine the challenges for the institutions given their respective plans for the future, makes a number of recommendations on how some of the issues which contribute to funding problems in the IoT sector can be addressed. These policy recommendations will feed into the work being undertaken on developing a sustainable funding model for the sector.

Funding overall for the higher education sector is a key concern for me particularly in light of the additional pressure that will fall on the system over the next decade or so. In seeking to address the issue in the short term, I have for the first time in nine years secured as part of Budget 2017, additional funding for the sector. In 2017, additional funding of €36.5 million will be made available with €160 million additional over the next three years.

The Report of the Expert Group on Future Funding for Higher Education, published in July, clearly outlines the funding challenges and offers a number of approaches and recommendations for consideration for the medium term. As committed to in the Programme for Government, the report has been referred to the Oireachtas Education Committee and this consultation will form part of the process of formulating a plan for the future of the sector.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

123. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which the full requirement in respect of special needs school places has been met in County Kildare; the number of such places still outstanding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35490/16]

126. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which his Department continues to monitor the special needs teaching requirements in terms of teachers and SNAs at primary and second level in all schools throughout the country; the extent to which he expects to be in a position to meet the increased demand; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35493/16]

131. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which his Department continues to monitor the special needs teaching requirements in terms of teachers and SNAs at primary and second level in all schools throughout County Kildare; the extent to which he expects to be in position to meet the increased demand; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35498/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 123, 126 and 131 together.

Funding for special education provision in 2016 will amount to some €1.5 billion, which is

equivalent to over 17% of the gross overall current allocation for education and training and an increase of 10% in spending in the past two years.

This funding provides for a range of supports and services including additional learning and resource teaching support, access to Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support, special transport arrangements, building adaptations, enhanced capitation in special schools and special classes, specialised equipment, additional teacher training and the services of the National Educational Psychological Service.

Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) are allocated to mainstream Primary, Post Primary schools and to Special Schools to assist children with special educational needs who also have additional and significant care needs. Such support is provided in order to facilitate the attendance of those pupils at school and also to minimise disruption to class or teaching time for the pupils concerned, or for their peers, and with a view to developing their independent living skills.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE), through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), is responsible for processing applications from schools for Special Educational Needs supports.

The NCSE allocates SNA support to schools in accordance with the criteria set out in my Department's Circular 0030/2014. This year, 12,900 Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) are available for allocation to schools, to the end of 2016, which represents an increase of 23% over the numbers allocated in 2011.

There are currently over 12,400 learning support and Resource Teacher posts in mainstream primary and post primary schools.

The NCSE has allocated 7430 resource teacher posts to schools for the 2016/17 school year. This represents an increase of 41% in the number of resource teachers which have been allocated since the 2011/12 school year, at which point 5265 posts were allocated.

The NCSE has published details of the SNA and Resource Teaching Posts allocated to schools, including schools in County Kildare, for the current school year, 2016/2017, on its website www.ncse.ie.

In addition, over 5000 learning support posts have been allocated to schools under the General Allocation Model for primary schools and Learning Support allocations for post primary schools.

The NCSE, in consultation with the relevant education partners, also has responsibility for the establishment of special classes in various geographical areas, as required. The NCSE continues to engage with schools in opening special classes where there is an identified need for special class provision.

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

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

As part of the recent Budget announcements, an additional 115 SNA posts at an annual cost of €3.75 million will be provided for allocation from January to June 2017 and an additional €18 million in 2017 to provide for around 900 additional resource teacher posts.

I also announced that following development and piloting over the past number of years, a new model for the allocation of teaching resources for children with special educational needs

will be implemented from September 2017. Further details regarding implementation of the new model will be announced in the coming months.

The combination of supports provided means that school places are available for all children with special educational needs, including in County Kildare, regardless of their level of need.

Schools Building Projects

124. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which the school building programme at primary and second level in County Kildare continues to proceed as planned having particular regard to the urgent requirement of school places. [35491/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that it is my Department's intention to fully implement the 6 Year Capital Plan (2016-2021).

As the Deputy is aware, the 6 Year Capital Plan (2016-2021), announced last November, as part of the Government's €2.8 billion schools capital investment programme, details the major school building projects that are scheduled to proceed to tender/construction over the lifetime of the Plan. It is my Department's intention to progress these projects, including those listed for County Kildare, though the various stages of the architectural planning and construction process as outlined in the Plan.

The programme aims to prioritise new building projects and major extensions, including special schools, in areas where significant demographic need has been established. The Deputy will also be aware that the Capital Programme also progresses school projects that were announced under my Department's 5 Year Plan (2012-2016). In addition, the Capital Programme also provides for devolved funding for additional classrooms for schools, where an immediate enrolment need has been identified, such as the appointment of an additional teacher.

I set out for the Deputy's information details of the school projects in County Kildare that are listed on my Department's 6-Year school building programme.

6-Year Capital Programme 2016-2021

County	Roll Number	School Name & Address	School Type
Kildare	16706G	St Joseph's BNS, Kilcock	Primary
Kildare	18288B	Scoil Mhichil Naofa, Athy	Primary
Kildare	19796C	St Patrick's BNS, Clane	Primary
Kildare	20428D	Gaelscoil Mhic Aodha, Kildare Town	Primary
Kildare	61702D	St Paul's Secondary School, Monasterevin	Post-Primary
Kildare	15769C16707I	Scoil Eimhinn Naofa & St Peter's NS, Monasterevin	Primary
Kildare	17341U	Maynooth BNS	Primary
Kildare	17872F	St Conleth's/St Mary's, Newbridge	Primary
Kildare	17873H	St Conleth's Infant School, Newbridge	Primary
Kildare	19277B	St Anne's Special School, Ballymany Cross, Curragh	Special School
Kildare	76194S	Naas Community College, Naas	Post-Primary
Kildare	17254C	St Corban's NS, Naas	Primary
Kildare	18988G	St Raphael's Special School, Celbridge	Special School
Kildare	19455W	St Mark's Special School, Newbridge	Special School
Kildare	20292E	Maynooth ETNS	Primary
Kildare	61690W	Cross & Passion College, Kilcullen	Post-Primary

County	Roll Number	School Name & Address	School Type
Kildare	70650L	Athy Community College	Post-Primary
Kildare	70720G	St Farnan's Post Primary, Prosperous	Post-Primary
Kildare	13902O	Hewetson NS, Clane	Primary
Kildare	61681V	Patrician Post-Primary, Newbridge	Post-Primary
Kildare	61730I	St Mary's Girls Post-Primary, Naas	Post-Primary

Schools Building Projects

125. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which the use of precast building methods can be incorporated into the school building programme thereby facilitating rapid construction without reduction in specification including heat conservation capacity and life expectancy of the buildings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35492/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Precast concrete building methods are already being used on school building projects, primarily the Departments "RAPID" Design & Build programme, and have been for a number of years. A precast concrete structure offers programme advantages in that the structural frame is quickly erected following which the roof can be constructed and remaining trades can then proceed under cover, protected from weather. However, a precast concrete frame can be more expensive than the concrete blockwork construction traditionally used on school buildings.

Economies in using precast concrete can be achieved in building types where there is a lot of repetition of identical wall panels. This is not always possible with school buildings due to site constraints. Contractors tendering for school building projects may propose to use precast concrete in lieu of blockwork on a cost neutral basis. A precast concrete solution can only be shown to be economical when it is in competition with other structural solutions (e.g. loadbearing blockwork, structural steel frame, etc.).

The Department considers that the balance between precast concrete building methods and other alternative systems for building schools is reasonable at present and will continue to monitor the marketplace for any changes that might be required in order to maintain equilibrium between quick delivery and value for money.

Question No. 126 answered with Question No. 123.

Schools Building Projects Status

127. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which his Department continues to examine the need for new building at a school (details supplied); when he expects an evaluation to be completed; the extent to which the project continues to be examined in the relevant section of his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35494/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that the school in question contacted my Department in March 2015 regarding its accommodation. My Department subsequently provided the school with an application form. To date, my Department has no record of receiving a completed application form. In that regard, a further communication issued to the school earlier this year. Any application received will be assessed in the context of current competing priorities and the need to prioritise available funding for

essential classroom accommodation where additional teachers are being appointed.

Physical Education Facilities

128. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which favourable consideration and support will be given to the provision of extended facilities at a school (details supplied) which might double for indoor recreational purposes; the extent to which the project continues to be examined in the relevant section of his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35495/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy will be aware that my Department's priority is to ensure that each child will have access to a physical school place. In October 2015, my Department advised the school in question that its application for a PE hall could not be grant-aided due to the need to prioritise the limited funding available for essential classroom accommodation to meet demographic demand.

Given the need to meet demographic growth, the delivery of new schools, together with extension projects, to meet future demand will be the main focus of the Department's budget for the coming years. In this context, it is not possible to indicate at this point when a project for school referred to by the Deputy can be progressed.

School Accommodation Provision

129. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which he has received submissions from the school authorities at a school (details supplied) requesting a top up of funding to complete the project; when he expects to be in a position to meet the request; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35496/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The school to which the Deputy refers was allocated funding under my Department's Additional Accommodation Scheme 2015 to provide 3 mainstream classrooms.

The school subsequently applied for additional funding for the project. My Department has been in communication with the school authority about this application to ascertain how and why the additional funding request arises.

My Department expects to be able to take a decision on the request shortly and this will issue directly to the school authority.

Bullying in Schools

130. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which revised procedures in respect of detection and addressing the problem of school bullying continue to be examined with current effect; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35497/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Action Plan on Bullying sets out my Department's approach to tackling bullying and promoting an anti-bullying culture in schools. It recommended actions that focus on support for schools, teacher training, research and awareness raising and aim to ensure that all forms of bullying are addressed. Implementation of the actions is ongoing and good progress has been made across all areas of the plan.

The Deputy will be aware that as part of the implementation of the Action Plan on Bullying, my Department published new anti-bullying procedures for all primary and post primary schools at the beginning of the 2013/14 school year.

The procedures are designed to give direction and guidance to school authorities and school personnel in preventing and tackling school-based bullying behaviour amongst its pupils. They include specific requirements in relation to the use of prevention and education strategies and the consistent investigation, follow up and recording of bullying behaviour.

The procedures for schools include important oversight arrangements that involve the school principal reporting regularly to the Board of Management and a requirement for the Board to undertake an annual review of the school's anti-bullying policy and its implementation. Confirmation that the annual review has been completed must be provided to the Parents' Association and published on the school website.

In addition, my Department's Inspectorate, as part of its inspection work, places a stronger focus on the actions schools take to create a positive school culture and to prevent and tackle bullying.

Question No. 131 answered with Question No. 123.

Schools Building Projects Status

132. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress to date in regard to the provision of proposed two new schools (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35499/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The project to which the Deputy refers is currently out to tender. The closing date for the receipt of tenders is 12 December 2016.

Skills Development

133. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which it is expected to match the skill requirement of industry with the skills and qualifications of those exiting education in the current year based on previous years' experience; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35500/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): My Department has already developed and will continue to develop ambitious strategies and actions in the education and training sector to meet the existing and future skills requirements of industry as well as sustaining economic success and converting economic success into building strong communities.

I launched the first Action Plan for Education with the Taoiseach and Minister of State Halligan in September. The central vision contained in the Plan is to make the Irish Education and Training system the best in Europe over the next decade. The plan contains hundreds of actions to be implemented with particular focus on disadvantage, skills, and continuous improvement within the education system.

In addition, the new National Skills Strategy 2025 launched earlier this year by my Department aims to provide a framework for skills development that will help drive Ireland's growth

both economically and societally over the next decade. The Strategy underlines the importance of meeting the key skills needs of enterprise.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

134. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which primary school places and class requirements in County Kildare continue to be met; if class sizes fall within the national average; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35501/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that it is my Department's intention to fully implement the 6 Year Capital Plan (2016-2021).

As the Deputy is aware, the 6 Year Capital Plan (2016-2021), announced last November, as part of the Government's €2.8 billion schools capital investment programme, details the major school building projects that are scheduled to proceed to tender/construction over the lifetime of the Plan. It is my Department's intention to progress these projects, including those listed for County Kildare, though the various stages of the architectural planning and construction process as outlined in the Plan.

The programme aims to prioritise new building projects and major extensions, including special schools, in areas where significant demographic need has been established. The Deputy will also be aware that the Capital Programme also progresses school projects that were announced under my Department's 5 Year Plan (2012-2016). In addition, the Capital Programme also provides for devolved funding for additional classrooms for schools, where an immediate enrolment need has been identified, such as the appointment of an additional teacher.

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

The Statistics Section of my Department's website contains extensive data relating to class sizes at primary level. The most recent published information relates to the 2015/2016 school year. Statistics in relation to the current school year will be published in 2017 when the data has been compiled.

The configuration of classes and the deployment of classroom teachers are done at local school level. My Department's guidance to schools is that the number of pupils in any class is kept as low as possible taking all relevant contextual factors into account (e.g. classroom accommodation, fluctuating enrolment etc.). School authorities are also requested, where possible, to use their autonomy under the staffing schedule to implement smaller class sizes for junior classes.

Environmental Policy

135. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to ban or highlight the effects of microbeads used in personal care products and biomedical research; the effects they are having on health and marine life; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35274/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Microbeads are one facet of the larger problem of marine litter. Marine litter is a key feature of national and international maritime environmental policy. It has been identified as an

issue to be addressed under the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive. It is also specified as a harmful human activity under the OSPAR Treaty which addresses pollution and other human impacts on the North Eastern Atlantic Environment.

The marine litter problem is largely caused by poor waste management on land and at sea. Marine litter can be found in every aspect of the marine environment, and ranges in size from large objects such as fishing nets or shipping containers to micro-litter particles (defined as particles being smaller than 1 millimetre in size) such as fibres from artificial fabrics or micro-beads. The fact that litter can move across marine borders with wind and currents means that no one country can solve the problem on its own. It needs an international approach.

However, the extent of the marine litter problem and the level of harm it causes to the environment are not fully understood at this time. Nonetheless, we are taking measures in co-operation with the EU and with our OSPAR partners to address this issue on the basis of the precautionary principle (i.e. that we should treat it as potentially harmful and respond accordingly while we develop our understanding of the actual harm it causes).

In conjunction with this, we are undertaking research to quantify the problem, identify the main sources of marine litter, establish the harm caused, and develop techniques to prevent, reduce and monitor marine litter levels. We are also working to raise awareness of this issue. For example I am supporting An Taisce with funding to develop a world leading module on marine litter as part of their excellent Green Schools' programme. If this pilot programme is successful, it will be rolled out, not only throughout Ireland, but will be used as a model internationally.

Plastic is a particular problem for the marine environment. Due to its buoyancy, it can easily be washed down rivers, blown offshore or collected by the tide from the shore as well as being dumped or lost directly into the seas from ships and fishing boats. It does not biodegrade and remains in the environment for a very long time. It can breakdown into secondary micro-plastic particles through erosion and there is evidence that both large plastic items and microplastics are being ingested by marine organisms with undetermined consequences. Microplastics are also entering the marine environment in other forms such as microbeads in products.

In relation to microbeads specifically, it is estimated that they represent a small but significant portion of marine micro plastic pollution. It is hard to remove them from waste water which can flow via rivers and estuaries into the sea and once there, they are impossible to remove. There are many well established natural biodegradable and mineral alternatives and there is a widely held view that their societal value as a product is considerably less than their potential for environmental harm. In general it is considered that plastic microbeads used in cosmetics and body care products, such as exfoliating creams and body washes, as well as in detergents and surface cleaning agents, should, ultimately, be banned from use. However, for maximum impact, this would be best achieved at an EU-wide level. Accordingly Ireland supports, in principle, the ultimate introduction of a ban on micro-plastic beads from cosmetics and detergents across the EU.

