

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 10, inclusive, answered orally.

Questions Nos. 11 to 33, inclusive, resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 34 to 38, inclusive, answered orally.

Broadband Service Speeds

39. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if there are any grants or assistance to help small rural businesses in counties Cavan or Monaghan avail of higher speed broadband connections to make running a business from home feasible. [38305/16]

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 through a combination of commercial investment by the telecommunications sector and a State intervention in those areas where commercial investment has not been fully demonstrated. Of the 42,372 addresses in County Cavan, over 24,000 are to be included in the State Intervention Area. In County Monaghan about 19,500 of the 33,465 addresses are earmarked for State Intervention.

The Department is now in a formal procurement process for the State Intervention.

Separately, my Department's Trading Online Voucher Scheme is specifically designed to support small and micro enterprises to trade online. As the digital economy grows, it is essential that the benefits are felt in every city, provincial town and rural area. Through training, mentoring and networking, coupled with financial support, the scheme is helping small businesses to grow and diversify their markets.

Some 2,700 small businesses, including 31 businesses in County Cavan and 46 businesses in County Monaghan have, to date, successfully applied for a trading online voucher. Furthermore, 6,000 or so businesses have benefitted from training and advice delivered by the Local Enterprise Offices under the scheme.

According to surveys of the enterprise impacts of the scheme, businesses grow on average by 21%, employ 35% more people and 60% export for the first time. Digital trade is contributing to sustainable regional economic development, with urban and rural based businesses benefitting equally from the online opportunity.

In the recent Budget, I secured €3m for the continuation of the scheme in 2017. I am also

looking at ways to build on the success of the scheme, putting Ireland further ahead of our European counterparts in realising the benefits of selling goods and services online.

Questions Nos. 40 to 47, inclusive, answered orally.

Sustainable Development Strategy

48. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his attention has been drawn to the fact that there were upwards of 400 persons at the sustainability gathering in Dublin Castle recently, all demanding government action on policy for sustainability; and his plans to fast-track policy to support clean energy and sustainable business. [37399/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I welcome the interest reflected at the Sustainability Gathering 2016 and indeed note the participation of relevant officials from my own Department in the discussions that took place. It will be important to continue this dialogue as I have responsibility for a number of key areas where policy is being progressed consistent with, and in support of, sustainable development.

Sustainability is an important policy principle supporting on-going climate-action related work. The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act, 2015 provides statutory recognition of the ‘national transition objective’ – the goal of pursuing a low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by 2050. In order to facilitate the achievement of this objective, the 2015 Act provides for the development and submission to Government of national mitigation plans and adaptation frameworks which must take account of, inter alia, the need to promote sustainable development in performing functions related to these measures.

I intend shortly to initiate a public consultation on a new Clean Air Strategy for Ireland. The initiatives on climate action and air quality are key steps in progressing national policy in support of transition to a low-carbon, competitive and environmentally sustainable future.

The Energy White Paper, Ireland’s Transition to a Low Carbon Energy Future 2015-2030, sets out a long-term vision to guide Irish energy policy and actions to be taken in the energy sector from now until 2030, in order to transform Ireland into a low carbon society and economy by 2050 and reduce our fossil fuel dependency. The Government has a range of policy measures and schemes in place to accelerate the development and diversification of renewable energy in Ireland including the REFIT schemes which underpin the development of a range of renewable electricity technologies. Two new renewables support schemes are also under development including a Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) aimed at increasing renewables in the heat sector and a Renewable Electricity Support Scheme aimed at providing support for renewable electricity.

Concerning waste, my Department is actively engaged in the on-going discussions on the EU action plan on the circular economy. The circular economy aims to replace the ‘take-make-dispose’ model of production with a more sustainable one that champions recycling and renewables, the reduction of emissions and waste, minimum extraction of virgin raw materials and the reuse of valuable components and materials.

Finally, Our Sustainable Future – the Framework for Sustainable Development in Ireland, which was launched in June 2012, identifies some 70 measures to be implemented across Government and tasks a high-level inter-departmental group with ensuring that the vision set out in the policy document is translated into clear and effective action. The report on implementa-

tion of the framework published last year described how Ireland continues to move in the right direction generally across the spectrum of sustainable development goals. As economic activity increases, maintaining the focus on sustainability in parallel with economic recovery and growth will be critical.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

49. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to safeguard existing fixed wireless broadband networks in view of the ongoing tendering for the national broadband plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38628/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): In October, I signed Regulations which will allow ComReg to auction spectrum in the 3.6GHz band (Wireless telegraphy (3.6GHz Band Licences) Regulations, 2016 (S.I. 532 of 2016)). The liberalisation of this band is an EU requirement and the release of spectrum in this band will provide an 86% increase in total spectrum available for mobile and/or fixed wireless services, leading to better quality voice and data services to customers across Ireland.

ComReg is independent in its functions and I have no role in the process for allocating the spectrum which is now underway. Having regard to the independence of ComReg in the matter and the fact that a process is underway, it would not be appropriate for me to comment further on the matter at this time. I would note however that the allocation process followed extensive public consultation by ComReg over almost a two year period.

The National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to deliver high speed services to every city, town, village and individual premises in Ireland. The Programme for Government commits to the delivery of the NBP as a matter of priority. This is being achieved through private investment by commercial telecommunications companies and through a State intervention in areas where commercial investment has not been fully demonstrated.

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

In line with State Aid Guidelines for deployment of high speed broadband the procurement process is technology neutral. All three bidders involved in the competitive dialogue process are proposing a predominantly fibre-to-the-home network solution to connect rural Ireland. This is their choice of technology. It is however possible that wireless technology may be part of the solutions proposed and this is a matter for bidders. Furthermore, as the network to be built will offer wholesale services, on an open-access basis, it will be open to existing wireless retailers to offer services on the new network. Wireless operators can also connect their technologies to the network if they can meet the high speed broadband specifications set out in the Plan, which includes a minimum of 30 megabits per second download speed and 6 megabits per second upload speed.

Broadcasting Charge

50. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to provide private media companies with revenue from the broadcast charge

fee; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38589/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The licence fee is distributed in accordance with Section 123 of the Broadcasting Act 2009, to both RTÉ and TG4 in order to facilitate the pursuit of their public service objectives. In addition, 7% of the revenue goes towards the Broadcasting Fund, which is operated by the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland. The schemes established under this Fund provide funding in support of high quality programmes on Irish culture, heritage and experience, programmes to improve adult literacy, and archiving of programme material. Revenue from this fund can be applied for by independent producers and broadcasters for specific projects of a public service nature.

I am very conscious that while the TV licence fee model has provided a measure of stability to date, the rapid changes in technology altering the traditional way in which television is watched, together with economic pressures generally, means that a serious question mark exists over the ability of the current funding model to be able to provide continued stable funding for public service media in the longer term. My Department is currently examining a number of actions to strengthen the current model.

The issue of funding public service media in the longer term is one that requires extensive engagement with all stakeholders including the commercial and community sectors. With that in mind, I recently asked the Joint Oireachtas Committee to consider the issue. I am happy to say that the Committee has responded positively to my request and has launched a public consultation and initiated engagement with all stakeholders in early November 2016.

I look forward to receiving the Committee's Report in due course which will help to inform my decisions on this important issue.

Television Licence Fee Collection

51. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to ensure that the television licence fee is collected in full; and the discussions he has had with RTE regarding the provision of the licence fee. [38569/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I recognise the important part that public service broadcasters play in our democratic society. The provision of stable and adequate funding is essential to ensuring the continued delivery of their role in this regard. I am very much aware, however, of the challenges that face the existing TV Licence system, including the current unacceptable levels of evasion. While the rate has fallen from 15.3% at the end of 2013 to the current rate of 13.75% it is still very high.

In that context, my Department has been working with An Post and RTÉ on an on-going basis so that all steps are being taken to ensure the system is working as effectively as possible. Measures such as marketing campaigns, more evening and weekend inspections and appointment of additional temporary Inspectors are just some of the initiatives that have been utilised to enhance sales and improve compliance rates.

My Department is also currently examining a number of additional actions that might be taken with the aim of strengthening the system including legislative amendment to provide for the tendering of Licence fee collection.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

52. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on the findings of the SEAI that greenhouse gas emissions here grew by 5% in 2015; his further views on the projections that Ireland will almost certainly miss EU 2020 emissions targets; the expected fines that will be incurred by the State if it fails to meet these targets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38615/16]

59. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the actions being implemented and the measures being put in place by Departments to ensure Ireland's 2020 targets on greenhouse gas emissions are not missed. [38505/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 52 and 59 together.

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

In March 2016, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) published projected emissions for 2020 which indicate that Ireland's emissions at that stage could be in the range of 6 - 11% below 2005 levels. On a cumulative basis over the period 2013 - 2020, Ireland is projected to have a deficit of between 3 and 12 Megatonnes Carbon Dioxide Equivalent (MtCO₂e).

According to the latest GHG inventory published by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in November 2016, emissions for 2015 are estimated at 59.84 million tonnes carbon dioxide equivalent (MtCO₂eq), which is 3.7% higher than emissions in 2014.

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

I intend to launch an initial non-statutory public consultation process shortly to inform preparation of a draft National Mitigation Plan. This draft Plan will then be subject to a further statutory consultation, followed by submission of a final plan to Government for approval by June 2017. Work is well underway on the development of the National Mitigation Plan, the primary objective of which will be to track implementation of measures already underway, identify additional measures in the longer term to reduce GHG emissions, and progress the overall national low carbon transition agenda to 2050. The first iteration of the National Mitigation Plan will place particular focus on putting the necessary measures in place to address the challenge to 2020, but also in terms of planning ahead to ensure that appropriate policies and measures can be put in place beyond this date and out to 2030.

Notwithstanding the efforts outlined above to address the challenge to comply with the 2020

targets, in the likely event that a gap to target still exists in 2020, retirement of Annual Emissions Allocations and units from the Kyoto Protocol Flexibility Mechanisms carried forward from 2008-2012 can be offset against the deficit. If this does not fully address any potential deficit, further carbon units could be purchased. It is not possible to accurately quantify the cost to purchase notional carbon units at this stage as the cost is dependent on both the quantum and price of carbon units to be purchased at the time. Should the need to purchase carbon units arise, funding options will be considered in due course and will have regard to a number of matters, including the need to comply with the fiscal rules.