However, a comprehensive consultation process needs to be undertaken, including key stakeholders in industrial sectors, environmental science, public health and the general public, to establish how best to achieve this and how quickly it can be done. It is also important that any such proposal should be clearly limited to cosmetics and detergents at this time to avoid possible unintended consequences of a blanket ban. For example, there are legitimate uses for micro-plastics in medical and veterinary pharmaceuticals and alternatives may not yet have been developed that are safe for general use.

Local Government Reform

136. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if his Department has conducted an analysis of the cost effectiveness of the 2014 amalgamation of Waterford city and county councils, and the parallel abolition of Dungarvan and Tramore town councils; and if so, the findings which were arrived at. [35332/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The decision to replace town authorities with a new model of municipal governance under the Local Government Reform Act 2014 was designed primarily to strengthen local government within counties and to address widely acknowledged and long-standing weaknesses and anomalies in the previous system, rather than as a cost saving exercise. However, the 2012 Action Programme for Effective Local Government, Putting People First indicated that it would also be reasonable to anticipate that overall savings to local authorities in the range €15 to €20 million per annum relative to 2010 expenditure figures would be achievable from sub-county reorganisation when the reformed structures, including the establishment of municipal districts, had bedded down.

The Waterford Reorganisation Implementation Group, which oversaw planning for the merger of Waterford City Council and Waterford County Council identified long term payroll savings of some €4,350,000 per annum which it anticipated would accrue through the non-replacement of staff and councillors. In addition, a review by Grant Thornton, financial consultants, identified a further €755,000 per annum of specific savings in non-payroll expenditure, plus further potential savings of up to €272,000 per annum. This brings to almost €5.4m the estimated enduring annual savings. However, other savings which have not been captured in these exercises include the increased efficiencies brought about by more productive uses of staff which had previously been engaged in corporate type roles arising purely from the existence of separate local authorities.

Departmental Expenditure

137. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the amount that has been spent and is to be spent on marketing, advertising and holding press conferences for the Rebuilding Ireland initiative. [35370/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): There has been no expenditure on marketing or advertising the Rebuilding Ireland programme and no such expenditure is planned.

There is a Consultation, Communication and Engagement Strategy associated with Rebuilding Ireland, the main aim of which is to ensure that the momentum for implementation is maintained throughout the life of the Plan. A key part of the successful implementation of Rebuilding Ireland will be ensuring that all stakeholders and the wider public are fully aware of the commitments, understand the range of initiatives and actions being rolled out and can access relevant and up-to-date information on progress.

A number of initiatives have been put in place aimed at maintaining and updating the information flow and providing a forum or point of contact for feedback where needed. For example, a dedicated website, www.rebuildingireland.ie, has been put in place and a dedicated email address, rebuildingireland@housing.gov.ie has also been created. Social media platforms are also being used to keep the public informed of progress in an open and accessible way.

Pillar specific launches have also taken place to build implementation momentum by allowing for a deeper focus on a specific pillar area. Three Pillar launches have taken place thus far and similar launches for the two remaining pillars will take place in due course. In relation to one of the Pillar launches, there was a cost of approximately €2,200 for room hire and associated costs.

Finally, there have been a series of local authority-hosted regional events, to stimulate and encourage active involvement and early engagement by all key stakeholders at local and regional levels.

All efforts will continue to be made to keep expenditure in connection with Rebuilding Ireland to a minimum. Further information in relation the Consultation, Communication and Engagement Strategy and in relation to progress more generally under Rebuilding Ireland is available in the First Quarterly Progress Report on Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness (in respect of Quarter 3 commitments and actions), which was published on 1 November and can be accessed at: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/First-Progress-Report.pdf>.

Fire Service

138. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of requests his Department has received from Dublin City Council to date in 2016 regarding funding for the purchase of additional emergency appliances and-or equipment for Dublin Fire Brigade; the number of those requests that have been approved, pending or refused; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35253/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The provision of a fire service in its functional area, including the establishment and maintenance of a fire brigade, the assessment of fire cover needs, the provision of fire station premises, is a statutory function of individual fire authorities under the Fire Services Act, 1981. My Department supports the fire authorities through setting general policy, providing a central training programme, issuing guidance on operational and other related matters and providing capital funding for priority infrastructural projects.

My Department, earlier this year, announced a five-year Fire Services Capital Programme with an allocation of €40 million, based on the current annual €8 million allocation, to be used for the purchase of fire appliances and specialist equipment, building or upgrading of prioritised Fire Stations, an upgrade of the Communications and Mobilisation system and improvements to Training Centres. Under this programme, sixteen new-build fire stations are to be provided and ten fire stations are to be upgraded. The projects in the capital programme will be reassessed on an annual basis and priority may be adjusted to bring forward projects offering best value-for-money and to take account of the state of readiness of the projects.

Dublin City Council provides fire services on behalf of the four Dublin local authorities. Continued investment in the fire appliance fleet is one of the key national priorities for the Fire Services Capital Programme. My Department announced a new national joint - procurement programme in 2015 to purchase 20 fire appliances, under which Dublin Fire Brigade received an allocation for three new appliances. Dublin City Council have been recouped €36,839 in respect of the Risk Based Approach to Emergency Cover project, and €4,059 for the Community Smoke Alarm Scheme this year. No other requests for funding have been received from Dublin City Council under the Fire Services Capital Programme to date.

All requests for funding from my Department's Fire Services Capital Programme will be

considered within the constraints of available resources and will have regard to local authorities' priorities, the value for money offered by proposals and the totality of requests from fire authorities.

Traveller Accommodation

139. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the funds available from his Department to Galway City Council and Galway County Council for capital projects in Traveller housing since 2011; the amount drawn down by each of the local authorities since 2011; the achievements by each of the local authorities since 2011 in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35273/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): In accordance with the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998, housing authorities have statutory responsibility for the assessment of the accommodation needs of Travellers and the preparation, adoption and implementation of multi-annual Traveller Accommodation Programmes (TAPs) in their areas. My Department's role is to ensure that there are adequate structures and supports in place to assist the authorities in providing such accommodation, including a national framework of policy, legislation and funding. Capital allocations and amounts recouped to Galway City Council and Galway County Council in respect of Traveller-specific accommodation for the years 2011 to 2016 are set out in the following table.

Year	Galway City Council		Galway County Council	
	Allocation €	Recouped €	Allocation €	Recouped €
2011	550,000	135,328	100,000	292,947
2012	360,000	391,250	500,000	0
2013	159,000	0	190,000	138,840
2014	75,127	72,241	0	0
2015	0	62,150	0	0
2016	40,000	0*	117,000	3,810*

*Recouped to date

Both Councils have indicated to my Department that they expect to draw down their allocations in full by year-end.

Accommodation for Travellers is provided across a range of options and it is open to Travellers to opt for any form of accommodation. These include standard local authority housing, which is financed from my Department's capital allocations for social housing, private rented accommodation or private housing assisted by local authorities or voluntary organisations, and Traveller-specific accommodation which is funded by means of 100% capital funding from my Department. Traveller-specific accommodation includes group housing schemes and halting sites. A breakdown of these accommodation options is set out in the Annual Reports of the National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee (NTACC). The NTACC Reports for 2011, 2012 and 2013 are available on my Department's website at the link below. The 2014 and 2015 NTACC Reports are currently being finalised and will be published shortly on my Department's website.

<http://www.environ.ie/corporate/organisation/partner-bodies/national-traveller-accommodation-consultative-committee>.

Environmental Policy

140. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the measures his Department is taking at policy level to encourage and incentivise rain water harvesting (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35292/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The Building Regulations, which are primarily concerned with the safety and well-being of persons in and around buildings, set down mandatory performance standards for buildings, and these performance standards are regularly reviewed and upgraded over time. The statutory requirements are set out in twelve parts (classified as parts A to M) included under the Second Schedule to the Building Regulations 1997 to 2014. Technical guidance documents (TGDs) are published to accompany each of the twelve parts in order to demonstrate how the statutory requirements may be achieved in practice. Where works are carried out in accordance with the relevant technical guidance such works are considered to be, *prima facie*, in compliance with the relevant regulation(s). Compliance with the Building Regulations is the responsibility of the owner or builder of a building and/or the works.

Generally speaking, the performance standards set out under the Building Regulations can be met by a variety of traditional or innovative approaches. The Building Regulations and the accompanying TGDs leave it open to building designers to pick the optimum solution for the particular building concerned while ensuring that the mandatory performance requirements are met.

In this regard, Part H of the Building Regulations sets out the legal requirements in relation to drainage and waste water disposal. Part H was the subject of a full review which concluded in late 2010 with the publication of Technical Guidance Document H – Drainage and Waste Water Disposal (2010) which provides detailed technical guidance on water sustainability systems that are coming into increasing use such as rainwater harvesting systems and systems for greywater usage. A number of corrections and amendments were also made to TGD H earlier this year.

While there are no mandatory requirements to install rainwater harvesting systems in new buildings, the technical guidance provided in TGD H ensures that rainwater harvesting systems, where used, can be designed and constructed in a safe and responsible manner and in accordance with the best available national and international guidance. I have no proposals to amend Part H to obligate building owners to install rainwater harvesting systems in new buildings.

Part G of the Building Regulations sets out the minimum statutory requirements in respect of hygiene. Technical Guidance Document G – Hygiene (2008) was amended in 2008 and, in the interests of water efficiency, introduced a requirement that dual flush toilets are now standard when toilets are being installed in new buildings or are being replaced in existing buildings.

My Department has also published design guidance for local authorities - Quality Housing for Sustainable Communities - which emphasise environmental sustainability and resource efficiency. The influence of this guidance extends beyond social housing provision to provide an important reference point in promoting sustainability issues in the built environment generally.

Departmental Funding

141. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if there will be an increase in funding for an organisation (details supplied) in 2017, particularly in view of the reduction in funding by 17% to that organisation since 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35298/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department's Community & Voluntary Supports & Programmes provide a cohesive framework of support for the community and voluntary sector. This programme supports 21 Volunteer Centres and 8 Volunteer Information Services, as well as a number of national organisations, including Volunteer Ireland. Over €3m was allocated for these organisations in 2016.

With the assistance of Volunteer Ireland, my Department has recently initiated a review of the distribution of funding to Volunteer Centres, to ensure that the approach adopted is sustainable. The funding of all Volunteer Centres will be considered in the course of this review, and in the context of the funding available following Budget 2017.

Local Authority Housing Provision

142. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans for new council housing units to be built in counties Cavan and Monaghan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35305/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The development of new social housing in counties Cavan and Monaghan is, in the first instance, a matter for the respective local authorities. Both local authorities were notified in April 2015 of social housing targets and provisional funding allocations out to end-2017; these are available on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.environ.ie/housing/social-housing/minsters-kelly-coffey-announce-eu15-billion-social-housing-targets-local>. Together these two local authorities have a target of 445 social housing units for the period out to 2017, supported by an allocation of €24 million, to be invested in a combination of building, buying and leasing schemes.

Both authorities have made proposals in respect of new social housing delivery via capital-funded programmes, which have been approved by my Department, as set out in announcements made in May 2015, July 2015 and January 2016. These announcements included over 56 units of accommodation in respect of Cavan and Monaghan, supported by investment of some € 6.3 million, details of which are available on my Department's website at the following links:

<http://www.environ.ie/en/DevelopmentHousing/Housing/News/MainBody,41340,en.htm>

<http://www.environ.ie/en/DevelopmentHousing/Housing/News/MainBody,42225,en.htm>

<http://www.environ.ie/housing/social-housing/ministers-kelly-coffey-announce-further-1000-social-housing-units>.

Since then, 79 additional units have been approved for Cavan and Monaghan and added to their pipeline, as set out below.

Local Authority	Location	Delivery Method	No. of Units
Cavan	Rosehill, Mullagh (Phase 6)	LA Construction	8
Monaghan	Liseggerton, Clones by Oaklee Housing Trust	AHB Construction	16
Monaghan	Monaghan Town	3 Turnkey developments	50

Local Authority	Location	Delivery Method	No. of Units
Monaghan	Smithborough	Turnkey development	5

Given the projects that are already in the pipeline for both local authorities and the measures that are set out in Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, I anticipate a ramping up in social housing construction activity over the next year. While these construction projects are being advanced, acquisitions of new and second-hand houses and apartments remain an effective means of meeting immediate social housing need. This year, the two local authorities are looking to purchase around 70 housing units for social housing purposes. They have also continued to receive substantial support from my Department to remediate vacant social homes and make them available to those on the waiting list, with some 86 such housing units between those remediated in 2015 and targeted in 2016.

Support is also provided by my Department to Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) under the Capital Advance Leasing Facility for the delivery of new social housing. This funding approach is being used to support the acquisition and construction of 55 units by three AHBs in Cavan and Monaghan. Delivery is contingent on AHBs securing the balance of funding required from either private finance or other borrowings. If successful, it is anticipated that these 55 units will be delivered by the end of 2017. Locations include Kingscourt, Clones and Carrickmacross.

Local Authority Housing Waiting Lists

143. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the waiting lists for council housing in counties Cavan and Monaghan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35306/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Details on the number of households on waiting lists in each housing authority area are provided in the statutory summary of social housing assessments. The most recent figures available are the results of the 2013 summary. These are available on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/DevelopmentandHousing/Housing/FileDownload,34857,en.pdf>.

The 2013 results show that there were 741 and 696 households on the waiting lists in counties Cavan and Monaghan, respectively.

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

Motor Tax

144. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will remove the word disabled from the vehicle tax disc of primary certificate holders; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35337/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers Scheme, which is the responsibility of my colleague the Minister for Finance, provides an exemption from the payment of annual

motor tax for a vehicle which has been admitted to the scheme. Only the word “exempt” appears on a motor tax disc that is issued in relation to such a vehicle.

Housing Data

145. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if his Department collects statistics from local authorities on homeless presentations for families with dependants as well as single households and households without dependants, as opposed to persons living in emergency accommodation; and if not, his views on whether his Department has an accurate picture of the true scale of homeless needs in different areas. [35371/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The official homelessness data reports provided by housing authorities are produced using the Pathway Accommodation & Support System (PASS), the single integrated national data information system on the State-funded emergency accommodation arrangements that are overseen by housing authorities. These reports are published on my Department’s website as soon as they are available and can be accessed using the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/homelessness/other/homelessness-data>.

These reports contain details of adult individuals and households with dependants placed in emergency accommodation and the various types of emergency accommodation in which they are placed. While they do not contain details of those that present to housing authorities as homeless but are not placed in emergency accommodation, generally those considered homeless by a housing authority, having regard to the criteria set out in Section 2 of the 1988 Housing Act, will avail of emergency accommodation that is overseen and funded by housing authorities and therefore appear in the official homelessness data reports.

Furthermore, households that meet the eligibility criteria, have a housing need and have applied to their local authority for social housing support are placed on the housing waiting list. The oversight and management of housing waiting lists is a matter for the individual housing authorities in accordance with the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 and associated regulations.

Housing Provision

146. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the funding that has been made available to each local authority in 2016 and 2017 for building rapid build units; the number of projects and the number of units that will be built. [35385/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Funding for the delivery of rapid build housing units is being made available, as part of the overall significant increase in my Department’s capital funding for the provision of social housing units. The funding that is being provided is in addition to funding for those social housing projects that have already been approved and will not impact on their progress. As the Deputy will be aware, my Department is working closely with the four Dublin local authorities in relation to the Rapid Delivery Programme. 22 rapid build units have already been delivered as a pilot project and are occupied; €3.789 million has been recouped to Dublin City Council in respect of this project to date.

Dublin City Council is currently advancing a number of other rapid build projects, including on four sites at Finglas, Darndale, Cherry Orchard and Drimnagh, which will deliver a further 131 units. While budgets have been approved in respect of these four projects, the amounts involved have not been made publicly available at this stage, given the market sensitivity of the information at a time when similar procurements are underway or are due to commence shortly. These units will be handed over to Dublin City Council on a phased basis from the end of the year and delivery will be completed early in 2017.

Further work is underway across the four local authorities, which will bring to 350 the total number of rapid delivery homes advancing through various stages of delivery, including construction, by the end of the year, on additional sites in Dublin city and on sites in Dun Laoghaire, Tallaght, Blanchardstown and Balbriggan. Work is also underway to support the delivery of a further 650 units over the course of 2017.

Housing Issues

147. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his department's estimates for the average cost of a rapid build unit. [35386/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Estimates set to date for rapid build units have been based on standard unit cost ceiling data held by my Department for standard social housing units. Recently returned tenders analysed have supported this approach, with the average tenders being returned within 5% of the unit cost ceiling data, which is considered to be a successful outcome. Given that there are procurements either underway or planned to commence shortly on a number of projects, it would not be appropriate, at this stage, to make information available on average costs for recently completed procurements, given the market sensitivity of the information. All rapid build homes are required to comply with the minimum standards of the Building Regulations and the requirement for a 60 years durability, as for general social housing, in which case it is not anticipated that there would be any significant departure from normal build costs.

Social and Affordable Housing Data

148. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of tenancies in RAS, HAP and any long term leasing programme; the annual cost to the State arising from these schemes and the number of tenancies who have transferred directly into HAP from rent supplement since the scheme was introduced. [35404/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department operates three current expenditure funded schemes in which units are sourced from the private rental sector for social housing use. These are the Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme (SHCEP), formerly the Social Housing Leasing Initiative which was initiated in 2009; the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) initiated in 2005; and the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) Scheme which was established in 2014. SHCEP supports the delivery of social housing by recouping to local authorities the cost of long-term lease agreements that are entered into with Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) or private property owners and developers. Properties made available under SHCEP are used to accommodate households from local authority waiting lists. Leased properties are allocated to tenants, in accordance with the relevant local authority's allocation scheme.

The table sets out the annual expenditure on the SHCEP since its inception in 2009 to the

end of September 2016. The annual Exchequer provision for the Programme funds the full year cost of the ongoing contractual commitments of leases and contracts, and the cost of new contracted units that become operational under the Programme during the year. €57 million was provided in my Department's Estimate for the Programme in 2016, and €84 million will be available in 2017. Expenditure in 2015 included a self-funding element of €7.933 million which was funded by local authorities from built up RAS reserves. At the end of Q4 2015, there were 7,099 social housing units operational under the Programme, and in the 9 months to end Q3 2016, an additional 638 new units had become operational.

Year	SHCEP Outturn
2009	€642,178
2010	€3,774,920
2011	€13,817,464
2012	€20,814,526
2013	€27,362,615
2014	€34,844,781
2015	€42,150,239
2016 (to end Sept)	€28,165,770

RAS, which commenced in 2005, is a targeted scheme that allows households to transfer from rent supplement to social housing if they have been in receipt of rent supplement for 18 months or more. RAS tenants can find their own private rent accommodation or a local authority can source that accommodation. The landlord tenant relationship is a three-way relationship – the landlord has landlord responsibilities but also signs a contract with the local authority to secure the use of the unit. The local authority pays the rent to the landlord in return. The tenant pays the local authority differential rent.

The following table sets out the annual expenditure on RAS since its inception in 2005 to the end of September 2016. The annual Exchequer provision for the scheme covers recoupments made to local authorities in respect of the contracted rents due to landlords, and deposits on newly acquired accommodation. €135 million was provided in my Department's Estimate for the scheme in 2016, and €134 million in 2017. Expenditure in 2015 and 2016 included a self-funding element of €14.85 million and €13.4 million, respectively, which was funded from built up RAS reserves. At the end of Q4 2015, there were 20,834 tenancies supported under the scheme, and in the 9 months to end Q3 2016, an additional 930 new transfers had been completed.

Year	RAS Outturn
2005	€723,280
2006	€6,199,980
2007	€27,384,837
2008	€53,025,430
2009	€83,394,513
2010	€100,076,430
2011	€115,917,365
2012	€125,429,966
2013	€130,886,608
2014	€133,512,889
2015	€136,639,464
2016 (to end Sept)	€98,003,139

Under the HAP scheme, which has been rolled out incrementally since the initial pilot in 2014, households find their own accommodation in the private rented market. The local authority will make a monthly payment to the landlord, subject to rent limits depending on the household size and the relevant local authority area, on behalf of the tenant. The tenancy is between the tenant and the landlord and is covered under the terms of the Residential Tenancies Act 2004 (as amended). The local authority is not a party to the tenancy. The tenant pays a rent contribution based on the household's income; the rent contribution is calculated in the same way as the differential rent paid by a tenant of a local authority owned property.

The following table sets out the costs of the HAP scheme to my Department, which includes the cost of landlord payments and local authority administration, from its inception to the end of September 2016. €47.7 million was provided in my Department's Estimate for the scheme in 2016, and €153 million will be available in 2017. At the end of Q4 2015, there were **5,853** households being supported under the scheme, and in the 9 months to end Q3 2016, an additional 8,727 new HAP tenancies had been set up, of which 2,960 had transferred from the Rent Supplement scheme. In total, as at the end of Q3 2016, some 5,059 households had transferred from the Rent Supplement scheme to HAP since the scheme was introduced.

Year	HAP Outturn
2014	€394,472
2015	€15,643,829
2016 (to end Sept)	€ 29,853,881

Rural Resettlement Scheme

149. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the amount of money granted to rural resettlement each year since 2012, in relation to the Government's commitment to rural resettlement; the current uptake of the scheme; if he will reinstate funding to Rural Resettlement Ireland whose funding was cut in 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31151/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): As the Deputy will be aware, my colleague, the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, has overall responsibility for regional and rural affairs and will be advancing a broadly-based rural development strategy, in the context of commitments under the Programme for a Partnership Government. While there is no specific rural resettlement programme operated by my Department, the recently published *Rebuilding Ireland: An Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness* includes a range of measures supportive of the regeneration and renewal of towns and villages across rural Ireland and, consequently, ensuring a vibrant population in those places. It is my aim that all steps are taken to secure the re-use of vacant and under-utilised properties for residential purposes, particularly in the many towns and villages in rural Ireland that contain a significant number of empty houses. *Action 5.1 of the Action Plan relates to the development of a National Vacant Housing Re-Use Strategy and I intend to examine the potential to widen the geographical range of social housing location options available to persons seeking such accommodation.*

The Strategy will examine the potential for bringing existing but vacant housing back into beneficial use. I intend to examine mechanisms to match such accommodation potential to prospective applicants for social housing, through measures such as the Repair and Leasing Initiative, which will see up-front financial assistance being made available to upgrade empty, but sub-standard, accommodation in return for leasing the property back for social housing purposes. Acquisition and leasing options are also available to local authorities to ensure that

households needing accommodation may be provided with that accommodation.

The development of a rural resettlement programme will be considered further, in conjunction with the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, in the context of taking forward these measures, the details of which are set out in the Action Plan, which is available on the website, www.rebuildingireland.ie.

Departmental Staff Training

150. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Social Protection if all staff working in Intreo offices have received disability awareness training; the full cost of training those persons who have not yet received disability awareness training; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35268/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Department of Social Protection supports its staff by offering a suite of disability awareness training, including Disability and Deaf Awareness, Dealing with Blind Customers, and Mental Health Awareness. The Department also offers courses in Stress Awareness, SafeTALK suicide awareness and ASIST suicide prevention. These are available to all staff in the Department, including staff in Intreo Offices. Specific figures for take-up of these courses by staff in Intreo offices are not available. However in the last three years, 2,100 staff attended over 140 instructor-led training courses in these areas. In addition, e-learning courses developed for front line public servants by the National Disability Authority (NDA) and the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) are freely available online to all staff via the Department's Staff Development intranet site. During 2016, in the context of Departmental commitments under Pathways to Work 2016-2020 to extend and intensify proactive engagement for people with a disability, 67 dedicated Case Officers were nominated across the Intreo network. The Department's Staff Development Unit provided a Disability Awareness Seminar in March 2016 for these Case Officers with speakers from the National Disability Authority and Epilepsy Ireland. This was supplemented by tailored instructor-led training nationally in Employment Supports for People with Disabilities.

Induction and orientation training given to staff highlights the range of Departmental supports and grant-aid available for both staff and clients with disabilities. These include employment supports for jobseekers with disabilities such as the Wage Subsidy Scheme, EmployAbility Services and the Reasonable Accommodation Fund.

The Department has a dedicated Staff Disability Liaison Officer who maintains awareness of disability issues and services among staff, including managing the Department's active participation in the Irish Association for Supported Employment's Job Shadow Initiative and AHEAD's Willing, Able, Mentoring Programme. The Department also provides translation, interpretive and Irish Sign Language services as required and is committed to the provision of information in alternative formats where feasible.

Ongoing liaison, via the Department's Disability & Illness Policy Unit, with the National Disability Authority (NDA) and the Disability Federation of Ireland (DFI) ensures that information on relevant events and seminars is communicated to Departmental staff. As recently as September 2016, Case Officers from around the country attended an NDA Seminar on Supported Employment.

It is estimated that the cost of providing disability awareness training to all staff in the Department would be approximately €150,000.

Employment Support Services

151. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Social Protection the money allocated to the various schemes under the reasonable accommodation fund from 2012 to date in 2016 in tabular form; the actual expenditure on this fund for the same period; the efforts made by his Department to raise awareness of this scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35269/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The reasonable accommodation fund for the employment of people with disabilities assists employers in the private sector to take appropriate measures to enable a person with a disability/impairment to have access to employment by providing a range of grants. These grants and supports include:

- the workplace equipment and adaptation grant,
- the personal reader grant,
- the job interview interpreter grant, and
- the employee retention grant.

The reasonable accommodation fund is a demand led scheme in that expenditure arises in response to applications received. Given the small size of each of these grants, a separate estimate for each of these schemes is not set out in the revised estimates volume. The actual expenditure on this fund is set out in the table.

Awareness of this scheme is promoted through a range of channels including through the Department's website and by means of employer engagement opportunities and job fair events. Moreover, the EmployAbility service, which is funded by the Department of Social Protection, regularly disseminates information on the reasonable accommodation fund to both people with disabilities and private sector employers. Furthermore, under the One DSP Learning initiative, introduced in 2015, a module covering Employment Supports for People with a Disability is available to Case Officers working in the Intreo service. This module covers all the DSP grants and supports available to people with a disability, thereby providing Case Officers with the appropriate knowledge to promote the scheme.

Table: Expenditure on the Reasonable Accommodation Fund for People with Disabilities

Year	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016*
Workplace equipment and adaptation grant	€71,176	€81,724	€61,776	€58,108	€39,903
Personal reader grant	€27,274	€27,526	€14,499	€11,866	€14,313
Job interview interpreter grant	€6,355	€2,767	€1,589	€3,950	€6,881
Employee retention grant	€4,320	€0	€0	€0	€0
Total	€109,125	€112,017	€77,864	€73,925	€61,097

*To date.

Social Welfare Benefits

152. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Social Protection if his Department has considered extending the wage subsidy scheme to those in receipt of the partial capacity benefit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35270/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):

The partial capacity benefit (PCB) scheme is designed for people who are on illness benefit, for at least six months, or on invalidity pension and who have retained some capacity for work and wish to work. If awarded, PCB will allow them to continue to receive, in addition to their earnings from employment, a percentage of their illness benefit or invalidity pension payment while working.

The wage subsidy scheme (WSS) is an employment support to private sector employers, the objective of which is to encourage employers to employ people with disabilities and thereby increase the numbers of people with disabilities participating in the open labour market. The scheme provides financial incentives to private sector employers to hire people with a disability for between 21 and 39 hours per week under a contract of employment.

The issue of extending the WSS to participants on the PCB scheme has been considered in a number of Department of Social Protection reviews, including a review of the WSS, completed in 2013 and a review of the PCB scheme, which was undertaken in 2015. The issue was also examined in the context of a recent review of the operational guidelines for the WSS. However, there is no decision to extend at this time.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Applications

153. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the progress to date in determination of an application for disability allowance in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35280/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): I confirm that my department received an application for disability allowance from this lady on 5 October 2016. On completion of the necessary investigations on all aspects of the claim a decision will be made and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

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

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Family Income Supplement Applications

154. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the progress to date regarding an application for a family income supplement in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35336/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): In order to qualify for family income supplement (FIS) the applicant must be engaged in full-time remunerative employment as an employee for at least 38 hours per fortnight (19 hours per week).

An application for FIS was received from the lady concerned on 25 October 2016, but was disallowed on the grounds that she is not working the required number of hours.

A letter was issued to the person concerned on the 12 November 2016 in relation to this

matter.

The lady concerned has been in receipt of a weekly basic supplementary welfare allowance payment since 26 October 2016. She is further advised to contact her local citizen's information service to discuss all available options and ensure that she is receiving the supports appropriate to her current circumstances.

Invalidity Pension Applications

155. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an appeal for an invalidity benefit by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35340/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The lady referred to has been awarded invalidity pension with effect from the 14 July 2016. Payment will issue to her nominated bank account on the 01 December 2016. Any arrears due from 14 July 2016 to 30 November 2016 (less any overlapping social welfare payment and/or outstanding overpayment) will issue in due course. The lady in question was notified of this decision on the 15 November 2016.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Payments Waiting Times

156. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the average waiting times for receipt of social protection payments in 2016 to date, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35342/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The information requested (where available) by the deputy is detailed in the following tabular statement.

Social Welfare claims by average waiting times 31 October 2016

Scheme	Average Waiting Time(weeks)
Jobseeker's Benefit	1
Jobseeker's Allowance	2
One-Parent Family Payment	6
State Pension Contributory (Dom)	6
Widow's, Widower's or Surviving Civil Partner's Contributory Pension	1
State Pension Non-Contributory	14
Household Benefits	3
Free Travel	2
Domiciliary Care Allowance	16
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	1
Child Benefit (Domestic & FRA)	3
Child Benefit (EU Regulation)	37
Family Income Supplement (New)	4
Disability Allowance	12
Invalidity Pension	9

Rent Supplement Scheme Data

157. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of rent supplement recipients by county; the number of persons who have had their rent supplement increased above the prescribed limit for their area in 2016 to date, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35343/16]

163. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of households in receipt of rent supplement; the total cost to the State per month arising from these payments; and the number of rent supplement claimants who have come off rent supplement and transferred directly into the housing assistance payment since that scheme was introduced. [35403/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 157 and 163 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, approximately €22.3 million per month. A breakdown of rent supplement recipients by county is provided in the following tabular statement.

In recognition of supply difficulties for suitable rentable housing stock being experienced throughout the State, my Department has implemented a targeted policy approach that allows for flexibility where landlords seek rents in excess of the limits for both existing customers and new applicants to the rent supplement scheme. This has ensured that over 4,400 rent supplement households have been able to retain or acquire rented accommodation through increased rent supplement payments during 2016. A county breakdown of these payments is provided in the tabular statement.

The number of rent supplement tenancies transferred directly to the new housing assistance payment, HAP, scheme is almost 5,300; approximately 35% of the 14,960 tenancies currently in receipt of HAP. A county breakdown of these cases is provided in the following tabular statement.

In tandem with the revised rental limits introduced in July 2016 and on-going transfers to HAP, my Department will continue to implement a targeted, flexible, case-by-case approach where rents may exceed the appropriate maximum limit ensuring where possible the threat of homelessness for tenants can be avoided.