Electric Vehicles

53. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to encourage the development of the electric vehicle fleet and electric vehicle charge points here. [38630/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The 2009 Renewable Energy Directive sets all Member States a binding target that at least 10% of the energy used in the transport sector must come from renewable sources by 2020. Ireland aims to meet this target mainly through the increased use of sustainable biofuels, with electric vehicles (EVs) also making a small contribution. In 2015, 5.7% of the energy in transport was from renewable sources.

Since 2011, the Electric Vehicle Grant Scheme has been supporting and incentivising, through grants of up to €5,000, the deployment of EVs in Ireland. These grants are in addition to tax incentives such as the Vehicle Registration Tax (VRT) reliefs of up to €5,000, which apply to EVs and Accelerated Capital Allowances (ACA), which allows companies to offset the cost of investment in qualifying technologies including EVs. Budget 2017 extended the relief from VRT on EVs for a further 5 year period and on Hybrid vehicles for 2 years. The purchase of 1,702 new EVs has been supported since the Grant Scheme commenced. Of these, 615 have been grant aided to date this year which is an increase from 2015 when 555 were grant aided over the full year.

The ESB, through its ecars programme, has installed almost 900 publically accessible charge points for electric vehicles. These include 79 DC fast chargers, most of which have been installed mainly on the inter-urban roads. The location of these charge-points is available on the 'ecars' section of the ESB's website at www.esb.ie. In addition, ESB ecars has installed over 1,900 charge points in domestic and commercial premises.

In accordance with the commitment in the Programme for Government, my Department and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport are establishing and will co-Chair a Low Emissions Vehicles Task Force involving relevant Government Departments and agencies. The first meeting is scheduled for later this month. A key task will be to examine as a matter of priority what further actions are necessary to further stimulate EV sales and other low emission vehicles to 2020 and beyond. In addition, the Task Force will look at actions to ensure sufficient and effective charging infrastructure exists as the EV fleet develops.

Broadcasting Sector

54. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he is satisfied that the national broadcaster has met the legal and regulatory requirements under the Broadcasting Act 2009 with regard to the outsourcing of programming by RTE.

[38307/16]

55. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the discussions his department had with the RTE authorities prior to the announcement that the broadcaster would outsource all young persons' programming; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38306/16]

66. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he has had any discussions with the RTE board or management about cuts in children's programmes and the outsourcing of same. [38623/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 54, 55 and 66 together.

RTÉ is an independent national public service broadcaster whose remit and obligations are set out in the Broadcasting Act 2009.

Section 114 (1) of the Broadcasting Act 2009 states the principal objects and associated powers of RTÉ and Section 98 provides that it shall be independent in the pursuance of these objects, subject to the requirements of the Act.

As such, I have not had any discussions with RTÉ in relation to its recent announcement that it intended to commission its young people's programmes from the independent sector. The decision is solely a matter for the Board and management of RTÉ and, while it remains subject to discussion with the RTÉ Trade Union Group, I am satisfied that the decision is in compliance with RTÉ's obligations under the Broadcasting Act 2009.

The decision is a reflection of the difficult financial challenges being faced by the broadcaster and the need for it to examine all options to ensure that it is operating as efficiently as possible.

I welcome RTÉ's statement that the decision does not reduce its commitment to young people's programming which is vital in ensuring that our children can continue to watch content with Irish voices and Irish stories.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

56. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the current projected commencement date and completion date for the national broadband plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38342/16]

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 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, 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. In addition, bidders need adequate time to 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 on timelines at this juncture, given that discussions are on-going 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 that will transform society, akin to rural electrification in the last century.

During the Department's extensive stakeholder consultations in 2015, telecommunications service providers indicated a 3-5 year timeline to rollout a network of the scale envisaged under the NBP. 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.

Telecommunications Services Provision

57. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of times the mobile phone and broadband task force has met; the action points that have been acted on from these meetings; the number of phone companies he has met since the task force was established; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38572/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I am critically aware of the frustration currently being experienced across Ireland, where mobile phone and broadband networks are not always delivering the services people expect. Telecoms operators have however rolled out high speed broadband services to approximately 1.4m premises in Ireland over the last number of years, and mobile operators have invested significantly in rolling out improved services, following ComReg's multi-band spectrum auction. At least one operator now has in excess of 90% 4G population coverage. The rate of demand for data services has however increased by 500% in the last four years and this presents a continuing challenge for mobile operators, regulators and policy makers both in Ireland and

internationally.

Recognising this challenge, I specifically included in the Programme for Government, a commitment to a Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce. In July, I established the Taskforce, together with Minister Humphreys, which aims to unlock barriers to investment in mobile and broadband services. The Terms of Reference of the Taskforce state that it will identify and recommend practical actions that can be taken to improve mobile reception and broadband access. The Taskforce and its subgroups have met approximately 20 times since July, with a number of helpful initiatives emerging in the areas of planning, local authority engagement, and consumer information and engagement.

The Taskforce involves Government Departments and agencies, as well as engagement with ComReg and telecoms operators. Minister Humphreys and I intend to bring the report of the Taskforce to Government over the coming weeks. This report will set out specific timelines for the delivery of the recommendations and actions.

Under the Programme for Government, Minister Humphreys has also established two regional action groups to work with Local Authorities, Local Enterprise Offices, LEADER Groups and other relevant agencies in helping accelerate the rollout of broadband and mobile services at local level.

In addition, I recently signed Regulations allowing ComReg to proceed with an early 2017 allocation of spectrum in the 3.6GHz radio spectrum band. This will provide an 86% increase in total spectrum available for mobile and fixed wireless services.

In my Department's estimates for 2017 I have secured an €8m provision for RTÉ to allow it to free up the 700MHz spectrum band. ComReg in turn will make plans to allocate this spectrum, to provide for significantly enhanced mobile coverage. The 700 MHz band is particularly suited to rural environments where the signal can travel long distances.

These initiatives should assist in enhancing the quality of mobile phone and data services across Ireland, and particularly in rural Ireland.

In parallel, the National Broadband Plan aims to deliver high speed services to every city, town, village and individual premises in Ireland, through private investment and a State intervention in areas where commercial investment have not been fully demonstrated.

The procurement process is underway and the three bidders in the process have indicated that they are proposing a predominantly fibre-to-the-home solution for rural Ireland. Intensive dialogue with bidders is ongoing, with a view to putting in place contract(s) that will deliver the NBP network and put Ireland to the forefront internationally in terms of connectivity.

Departmental Priorities

58. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the ten most important proposals or initiatives contemplated by his Department calculated to be of most benefit in the context of climate action and environmental protection; if specific deadlines have been agreed on these issues; if he has identified specific threats to progress in this area; the anticipated costs of action required; the costs in the event of no or insufficient action; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38636/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): In the context of environmental protection and climate action, the Programme for

Partnership Government sets out a coordinated approach to shape the long-term future of Irish environmental policy, including how we will achieve our transition to a low carbon climate resilient future. Recognising the roles of climate change plans, both mitigation and adaptation, and their interaction with the areas of energy, agriculture, transport and flood risk management, the Programme for Government identifies the key measures to be pursued on a cross-sectoral basis which also address key areas of environmental protection.

Environmental sustainability is, of course, a core principle of this Government's work and is at the heart of the policies and schemes that are implemented by my Department, particularly given Ireland's objective of achieving a low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by 2050. In this regard, the important role of the Environmental Protection Agency should also be highlighted in terms of its primary responsibilities covering licensing and enforcement, and monitoring and reporting on the environment.

Within my own remit I am currently initiating a number of key priority actions which are relevant to climate action and environmental protection:

- Tomorrow I will present Ireland's first Annual Transition Statement as required under our Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act, 2015.

- In the coming days, I intend to initiate a preliminary public consultation to inform the preparation of Ireland's first draft National Mitigation Plan so as to ensure our citizens can contribute to the process of its preparation. Economic analysis to underpin the plan is on-going and will be finalised in the Spring.

- Both of these actions I see as being key components of Ireland's National Climate Dialogue which I intend to formally launch early in 2017.

- I am also prioritising a National Adaptation Framework to ensure we address climate resilience in terms of our long term planning out to 2050. An economic framework for costing adaptation will be a key aspect of this work.

- I will shortly publish an initial consultation paper on a Clean Air Strategy for Ireland. This strategy will seek to ensure on-going compliance with EU legislation, while bringing about improved health outcomes and wider environmental benefits.

- An increased budget in 2017 of over €100m will help expand the Better Energy Scheme and introduce new measures such as the Renewable Heat Incentive. A record €25m in grants will be ring-fenced for projects that bring our communities together to engage in collective energy efficiency activity through the Better Energy Communities scheme.

- A new Public Sector Energy Efficiency Action Plan has been developed to draft stage with publication, subject to Government approval, due to take place before the end of this year.

- Significant work has taken place in the development of a new Renewable Electricity Support Scheme, with a further consultation to take place in early 2017 followed by finalisation of the scheme subject to State aid approval from the European Commission.

As Minister for the Environment, I also have responsibility for making allocations from the Environment Fund, which is ring-fenced for environmental purposes. Allocations totalling €40.5million were made from the Environment Fund in 2016 and targeted, inter alia, waste schemes, environmental research and development, the Local Agenda 21 Scheme, and support for Environmental Non-Governmental Organisations, all which have relevance for climate action and protecting our environment.

The range of actions being pursued by my Department, and other key Departments and Agencies, is evidence of the cross-Government commitment to protect Ireland's environment and manage effectively the transition to a low-carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable future.

Question No. 59 answered with Question No. 52.

Media Pluralism

60. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he has received the report on media diversity in Ireland published by the European University Institute's Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom; if he has considered recommendations in the report on the concentration of media ownership here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38588/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Competition and Consumer Protection Act 2014 gives the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the responsibility for assessing proposed media mergers, and empowers the Minister to prevent any merger that is deemed likely to be contrary to the public interest in maintaining the plurality of media in the State. There is no retrospective element to this legislation.

While the report referenced in the question puts forward the view that a retrospective provision should be inserted in the 2014 Act, attempting to intervene in the operation of a media business when no merger is planned would be difficult and, given that the purpose of the legislation is to safeguard media pluralism, is also likely to be counter-productive.

Applying a retrospective element to the legislation could, effectively, mean empowering a Government Minister to determine the fate of any media organisation at any given time. This would raise a number of difficult questions about preserving the freedom and independence of the press, even before one considers the legal and constitutional complexities associated with retrospective action of this kind.