Table 1: Rent supplement Recipients by County – End October 2016

COUNTY	RECIPIENTS	%
CARLOW	651	1.3%
CAVAN	366	0.7%
CLARE	495	1.0%
CORK	5,249	10.6%
DONEGAL	501	1.0%
DUBLIN	20,842	41.9%
GALWAY	2,643	5.3%
KERRY	1,571	3.2%
KILDARE	2,724	5.5%
KILKENNY	358	0.7%
LAOIS	875	1.8%

Questions - Written Answers

COUNTY	RECIPIENTS	%
LEITRIM	286	0.6%
LIMERICK	1,021	2.1%
LONGFORD	396	0.8%
LOUTH	959	1.9%
MAYO	1,126	2.3%
MEATH	1,097	2.2%
MONAGHAN	205	0.4%
OFFALY	595	1.2%
ROSCOMMON	566	1.1%
SLIGO	308	0.6%
TIPPERARY	1,006	2.0%
WATERFORD	662	1.3%
WESTMEATH	1,312	2.6%
WEXFORD	1,992	4.0%
WICKLOW	1,929	3.9%
Grand Total	49,735	100.0%

Table 2: Rent supplement Uplifts Awarded by County for 2016 (to 14 November 2016)

COUNTY	Awards under National Tenancy Sustainment Framework	Awards under protocol with Threshold	Total no. of increased payments by County
CARLOW	46		46
CAVAN	39		39
CLARE	0		0
CORK	210	22	232
DONEGAL	0		0
DUBLIN	1,673	732	2,405
GALWAY	91	2	93
KERRY	133		133
KILDARE	292	3	295
KILKENNY	23		23
LAOIS	18		18
LEITRIM	48		48
LIMERICK	0		0
LONGFORD	183		183
LOUTH	74		74
MAYO	0		0
MEATH	158	0	158
MONAGHAN	0		0
OFFALY	12		12
ROSCOMMON	37		37
SLIGO	1		1
TIPPERARY	109		109
WATERFORD	34		34
WESTMEATH	245		245
WEXFORD	13		13
WICKLOW	245	3	248
Grand Total	3,684	762	4,446

Table 3: HAP cases transferred from Rent Supplement (14 November 2016)

County	HAP Cases Transferred from Rent Supplement
Carlow	255
Clare	331
Cork	1,295
Donegal	516
Dublin	516
Galway	150
Kildare	269
Kilkenny	214
Limerick	540
Louth	391
Mayo	108
Meath	42
Monaghan	17
Offaly	3
Sligo	35
Tipperary	335
Waterford	247
Grand Total	5,264

Social Welfare Code Review

158. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the schemes which are currently under review by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35345/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): My Department administers over 65 separate schemes and services which serve a diverse group of clients including families, employees and employers, jobseekers, people with disabilities, carers and older people. All of these schemes and services are kept under constant review with a view to ensuring that they continue to meet the needs of my Department’s customers.

In line with the Programme for a Partnership Government and the responsibilities of my Department more generally, a number of specific focussed reviews are currently underway, or will commence shortly. These include:

- **Back to Work Family Dividend** – a Focused Policy Assessment (FPA) of the Back to Work Family Dividend scheme is currently being undertaken, which is examining the rationale underpinning the scheme and its effectiveness in helping families transition from welfare to work.

- **Jobseeker’s Allowance Transition** - a formal review of the Jobseeker’s Transitional Payment (JST) will commence in 2017. This review will take the form of a Value for Money review and will examine the JST since its inception in 2013.

- **Working Family Payment** - in line with the Programme for a Partnership Government, the effectiveness of the Family Income Supplement (FIS) scheme is currently being examined, along with a range of other supports to both jobseekers and to those in employment, in the context of the development of a new Working Family Payment.

- **Reduced Rates of Jobseeker’s Allowance for Young Jobseekers** - the National Univer-

sity of Ireland, Maynooth is currently undertaking research which is examining the effectiveness of the reduced rates of Jobseeker's Allowance in encouraging young jobseekers to avail of education, training and employment programmes/opportunities. The findings of this research will inform my Department's review of the effectiveness of the reduced rates in encouraging young jobseekers into education, training or employment opportunities.

- **Community Employment (CE) Scheme** - a review of the Community Employment (CE) Scheme has recently been conducted by my Department and the findings of that review are now being considered.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications

159. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an application for a domiciliary care allowance in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35364/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): An application for domiciliary care allowance (DCA) was received in respect of this child on the 15th March 2016. The application was not allowed as it was considered that the child did not meet the eligibility criteria for the allowance. A letter issued on 6th July 2016 outlining the decision in this case and the right to seek a review of the decision and/or to appeal the decision.

A review of the decision was requested on 12th July 2016 and the person concerned was notified on 10th November 2016 that following an examination of the application the original decision was upheld.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications

160. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an application for a domiciliary care allowance in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35365/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): This lady applied for domiciliary care allowance in respect of her child on the 4th April 2016. The application was not allowed as it was considered that the child did not meet the eligibility criteria for the allowance. A decision letter issued to her on the 25th July 2016.

An appeal of this decision was registered on 23rd August 2016 and additional information on her child's condition/care needs was supplied. The application together with the new information supplied has been forwarded to a Medical Assessor for their professional opinion. Upon receipt of the Medical Assessor's opinion, the case will be further examined by a deciding officer, who will revise the original decision if warranted or alternatively, forward the case for consideration by the Social Welfare Appeals Office.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications

161. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an application for a domiciliary care allowance in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35366/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an Appeals Officer, having fully considered all of the available evidence, has decided to allow the appeal of the person concerned by way of a summary decision. The person concerned has been notified of the Appeals Officer's decision.

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

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Jobseeker's Allowance Data

162. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Social Protection the total number of persons in receipt of a transitional jobseeker's allowance that had previously been in receipt of a one parent family payment. [35402/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): At the end of September there were 11,930 persons in receipt of a transitional jobseeker's allowance who had been in receipt of a one parent family payment during the previous 30 days.

Question No. 163 answered with Question No. 157.

Rural Social Scheme Data

164. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of positions from the rural social scheme that will be allocated to County Tipperary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35409/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The purpose of the rural social scheme (RSS) is to provide income support to farmers and fishermen and women who have an entitlement to specified social welfare payments. The Government, as part of the budget package for 2017, announced 500 additional places on the scheme which will increase the overall number to 3,100.

A request for expressions of interest in additional RSS places was recently sent to all RSS Implementing Bodies. My Department intends allocating these places as early as possible in 2017 taking into account a number of factors. These include the number of places already allocated, the demand for new places in particular areas, work opportunities available in local areas and the numbers of farmers and fishermen and women in receipt of income support.

In allocating the additional places, the Government recognises the benefits the RSS provides for participants and their families, as well as the valuable contribution the scheme is making to the provision of services in communities across Ireland. It is not possible at this stage to give the exact locations where these 500 additional places will be allocated.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Military Aircraft Landings

165. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of landings by UK military aircrafts at Dublin Airport and other national airports, indicating which airport for each month in each of the years 2015 and to date in 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35254/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Air Navigation (Foreign Military Aircraft) Order 1952 gives the Minister for Foreign Affairs primary responsibility for the regulation of activity by foreign military aircraft in Ireland. Permission must be sought in advance for landings by all foreign military aircraft and, if granted, is subject to strict conditions. These include stipulations that the aircraft must be unarmed, carry no arms, ammunition or explosives and must not engage in intelligence gathering, and that the flights in question must not form part of military exercises or operations.

My Department received seven requests for landings in Ireland by UK military aircraft in 2015. To date in 2016 my Department has received twenty requests for landings in Ireland by UK military aircraft, eleven of which were for the Red Arrows participation in the Bray Air Show.

Details of all requests for landings in the State by UK military aircraft in the period referred to are set out below.

2015	Landing Requests Received	Month Request Received
Casement	4	March (2) and June (2)
Shannon	2	May
Listowel	1	April
2015 Total	7	
2016 (to 14/11/16)	Landing Requests Received	Month Request Received
Casement	15	March (12), June (1) and July (2)
Dublin	4	May
Donegal	1	May
2016 Total to 14/11/16	20	

Passports Misplacement

166. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his Department will refund a person (details supplied) for costs associated with replacing their passport which was lost by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35296/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The person to whom the Deputy refers submitted two passports by post to the Passport Service. These passports were returned to him in a delivery envelope which An Post has recorded as having been delivered to his address. The person has been in contact with my Department and was advised that as the items are recorded as collected from the Passport Service and delivered to his address he should pursue the matter with An Post.

Public Sector Staff Recruitment

167. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of a person (details supplied) on the Public Appointments Service panel; the length of time they

may be waiting to be called; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35264/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware the Public Appointments Service (PAS) is the centralised recruiter for the Civil and Public Service. It is an independent, statutory body which provides professional recruitment and selection services.

It is the policy of the PAS not to discuss an individual's candidature for a campaign with anyone other than the candidate.

In this regard the PAS will contact the candidate and deal with him directly regarding the position.

Appointments to State Boards

168. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the circumstances which led him to change his decision not to sanction the reappointment of the CEO of Horse Racing Ireland to, three weeks later, deciding to sanction the reappointment of the CEO; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35302/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I refer to my reply to Parliamentary Question No. 135, reference number 33951/16, on 9.11.2016.

Údarás na Gaeltachta Expenditure

169. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if she will provide a list of the Údarás na Gaeltachta supported companies in County Donegal that received moneys under the capital grants scheme in 2015 and to date in 2016, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35362/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Seán Kyne): The information requested by the Deputy in relation to companies supported by Údarás na Gaeltachta in County Donegal that received moneys under the capital grants scheme in 2015 and to date in 2016, is provided in tabular format below.

Údarás Supported Companies
Algaran Teo
Arán Ard Teo
Bá Dhún na nGall Teo
Baile na Finne Plaisteach Teo
Beachóga Dhún na nGall Teo
Caoimhín Ó Gallchóir
Cliabhain C6 sta Teo
Clós Bhád Mhíobhaigh Teo
Coiste Éigse Sheáin Bháin Mhic Meanman
Conal Ó Gallachóir
Cuan Tamhnaigh Teo
Donal Mc Monagail & a Mhic Teo
Éadach Charn na nÉan Teo
Emily Bazeley

Údarás Supported Companies
Euroflex Teo
Feamainn Thír Chonail Teo
Feidhm Mara Teo
Foilseachán na Mara Teo
GSPK Circuits (Ireland) Teo
Innealtóireacht PMC Teo
Kombucha Éireannach Teo
Máire Ní Chnámhsí
Máirtín Ó Breisleáin
Meastóirí Domhanda Teo
Millíní Admhaid Dhún na nGall (1 e clárú)
Niall Haicéid
Nuvotem Teo
Oileán Glas Teo
Paula Ní Fhlanagáin/Jim Ó Donnchadh
Próiseáil (A n Clochán Liath) Teo
R.A. Pacáistí Teo
Radox Teo
Seán Mac Giolla Bhríde
Sláinteachas & Lónadóireachta Dhún na nGall
Snáth Dún na nGall Teo
Tazetta Ltd
The Veneerist Ltd
Troscán Tábhairne Teo
Uppiddee Ltd

Services for People with Disabilities

170. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that by the end of 2016 there will no longer be a nurse on the site of a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35266/16]

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

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

Medical Card Eligibility

171. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health if he will liaise with the Minister for Social Protection to ensure that the income guidelines for medical card applicants will increase to, at a minimum, reflect the increases in social protection in budget 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35282/16]

175. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health if persons in receipt of a social protection payment, whose sole income is from social protection, will automatically qualify for a medical card; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35281/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 171 and 175 together.

In accordance with the provisions of the Health Act 1970 (as amended), eligibility for a medical card is determined by the HSE. The Act obliges the HSE to assess whether a person is unable, without due hardship, to arrange general practitioner services for himself or herself and his or her family, having regard to his or her overall financial position and reasonable expenditure and every application must be assessed on that basis. Under the legislation, having a particular illness, in itself, does not establish eligibility for a medical card and therefore, the medical conditions of applicants for this scheme are not monitored on that basis. Where the applicant's income is within the income guidelines, a medical card or GP visit card will be awarded.

If a person's only income is a means tested Social Welfare Allowance, he/she will qualify for a Medical Card.

There is a statutory obligation on the Minister to review annually the gross income limits for medical cards and GP visit cards for persons over the age of 70 years. Subject to the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, the gross income limits may be increased or decreased to reflect any increase or decrease in the Consumer Price Index.

National Lottery Funding Applications

172. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the funding in place for a project (details supplied) in counties Cavan and Monaghan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35314/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My Department administers a National Lottery Discretionary Fund from which once-off grants are paid to community and voluntary organisations providing a range of health related services. Funding in 2016 amounts to €3.286m of which €585,000 has been allocated to date.

An application for funding has been received from Virginia Men's Shed, Co Cavan, which is among a large number of applications currently being assessed by my Department.

I will decide on the allocation of the remaining funds in the coming weeks. Once a decision has been made, organisations will be notified of the outcome of their application.

Primary Medical Certificates Data

173. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health the details of applications by county for primary medical certificates under headings (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35354/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and

plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

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

Mobility Allowance

174. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the progress made to date to develop a scheme to replace the motorised transport grant which has been closed to new applicants since 2013; the timeframe for when legislation for a new mobility scheme will be brought before the Houses of the Oireachtas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35271/16]

193. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Health the status of his plans to introduce a grant to replace the mobility allowance grant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35347/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I propose to take Questions Nos. 174 and 193 together.

Conscious of the reports of the Ombudsman in 2011 and 2012 regarding the legal status of both the Mobility Allowance and Motorised Transport Grant Scheme in the context of the Equal Status Acts, the Government decided to close both schemes in February 2013. The Government is aware of the continuing needs of people with a disability who rely on individual payments which support choice and independence. In that regard, monthly payments of €208.50 have continued to be made by the Health Service Executive to 4,700 people who were in receipt of the Mobility Allowance at the time the scheme closed.

The Government decided that the detailed preparatory work required for a new Transport Support Scheme and associated statutory provisions should be progressed by the Minister for Health. I am pleased to inform the Deputy that the Programme for Partnership Government acknowledges the ongoing drafting of primary legislation for a new Transport Support Scheme. I can confirm that work on the policy proposals in this regard is at an advanced stage and I anticipate that this will be brought to Government shortly.

The proposals seek to ensure that:

- There is a firm statutory basis to the Scheme's operation;
- There is transparency and equity in the eligibility criteria attaching to the Scheme;
- Resources are targeted at those with greatest needs; and
- The Scheme is capable of being costed and is affordable on its introduction and on an ongoing basis.

Question No. 175 answered with Question No. 171.

Legislative Measures

176. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health further to his attendance at the

Oireachtas health committee on 28 September 2016, the number of meetings and level of consultation he or any of his officials have had with a person (details supplied) in respect of the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) (Amendment) Bill 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35284/16]

177. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health further to his attendance at the Oireachtas health committee on 28 September 2016, if he or any of his officials have any meetings planned with a person (details supplied) to discuss or consult on the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) (Amendment) Bill 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35285/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 176 and 177 together.

Officials in my Department are progressing work in relation to this matter. No meetings have yet taken place with Deputy Kelleher on the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) (Amendment) Bill 2016.

Medicinal Products Prices

178. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health if a rebate scheme formed part of the previous medicine pricing agreement, agreed between his Department and the Irish Pharmaceutical Healthcare Association, which applied up to November 2015; if so, the way in which this rebate scheme was applied and operated; the total revenues which were generated by these rebates over the lifetime of the agreement; the amounts raised during each year of the agreement; the way in which these moneys were collected; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35286/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under Clause 9 of the 2012 Framework Agreement on the Supply and Pricing of Medicines there is a rebate of 4% of the value of all medicines dispensed in the GMS and community drugs schemes. No rebate was payable in respect of those medicines covered by Clause 6 'Patent Expired Medicines' of that Agreement.

A full copy of the Agreement is available at: https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/Who/cpu/IPHA_Agreement_2012.pdf.

As the HSE was responsible for the implementation of that Agreement, I have asked them to reply directly to the Deputy on the other matters he has raised.

Medicinal Products Prices

179. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the way in which the rebate scheme which forms part of the current medicine pricing agreement, agreed between his Department and the Irish Pharmaceutical Healthcare Association, will apply and be operated; the total revenues which his Department anticipates will be generated by these rebates over the lifetime of the agreement; the amounts expected to be raised each year of the agreement by this rebate scheme; the way in which these moneys will be collected; if he will publish the details of same at the end of each year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35287/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The estimated value of the rebate, calculated under Clause 9 the Agreement, is €300 million. A copy of the Agreement is available at: <http://health.gov.ie/blog/publications/framework-agreement-on-the-supply-and-pricing-of->

medicines/.

The breakdown of the amounts expected to be raised each year are set out in the table below.

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
Estimated Value of the Rebates*	€65m	€70m	€80m	€85m

*Rounded to the nearest €5m

My Department, in consultation with the HSE and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, are currently monitoring the implementation of the Agreement and associated savings, and will give consideration to the publication of the savings achieved on a yearly basis.

The issues in relation to the application of the rebate and its collection across PCRS and hospitals has been referred to the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy, as this is an operational matter.

Medicinal Products Prices

180. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the way in which the HSE charges and calculates rebates for biosimilar drugs that are approved and for sale in the market; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35288/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Details of the level of rebates and medicines to which it applies are set out in the new Framework Agreement on the Supply and Pricing of Medicines 2016-2020. The Agreement is available at:

<http://health.gov.ie/blog/publications/framework-agreement-on-the-supply-and-pricing-of-medicines/>.

The issue in relation to the calculation of the rebate by the Primary Care Reimbursement Service and hospitals has been referred to the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy as this is an operational matter.

Health Services Provision

181. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health if an allocation of a drink supplement will be increased in respect of a person (details supplied). [35291/16]

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 Staff

182. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health if he will consider employing a liaison officer in hospitals for victims of institutional abuse (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35295/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Your question has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Disability Services Funding

183. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the status of an application (details supplied) for funding to the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35297/16]

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

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

Hospital Appointments Status

184. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) can expect an appointment. [35299/16]

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.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Data

185. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons who have applied for the fair deal scheme from 2010 to 2016 to date in counties Cavan and Monaghan, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35304/16]

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 Consultant Recruitment

186. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if further efforts are being made to fill the positions of consultant child psychiatrists here following a failure by the HSE to fill these positions despite advertising; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35308/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): As this is a

service issue this question has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Carer's Allowance Waiting Times

187. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the current waiting time for carer's allowance and carer's benefit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35316/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): For future reference, the issue of carer's allowance and carer's benefit is a matter for my colleague Mr Leo Varadkar T.D., Minister for Social Protection. However, my Department has received a response to your question from his Department which I hope will be helpful to the Deputy.

I have been informed by my colleague Mr Varadkar that the Department of Social Protection 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 average waiting time for new carer's allowance (CA) applications at the end of September was 14 weeks and 9 weeks for carer's benefit (CARB). At the end of September, there were 4,146 CA and 484 CARB applications awaiting decision. The volume of claims on hands are a consequence of continued strong claim intake and the delays in processing are frequently caused by the customer failing to fully complete the claim form or failing to attach the supporting documentation that is requested on the application form.

Applications for CA by the end of September 2016 are 20% higher than in the same period in 2015 while applications for CARB are 24% higher. This has impacted on the timely processing of applications.

Reducing these waiting times is a priority for the Department and it is 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.

Medical Card Applications

188. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the current waiting time for a medical card application to be processed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35317/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As at week ending 11 November 2016,

99.67% of medical card applications received by the Primary Care Reimbursement Services were processed within a 15 day timeframe.

All applications or reviews concerning medical and GP visit cards must be supported with a range of documentation, as outlined on the application forms. Where such supporting documentation is not supplied or is incomplete, to enable the assessment of the application, in accordance with the National Assessment Guidelines, the HSE will issue correspondence to the applicant specifying the additional information required to progress the assessment of their application. Clearly the processing time for incomplete applications is dependent on the furnishing of the required documentation by the applicant.

The HSE provides weekly statistics on turnaround times on its website <http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/schemes/mc>.

Services for People with Disabilities

189. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the criteria and procedure for applying for a disabled parking permit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35324/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Disabled Parking Scheme operates under Road Traffic legislation and comes within the remit of the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Appeals

190. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the progress to date in determination of an appeal for assistance under the fair deal scheme in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35325/16]

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.

Medical Aids and Appliances Applications

191. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will be supplied with a replacement artificial limb. [35328/16]

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 Administration

192. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite an appointment for an MRI scan in respect of a person (details supplied) without delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35335/16]

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.

Question No. 193 answered with Question No. 174.

HIV-AIDS Programmes

194. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE seeks to provide pre-exposure prophylaxis medication in view of its effectiveness in preventing HIV infection. [35349/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The National Sexual Health Strategy 2015-2020 was launched in October 2015. The strategy was developed in response to a recommendation of the National AIDS Strategy Committee on the need to establish clear leadership within the health sector around the area of sexual health. The Strategy contains 71 recommendations that address all aspects of sexual health and a Sexual Health Action Plan for 2015-2016 that contains 18 priority actions for immediate attention.

One of the priority actions identified in the Action Plan for 2016 is to 'Prioritise, develop and implement guidance to support clinical decision making for STI testing, screening and treatment and on the appropriate use of antiretroviral therapy in HIV prevention'. An Implementation Group has now been established within the HSE as an outcome of this action. This group will make recommendations on the appropriate use of HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) in the overall context of the national approach to HIV prevention. It is intended that work will start on a national demonstration project on PrEP in 2017.

Hospital Appointments Status

195. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) may expect an appointment to be scheduled. [35353/16]

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.

Home Care Packages Data

196. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health the number of home care packages that were applied for and approved through both the Louth and Meath disability services in counties Louth and Meath in each of the years of 2014 to date in 2016, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35367/16]

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.

Medicinal Products Regulation

197. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health if he has powers under statutory instrument or regulations to set or change the level of tetrahydrocannabinol, THC, acceptable in medicines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35378/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) is the principal psychoactive constituent of cannabis. Under the Misuse of Drugs Acts 1977 to 2016 and the Regulations made thereunder, the manufacture, production, preparation, sale, supply, distribution and possession of cannabis and certain cannabis-related compounds is currently unlawful except under licence. However, the scope for such licences to be issued is restricted to a limited number of specific circumstances. This is in line with the international controls on cannabis as prescribed under the United Nations Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs 1961. It is open for an Irish registered doctor to apply for a licence for such preparations for an individual, named-patient under their care. Such applications will be considered on a case by case basis. The appropriateness of any particular treatment is a matter between the patient and their doctor. It would be entirely inappropriate for me, as Minister for Health, to involve myself in this process. My understanding is that many doctors would be quite cautious about recommending a cannabis-based treatment for a patient, in the absence of the robust clinical evidence which underpins authorised medicines.

Under European and Irish legislation, before a medicine can be placed on the Irish market the manufacturer has to seek an authorisation from the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) or in the case of certain medicinal products, the European Medicines Agency (EMA). A determination on an application for authorisation of a medicine is based on a rigorous scientific assessment of the application against the criteria of safety, quality, efficacy, legal and regulatory requirements.

In July 2014, the Misuse of Drugs Regulations 1988, were amended to allow for a specific cannabis-based medicinal product to be used in Ireland. This derogation was facilitated based on evidence from scientific data submitted by a company to demonstrate the quality, safety and efficacy of this specific medicine and its ability to provide a clear medical benefit for patients with multiple sclerosis. Subsequently the HPRA granted a marketing authorisation for Sativex Oromucosal Spray to be marketed in the State for the relief of symptoms of spasticity for people with multiple sclerosis where other conservative treatments have failed to provide adequate benefits. To date, the HPRA has not received any applications for authorisation for any further cannabis-based products, but remains open to doing so.

I have committed to urgently reviewing policy on medicinal cannabis. I have asked the HPRA for advice on emerging research and international developments in the use of medicinal cannabis. I hope to receive a report from the HPRA early in the new year. I will then be in a position to consider and progress any legislative changes that may be recommended.

Hospital Consultant Recruitment

198. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Health if the position for the sarcoma specialist at St. Vincent's Hospital has been advertised; if so, if the advertisement specifically mentioned a sarcoma specialist; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35379/16]

201. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 529 of 12 July 2016 the status of his commitment that the recruitment of a consultant medical oncologist with a special interest in sarcoma, based in St. Vincent's University Hospital, will be prioritised; the criteria stipulated in the job description to ensure that a specialist with extensive experience in treating this rare disease is being sought by his Department; if he is satisfied that the recruitment process commenced by the director general of the HSE will ensure that a specialist of world class standard will fill this position and that the highest possible standards will be met unequivocally in respect of treating patients with sarcoma; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35395/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 198 and 201 together.

A new permanent post of consultant medical oncologist with a special interest in sarcoma is currently being recruited for St. Vincent's University Hospital. The post is advertised as a Medical Oncologist in line with Medical Council stipulations. The job description for this position, which is designed to attract the best candidates, makes it clear that the post will provide a specialist service for sarcoma patients and this will be a focus during the recruitment process.

Nursing Home Services

199. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Health if he will secure the day care services and the nursing home at a location (details supplied), his future plans for the home, including future investment and upgrading; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35388/16]

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.

Health Services Staff Recruitment

200. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the trouble the HSE is having in recruiting key essential professionals within the health service in counties Cavan and Monaghan; his views on these difficulties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35390/16]

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.

Question No. 201 answered with Question No. 198.

Hospital Appointments Status

202. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health the status of an ear, nose and throat appointment in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on

the matter. [35399/16]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Waiting Lists

203. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35407/16]

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.

HSE Staff

204. **Deputy Colm Brophy** asked the Minister for Health if he will address the understaffing at a health centre (details supplied). [35489/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Waiting Lists

205. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite appointments for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35503/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Ser-

vice 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.

General Medical Services Scheme Administration

206. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if third level students may nominate a second or additional general practitioner to enable them to access GP services while attending educational institutions situated in areas which are not within reasonable travel distance from their homes, and thus, their local GPs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35504/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Patients who hold a medical card or GP visit card are registered with a single GP who holds a contract to provide services to eligible patients under the General Medical Services (GMS) scheme. GPs are remunerated for these services primarily on a capitation basis, with a range of additional support payments and fees for specific items of service. The amount payable in respect of certain supports is related to the doctor's panel size. As the fees and allowances payable to GPs under the GMS scheme are largely determined by the number of patients on their panel, it is not possible for a GMS patient to be registered on the panel of more than one GP.

Should a GMS patient wish to change their GP it is required that they submit a completed change of doctor form to the National Medical Card Unit, Exit 5 M50, North Road, Finglas, Dublin 11. Change of doctor forms are available from all HSE Local Health Offices or from the HSE's website.

Fishing Industry

207. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide information regarding the liquidation of a company (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35249/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): While I understand that the liquidator is currently undertaking a period of commercially sensitive negotiations, my Department has no involvement in or direct knowledge of these matters. However, Bord Iascaigh Mhara and Enterprise Ireland stand ready to offer any assistance they can.

A wide range of supports are available to the seafood processing sector through Bord Iascaigh Mhara under my Department's €240 million European Maritime and Fisheries Fund Operational Programme. The need for greater scale within the seafood processing sector has been recognised in that Operational Programme and in Food Wise 2025. The Seafood Scaling and New Market Development Scheme under the Operational Programme makes available generous supports for companies seeking to merge, or otherwise work constructively together. The Seafood Capital Investment Scheme provides supports for capital investment by companies

wishing to grow and add value to their products, while the Seafood Innovation and Business Planning Scheme may assist companies wishing to innovate and develop new products.

Horse Racing Ireland

208. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 418 of 8 November 2016 if his Department or the chairman, board or the executive of Horse Racing Ireland are aware of any unresolved legal action or actions which remain active, awaiting a hearing or awaiting a decision of determination by any court within our jurisdiction as of 9 November 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35243/16]

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

HRI has informed me that currently it has an ongoing landlord tenant dispute in relation to Leopardstown Club Limited. There are also a small number of claims taken by HRI in relation to unpaid Foal Levy charges, with a separate Small Claims Court dispute about the precise amount of levy payable to HRI. I am also informed that at any given time there may be a number of personal injury claims arising from accidents on racecourses etc. – these are generally dealt with within the remit of the Personal Injuries Assessment Board or directly by HRI insurers.

These are operational matters for HRI.

Horse Racing Ireland Funding

209. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 416 of 8 November 2016, if he will provide a list of the nominating bodies which receive funding from the taxpayer, distributed by Horse Racing Ireland, including the amounts of such funding; if he will provide a list of the individual nominating bodies in receipt of funding; the amount or amounts of money each individual body receive in public funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35244/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The current HRI Board is made up of 14 members comprising:

a Chairman & two ordinary members – Appointed by the Minister

a representative of the industry in Northern Ireland – Appointed by Minister

3 Racing Regulatory Body Nominees – the Racing Regulatory Body receives annual integrity funding directly from HRI as provided for under legislation. Details of this funding are published in the Annual Accounts of HRI.

Persons employed directly in the Industry – the Irish Stable Staff Association does not receive any direct funding from HRI but receives indirect funding as a prize money deduction.

Persons Employed in the Industry – this has been a nominee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) which does not receive any direct or indirect funding from HRI.

Authorised Racecourses – the Association of Irish Racecourses does not receive funding either directly or indirectly from HRI.

Racehorse Owners – the Association of Irish Racehorse Owners does not receive funding either directly or indirectly from HRI.

Racehorse Trainers – the Irish Racehorse Trainers Association does not receive any direct funding from HRI but receives indirect funding as a prize money deduction.

Racehorse Breeders – the Irish Thoroughbred Breeders Association does not receive any direct funding from HRI but receives indirect funding from the Foal Levy.

Authorised Bookmakers – the Irish National Bookmakers Association does not receive funding either directly or indirectly from HRI.

Horse Racing Industry Funding

210. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 421 of 8 November 2016 if he will provide a list of recipients who commercially and financially benefit from the spending of taxpayers' money on marketing activities by Irish Thoroughbred Marketing, while acknowledging this kind of marketing and promoting is a critical element in the development of the Irish thoroughbred sector; if he will explain in precise terms the way in which all taxpayers benefit from this expenditure of public funds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35245/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Irish Thoroughbred Marketing (ITM) is funded in part by an HRI grant (€1.275 m in 2016) and in part from outside sources totalling an estimated €834k in 2016 (Foal Levy €415k, sales companies €319k, stallion owners €100k).

You will be aware of the broad remit of ITM to promote and market the Irish Thoroughbred racing and breeding industry internationally, as well as in its role in promoting racehorse ownership in Ireland.

This ITM work produces significant financial return for the exchequer through direct inward investment into the country creating many jobs; all the subsequent taxation generated from the operation of training and breeding establishments; the related importance for the many connected ancillary bloodstock services; the positive impact on the broader local economy around Irish bloodstock sales; and the tax returns (VAT) on the sale of bloodstock.

Horse Racing Ireland

211. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his attention has been drawn to any official communications by letter, e-mail and telephone, including landline and mobile telephone, and including by a person (details supplied), with the chairman, board, the chief executive officer or any other executive member employed by Horse Racing Ireland at an emergency general meeting of the HRI board, held on 27 September 2016, prior to the board of HRI releasing a press release which supported the reappointment of the chief executive of HRI; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35246/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I was advised by my department that it had been notified by HRI that there was to be an EGM of the HRI

board on the date in question.