An important part of the current regime is the requirement on the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) to prepare, every three years, a report on the ownership and control arrangements of media businesses in Ireland. In June of this year, I published the first such report, the Report on Ownership and Control of Media Businesses in Ireland 2012-2014. In this report, which is available on my Department's website, the BAI concludes that there has not been a material reduction in media plurality in the State due to the limited changes in ownership and control in the period 2012-2014.

Furthermore, the international expert group Sustainable Governance Indicators ranked Ireland 9.0/10 in *Media Freedom* and 8.0/10 in *Media Pluralism*, noting that Irish media *is independent, with a pluralist ownership structure*.

In my view, the reforms introduced in the Competition and Consumer Protection Act 2014 have struck the correct balance in this area and are working well and, as a result, I am confident that we have a robust and effective set of measures in place to support and encourage a plural and diverse media.

Mobile Telephony Services

61. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he has had discussions with the Communications Regulator regarding the quality and availability of mobile telephony with particular reference to the need to ensure the availability of good quality service in all urban and rural areas throughout the country; if action has been taken or is promised on these issues; when a reasonable standard and quality of service can be expected; if a plan exists to deal with the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38635/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The management of radio spectrum is a statutory function of the independent regulator of the telecommunications sector, the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg). Licences issued by ComReg impose terms and conditions on mobile network operators, including minimum population coverage obligations. ComReg monitors compliance in this regard by means of biannual drive tests. However, given ComReg's independence, I have no statutory function in the matter of auditing mobile coverage.

I am critically aware of the frustration currently being experienced across Ireland, where mobile networks are not always delivering the services people expect. Mobile operators have invested significantly in rolling out improved services, following ComReg's multi-band spectrum auction. At least one operator now has in excess of 90% 4G population coverage. The rate of demand for data services has however increased by 500% in the last four years and this presents a continuing challenge for mobile operators, regulators and policy makers both in Ireland and internationally.

Recognising this challenge, I specifically included in the Programme for Government, a commitment to a Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce. In July, I established the Taskforce, together with Minister Humphreys, which aims to unlock barriers to investment in mobile and broadband services. The Terms of Reference of the Taskforce state that it will identify and recommend practical actions that can be taken to improve mobile reception and broadband access. The Taskforce and its various subgroups has already met approximately 20 times, with a number of helpful initiatives emerging in the areas of planning, local authority engagement, and consumer information and engagement.

The Taskforce involves Government Departments and agencies, as well as engagement with ComReg and telecoms operators. I anticipate that we will bring a report to Government later this month, on foot of its work. This report will set out specific timelines for the delivery of the recommendations and actions.

Under the Programme for Government, Minister Humphreys has also established two regional action groups to work with Local Authorities, Local Enterprise Offices, LEADER Groups and other relevant agencies in helping accelerate the rollout of broadband and mobile services at local level.

In addition, I recently signed Regulations allowing ComReg to proceed with an early 2017 allocation of spectrum in the 3.6GHz radio spectrum band. This will provide an 86% increase in total spectrum available for mobile and fixed wireless services.

Furthermore, in my Department's estimates for 2017 I have secured an €8m provision for RTÉ to allow it to free up the 700MHz spectrum band. ComReg in turn will make plans to allocate this spectrum, to provide for significantly enhanced mobile coverage. The 700 MHz band is particularly suited to rural environments where the signal can travel long distances.

These initiatives should assist in enhancing the quality of mobile phone and data services across Ireland, and particularly in rural Ireland.

In parallel, the National Broadband Plan aims to deliver high speed services to every city, town, village and individual premises in Ireland, through private investment and a State intervention in areas where commercial investment have not been fully demonstrated.

The procurement process is underway and the three bidders in the process have indicated that they are proposing a predominantly fibre-to-the-home solution for rural Ireland. Intensive dialogue with bidders is ongoing, with a view to putting in place contract(s) that will deliver the NBP network and put Ireland to the forefront internationally in terms of connectivity.

Climate Change Negotiations

62. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the engagement he has had with his counterpart in the Northern Executive regarding an all-island approach to the agreements made in Paris regarding climate change. [38571/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The global response to the challenges of climate change is driven by the Paris Agreement, which entered into force last month. The Agreement has an overall goal of restricting global temperature rise to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels, with an ambition to limit it to a 1.5°C increase above pre-industrial levels. It aims to tackle 95% of global emissions through 188 Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).

Ireland will contribute to the Paris Agreement via the NDC tabled by the EU on behalf of its Member States, which commits to 40% reduction in EU-wide emissions by 2030 compared to 1990. The specific details of the contribution to this 40% to be made by each Member State, including Ireland and the UK, in respect of the non-ETS sector was the subject of a European Commission proposal published in July 2016. The full implications of this proposal from a domestic perspective are currently being examined.

In conjunction with the coordinated EU response to climate change, my Department also engages with the Northern Executive on a range of environmental areas, including air quality, cross-border waste management and environmental protection (including climate change). On matters relating specifically to climate change, I am aware that officials from my Department are continuing to liaise with their counterparts in Northern Ireland on a range of areas of mutual interest covering both mitigation and adaptation.

The North-South Ministerial Council, established under the Good Friday Agreement, facilitates good cooperation on environmental issues, and I look forward to continued cooperation with the Northern Ireland Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs on matters of mutual interest, as referenced in the Programme for Partnership Government.

Renewable Energy Generation Targets

63. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if Ireland is on target to meet binding European Union 2020 renewable targets; the fines that will be realised if not achieved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38594/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I refer to the reply to Question No. 34 on today's Order Paper.

Telecommunications Services Provision

64. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to ensure universal access by all householders to high-speed mobile phone services in addition to high-speed broadband services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38309/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The current EU and national regulatory framework for telecommunications allows for the application of a Universal Service Obligation in respect of fixed voice services. This framework has, in my view served consumers well over several decades and ensured that householders can get an affordable fixed voice service, regardless of where they are located.

Currently there are no universal service obligations (USO) for high speed broadband provision in Ireland and the European Telecommunications Framework does not facilitate the imposition of a high speed broadband USO. The National Broadband Plan aims to deliver high speed broadband to every premises in the country, through a State intervention in areas where such networks are not available. The winning bidder(s) in the procurement process will be required to build out a wholesale, open access, high speed broadband network. Under a 25 year contract with the Department, they will be required to connect any premises within the Intervention area that requires a high speed connection.

Thus National Broadband Plan will deliver the network which will be required, to connect all premises. While USO alone could not be expected to deliver new high speed broadband networks of this scale, I am of the view that where high speed broadband networks are available, USO could provide a very useful tool to ensure that all premises within a network area can get a connection. This is particularly relevant in cities and towns, where commercial operators have already deployed high speed networks, but for technical or other reasons, some premises still may not be able to obtain services.

I am in discussion with ComReg as to whether a universal service obligation (USO) may be a viable instrument in such instances, i.e. in areas where a high speed network is available but individual premises cannot access such services at an affordable price. This is similar to the arrangements which are already in place for fixed voice.

I have also raised the issue of a USO for high speed broadband at EU level. In September, the European Commission published an ambitious proposal for the regulation of the European telecoms sector, which aims to incentivise and encourage increased investment in high speed broadband networks. I have asked the Commission to consider a specific provision in the new framework that will allow Member States to apply a USO for high speed broadband, where such networks are available.

There are no provisions in European or national regulation for a USO in relation to mobile voice services. Mobile operators are however rolling out 3G and 4G networks across Ireland following ComReg's 2012 Multiband Spectrum auction, with at least one operator now having over 90% population coverage of 4G services. The Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce is considering issues which will facilitate better delivery of mobile voice and data services. In October, I signed regulations which will allow ComReg to allocate spectrum in the 3.6GHz spectrum band. This will provide an 86% increase in total spectrum available for mobile and fixed wireless services.

In my Department's estimates for 2017 I have secured an €8m provision for RTÉ to allow it to free up the 700MHz spectrum band. ComReg in turn will make plans to auction this spec-

trum, to provide for significantly enhanced mobile coverage. The 700 MHz band is particularly suited to rural environments where the signal can travel long distances.

I intend to discuss with ComReg, how the allocation of spectrum in the 700MHz band could facilitate greater penetration of mobile voice and data services.

Climate Change Policy

65. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his Department's definition of carbon neutrality and sustainable food production, in view of the fact that these terms are often used in tandem with each other with regard to Ireland's climate change mitigation obligations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38614/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The EU and wider international position on carbon neutrality is not well developed and lacks clarity of definition at this stage.

As part of the process of defining carbon neutrality from an Irish agriculture and land use perspective, a number of scenarios are being considered and the definition ultimately approved will have to be robust on scientific, technical and environmental grounds, and compatible with present and anticipated future requirements under EU and International law.

This issue was examined by NESC in its 2012 report, "Ireland and the climate change challenge: connecting "How Much" with "How To"". Teagasc has also produced a report setting out a number of conclusions on proposed pathways towards carbon neutrality in 2050 entitled Carbon Neutrality as a horizon point for Irish Agriculture: a qualitative appraisal of potential pathways to 2050. Both these analyses will inform the definition process and ultimately feed into Ireland's mitigation planning in the future.

Regarding the definition of sustainable food production, Ireland's Food Wise 2025 agri-food strategy sets out a vision for the sustainable growth of the food production sector, in line with the European Union Council Conclusions of July 2014 on the 2030 Climate and Energy Framework. In an Irish context, environmental protection and economic competitiveness are considered as equal and complimentary. One cannot be achieved at the expense of the other. Improving productivity, while using natural resources in a manner which protects them into the future, requires on-going strong commitment from the sector to adapt through embracing and applying the latest innovations, new techniques and processes.

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

Question No. 66 answered with Question No. 54.

Alternative Energy Projects

67. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he envisages a long-term future for the burning of biomass in electric power generation. [38624/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Programme for Government contains a commitment to further decrease Ireland's dependence on imported fossil fuels through the use of indigenous renewable energy resources. This commitment builds on the 2015 Energy White Paper which recognised the long-term strategic importance of diversifying Ireland's energy generation portfolio. While Biomass will have a role to play in this regard, I am also aware that the use of biomass in the energy mix can lead to an increase in emissions particulate matter (PM) and nitrogen oxides (NOx). Thus, measures will be needed to minimise the risk of exacerbating air quality issues through the use of appropriate technology standards and fuel quality.