I understood that the Board was meeting with a view to discussing the appointment of the CEO and that a further statement might be issued regarding the reappointment of the CEO. The issue of any such statement was of course entirely a matter for the Board and my Department had no role in the matter.

My Department received confirmation that a statement had been agreed after it was approved by the Board.

Horse Racing Ireland

212. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 415 of 8 November 2016, if his position as outlined in his reply still stands; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35247/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My position as outlined in my earlier reply still stands.

The Chairman apologised in his opening address to the Committee for his handling of the matter stating that the CEO appointment process could have been done better and that he takes responsibility for this matter.

The Board of HRI has also indicated that it is satisfied that “the best result for HRI and the industry has been achieved with the successful completion of the new CEO contract”.

Harbours and Piers

213. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to identify the person responsible for a pier (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35290/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department owns, manages and maintains the six State-owned Fishery Harbour Centres, located at Castletownbere, Dingle, Dunmore East, Howth, Killybegs and Ros An Mhíl. In accordance with the 1902 ex-congested Districts Board Piers, Lights and Beacons Act, my Department also has responsibility for North Harbour Cape Clear, and a limited number of small piers, lights and beacons.

I can confirm that my Department does not have responsibility for Kilkeavagh Pier, Co Kerry and therefore is not responsible for the upkeep of same.

Furthermore, my Department holds no records on the title of this pier. However we have established that Kilkeavagh Pier is not owned by the Local Authority and is not accessible by public road.

Felling Licences Applications

214. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a forestry application in respect of a person (details supplied). [35300/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): On 5th February 2016, my Department received an application for a General Felling Licence from the person named in respect of 2.14 hectares of forestry. The reason given for the felling was land reclamation.

Following examination of the application, the Department recommended that as the applicant did not wish to replant the land being cleared, a Limited Felling Licence would be more appropriate. Under a limited felling licence it is possible to plant an alternative area to compensate for the area being cleared, whereas a general felling licence dictates that the area cleared must be replanted.

My Department wrote to the applicant on the 16th June 2016, advising him that as he did not wish to replant the felled area that a General Felling licence would not be granted. The applicant was advised that should he wish to proceed with the proposed felling, a Limited Felling Licence would be the more appropriate licence for which to apply and the appropriate forms were enclosed.

The applicant was also informed that compensatory afforestation in lieu of the proposed felling would be required and he was provided with information in this regard.

The Department has not received any further correspondence relating to this application from the applicant. The original General Felling Licence application is closed.

TB Eradication Scheme

215. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the protocols involved when TB is detected on a farm; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35309/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The protocols involved when TB is detected on a farm are extremely detailed and are set out in the 'Veterinary Handbook for herd Management in the Bovine TB Eradication Programme' on my Department's website www.agriculture.gov.ie.

In summary, when TB is detected on a farm, the holding is restricted and a notice of restriction with the relevant conditions attached is served on the keeper. No animals may move off the farm until the herd has been derestricted except to slaughter and no animals may move on to the farm until at least one clear re-test has been completed. Movement permits are generally not required to move non-reactor animal to slaughter but are required for the removal of reactor animals.

My Department's veterinary inspectorate carries out a Quality Control inspection of the reactors disclosed and of the test itself as soon as possible after disclosure on holdings with 4 or more reactors. Holdings with less than 4 reactors are selected for inspection on a risk basis. This inspection includes a check on the test site, testing facilities, milk from reactors being withheld from the market, identification issues arising at test, animal remedies administered to reactors, identification of the focus of infection including badger activity etc. The number and type of reactors disclosed will dictate any consequential testing to be carried out but in general the holding will remain restricted until all animals on the holding have had two consecutive clear tests, the first conducted a minimum of 60 days and the second a minimum of 4 months after the removal of the last positive reactor.

With regard to compensation, my Department provides all herdowners whose herd has ex-

perienced a TB outbreak with an information pack ('Information Booklet for Farmers') giving information in relation to the restriction of the holding and the compensation schemes available. This booklet is also available on my Department's website.

Agrifood Sector

216. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the details of the latest efforts by the Government to help the mushroom industry, particularly in counties Cavan and Monaghan. [35310/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I am very aware of the significant challenges that the mushroom sector is experiencing in the aftermath of the UK Referendum decision to exit the EU, and particularly in light of recent fluctuations in currency. I am focused on working with the industry to meet these difficulties in the months and years ahead. I am monitoring Sterling fluctuations closely and my own Department has established a dedicated unit to consider the full impact of Brexit.

Grower production of this highly perishable product must be well aligned with demand and the mushroom sector, like other food exporting sectors, is highly dependant on the UK market.

I have met and will continue to meet senior executives from the UK retailers to highlight the obstacles that producers are facing.

Bord Bia is working closely with the sector on market intelligence, UK consumer research and quality assurance. They recently held a currency and negotiation workshop specifically targeted at the sector, which I understand was very well received. A Marketing Intensification Programme which aims to provide targeted marketing supports to companies with high dependency on UK markets has been rolled out. Grant supports will be prioritised to assist companies in strengthening their position in that market, and in their efforts to identify new markets.

As announced in Budget 2017, I have secured an additional €700,000 in funding for capital investments in the commercial Horticulture sector which includes the Mushroom sector. This will increase the budget for this scheme to €5million in 2017. Additionally, the Horticulture sector will have access to the €150m low interest cash flow support loan fund announced in the Budget, providing access to highly flexible loans for up to six years, for amounts up to €150,000, at an interest rate of 2.95%.

To ensure on-going support for the sector, my Department extended, under EU sanction, the Scheme of Investment Aid for the Development of the Commercial Horticulture Sector to run until 31 December 2019. In 2014 and 2015 a total of €1,635,190 grant aid was paid to mushroom growers. The grant aid paid supported some €4.1 million in investment by these growers.

Under the 2016 Scheme of Investment Aid for the Development of the Commercial Horticulture Sector, my Department issued approvals in the amount of €1.33 million in aid to growers in the mushroom sector, supporting €3.3 million in proposed investment.

The EU Producer Organisation Scheme is also a vital support for mushroom growers, with 65% of Irish growers in a producer organisation at present. This scheme provides an important mechanism for growers to achieve greater bargaining power in the marketplace by becoming part of a larger supply base. Between 2005 and 2015, a total of €39.8 million was paid to mushroom producer organisations as part of the EU Producer Organisation scheme. I recently arranged the payment of just under €1.57 million to one of our mushroom producer organisations.

My Department and its agencies will continue to work with the industry including producers in Cavan and Monaghan through this challenging period.

Milk Prices

217. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the efforts being made to address the volatility in the milk sector; his plans to put in a floor in the milk price to ensure farmers particularly in counties Cavan and Monaghan are not working for nothing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35321/16]

219. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to sustain milk production going forward and to secure jobs in counties Cavan and Monaghan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35323/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 217 and 219 together.

As minister for Agriculture, I am concerned with the livelihoods of farmers in all sectors in each of the 26 counties.

I am acutely conscious of the pressure farmers are under at present, and I can assure the Deputy that I am committed to exploring all of the appropriate options for providing assistance to the farm sector through current difficulties. I have no role in the setting of prices of course.

After a prolonged period of price volatility in dairy markets, there are some tentative signs of recovery. At present the Irish raw milk price is 6.2% above the EU average and there has been strong increase in butter prices across the EU bloc in recent weeks.

However, volatility will continue to be a feature of global dairy markets. Fixed price and margin contracts, futures markets and access to increasingly flexible forms of credits are all part of the toolkit that will be required. There has been significant progress in each of these areas, with initiatives by processors and a new flexible loan fund for dairy and other farmers announced in Budget 2017.

On the market front, since taking office I have led trade missions to Asia and to North Africa, with a view to increasing the profile of Ireland as a producer of quality food products, including dairy products. These markets are characterised by existing business relationships, but also high potential for further growth. The development of trade in international dairy markets for Irish producers is key to ensuring sustainable growth for the sector and is also a critically important element in mitigating market volatility. This work on market diversification is particularly important in the context of Brexit.

The Dairy Quality Assurance Scheme is also critically important in developing a unique selling point for Irish dairy products on EU and international markets. Dairy processors make a substantial contribution to cover some of the costs of audits under the scheme, but of course the question of price incentives for participation is a matter for the industry.

On-going efforts within industry, supported by Government, to move dairy production up the value chain wherever possible are also critically important. These efforts are supported by investment by my Department and its agencies in research and innovation. By providing financial support for Teagasc, ICBF and Animal Health Ireland, and for knowledge transfer groups, we are investing in the provision of advice and education to farmers, to facilitate technology adoption and improve profitability at farm level. My Department is also providing support for

investment at farm level through the TAMS scheme.

Where appropriate, we must continue to focus on appropriate national and EU measures that can play a role in supporting the sector. It is vital that we continue to work closely with the Commission and all other key stakeholders in this regard. The Commission, in many instances based on suggestions from Ireland and other like minded Member States, has already deployed a range of market supports including intervention and Aids to Private Storage, and a financial package of €500 million for liquidity assistance was agreed at the Agriculture council in September 2016, with Ireland topping up its allocation to provide a total assistance package of approaching €27M to Irish farmers in late 2015 and early 2016.

The Commission also announced a further €500m support package for EU farmers in July 2016. The first €150m was reserved for an EU-wide scheme compensating farmers who reduce their milk output over certain reference periods towards the end of 2016. This was very well subscribed to in Ireland and, should the commitments for reduction be adhered to, will be worth over €10M to Irish dairy farmers in 2017.

For the other element of the Commission package, €350m is set aside for Member State initiatives with fixed allocations per MS. Ireland's allocation under this scheme is €11m. I have decided to provide an additional €13 million national aid in that in order to optimise the effectiveness of this measure and to use it to support the development of a €150 million fund for low interest loans for farmers.

A further measure that has assisted in reducing the burden on farmers was the negotiation and agreement of advanced payments for the Basic Payment and the RDP schemes, allowing us to pay out 70% and 85% respectively from 16th October.

I can assure the Deputy that I will continue to work closely with the dairy sector, with EU colleagues and International counterparts to ensure the development and maintenance of a sustainable dairy sector in Cavan, Monaghan and elsewhere.

Agriculture Industry

218. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the impact the election of President Elect, Donald Trump will have on the farming sector here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35322/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): It is unclear at this early stage following the US election what impact the election result will have on the farming sector in Ireland. Any impact that may arise is likely to be in the area of trade in agricultural products. We do not yet know what the new administration's approach will be in this area, for example in terms of whether its overall attitude is likely to be more protectionist in nature, or whether it will take a different approach than heretofore in negotiating free trade agreements.

In the latter case, the EU has been negotiating the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) with the US for quite some time. It appears that these negotiations have essentially entered a period of pause until after the new administration has settled into office. We will have to wait and see what the administration's approach will be, but I would be hopeful that the negotiations can recommence in 2017.

Question No. 219 answered with Question No. 217.

Young Farmers Scheme

220. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons that applied for funding under the young farmers scheme for 2016; the number that were denied; the number in County Louth that applied; and if there were any departmental waivers given to those who did not meet the set criteria. [35338/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department received some 8,600 applications for funding under the 2016 Young Farmers Scheme. To date 340 applications have been deemed to be unsuccessful. 84 applications for the 2016 Young Farmers Scheme were received from Co. Louth applicants.

EU Regulations governing the operation of the Young Farmers Scheme set down the definition of a young farmer for the purposes of eligibility under the Scheme. This definition applies to all Member States and my Department has no discretion with regard to its implementation in Ireland. Successful applicants to the Scheme are also required to fulfil certain criteria with regard to agricultural educational qualifications. No Departmental waiver has been given to any applicant in relation to the 2016 Young Farmers Scheme.

Fishing Industry

221. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the structures that are in place safeguarding Irish fishing in view of Britain's vote to leave the EU. [35341/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The outcome of the UK Brexit referendum is obviously foremost in our minds and in Government it is very much a priority. It poses enormous challenges for the Irish agri-food sector as a whole including the fisheries sector. However, potentially, depending on what the UK seeks to do, there are additional and unique challenges for our fishing industry.

Fish stocks are a shared resource managed under the Common Fisheries Policy of the European Union. Nearly all of the main commercial stocks upon which the Irish fisheries sector is reliant are shared to some degree with the UK. In addition, many of our traditional fishing grounds lie within UK waters. Any change to the existing situation could have very serious negative consequences for our fleets.

My Department, together with its agencies and stakeholders, has been considering all of the potential impacts, looking at the areas where the greatest risks will arise and on which we will need to focus when the negotiations begin. Ensuring that our fishing interests are reflected in the overall EU negotiating position will be a key priority.

I have established a dedicated Brexit unit in my Department, and a consultative committee of stakeholders has been convened in order to ensure a full exchange of information as negotiations proceed.

I will remain in close contact with fisheries stakeholders as the issues develop and work with them and my fellow fisheries Ministers in the EU to ensure that we are all fully prepared for what are likely to be extremely complex negotiations.

Fish Quotas

222. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if all fish species caught between the baseline and shore, under the Maritime Jurisdiction Act 1959 and the Straight Baseline Order 1959, constitute part of EU quotas; if he has sought to gain any percentage quota of bluefin tuna or any other tuna species; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35348/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Common Fisheries Policy of the European Union covers the conservation of marine biological resources and the management of fisheries and fleets exploiting such resources. Fisheries are managed by the setting of a Total Allowable Catch (TAC) for particular stocks in Union waters. Union waters are those waters under the sovereignty or jurisdiction of the Member States of the EU. Quotas are those proportions of the TAC allocated to a Member State. Consequently, all fish in Union waters wherever they are, managed under a TAC, are allocated to Member States as quota and are part of the totality of quotas in the EU.

With regard to the second part of the Deputy's question concerning tuna species, Ireland does not have a dedicated bluefin tuna quota as we had no track record for fishing this species when quotas were established. Ireland does have access to a small bycatch quota of 39 tonnes – shared with other Member States – for use in our albacore tuna and pelagic fisheries. It is extremely unlikely that Ireland could obtain a dedicated bluefin quota as it would involve reducing the share of the Total Allowable Catch of those EU Member States that do have quota and for whom bluefin is an important commercial fishery .

Ireland does have a substantial and valuable quota for albacore tuna. In 2016, Ireland's quota was 2,510 tonnes which is nearly 10% of the total EU Total Allowable Catch and is worth over €5 million directly to our catching sector.

TAC's for both bluefin and albacore tuna are set by ICCAT (the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas) at its annual meeting, which take place this week in Portugal. My Department is represented at this meeting. For 2017 quotas, my priority is to work with other Member States to make the case for a small increase in our albacore tuna quota taking account of the scientific advice.

Hardship Grant Scheme

223. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will review a scheme (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35387/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The primary compensation scheme for farmers whose herds are affected by TB is the On-Farm Market Valuation Scheme under which compensation is payable for cattle removed as reactors. Herdowners compensated under the On Farm Market Valuation Scheme may also qualify for supplementary payment under the Depopulation, Income Supplement and Hardship Grants Schemes subject to compliance with the relevant criteria. I would note that these supplementary schemes are unique in Ireland and are not available in other jurisdictions where there is a TB problem. For example in Northern Ireland, England and Wales compensation is only payable for the value of the removed reactor.

A review of all the TB Eradication Compensation Schemes was completed earlier this year by my Department, following consultation with the farming organisations. Following that review, the Hardship Scheme was extended to include farmers with income from sales of milk.

There are no plans to further review the Hardship Grant scheme.

Animal Welfare

224. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will consider introducing a ban on wild animal circuses on animal welfare grounds; if his Department has investigated the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35389/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The conditions under which all species of animals in circuses are kept and managed come under the scope of the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013, which contains rules relating to the welfare of all animals, including wild animals in circuses. Section 25 of the Act provides for the adoption of codes of practice in relation to, inter alia, matters concerning the welfare of animals, and this is being kept under review in the context of use of animals in circuses. My Department continues to engage with stakeholders, including circus groups, animal welfare organisations, in relation to the welfare of wild animals in circuses. According to the information available to my Department, there are in fact very few wild animals currently performing in Irish circuses. I have no plans at this juncture to ban the use of wild animals in circuses.

GLAS Applications

225. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 170 of 27 October 2016, if the issues have been resolved to allow an application under GLAS 2 to be submitted by a person (details supplied) in County Galway; if not, when these issues are likely to be resolved in view of the fact that this person has been trying to submit an application for the past 11 months without success; the reason for the delay in resolving the issues involved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35401/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I am aware that in the specific case of the person named, the advisor concerned was unable to submit a GLAS 2 application on behalf of the person named. My Department has been working to resolve the issues with this application and has been in direct contact with the person named including by written correspondence dated 15 November 2016.

Air Pollution

226. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will review the provisions of sections 24 and 26 of the Air Pollution Act 1987, in view of the fact that local authorities seem to have inadequate powers to prevent the ongoing pollution of the atmosphere by domestic householders arising by the operation of wood burning stoves, despite securing convictions in the courts for breaches of the law; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35272/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Section 26 of the Air Pollution Act gives local authorities powers to serve a notice on the occupier of any premises in order to prevent or to limit air pollution from that premises while section 24 applies to non-domestic premises only and is not applicable to domestic households. It is a matter for a local authority to exercise its judgement in any individual case as to whether a nuisance is being caused and if so, what abatement action is required. It should be

noted that this section applies equally to all sources of emissions to air including the burning of substances other than wood.

The powers provided are considered adequate and there are no plans to review these provisions of the Air Pollution Act, however my Department is happy to engage with local authorities on any particular problems that arise in implementation.

Regarding wood burning stoves and stoves in general, there are a number of on-going initiatives that are working to improve the emissions from wood burning stoves. The Department of Agriculture Food and Marine has taken steps to raise the standard of wood used through the voluntary Wood Fuel Quality Assurance Scheme, as better quality wood with a low moisture content tends to have lower emissions. In addition the European Committee for Standardisation (CEN) has developed standards for solid biofuels, including wood biomass, under Technical Committee (TC) 335 Solid Biofuels, which Ireland has adopted. Although it is not a legal obligation for fuel suppliers to apply this standard, it is strongly recommended that consumers look for fuels meeting the standard when purchasing wood fuels. Also at EU level, Ireland supported the introduction of stringent emission standards from solid fuel space heaters under the Eco Design Directive (2009/125/EC). These standards will apply to all new stoves and must be introduced by 2022 at the very latest, although Member States have the option to introduce them earlier.

EU Directives

227. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the roll-out of a directive (details supplied); the details of tendering; if works have started in counties Cavan or Monaghan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35339/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): There is no specific EU directive that stipulates that public lighting assets must be upgraded. However, there is a directive (347/2010) stating that certain lamps and lamps with magnetic ballasts either cannot be sold, or must, from 2017, meet certain performance criteria. The EU Directive that is most relevant to changes to public lighting is the Energy Efficiency Directive. Under that Directive Ireland has committed to achieving a target of 20% energy efficiency by 2020 and the Government set a more ambitious target of 33% for the public sector. Upgrading of public lighting is central to the achievement of the public sector target.

While some Local authorities have already undertaken some retrofit work the main focus now is on a co-ordinated national effort to retrofit public lighting nationwide. This is being overseen by the National Public Lighting Steering Group. This group is chaired by the City & County Management Association (CCMA) and includes representatives from Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI), the Department of Transport, Tourism & Sport and my Department. Preparation for the physical upgrading of public lighting assets is underway across a number of work-streams. The initial focus is on inventory and database refinement. SEAI and TII part funded this activity in 2016. Cavan and Monaghan are drawing down this support and have contractors doing this. This is expected to lead to regional contracts for maintenance and retrofit in 2017/18.

Ministerial Meetings

228. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Ac-

tion and Environment if he has met formally with a person (details supplied) since their appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35255/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): As a matter of course, as Minister, I meet, from time to time, with the Chairs and CEOs of bodies under the aegis of my Department. I can confirm that I have formally met the individual in question.

Ministerial Meetings

229. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will meet with a group (details supplied) regarding the North-South interconnector project. [35313/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I am always happy to consider meeting requests from groups on issues of public importance such as the North-South 400kV Interconnector project.

To request a meeting, the group can write to my office either via post to Minister's Office, Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment, 29-31 Adelaide Road, Dublin D02 X285 or via email to Ministersdiary@DCCAE.gov.ie.

It should be noted that this project is the subject of a statutory independent planning process currently before An Bord Pleanála. According to their website, the case is due to be decided by 21 December 2016.

As the planning process is still ongoing there may be a limit to what it would be appropriate for me to discuss in a meeting on this topic.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

230. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when his Department will extend broadband cover to a location (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35394/16]

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 formal procurement process for the State Intervention commenced in December 2015.

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

- The areas marked BLUE represent those areas where commercial providers are either currently delivering or have previously indicated plans to deliver high speed broadband services.
- The areas marked AMBER on the High Speed Broadband Map represent the target areas for the State Intervention which are the subject of the current procurement process.

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

Based on information provided by commercial operators up to 68% of the townland of Fountainstown will be covered by commercial operators while the remaining 32% of the townland will be part of the State Intervention. Members of the public can view whether their premises in Cork are in the BLUE or AMBER area by accessing the High Speed Broadband Map and entering their Eircode.

While I cannot compel any operator to provide services to a particular premises, the NBP aims to ensure that all premises can access high speed broadband. In this regard, my Department continues to actively monitor the deployment plans in the BLUE area and direct feedback from consumers is important. I would encourage customers in the townland of Fountainstown area who cannot access high speed broadband services to contact my Department directly at broadband@dcaae.gov.ie, quoting their address and Eircode, and giving details of providers they have contacted with a view to obtaining services. My Department needs this information to keep track of progress in those areas so that high speed broadband solutions can be found in parallel with the State Intervention high speed broadband network roll-out.

The Department is now in a formal procurement process to select a company or companies who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network within the State Intervention Area comprising over 750,000 premises including 85,000 premises in Co Cork, covering 100,000km of road network and 96% of the land area of Ireland.

Intensive dialogue with bidders is continuing and the three bidders have indicated that they are proposing a predominantly fibre-to-the-home solution. Householders and businesses may get speeds not just of 30 Megabits per second but potentially up to 1000 megabits per second 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 rollout a network of the scale envisaged under the NBP. It is however open to bidder(s) to suggest more aggressive timescales as part of their bids.

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

will be published once contract(s) are in place.

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

Sports Capital Programme

231. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the sports capital grant application system will be open; the supports that will be put in place to assist clubs with their applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35240/16]

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 relation to the supports available for clubs to complete the application, the new Programme will include a revised online portal which will make the process more user-friendly. Other supports will include a comprehensive written guide and video guides. Staff in the relevant section of my Department will also be available to assist clubs by phone and email.

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. I will be announcing more comprehensive details of the new round shortly.

Taxi Licences

232. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has had representations regarding the knowledge test for applicants for taxi licences or if his attention has been drawn to concerns regarding the fairness of the test and of its administration since it was contracted out to a private company; if his Department will liaise with the National Transport Authority and the Taxi Regulator on this matter to review whether this test and its administration are fit for purpose; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35242/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The regulation of the small public service vehicle (SPSV) industry, including administration of the SPSV Entry Test, is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the provisions of the Taxi Regulation Act 2013. I am aware that the NTA recently commenced a public consultation on SPSV driver entry requirements with a closing date for submissions of 30 November.

I have referred your question to the NTA for direct reply to you. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

National Transport Authority Staff

233. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of new staff recruited by the National Transport Authority, NTA, in each of the years 2013 to date in 2016; the number of staff that left the NTA during this same period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35252/16]

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.

Road Improvement Schemes

234. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the proposed Coonagh–Knockalisheen road will be completed (details supplied); and the monies his Department will allocate to ensure that this road project will be completed. [35267/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads within its area is the statutory responsibility of each local authority, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from the Council's own resources supplemented by State road grants.

As previously explained to the Deputy, before the main contract for the Coonagh to Knockalisheen Road Scheme can commence, important advance works must be undertaken. These advance works include special ground works treatment along a section of the proposed road. Following receipt and examination of the relevant tender documentation, approval was given by my Department to Limerick City and County Council in July this year to proceed to tender in respect of the Advance Works Contract and the timeframe for progressing the tender process is now a matter for Limerick City and County Council.

Coast Guard Services

235. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of call outs responded to by each helicopter unit at the four Irish Coast Guard search and rescue bases in each of the past three years. [35334/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Helicopter callouts 2013 – Nov 2016.

Location	2013	2014	2015	2016 (to 14th Nov)
Shannon	290	311	334	248
Sligo	243	275	347	316
Dublin	131	140	151	108
Waterford	144	188	181	144

Irish Coast Guard Issues

236. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the details

on funding for the Irish Coast Guard in 2014, 2015 and 2016; and his plans to improve or discontinue service coverage in any parts of the country. [35368/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Coast Guard provides maritime Search and Rescue (SAR) through its three Rescue Co-ordination Centres and dedicated search and rescue units (SRUs). These SRUs comprise of the SAR helicopters and Coast Guard volunteer Units. SRUs are also ‘declared’ to the Coast Guard from the RNLI, with which the Coast Guard has a very close working relationship.

As is recommended practice worldwide, Search and Rescue in Ireland is built upon the Rescue Centres listening for and receiving distress messages, responding to and sending and co-ordinating SRUs to and at the scene of an incident. The Coast Guard depends on the SAR Helicopters, Coast Guard Volunteer Units and RNLI lifeboats to respond to vessels or persons in distress at sea. The network of SRUs has been built up over many years and today provide an excellent network of response units to respond to persons in distress.

The location, distribution and response service provided by Coast Guard assets are kept under continuous review with the view to development and improvement in the delivery of SAR services around the country. The Coast Guard are working to improve buildings around the coast and are currently introducing upgraded all-terrain vehicles and climbing unit vans. Additionally trials are taking place at present on new boats as part of a renewal process. There are no current plans to discontinue or downgrade any of the services provided around the coast.

€	2014	2015	2016
Current	63,295,000	62,665,000	65,855,000
Capital	8,267,000	4,940,000	4,600,000

Tourism Promotion

237. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his Department is working with the Department of Justice and Equality to improve the visitor visa schemes for overseas tourists to Ireland; and if his Department received advice from Tourism Ireland on the way visa schemes could be improved to make it easier for overseas tourists to visit Ireland. [35369/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Ease of access is an important consideration for visitors from countries outside of Ireland’s primary source markets of Great Britain, mainland Europe and North America. My Department liaises with the Department of Justice and Equality and Tourism Ireland on advances in visa policy.

Under the Irish Short Stay Visa Waiver Programme, certain short stay visas issued by the Immigration authorities of the United Kingdom are recognised by Ireland for the purposes of onward travel to Ireland. The Programme is regarded as being very successful in promoting tourism into Ireland and facilitating cross-border tourism. The success of the programme helped lay the foundations for the development of the British Irish Visa Scheme and its roll-out to China and India.

Tourism Ireland has advised my Department of the importance of the Irish Short Stay Visa Waiver Programme, particularly in the context of tourism trade missions to countries covered by the Programme. Therefore, I welcome the recent decision of the Minister for Justice and Equality to extend the Programme for a further five years.

My Department will continue to support the initiative of the Department of Justice and

Equality in the development of the British Irish Visa Scheme and other enhancements of the visa system to promote growth in tourist and business visits to Ireland.

Tourism Promotion

238. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his Department or a body under its aegis is taking action to promote designation of areas as dark sky preserves and Ireland as a destination for astro tourism; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35372/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): My Department's role in relation to tourism lies in the area of national tourism policy. It is not directly involved in the management or development of individual tourism projects. This is an operational matter for the Board and Management of Fáilte Ireland.

Accordingly, I have referred the Deputy's question to Fáilte Ireland for direct reply to the Deputy. Please contact my private office if you have not received a reply within ten working days.

Appointments to State Boards

239. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the terms of appointment of the current chairpersons and board members for each agency, commercial semi-State company and public body under the aegis of his Department; the current vacancies on each board; the appointment process to fill any vacancies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35373/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Board appointments are generally made in accordance with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform Guidelines on State Board Appointments. Under these Guidelines, the Public Appointments Service (PAS) advertises vacancies on the State Boards portal, www.stateboards.ie, is responsible for establishing Assessment Panels to assess all applications. Where a re-appointment is proposed the PAS process does not apply. I am currently considering means by which the appointment processes can be enhanced to ensure in so far as possible the best appointments are made.

Details of appointments can be found on my Departments website at the following link www.dttas.ie/corporate/english/state-board-membership-and-approved-fees.

Parking Charges

240. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if clampers at car parking places are permitted to impose fees of €120 as they have done recently at Sallins railway station in view of the fact that legislation was enacted to cap fees at €100 in the last Dáil term; if he is satisfied with the operation of this legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35397/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Currently, there is no statutory regulation of clamping activities on private land.

However, following commencement of the Vehicle Clamping Act 2015 it will be the function of the National Transport Authority (NTA) to regulate clamping activities wherever they take place, including the determination of maximum clamp release fees in private car parking areas. The conferral of vehicle clamping regulatory responsibilities on the NTA has resulted in a requirement for the allocation of additional resources to allow the NTA carry out its new functions in this area.

In addition, the NTA has also required a period of time to make and prepare the necessary regulations provided for under the Act, as well as to ensure that the appropriate training and administrative supports are in place to allow for commencement of its regulatory responsibilities.

This very necessary preparatory work is almost complete and my Department is now finalising arrangements with the NTA in relation to an appropriate commencement date.

Public Transport Fares

241. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will review the rail fares in towns in County Kildare where persons from Newbridge are now paying considerably more for a commuter trip to Dublin than persons in Naas and Celbridge; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35502/16]

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

Departmental Expenditure

242. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the source of the increase in capital funding for her Department from the figure given on page 86 of the budget 2017 expenditure report of €30 million and the statement by her on 3 November 2016 that the figure is actually €52 million; the other funding that has been cut to meet this increase; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35293/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): In the Revised Estimates Volume for 2016 my Department was allocated €503m in capital expenditure for 2016. In the Mid-Year Expenditure Review in July this year my Department was shown as having an indicative capital allocation of €525m for 2017. However, following successful negotiations in the recent Estimates 2017 process the Department was allocated €555m. Accordingly, the 2017 Estimates' allocation is €30 million above the originally published allocation, and €52m above the 2016 allocation.

It is the case that the €555 million capital secured represents the largest capital funding allocation to the Department in over a decade. The increased capital funding is 10% higher than the 2016 level. It will enable the Department and its Agencies to support further job creation, innovation and assist Irish based enterprise in responding to the evolving challenges and opportunities relating to Brexit. The additional funding secured demonstrates Government's ongoing commitment to delivering 200,000 additional jobs by 2020 of which 135,000 will be in the regions.

Work Permits Applications

243. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the status of the work permits for persons (details supplied); if assistance will be offered taking into account the specialised need; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35241/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen): An application for the first General Employment Permit mentioned by the Deputy was received on 13th August 2016. This application was refused on 30th August 2016. In accordance with the provisions of the Acts, the applicant sought a review of this decision. The application was granted on review and the Employment Permit issued on 15th November 2016.

An application for a second General Employment Permit was received on 19th October 2016 with appropriate fee paid online. Current processing dates for Standard employer permit applications is 3rd October.