The REFIT 3 (Renewable Energy Feed in Tariff) scheme, which closed at the end of 2015, was designed to incentivise the addition of 310 MW of renewable electricity from biomass technologies to the Irish electricity grid. Technologies included electricity from solid biomass and the co-firing of biomass in peat powered stations. A number of projects will receive support to 2030 under REFIT3 including some producing electricity from the combustion of biomass.

My Department is currently working on the development of a new renewable electricity support scheme (RESS). As part of this process, a range of renewable energy technologies are being assessed, including electricity from biomass. The first Technology Review public consultation on the new renewable support scheme was published in 2015 and following the completion of detailed economic analysis on the viability and cost effectiveness of supporting a range of renewable technologies a second public consultation will be published in early 2017. Details of the next public consultation will be advertised on the Department's website *www.dccae.gov.ie*.

While the future supports for biomass in the electricity sector will be decided in the context of the new support scheme, a 2015 Government-commissioned technical analysis considered biomass usage and concluded that Ireland's limited biomass resource would be more efficiently deployed in the heating sector. In this context, biomass is expected to be supported as part of the new Renewable Heat Incentive which will be introduced in the second half of 2017.

Landfill Sites

68. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his Department has a register of historical landfill sites around the country; and if he is satisfied that adequate regulation, governance and, if necessary, remediation is in place regarding same, particularly in situations in which a site may have been at operational peak at a time when environmental and waste management rules were less developed. [38625/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): For the purposes of waste management planning, Ireland is divided into three regions: Connacht-Ulster; Eastern-Midlands and the Southern Region. Waste management plans for the three regions include an inventory of sites identified as previous disposal or recovery sites. Historic landfills are regarded as the landfills that were in operation in the period 1977 to 1997 and while they were not in breach of national legislation at the time, they are now considered as posing a possible risk to the environment and human health. Section 13 of the waste management plans sets out the approach to managing historic landfills in each region and Appendix F lists the sites in question at the level of individual local authority.

The Waste Management (Certification of Historic Unlicensed Waste Disposal and Recovery Activity) Regulations (S.I. No. 524 of 2008) provide for the certification of historic unlicensed waste disposal sites, registration of these facilities, the conduct of a risk assessment by local authorities and the determination of necessary remedial measures. Sites also require a certificate of authorisation from the EPA. Such a certificate determines the adequacy of the risk assessment and specifies any further necessary measures to ensure the protection of the environment.

To assist local authorities with risk assessment and to ensure a consistent approach, the EPA has developed a Code of Practice for Environmental Risk Assessment for Unregulated Waste Disposal Sites as well as an online tool for local authorities to record the detail of the risk assessments.

The Waste Management Planning Regions are now developing a work plan for the investigation, assessment and remediation of the landfills with priority attaching to the sites of highest risk. My Department is working with the Planning Regions to ensure that we maximise the number of high-risk historic landfills that can be progressed towards remediation in an appropriate timeframe. These are complicated projects so we must also ensure the projects are well-planned and well-executed, mindful of the environment and adjacent communities.

Telecommunications Infrastructure

69. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the communication he has had with mobile phone companies and the British Government regarding cross-Border roaming charges post-Brexit. [38507/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): In September, the European Commission published an ambitious proposal for the regulation of the European telecoms sector, which aims to incentivise and encourage increased investment in high speed broadband networks in particular. I have invited the Irish telecoms industry to provide their views on the proposed new framework, and taken that opportunity to also consult with industry on the issues of roaming and Brexit respectively.

The EU Roaming Regulations aim to abolish retail roaming charges within the EU by June 2017, subject to Fair Use Policy. In parallel with industry discussions, negotiations on both the EU Wholesale Roaming Regulation and the Implementing Act on Fair Use and Sustainability are ongoing at EU level. On Friday last, the Council of Ministers agreed a basis for negotiations with the European Parliament.

The Deputy will be aware of the Cabinet Committee set up to consider all potential contingency planning issues following the UK referendum, which is headed up by the Department of the Taoiseach. I am a member of this Cabinet Committee and officials from my Department are members of the inter-departmental group chaired by the Department of Taoiseach.

It is not yet possible to say what impact Brexit will have on cross border roaming charges. This will be largely dependent on the future relationship between the EU and UK. I can assure the Deputy however that I will continue to engage with the key stakeholders on this matter, to ensure that any progress made at EU level in reducing roaming charges applies also in any new relationship with the UK.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

70. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the progress made since he took office with regard to the roll-out of the national broadband plan; when it is expected the contract will be awarded; the number of houses and businesses it is expected will be connected through the plan in 2017; the budget allocated for the plan in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38308/16]

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

A key principle of the NBP is to support and stimulate commercial investment through policy and regulatory measures. Commercial investment since the publication of the NBP has considerably exceeded expectations. To date, the commercial telecommunications sector has invested over €2.5bn in upgrading and modernising networks which support the provision of high speed broadband and mobile telecoms services.

It is estimated that up to 70% of premises in Ireland will have access to commercial high speed broadband services provided by telecommunications operators, while the remaining 30% consisting of just over 750,00 premises will fall within the proposed State led intervention under the National Broadband Plan. Currently, approximately 1.4m premises in Ireland can get high speed broadband from commercial service providers.

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 telecommunications 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. It is intended that premises within this area will have access to services of at least 30 megabits per second when the procurement process is completed and the network rolled out.

There are 1.6 m premises in the BLUE area of which approximately 1.4m premises in Ireland can now get high speed broadband. My Department is actively monitoring the deployment in the BLUE areas to ensure that all premises can get access to services. In this regard, direct feedback from consumers is important and if customers cannot access high speed broadband services, I would encourage them to contact my Department directly at broadband@dcae.gov.ie, quoting their address and Eircode and giving details of providers they have contacted with a view to obtaining services.

My 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, covering 100,000 km 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. In addition, bidders need adequate time to 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 on timelines at this juncture, given that discussions are on-going 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 a 3-5 year timeline to roll out a network of the scale envisaged under the NBP. As part of the competitive process, the Department will engage with winning bidder(s) on the best roll-out strategy, in order to target areas of particularly poor service, business needs and/or high demand. This will need to be balanced with the most efficient network roll-out plan. A prioritisation programme will be put in place in this regard, in consultation with the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. A detailed roll-out plan for the network will be published once contract(s) are in place.

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

In a further positive initiative, last July, I established a Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce with my colleague Minister Humphreys to address immediate issues in relation to the quality of mobile phone and broadband coverage. I expect to publish the report of the Taskforce in the coming weeks.

I recently signed Regulations allowing ComReg to proceed in early 2017 to allocate spectrum in the 3.6GHz radio spectrum band. This will provide an 86% increase in total spectrum available for mobile and fixed wireless services. I have also secured €8m for RTE which will allow it to free up the 700MHz spectrum band, to provide enhanced mobile services.

In the meantime, my Department continues to liaise closely with industry and relevant other Departments and agencies to assist in the removal of barriers to assist in commercial deployment of telecommunications networks.

These investments will further improve the coverage and quality of broadband and mobile voice and data services throughout the country.

While the Government's Capital Investment Plan includes an initial provision of €275m for the NBP up to 2021, the level of exchequer funding required for the NBP will only be known after bidders provide their estimates of cost and subsidy requirements.

71. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his Department has received the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland's annual report for 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38590/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The 2015 Annual Report and Accounts for the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland have been received by my Department and have been noted by Government. They were laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas on 10 November 2016. A second version which corrected a minor error in the Report was laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas on 23 November 2016.

National Broadband Plan Data

72. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when his Department first announced plans to introduce the awaited national broadband plan; the dates on which various Ministers held press conferences to publicise it; the expected commencement and completion dates given by Ministers at each of these press conferences; the current projected commencement date and completion date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38341/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Government's National Broadband Plan (NBP), which was published in August 2012 by the then Minister, outlined Government's commitment to deliver high speed broadband availability across the country and reflects Government and European objectives to deliver high speed broadband services to all citizens. Specifically it committed to a State intervention in those areas where commercial investment has not been fully demonstrated.

Since the publication of the Plan, there have been updates provided in respect of progress. In April 2014, the Government decided that it needed to scale up the ambition of the plan. This was a consequence of the mapping process, which had been underway since 2013, and which demonstrated that there was a significant fibre-deficit across Ireland which would require a major network build to address. It also recognised new State Aid Guidelines published in 2013, a significant ramp-up in demand for data services nationally and internationally, and accelerated industry investment following regulatory and policy decisions, which included legislation to allow ESB to enter the telecoms market.

Facilitating commercial investment continues to be a critical element of the Plan and industry is now delivering to approximately 1.4m premises across Ireland, which represents an increase of at least 400,000 more homes and businesses than had originally been anticipated. Telecoms operators are also rolling out fibre-to-the-home services in Ireland - a technology which was not envisaged on any scale in 2012. At least two operators have announced ambitious fibre-to-the-home roll-out plans, one of which involves the use of the ESB network, which was facilitated by legislation introduced by my Department as part of the broader NBP policy.

Following the Government's decision to scale up the ambition of the plan, significant additional resources were brought to bear on the project. Since then, my predecessor and I have held media briefings to flag key milestones in the development of the Plan. These include:

- November 2014 - the publication of the High Speed Broadband Map and launch of a public consultation.

- June 2015 - the publication of the draft Intervention Strategy along with 7 expert reports which are supporting the delivery of the procurement.

- December 2015 - the publication of the updated High Speed Broadband Map and formal launch of the procurement process, with the publication of a detailed Project Information Memorandum and Project Information Notice in the Official Journal of the EU.

- July 2016 - the decision by Government in relation to the ownership model for the network to be built and the shortlisting of three companies to be brought forward as bidders in the procurement process.

- July 2016- the establishment of a Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce to consider immediate measures to address telecommunications deficits in rural Ireland.

I am sure that the Deputy will agree that regular progress reports on the development of the plan, at the key milestone stages outlined, is important in order to inform the public of progress.

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

Earlier this year, before I came into office, the Department announced that it would be June 2017 before contract(s) were awarded under the NBP. The bidders in the process have recently indicated that they may need more time to conclude the procurement process. The timing of each stage of the procurement continues to be dependent on a range of factors including the complexities that may be encountered by the procurement team, and bidders, during the procurement process. Bidders need adequate time to prepare detailed proposals and their final formal bids and get the relevant shareholder and funding approvals at key stages of the process. It is also important to ensure that risks in this multi-million euro procurement are carefully managed. I do not propose to comment any further at this juncture, given that discussions are ongoing in the procurement process. I can assure the Deputy however, that the procurement process is being intensively managed, to ensure an outcome that delivers a future-proofed network that serves homes and businesses across Ireland, for at least 25 years. The Government considers the NBP to be one of the most significant investments in rural Ireland for decades, and one which will transform society, akin to rural electrification in the last century.