I recognise that having a wide range of cuisines in the restaurant sector supports Ireland being an attractive destination for tourists. Thus while chefs generally are on the ineligible list for employment permits an exception is made for Executive Chefs, Head Chefs, Sous Chefs and Specialist Chefs who specialise in cuisine originating from states that are not Member States of the EEA.

Brexit Issues

244. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if she will provide a breakdown of both the €3 million allocation for current expenditure and the €52 million allocation in capital expenditure which she stated were to help IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland and Science Foundation Ireland to deal with Brexit. [35251/16]

245. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if she will provide a breakdown of the reports her Department has consulted in order that the proposed €52 million additional allocation in capital expenditure which she stated was to help IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland and Science Foundation Ireland to deal with Brexit, will be allocated. [35257/16]

246. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the plans her Department has to spend the €52 million additional allocation in capital expenditure which she stated was to help IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland and Science Foundation Ireland to deal with Brexit. [35258/16]

247. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the details of the €52 million additional allocation in capital expenditure which she stated was to help IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland and Science Foundation Ireland, to deal with Brexit, in tabular form. [35259/16]

248. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the details, by regions and industry, of the proposed €52 million additional allocation in capital expenditure which she stated was to help IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland and Science Foundation Ireland to deal with Brexit, in tabular form. [35260/16]

249. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if the proposed €52 million additional allocation in capital spend, which she stated was to help IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland and Science Foundation Ireland to deal with Brexit, will only

be used to support firms affected by Brexit and that non-UK exporters will not benefit from this additional spend. [35261/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): I propose to take Questions Nos. 244 to 249, inclusive, together.

A total of €858.5 million gross has been provided for use by my Department next year as per the 2017 Expenditure Report which was published on 11 October 2016. This compares to a provision of €800.47 million in the 2016 Revised Estimates Volume.

The 2017 Expenditure Report sets out the Capital expenditure allocation for my Department next year at €555 million. This is the highest capital allocation secured by the Department for over a decade. The €555 million compares to €503 million capital as provided in the 2016 Revised Estimates Volume.

The increased capital, which is a 10% increase over the 2016 level, will greatly assist in progressing the enterprise, regional and innovation agendas next year, including assisting the response on Brexit issues.

The distribution of all Capital and Current funding for next year across the 39 subheads of my Department's Vote will be finalised during the 2017 Revised Estimates Volume (REV) exercise in the weeks ahead. This is an extensive process which is currently underway through my officials in conjunction with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. The 2017 REV is expected to be concluded in early December. Therefore it is not yet possible to provide the specific breakdown of the 2017 funding across the Department, Offices and its Agencies.

It is important to recognise that the €555 million in capital funding next year is to cover the following Agencies, organisations and programmes.

- Enterprise Ireland
- IDA Ireland
- Science Foundation Ireland
- 31 Local Enterprise Offices
- The Programme for Research in Third-Level Institutions
- InterTrade Ireland
- InterReg Programme
- National Standards Authority of Ireland
- The Credit Guarantee Scheme
- Tyndall National Institute
- Ireland's membership of various international research organisations which include:
 - the European Space Agency
 - ELIXIR
 - European Molecular Biology Conference
 - European Molecular Biology Laboratory

- Eureka
- COST – Co-operation in Science & Technology
- CECAM – Centre Européen de Calcul Atomique et Moléculaire.

The €555 million in capital funding is directly supporting over 400,000 jobs across the clients supported by Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland and Local Enterprise Offices. It is also assisting Ireland's standing as a globally recognised research performing nation, ranked 14th in the world.

Much of this funding is multi-annual in nature and is demand driven. To protect the Exchequer's investment the funding is also contingent on various terms and conditions being met by the grant recipient, be it a company, organisation or higher education institution. In the context of the research and development funding, this is often subject to rigorous scientific peer review. Across certain agency grant programmes there are competitive funding calls.

It is also important to appreciate the scale of the enterprise agency client base being supported through the Department's capital funding. Combined the Department's capital supports will cover in excess of 10,000 individual companies, higher education institutions and scientists. Accordingly it is not possible at this stage to provide a breakdown of the 2017 regional or sectoral funding that is being sought by the Deputy. Such a level of detail can only be done once expenditure has actually been incurred, verified by the Agency concerned and paid out to the grant recipients.

It is important to also recognise that Brexit is an evolving situation. As Chair of the Department's Brexit Co-Ordinating Committee, and since the UK Referendum result in late June, I have been working very closely with my officials and the Enterprise Agencies to ensure an effective and co-ordinated Brexit response on the wide range of enterprise, trade, innovation and regulatory matters of direct relevance to the Department's remit.

The additional €3 million in Pay that I secured in Budget 2017 is specifically to assist in our response to the evolving Brexit situation. It will enable the Department and its Agencies to recruit an additional forty to fifty staff. The additional staff will be specifically tasked with assisting companies adjusting to the challenges faced from Brexit, help enterprise clients to diversify into new markets, secure new business and explore innovation opportunities. I have established a specific Brexit Unit in the Department who, as well as assisting in the overall co-ordinated enterprise response, will also be directly involved in the extensive negotiations that will arise on foot of the UK's departure from the EU. Such extensive negotiations over the coming years will involve bilateral interactions with our UK counterparts as well as participation in EU specific negotiations.

Brexit Issues

250. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to meet businesses along the Border region, particularly in counties Cavan and Monaghan, ahead of Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35307/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): As Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, I am continuing to focus on developments in the fallout from Brexit and am deeply engaged with Enterprise Ireland (EI) and IDA Ireland regarding the impacts being felt by client companies. I have ongoing communication with these Agencies through my chairing of the High level Group of Senior Managers which includes the

CEOs of the Agencies. In addition, my officials are in daily contact with the Agencies and keep me informed of any issues arising.

I am monitoring the export and trading environment on an ongoing basis and have met with companies and other stakeholders from across the country to help inform our response. I will continue to meet with companies over the coming months.

Over €1 billion of EI exports go to Northern Ireland and I am very conscious of the challenges that may be faced by companies operating in close proximity to the border. EI is working with its clients, looking at the individual challenges faced by clients on a company by company basis in every county in Ireland and on a sectoral level as some sectors are more exposed than others.

I would urge any businesses who are experiencing difficulties to visit one of the 31 Local Enterprise Offices nationwide, or to contact Enterprise Ireland, for advice and support.

The exchange rate situation is an evolving one and we may not have felt the full effects of the weakening of the value of Sterling. In the immediate aftermath of the vote EI focused on reaching out to their clients by setting up a helpline, and:

- contacted all clients with a material exposure to the UK;
- developing a New ‘Guide to Exporting to the UK, post EU Referendum’;
- developing a Webinar on currency volatility and hedging;
- promoting global market opportunities in the media;
- preparing a Comprehensive Guide to Exporting to the UK with expert guidance and advice on diversification, competitiveness, tax, business planning and managing currency risk;
- publishing a revised schedule of Trade and Investment Missions.

The challenge ahead is significant. The vote of the UK to leave the European Union has created uncertainty in the short term and will lead to a structural shift in the international trading framework in which Irish companies operate. There is a whole of Government approach in place focusing on the issue of Brexit and my Department and its Agencies are to the forefront of this effort.

Examinership Arrangements

251. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the efforts she has made to safeguard jobs (details supplied) following reports that certain aspects of the business concerned have ceased production; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35326/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O’Connor): I understand that the company concerned is currently in examinership. A petition was presented to the High Court earlier this month and an Interim Examiner was appointed.

The aim of the examinership is to protect as many jobs as possible. However, given the sensitive nature of situations such as this, discussions are conducted on a strictly confidential basis.

The company concerned is a client of Enterprise Ireland and the Agency has had recent contact with the company. Enterprise Ireland, within its remit, is available to work with all

interested parties when a company faces difficulties. In this context, the agency is available to provide the Interim Examiner with information on any possible assistance that the agency can provide.

European Investment Bank Loans

252. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation further to Parliamentary Question No. 472 of 2 November 2016, if she will expand in greater detail on the type of projects that have been funded under InnovFin in the successful application by a bank (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35350/16]

253. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation further to Parliamentary Question No. 472 of 2 November 2016, if she will expand in greater detail on the type of projects that have been funded under InnovFin in the successful application by a company (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35351/16]

254. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation further to Parliamentary Question No. 472 of 2 November 2016, if she will expand in greater detail on the type of projects that have been funded under InnovFin in the successful application by a company (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35352/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy John Halligan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 252 to 254, inclusive, together.

The following information regarding the EIF/EIB agreements with Bank of Ireland and enet (Granahan McCourt Capital) is publicly available. More information on the FINEOS agreement is not publicly available and further information on these agreements cannot be provided as it may be commercially sensitive to the companies.

The Bank of Ireland-EIF agreement allows Bank of Ireland to provide finance to innovative companies in Ireland for a total of €100 million over the next 2 years with the support of a guarantee provided by the EIF and backed under Horizon 2020, the EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation. This InnovFin SME guarantee enables Bank of Ireland to offer innovative companies additional financing at favourable conditions. The aim of the InnovFin SME Guarantee is to encourage financial institutions to lend to SMEs and small mid-caps in need of investment and/or operating capital to finance research, development and innovation activities, with EU financial support.

In the enet (Granahan McCourt Capital)–EIB agreement, the EIB agreed to provide an initial investment of €12 million to support expansion of next generation fibre optic telecom infrastructure across Ireland by enet, an open access network operator owned by Granahan McCourt Capital and partners. This investment allows enet to develop next generation telecoms infrastructure over the coming years and builds on their current investment programme for the delivery of ‘Fibre to the Business’ networks in a number of Irish towns and cities.

Children in Care

255. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the exceptional reasons for which Tusla will deviate from its standard policy of not placing children under 12 years of age in residential care. [35250/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): It is Departmen-

tal and Tusla policy that, in general, children 12 years and under in care should be placed in foster care. The policy recognises that, occasionally, it may be in the interest of a younger child to be placed in an age appropriate residential centre for assessment or therapeutic intervention. This should only occur if it is in line with the child's care plan.

The Review of Adequacy 2014 indicates that there were 6,454 children in care at the end of 2014. Of these 3,988 were aged 12 or under, and 44 (approximately 1%) were in residential care.

Child Care Services Inspections

256. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of inspections and the number of visitations of each child care provider and the number of providers inspected, in each Tusla service area in 2015 and 2016, in tabular form. [35283/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): As this is a service matter, I have asked the Child and Family Agency/Tusla to consider the Deputy's request and to respond directly to the Deputy with the information she requests in no later than 10 working days. I have asked my officials to follow up on this and to ensure delivery of the information to the Deputy as a matter of urgency.

Child Care Services Inspections

257. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of crèches or other centre based child care facilities that had more than one inspection by Tusla in 2015 or in 2016; the location of these facilities; and if reasons are provided for a second or subsequent inspection. [35380/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): As this is a service matter, I have asked the Child and Family Agency/Tusla to consider the Deputy's request and to respond directly to the Deputy with the information she requests in no later than 10 working days. I have asked my officials to follow up on this and to ensure delivery of the information to the Deputy as a matter of urgency.

Child Care Services Data

258. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of crèches or other centre based child care facilities that were found not to be compliant with child care staff to child ratios in each year since the introduction of these regulations. [35381/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): As this is a service matter, I have asked the Child and Family Agency/Tusla to consider the Deputy's request and to respond directly to the Deputy with the information she requests in no later than 10 working days. I have asked my officials to follow up on this and to ensure delivery of the information to the Deputy as a matter of urgency.

Child Care Services Inspections

259. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number

of unannounced visitations to child care facilities that took place in 2015 and 2016 in each Tusla service region; her views on whether the centre based child care facilities should receive at least one unannounced visit by Tusla inspectors per year; and her Department's and Tusla guidelines on the number of unannounced visitations there should be. [35382/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): TUSLA has responsibility for the inspection of childcare services. Inspection is carried out to monitor compliance with the Child Care (Pre-School) (No 2) Regulations with the aim of ensuring the health, safety and welfare of children enrolled in pre-school services.

Budget 2017 provided €1 million to enhance the level of inspection of child care services provided by Tusla and the Department of Education and Skills and my Department will be engaging with Tusla to facilitate the recruitment of additional inspectors in 2017.

The detailed information sought by the Deputy is not currently available in my Department in the format requested. However, I have requested Tusla to provide the information which will be supplied to the Deputy no later than 10 working days. I have asked my officials follow up on this to ensure delivery as a matter of urgency.

After-School Support Services

260. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the regulations in terms of staff to child ratios and other child welfare and protection regulations that exist for after school child care; her views on whether regulations in this area are not requisite to deal with expansion in the after-school sector for children up to 15 years of age; and her further views on whether they will need to be strengthened. [35383/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): School age childcare is not currently regulated in the State. The Programme for a Partnership Government 2016 contained specific commitments relating to School age childcare, including a commitment to the introduction of a new system to support and expand quality afterschool care for school age children. In view of these commitments, a Working Group on School Age Childcare was established in June 2016, comprising senior officials from my Department and from the Department of Education and Skills.

I expect the Working Group to report to me and to Minister Bruton shortly. The Working Group is expected to recommend that National Quality Standards be produced for school age childcare as a first step towards regulating the sector, and this work will commence immediately.

Child Care Services Regulation

261. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if it is a statutory requirement for child care providers to maintain a logging system noting hourly supervision rotas and the staff to child ratios that pertained on any given day. [35384/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016 require registered service providers to ensure that there is at all times an adequate number of adults working directly with the children attending the pre-school service, and to apply the minimum ratio of adults to children as set out in Schedule 6 of the Regulations.

Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, has the statutory responsibility for enforcing the Regulations, and it is a matter for Tusla to determine the evidence it requires to determine whether the Regulations are being complied with.

Children in Care

262. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her views on a State sponsored voluntary DNA website for all those who have been in care in order to trace family and relatives; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35413/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): In the vast majority of instances, the family of a child or young person in State care is known to them and, of course, to Tusla – the Child and Family Agency. On that basis, there are no plans to establish a State sponsored voluntary DNA website in order that those who have been in care can trace their relatives.

As the Deputy may be aware, the Child Care Act 1991 and the Child and Family Agency Act 2013 are the two main pieces of legislation governing children in care. Under these Acts, Tusla has a statutory duty to promote the welfare of children who are not receiving adequate care and protection. A core principle of Ireland's care system is the maintenance of relationships with a child's natural family unless, of course, it is considered that such contact is not in the child's best interests.

In some cases, parents may agree to their children being taken into the care of Tusla on a voluntary basis that is with the agreement of the child's parent(s) or guardian(s). In others, Tusla may apply to the court for a care order. It should be noted that 93% of children in State care are in foster care and almost 30% of them have been placed with relatives.

Tusla has informed me that details in relation to family members and relatives and significant others are retained on the child's care file. Information in relation to these people is made available to the child during their time in care.

However, in some cases, children may not have details in relation to both of their natural parents. In such instances, social workers work closely with the family members to ascertain this information for the child(ren).

In the exceptional circumstance where no natural parents or relatives can be identified for a child who has come into care, namely with unaccompanied minors, Tusla makes extensive searches, and supports children and young people in searching for their family. Reunification with family is considered a priority for children in these circumstances.

Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries

263. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the stage the process is at in the report of the commission of inquiry that was handed in on 16 September 2016; her views regarding the completion timeline of the report; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35419/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): As I recently advised the Deputy, I have met with the three members of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes to discuss the submitted Second Interim Report and the general progress being made with the investigation.

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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, it has been necessary to consult with my cabinet colleagues and the Attorney General on these issues. In addition, I have sought additional information from the Commission to assist in these deliberations.

It is my intention to publish the Report in conjunction with Government's response to the findings of the Report. I hope to conclude this process as quickly as possible and I will ensure the publication arrangements are notified directly to the various advocacy groups representing former residents and their families.