During the Department's extensive stakeholder consultations in 2015, telecommunications service providers indicated that it could take 3-5 years to roll out a network of the scale envisaged under the NBP. It is however open to bidder(s) to suggest more aggressive timescales as part of their bids. As part of the competitive process, the Department will engage with winning bidder(s) on the best roll-out strategy, in order to target areas of particularly poor service, business needs and / or high demand. This will need to be balanced with the most efficient network roll-out plan. A prioritisation programme will be put in place in this regard, in consultation with the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. A detailed roll-out plan for the network will be published once contract(s) are in place.

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

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In the meantime, my Department continues to liaise closely with industry and relevant other Departments and agencies to assist in the removal of barriers to assist in commercial deployment of telecommunications networks.

These investments will further improve the coverage and quality of broadband and mobile voice and data services throughout the country.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

73. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the timeframe for awarding the contract for the national broadband plan. [38508/16]

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

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During the Department's extensive stakeholder consultations in 2015, telecommunications service providers indicated a 3-5 year timeline to roll out a network of the scale envisaged under the NBP. As part of the competitive process, the Department will engage with winning bidder(s) on the best roll-out strategy, in order to target areas of particularly poor service, business needs and/or high demand. This will need to be balanced with the most efficient network roll-out plan. A prioritisation programme will be put in place in this regard, in consultation with the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. A detailed roll-out plan for the network will be published once contract(s) are in place.

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In the meantime, my Department continues to liaise closely with industry and relevant other Departments and agencies to assist in the removal of barriers to assist in commercial deployment of telecommunications networks.

These investments will further improve the coverage and quality of broadband and mobile voice and data services throughout the country.

Employment Data

74. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Taoiseach the percentage of employment gains in each region in the 12 months to quarter 3 of 2016 in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38320/16]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) is the official source of estimates of employment in the State. The most recent figures available are for Q3 2016. Estimates of employment are produced by NUTS2 and NUTS 3 Regions.

The following table shows the number of persons aged 15 years and over in employment classified by NUTS2 and NUTS3 region in Q3 2015 and Q3 2016 and the annual change over this period.

Persons aged 15 years and over in employment (ILO) classified by NUTS2 and NUTS3 region, Q3 15 and Q3 16 and the annual change

NUTS2 and NUTS3 Regions	Q3 15	Q3 16	Annual Change '000	Annual Change %
Border, Midland and Western	494.8	502.8	8.0	1.6
Border	195.4	196.3	1.0	0.5
Midland	119.2	120.1	0.9	0.7
West	180.2	186.4	6.1	3.4
Southern and Eastern	1,488.2	1,537.7	49.5	3.3
Dublin	605.6	621.5	16.0	2.6
Mid-East	231.2	239.5	8.3	3.6
Mid-West	157.4	162.4	5.0	3.2
South -East	207.4	215.1	7.7	3.7
South West	286.5	299.1	12.5	4.4
State	1,983.0	2,040.5	57.5	2.9

Source: Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS), Central Statistics Office, Ireland.

Data may be subject to future revision.

Data may be subject to sampling or other survey errors, which are greater in respect of smaller values or estimates of change.

Reference period: Q3 = July-September.

Employment Data

75. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Taoiseach the total number of persons classified as underemployed in the 12 months to quarter 3 of 2016; the total share of the labour workforce, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38321/16]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) is the official source of estimates of employment in the State. The most recent figures available are for Q3 2016.

The following table shows the number of persons aged 15 years and over in the labour force and in employment in Q3 2015 to Q3 2016 and underemployed persons as a percentage of the labour force over this period.

Persons aged 15 years and over in the labour force and in employment from Q3 15 to Q3 16

-	Q3 15	Q4 15	Q1 16	Q2 16	Q3 16
In labour force	2,186.0	2,170.5	2,156.0	2,202.7	2,218.2
In employment	1,983.0	1,983.0	1,976.5	2,014.9	2,040.5
full-time	1,534.1	1,531.5	1,520.3	1,553.0	1,578.9
part-time	448.8	451.6	456.2	461.9	461.6
of which: part-time, not underemployed	342.4	347.5	357.1	347.5	361.2
part-time, underemployed	106.5	104.0	99.1	114.4	100.4
Underemployed as percentage of labour force %	4.9	4.8	4.6	5.2	4.5

Source: Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS), Central Statistics Office, Ireland.

Data may be subject to future revision.

Data may be subject to sampling or other survey errors, which are greater in respect of smaller values or estimates of change.

Reference period: Q1 = Jan-Mar, Q2 = Apr-Jun, Q3 = Jul-Sept, Q4 = Oct-Dec.

Departmental Communications

76. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if his Department has a policy regarding the use of an e-mail provider (details supplied) in view of his comments over the weekend of 26 and 27 November 2016 regarding same. [38366/16]

77. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he or his Department will continue to use an e-mail provider (details supplied) for non-urgent Government business. [38367/16]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 76 and 77 together.

My Department has detailed ICT policies relating to the use of email and the internet which are provided to all staff. These policies also deal with software downloads, media device usage, remote access and the security responsibility of users.

Office holders and staff in my Department use secure corporate email accounts for conduct-

ing official day-to-day business. While the existing policies do not explicitly ban the use of non-Department of the Taoiseach email services, the policies do stipulate that individuals using the Department's electronic media should handle their communications with the same care as with any other type of business communications.

The existing policies are currently being reviewed and consolidated and text dealing explicitly with the use of non-Department of the Taoiseach email accounts will be included in the consolidated policy.

Tribunals of Inquiry Expenditure

78. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Taoiseach the amount of legal fees paid by his Department in respect of tribunals of inquiry established by the State and any resulting legal actions; and if he will provide these broken down by tribunal and by year for 2006 to 2016 in tabular form. [38458/16]

The Taoiseach: My Department has administrative responsibility for the Moriarty Tribunal and the costs incurred by my Department in respect of the Tribunal for the years 2006 to end-November 2016 are contained in the following tables:

-	2006 €	2007 €	2008 €	2009 €	2010 €	2011 €
Fees to Tribunal's Legal Team	3,358,396	3,393,958	3,346,455	3,337,307	2,364,915	1,122,041
Legal Actions	345,219	0	166,708	0	0	0
Administration	524,087	760,606	472,974	444,767	516,409	469,609
Other	3,960	0	23,229	13,304	243,569	9,075
Third Party Costs	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	4,231,662	4,154,564	4,009,366	3,795,378	3,124,893	1,600,725

-	2012 €	2013 €	2014 €	2015 €	2016 (to end Nov) €
Fees to Tribunal's Legal Team	447,939	426,236	390,118	385,429	331,144
Legal Actions	300,833	99,917	0	104,077	282,990
Administration	342,915	210,873	171,172	197,585	195,284
Other	0	55,504	589,150	270,963	5,021
Third Party Costs	501,679	1,720,497	2,546,938	1,954,591(*)	181,057
TOTAL	1,593,366	2,513,027	3,697,378	2,912,645	995,496

(*) includes a payment in respect of third party costs arising from the Dunnes Tribunal.

UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

79. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if

she will address a matter raised in correspondence (details supplied) regarding the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. [38286/16]

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. The Bill will address issues such as the Convention's requirements in relation to reasonable accommodation and deprivation of liberty. The General Scheme of the Equality/Disability (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill is available on the Department of Justice and Equality 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 the Bill to be published very shortly so as to facilitate early ratification of the Convention.

Property Tax

80. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality her views on escalating fees being imposed by property management companies in private housing developments; her plans to phase out such fees following the introduction of the local property tax; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38565/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The primary purpose of the Multi-Unit Developments Act 2011 is to reform the law relating to the ownership and management of common areas of multi-unit developments and to facilitate the fair, efficient and effective management of owners' management companies (OMCs). These are bodies established for the management of such areas, the membership of which comprise the owners of residential units within the development.

As regards service charges, the position is that section 18 of the 2011 Act requires each OMC to establish and maintain a scheme of annual service charges to fund the costs of insurance, maintenance, cleaning, waste management and other common or shared services in respect of the development concerned. These service charges must be calculated on a transparent basis, be apportioned on an equitable basis between residential unit owners and be approved by the OMC members themselves at a general meeting of the OMC. In short, the Act gives residential unit owners themselves a role in determining the level of annual service charge, the level of services to be funded and the manner in which such services are to be provided.

I should add that service charges in multi-unit developments form part of the contract the unit owner enters into when purchasing the property. Consequently, there is no link between the service charge and the Local Property Tax which is charged on all residential properties in the State. Policy responsibility for the Local Property Tax rests with the Minister for Finance.

Employment Rights

81. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if plans are being considered to amend existing legislation governing employee entitlement for time off and-or reduced working hours for the purpose of breastfeeding in order to extend the existing 26 week post-confinement allowance; her views on whether the present entitlement period for employees who are breastfeeding is significantly less than recommendations from the World Health Organization, which advise that a child is breastfed for at least the first six months exclusively, with supplemental breastfeeding up to two years of age; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38691/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): Under Section 9 of the Maternity Protection (Amendment) Act 2004, women in employment who have given birth within the previous six months are entitled to take one hour (with pay) off work each day in order to breastfeed.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Government has approved drafting of a Family Leave Bill, which I intend to publish in 2017. The Bill will consolidate all existing family leave legislation such as parental leave, carer's leave, maternity leave and adoptive leave into one Act while making necessary amendments and improvements. I am aware that the current provision for time off for breastfeeding purposes has been superseded by the extension of maternity leave since the Maternity Protection Acts came into operation, and the Bill will provide an opportunity to consider an appropriate amendment to address this specific issue.

Departmental Staff Careers

82. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the reason staff officers are not afforded the same promotional opportunities as other Civil Service grades (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38794/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The management of staff and issues arising is a matter for my Department's Secretary General and his officials. If a member of staff of my Department has a query related to their employment they have the opportunity to raise such matters with Human Resources Division.

The Deputy may wish to note that all staff, including Staff Officers are afforded the same promotion opportunities as other civil service grades and that all competitions for promotion that are held by my Department are done so in accordance with the provisions regarding cross-streaming and the revised eligibility criteria for promotion arising from General Council Report 1526.

Furthermore, the particular office notices referenced are not promotional opportunities but opportunities for officers at certain designated grades to work in another area of my Department at the same grade. In this context it is important to note that as currently structured, while there are aspects of the Staff Officer role that are broadly analogous with the grade of Executive Officer, the Staff Officer and Executive Officer grades are distinct and separate.

The Deputy may wish to note that efforts are ongoing at a central level to amalgamate the two grades and my Department has already taken steps to give Staff Officers an opportunity to work in roles that would have previously only been undertaken by Executive Officers.

Crime Prevention

83. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the civil society and industry groups she has consulted or contacted on enhancing and updating the legislative framework regarding the lawful interception of communications and covert electronic surveillance to combat the threats from serious and organised crime and terrorism to date in 2016 and those she intends to meet in 2017 (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38284/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy may be aware, on 31 May this year I announced my intention to amend the legislative framework for lawful interception and covert surveillance in the context of the fight against organised crime and terrorism. The Government subsequently approved my proposals to draft a number of amendments to the Interception of Postal Packets and Telecommunications (Regulation) Act 1993 and other associated legislation.

The decision to amend this legislation highlights the difficult balance to be struck between the need to preserve and protect the personal privacy of our citizens while also ensuring their safety and security. Officials in my Department are currently engaged in consultation with industry professionals and civil society organisations to ensure that we develop legislation that is not only robust and effective, but also proportionate in terms of its scope, and which is mindful of the legitimate concerns of those, including the industries, affected by it.

A number of consultation meetings have been held to date with industry interests, including Google, Facebook, Microsoft and Yahoo, and with civil society organisations, human rights groups and academics with expertise in this field, including the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, the Irish Council for Civil Liberties and Digital Rights Ireland. The experience and insights of all participants will inform the development of the proposed legislative amendments and I appreciate and value their input. Further consultations with other interested stakeholders may take place in 2017, but the details have yet to be determined. Any eventual amendments proposed will be subject to the normal legislative process in this House.

Garda Vetting of Personnel

84. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality her views on whether it is acceptable that in areas of the public service disclosures under the National Vetting Bureau relating to minor traffic offences such as driving without an NCT and road tax should be the basis for disqualifying persons from public service employment when those offences bear no relation to ensuring child protection as set out in the Child and Vulnerable Persons Act 2012; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38376/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Acts 2012 to 2016 for the purpose of protecting children and vulnerable persons requires an organisation or employer before employing a person to receive a vetting disclosure from the National Vetting Bureau, where that person will have regular contact with or access to children or vulnerable persons. A vetting disclosure will contain particulars of the criminal record, if any, of the person. The disclosure may also contain information concerning a finding or allegation that the person may have harmed another person where such information is received from the Garda Síochána or any of the following bodies:

1. The Health Service Executive.
2. The Teaching Council.

3. The Medical Council.
4. The Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland.
5. The Dental Council.
6. The Health and Social Care Professionals Council.
7. The Mental Health Commission.
8. The Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland.
9. The Pre-Hospital Emergency Care Council.
10. The Health Information and Quality Authority.
11. The National Transport Authority.

and the Chief Bureau Officer of the National Vetting Bureau has a bona fide concern that the person may harm to a child or vulnerable person.

Under amendments to the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012 made by the Oireachtas earlier this year, certain convictions are not included in a vetting disclosure made by the National Vetting Bureau once 7 years has passed since the date of conviction and the convicted person has complied with the sentence imposed.

Among the convictions that are not disclosed are convictions in the District Court for motoring offences and convictions for minor public order offences, with the exception that non-disclosure of a conviction for dangerous driving is limited to one single conviction.

In addition, where a person has one, and only one, conviction (other than a motoring or public order offence) which resulted in a term of imprisonment of less than 12 months (or a fine) that conviction will not be disclosed by the Bureau after 7 years so long as the conviction is not an “excluded offence” under the Act.

The National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act was commenced on 29th April 2016.

Recruitment to the Civil Service is governed by the Public Service Management (Recruitment and Appointments) Act 2004 which established the Commission for Public Service Appointments (CPSA) and the Public Appointments Service (PAS). The CPSA sets the standards to apply to the recruitment of persons for positions in the Civil Service and certain other public service bodies.

Garda Training

85. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if a senior garda in each Garda division has been trained to act as a resource and liaison mental health officer in line with the recommendation 15.1.91 of A Vision for Change; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38422/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for carrying on and managing and controlling generally the administration and business of An Garda Síochána, including by arranging for the training of its members and civilian staff and I, as Minister, have

no direct role in the matter.

I have requested the information sought by the Deputy from the Commissioner and I will write to the Deputy on receipt of same.

Garda Deployment

86. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number that make up the drugs squad within An Garda Síochána in County Waterford in each of the years 2006 to 2016 to date, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38485/16]

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

I have been informed by the Garda Commissioner that as of the 31 October 2016, the latest date for which figures are readily available, there were 237 members assigned to the Garda Divisional Drugs Units, of whom 5 were assigned to the Waterford Divisional Drug Unit.

It is important to note that all Gardaí have a responsibility in the prevention and detection of criminal activity whether it be in the area of drug offences or otherwise. I can assure the Deputy that An Garda Síochána continues to pro-actively and resolutely tackle all forms of drug crime in this jurisdiction. The Garda National Drugs Unit works closely with dedicated Divisional and District Drug Units and other national units, including the Organised Crime Unit, as well as the Criminal Assets Bureau (CAB) in targeting persons involved in the illicit sale and supply of drugs.

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

Taking account of projected retirements, reaching a strength of 15,000 will require some 3,200 new Garda members to be recruited on a phased basis over the next four years in addition to the 1,200 that will have been recruited by the end of this year since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014. This is an ambitious target and will require a continuous pipeline of suitable candidates. I am pleased to say that the recruitment campaign launched by the Public Appointments Service on behalf of the Commissioner last September, the second campaign this year, again received a strong response.

Since the reopening of the Garda College, 679 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána, and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide. I am informed that so far 24 of these probationer Garda have been assigned to the Waterford Division. It is expected that drug law enforcement activities and all other Garda activities, will undoubtedly benefit from

these resources now coming on stream.

The following table gives a breakdown of the number of Garda members assigned to the Waterford Divisional Drugs Unit in each of the years 2008 to 2016 as of 31 October 2016. I have requested details of the number of Garda assigned to the Waterford Divisional Drugs Unit for the years 2006 and 2007 from the Commissioner and I will write directly to the Deputy when this information is to hand.

Waterford Divisional Drugs Unit

Year	Strength
2008	15
2009	12
2010	14
2011	10
2012	10
2013	9
2014	5
2015	5
2016	5

Public Sector Staff Retirements

87. **Deputy Josepha Madigan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality her plans regarding raising and or abolishing the mandatory retirement age; and if there are plans underway to progress the Employment Equality (Abolition of Mandatory Retirement Age) Bill 2014. [38536/16]

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

I have no Ministerial responsibility for retirement age issues generally either in the public sector (where mandatory retirement ages are a feature of public sector employment law) or the private sector (where there is no statutory retirement age).

The Bill to which the Deputy refers was a Private Members' Bill and I am not aware of any plans to advance it.

Court Procedures

88. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the advice that can be given to a person (details supplied) looking for information on a High Court case that was taken against that person's company by the Central Bank in 1999 and 2000; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38548/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the

Deputy is aware, under the provisions of the Courts Service Act 1998, management of the courts is the responsibility of the Courts Service which is independent in exercising its functions, which include the provision of information on the courts system.

However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has informed me that a litigant cannot be represented before the courts by a lay person. A company as a litigant possesses a legal personality in its own right and accordingly requires representation by a practising solicitor. Consequently no individual, whether director, shareholder or otherwise of a company, may represent that company. This principle equally extends to the examination of court records held on court files, access to which is restricted to solicitors representing a company in a case. In addition, those records are not subject to the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act. The Courts Service has informed me that it is not aware of having received an FOI request to access documents as mentioned. However, if additional details are supplied, the Courts Service will make further enquiries into the matter.

The Deputy makes reference to the individual concerned not being allowed to attend a court case. The Constitution provides that justice shall be administered in public, save in such special and limited cases as may be prescribed by law, and members of the public are therefore permitted access to court hearings dealt with in public.

Naturalisation Applications

89. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the reason it is taking so long to establish if a person (details supplied) will be entitled to naturalisation here, in view of the fact the person submitted an application on 20 July 2015; when the person can expect to receive a decision; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38555/16]

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 processing of the application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy is ongoing and has not yet reached a conclusion.

As the Deputy will appreciate, the granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation is a privilege and an honour which confers certain rights and entitlements not only within the State but also at European Union level and it is important that appropriate procedures are in place to preserve the integrity of the process.

It is recognised that all applicants for citizenship would wish to have a decision on their application without delay. While straightforward cases are generally processed within six months, the nature of the naturalisation process is such that, for a broad range of reasons, some cases will take longer than others to process. In some instances, completing the necessary checks can take a considerable period of time.

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

Legal Aid Service

90. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of solicitors operating in County Meath; and if a person can avail of a voucher for a legal board office solicitor but yet be denied free legal aid (details supplied) [38561/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Solicitors practising in Ireland are regulated by the Law Society of Ireland. Details of

solicitors who hold a current practising certificate and professional indemnity insurance in Meath are available on the Society's website www.lawsociety.ie.

I presume that when the Deputy refers to "a voucher for a legal board office solicitor" he is referring to a voucher for free legal advice issued under the Abhaile scheme.

In this context, in October 2016, I launched Abhaile, the Government's Mortgage Arrears Resolution Service. An important component of this scheme is that free legal advice is available to insolvent borrowers who are in danger of losing their family home. The free legal advice scheme operates on the basis that persons make applications to their local Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) office to avail of the Scheme. There are no means or merits criteria applicable although a person must meet three criteria for admission to the scheme:

The person is insolvent (as defined under s. 2 of the Personal Insolvency Act 2012: i.e. the borrower is 'unable to pay his or her debts in full as they fall due'), and

The person is in mortgage arrears on the home in which they ordinarily reside (their 'principal private residence' (PPR) as defined by s. 2 of the Personal Insolvency Act 2012), and

The person is at risk of losing that home (i.e. they have received from the mortgage lender repossession proceedings, a letter indicating that such proceedings will issue, a letter indicating that they are deemed non-cooperating, or an invitation to consider sale, surrender or other loss of all or part of the home).

If a person is admitted to the scheme, they will be given free financial advice either from the MABS office, a MABS dedicated mortgage arrears advisor, a PIP, or an accountant. If the MABS office or their financial advisor identifies that they would also benefit from free legal advice, they are given a voucher and a list of solicitors who have agreed to provide free legal advice under the scheme.

If a person who has been issued a legal advice voucher is having difficulty identifying a solicitor or redeeming a voucher they should contact the Legal Aid Board. It is important to note that while the Legal Aid Board administers this free legal advice service, the solicitors who provide services under this scheme are private practitioners and do not work in Legal Aid Board offices (law centres).

The scheme covers legal advice but does not extend to legal aid in the sense of representation in court. However, a duty solicitor service at county registrars' courts is available as part of the Abhaile scheme. The duty solicitor cannot come on record for the borrower nor may they draft the court documents needed to defend repossession proceedings. The duty solicitor may speak on behalf of the borrower but the applications they can make are limited to seeking an adjournment so that the borrower can either apply to a Legal Aid Board law centre for civil legal aid or obtain representation privately.

If such a person applies for services to a Legal Aid Board law centre in connection with the defence of repossession proceedings, the application will be considered under the normal criteria that apply under the Civil Legal Aid Act 1995 and the Civil Legal Aid Regulations 1996 to 2016.

Missing Persons Data

91. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the details of all missing persons from the State and the dates of their disappearances in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38694/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The following table shows the number of persons recorded as Missing Persons each year since 1951 who remain recorded as missing:

Year	No. of Persons	Year	No. of Persons	Year	No. of Persons	Year	No. of Persons
1951	2	1967	2	1984	9	2001	54
1952	2	1968	5	1985	6	2002	59
1953	2	1969	6	1986	13	2003	48
1954	4	1970	1	1987	6	2004	32
1955	1	1971	3	1988	8	2005	20
1956	4	1972	6	1989	7	2006	40
1957	2	1973	2	1990	9	2007	40
1958	0	1974	0	1991	5	2008	32
1959	1	1975	2	1992	4	2009	45
1960	0	1976	3	1993	8	2010	15
1961	3	1977	6	1994	9	2011	22
1962	1	1978	6	1995	8	2012	15
1963	2	1979	4	1996	7	2013	10
1964	0	1980	5	1997	2	2014	10
1965	3	1981	5	1998	6	2015	37
1966	1	1982	5	1999	13	2016	51*

The figures provided are provisional, operational and liable to change and are valid to 30th November, 2016.

* The figure of 51 outstanding missing persons for 2016 appears disproportionately high as the data is taken from PULSE which is a 'live' database and as such is operational and will decline in the coming months when those current investigations are concluded.

All incidents remain under investigation where the person reported missing has not been located and such cases are reviewed by An Garda Síochána on a regular basis.

The Deputy's question is timely as tomorrow, 7 December 2016, I will be hosting a ceremony at Farnleigh House to mark Ireland's national Missing Persons Day.

The objective of Missing Persons Day is to commemorate all those who have gone missing and recognise the lasting trauma for their families and friends. Missing Persons Day also draws attention to open or unsolved missing persons cases, and creates an opportunity to provide information on available support services. Missing Persons Day is an annual day of commemoration and takes place on the first Wednesday in December each year.

This year's ceremony will mark the fourth year for Ireland's national Missing Persons Day. The ceremony will be attended by families and friends of missing persons, as well as a number of organisations working in the community on their behalf. An Garda Síochána will also be in attendance at the ceremony, notably the Missing Persons Bureau and many Family Liaison

Officers. Further information on National Missing Persons Day is available from missingpersonsday@justice.ie.

Garda Vetting Applications

92. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she will assist in expediting an application in respect of a person (details supplied). [38700/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will appreciate the processing of vetting applications by the Garda National Vetting Bureau is an operational matter for the Garda Authorities and is carried out in accordance with the provisions of the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012-1016 and other relevant law.

I am informed by the Garda Authorities that the National Vetting Bureau received two vetting applications from a Registered Organisation in respect of the person referred to by the Deputy. The first application was received on 20 September 2016 and was processed and returned to the Liaison Person in the Registered Organisation on 23 September 2016. The second application was received on 24 November 2016 and was processed and returned to the Liaison Person in the Registered Organisation on 30 November 2016. In the circumstances, the applicant is advised to contact the Registered Organisation to ascertain the current position.

Garda Investigations

93. **Deputy Fergus O’Dowd** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she will meet and respond directly to a person (details supplied) regarding a matter; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38702/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised that the matters referred to have been the subject of a Garda investigation and have also come before the Courts. The Deputy will appreciate that it is not open to me to intervene in relation to particular Garda investigations, and that it would not be appropriate for me to comment in relation to the outcome of court proceedings.

However, to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have made arrangements for the correspondence in question to be brought to the attention of the Garda authorities. I am also advised that Gardaí have made contact with the person in question in relation to his concerns.

Direct Provision System

94. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 72 and 73 of 22 June 2016, the progress of the outstanding 82 recommendations as outlined in the McMahon report, in tabular form; the extent to which each of these 82 recommendations has been implemented; the recommendations that have yet to be addressed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38736/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): To coincide with the first anniversary of the publication of the McMahon Report last June 30th, a comprehensive account of progress on the implementation of the recommendations was compiled. I was pleased to publish and note the considerable progress made at that stage.

I can confirm that a further half-yearly analysis of progress is currently underway in my Department who are also co-ordinating updates from the other Departments and agencies responsible for implementation. This will be finalised early in the New Year and will be published shortly thereafter.

Criminal Assets Bureau

95. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the current levels of Garda and specialist staff numbers in the Criminal Assets Bureau; her plans to increase these staff resources; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38746/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I can inform the Deputy that the Criminal Assets Bureau currently has a staffing level of 71, incorporating staff on secondment from the Revenue Commissioners (12), the Department of Social Protection (6) and An Garda Síochána (37). In addition, there are 16 members of staff from my own Department.

Additional Garda resources have also been made available to the Bureau in support of the operation of the recently established Special Crime Task Force.

The Bureau is headed by the Chief Bureau Officer who is a Chief Superintendent with An Garda Síochána and assisted by the Bureau Legal Officer. In addition, legal advice and solicitor services are provided to the Bureau by the Criminal Assets Section of the Chief State Solicitor's Office.

In addition, Asset Profilers trained by the Bureau provide a criminal asset profiling service in each Garda Division in relation to persons or suspects operating within their area, with particular reference to those involved in serious criminal activity. Currently the number of trained Garda Asset Profilers is 192 plus Revenue Customs and Social Protection trained asset profilers making a total of 210 asset profilers throughout the State.

A number of vacancies at the Bureau are currently in the process of being filled including both a forensic accountant and a financial crime analyst vacancy.

Further detailed information concerning the resources allocated to the Bureau and its activities can be found in the Annual Reports of the Bureau which are available on my Department's website.

I can assure the Deputy that I am committed to making sure the necessary resources are made available to the Criminal Assets Bureau from within the available public finances. In this regard the resources of the Bureau are, and will continue to be, kept under ongoing review by both the Criminal Assets Bureau and my Department.

Community Policing

96. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of community gardaí by rank stationed in Coolock, Swords and Malahide as of November 2013, November 2014, November 2015 and November 2016; her plans to increase the number of community gardaí in these stations; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38747/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the

Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of resources, including personnel, among the various Garda Divisions and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. Garda management keeps this distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the optimum use is made of these resources.

I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that in regard to the deployment of Garda personnel, a distribution model is used which takes into account all relevant factors including population, crime trends and the policing needs of each individual Garda Division. It is the responsibility of the Divisional Officer to allocate personnel within his/her Division.

The Commissioner has advised that it is the case that all Gardaí have a role to play in addressing community policing issues as and when the need arises. In that sense, community policing involves far more than a single unit within An Garda Síochána. Community policing is at the heart of An Garda Síochána. It provides a means of recognising that every community – both urban and rural - has its own concerns and expectations. In this regard I welcome the strong emphasis placed by the Commissioner's Modernisation and Renewal Programme 2016-2021 on further developing and supporting the community policing ethos of the organisation so that Gardaí spend more time in the community, gaining public confidence and trust and providing a greater sense of security. Proposed initiatives include the establishment of local Community Policing Teams (CPTs) headed by an Inspector and made up of Gardaí from across a range of areas to proactively work with the community to prevent and detect crime; and the establishment of Community Safety Fora in every District comprising local Gardaí, local communities and key stakeholders.

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

Taking account of projected retirements, reaching a strength of 15,000 will require some 3,200 new Garda members to be recruited on a phased basis over the next four years in addition to the 1,200 that will have been recruited by the end of this year since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014.

I am further informed by the Garda Commissioner that since the reopening of the College, 679 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide. It is expected that Community Policing and all other Garda activities, will undoubtedly benefit from these resources now coming on stream.

I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that the tables below show the number of Community Gardaí by rank assigned to Coolock, Swords and Malahide Garda Stations which form the Coolock Garda District, as of November 2013, November 2014, November 2015, and 31 October 2016, the latest date for which figures are readily available.

Coolock Garda District number of Community Gardaí by rank as of 30 November, 2013

STATION	INSP	SERGEANT	GARDA	TOTAL
COOLOCK	0	2	13	15
SWORDS	0	2	11	13
MALAHIDE	0	0	6	6

Coolock Garda District number of Community Gardaí by rank as of 30 November 2014

STATION	INSP	SERGEANT	GARDA	TOTAL
COOLOCK	0	2	14	16
SWORDS	0	1	10	11
MALAHIDE	0	0	6	6

Coolock Garda District number of Community Gardaí by rank as of 30 November 2015

STATION	INSP	SERGEANT	GARDA	TOTAL
COOLOCK	0	2	14	16
SWORDS	0	0	9	9
MALAHIDE	0	0	5	5

Coolock Garda District number of Community Gardaí by rank as of 31 October 2016

STATION	INSP	SERGEANT	GARDA	TOTAL
COOLOCK	0	2	12	14
SWORDS	0	1	9	10
MALAHIDE	0	0	4	4

Garda Operations

97. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if An Garda Síochána has a specific operation to target alcohol-related crime and anti-social behaviour in Dublin city centre over the Christmas and new year period; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38748/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda authorities are responsible for policing strategies in relation to the matters referred to. In this regard, I am assured by the Garda Commissioner that the allocation of resources is continually monitored and reviewed, taking into account all relevant factors including crime trends, demographics, and security assessments relating to the area in question with a view to making the best possible use of Garda resources.

I have been advised by the Garda authorities that a Policing Plan has been put in place in Dublin City Centre to support public safety and deal with risks of public disorder and other anti-social behaviour during the festive period. The aims and objectives of the Policing Plan include:

Ensuring a high-visibility policing presence

Reducing instances of assaults and public disorder

Targeting criminals by intelligence-led policing and deployment of plain-clothes personnel to prevent, detect and disrupt criminality

Maintaining reassurance to the commercial community through a high-visibility presence in the City Centre and by providing security and crime prevention advice to businesses

Dealing with persons who may use this period to engage in unlawful collections in the city centre and where they may target elderly persons in residential areas.

I might add that there is a range of strong legislative provisions available to An Garda Síochána to combat anti-social behaviour, including provisions under the Criminal Justice (Public Order) Acts, the Criminal Damage Act and the Intoxicating Liquor Acts. The powers available to Gardaí support them in addressing anti-social behaviours, including the prevention of nuisance or annoyance to others and forestalling damage to property or a breach of the peace.

An Garda Síochána is committed to tackling public disorder and anti-social behaviour by working with communities to reduce this type of behaviour and enhance community safety. The Garda approach includes a strong focus on quality of life issues and collaboration with local authorities, businesses (in particular the night time economy) and other stakeholders to help address the causes of anti-social behaviour, including in relation to the misuse of alcohol.

Remembrance Commission

98. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she has received communication from persons (details supplied) requesting that she consider reopening the Remembrance Commission to allow it to consider the murder of a person; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38772/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I can confirm to the Deputy that I received correspondence from the person to whom the Deputy refers in his question.

I should say and I know that the Deputy will share my view, that this was a cowardly and brutal murder carried out by the Provisional IRA which robbed a woman and her children of a loving husband and father, and also deprived the State of a dedicated servant.

While the Remembrance Commission is no longer in being, given the unique circumstances of this case I had asked my officials to carry out a detailed review of the request in the light of the work of the Remembrance Commission. That process has now been finalised and I have been in direct communication with the person referred to in this regard.

Refugee Resettlement Programme

99. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the efforts made on accepting refugees from the Syrian conflict and from Calais, France; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38815/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Under the Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP) established by Government Decision in September 2015, the Government pledged to accept a total of 4,000 persons into the State by the end of 2017, through a combination of the EU relocation mechanism established by two EU Council Decisions in 2015 to assist Italy and Greece, and the UNHCR-led refugee resettlement programme currently focused on resettling refugees from camps in Lebanon.

The Refugee Resettlement strand is making excellent progress. 507 refugees have already

arrived from Lebanon. 519 will have arrived by the end of December fulfilling our original quota a year ahead of the EU deadline of 8 December, 2017. To build on this early success I was pleased to announce last week that I am sending our fourth mission to Lebanon to arrange for a further 260 refugees to come to Ireland. This is in addition to an earlier commitment of 260 refugees due to arrive in the first half of 2017. The total additional commitment of a further 520 refugees in 2017 in effect doubles our original commitment to resettle refugees under this two year programme.

This latest decision reflects the Government's commitment to welcome vulnerable refugees fleeing war and conflict and is another positive step towards meeting our overall commitment to accept 4,000 persons. It also takes account of the slower than anticipated arrival of asylum seekers from Greece and Italy as a result of operational difficulties experienced by all countries in the initial establishment of the Relocation strand of the IRPP in those countries. However, following a highly productive visit by Irish officials to Greece earlier this year the frequency and numbers of arrivals has increased and is continuing to improve. Ireland has provided the Greek authorities with a full timetable for the acceptance, by end September 2017, of the entire cohort of asylum seekers allocated to Ireland under the relevant Council Decisions. Ireland has to date accepted 131 persons under the relocation strand. A further 127 persons are scheduled to arrive later this month with regular substantial monthly arrivals from Greece thereafter. The Greek programme is now working very well and Ireland expects to meet its full obligations to Greece.

The relocation of asylum seekers from Italy to Ireland has been hampered by technical issues which have been the subject of discussion up to ministerial level. It is hoped that the issues can be resolved in the near future which will allow the numbers being taken in under the IRPP to increase further.

An All Party Dáil motion approved by Government on 10 November last called on the Government to work with the French authorities to identify up to 200 unaccompanied minors previously living in the unofficial migrant camp in Calais and who have expressed a desire to relocate to Ireland. My Department is working with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade on all matters arising from the commitments agreed in the recent Dáil motion. Both the French and British authorities and relevant NGOs have been contacted and information is awaited from NGOs in respect of children identified as wishing to relocate to Ireland. It is essential, if Ireland is identified as a location of choice for these young people, that services are in place and can cope with any such arrivals. We must ensure that we maintain the highest standards of international protection and care. The legal pathway for entry must also be robust to ensure that our actions fully comply with international best practice and protection law.

Citizenship Status

100. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality her views on amending legislation to restore citizenship by birth here without reference to a person's parents' status; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38816/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Entitlement to Irish citizenship is governed by the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended. Following a Referendum of the Irish people, the 27th amendment to the Constitution changed the situation in relation to entitlement to Irish Citizenship. As a result, Section 6 of the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956 was amended by the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act, 2004. The changes came into effect on 1st January 2005. As of that date a person

born in the island of Ireland is not entitled to be an Irish citizen, unless that person's parents have been resident in the island of Ireland for a total of three years during the four years preceding that person's birth. Periods of unlawful residence, periods of residence which were for the sole purpose of having an application for refugee status determined or periods of residence where permission was granted for the purposes of study are excluded from the determination of periods of reckonable residence.

Where a child born in the State did not at birth have an entitlement to Irish citizenship, the parent or guardian or person who is in loco parentis to the child may lodge an application for naturalisation on behalf of the child if and when the conditions for naturalisation are satisfied, including a requirement to have a total of 5 years residence in the State. This ensures that, even where a child born in the State did not have an entitlement to Irish citizenship, there is a path to obtaining Irish citizenship through naturalisation.

I have no plans to amend the legislation.

Garda Deployment

101. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda liaison officers with Europol from 2010 to date in 2016 in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38866/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of resources, including personnel, and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter.

An Garda Síochána maintains close liaison with other law enforcement agencies internationally and the work of Garda liaison officers who are permanently based in other jurisdictions and in international bodies such as Interpol and Europol, greatly facilitate the prompt exchange of information and intelligence on criminal activity. Such international liaison has led to many parallel investigations with international law enforcement agencies.

I have been informed by the Garda Commissioner, the number of Garda liaison officers based in Europol Headquarters in the Hague, as of 31 December 2010 to 2015 and up to 31 October 2016, the latest date for which figures are readily available are as set out in the following table.

Garda Liaison Officers in Europol 2010-2016

Location	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Europol HQ	2	2	1	1	1	2	1

Garda Districts

102. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of juvenile liaison officers per annum from 2010 to date in 2016 by Garda district in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38867/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of resources, including personnel, among the various Garda Divisions and I, as Minister, have no direct

role in the matter. Garda management keeps this distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the optimum use is made of these resources.

The Deputy will be aware that the Garda Diversion Programme operates in accordance with Part 4 of the Children Act 2001, as amended, and under the general superintendence and control of the Garda Commissioner. The aim of the Diversion Programme, through the network of Juvenile Liaison Officers (JLOs), is to deal with young people who offend by way of administering a formal or informal caution, thus diverting the young offender away from the Courts and minimising the likelihood of further offending. The Programme embraces, whenever possible, the principles of restorative justice and, at all times, pays the highest regard to the needs of victims. The Programme has proven to be highly successful in diverting children and young people away from crime by offering guidance and support to them and their families. This is evident from the continuing fall in the number of children and young people referred to the Programme in recent years.

For the Deputy's information I have set out in the following table the number of Gardaí who are assigned to JLO duties on a Divisional basis as provided by the Commissioner as of 31 December 2010 to 2015 and as of 31 October 2016, the latest date for which figures are readily available.

Juvenile Liaison Officers 2010 - 2016							
DIVISION	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
D.M.R.South Central	5	5	5	6	5	5	5
D.M.R.North Central	3	4	4	4	4	4	3
D.M.R.North	11	11	11	12	13	13	13
D.M.R.East	6	6	4	6	6	6	5
D.M.R.South	10	10	8	10	10	10	10
D.M.R.West	11	11	11	11	11	9	11
Waterford	4	3	4	4	4	4	3
Wexford	2	3	3	3	3	3	3
Kilkenny/Carlow	3	3	3	2	2	2	2
Tipperary	3	3	3	3	3	3	2
Cork City	6	8	7	7	7	7	7
Cork North	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Cork West	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Kerry	3	4	4	4	4	4	4
Limerick	6	6	6	6	6	6	4
Donegal	3	3	4	3	3	3	3
Cavan/Monaghan	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Sligo/Leitrim	2	2	2	2	1	1	1
Louth	2	3	2	3	3	3	3
Clare	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Mayo	3	3	2	2	2	2	2
Galway	4	4	4	4	4	4	4

Juvenile Liaison Officers 2010 - 2016							
DIVISION	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Roscommon/ Longford	2	1	2	2	2	2	2
Westmeath	2	1	2	2	2	2	2
Meath	2	3	3	3	3	3	3
Kildare	3	3	2	3	3	3	3
Laois/Offaly	2	2	2	2	2	2	3
Wicklow	3	4	4	4	4	4	4
TOTAL	110	115	111	117	116	114	108

Insurance Costs

103. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the fact that insurers are charging significant sums for a change of address on motor insurance; if the Financial Services Ombudsman has ever made any findings regarding this practice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38296/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): It has been brought to my attention that some insurance companies are charging significant sums for a change of address on a motor insurance policy. While I do not agree with this practice, neither I, nor the Central Bank can directly influence insurance pricing 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 position 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. It should be noted that as Minister for Finance, I am responsible for the development of the legal framework governing financial regulation.

However, I have 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 review of 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, including the issue of transparency of pricing in the insurance industry.

The Working Group provided me with an initial set of emerging recommendations at the end of October 2016 which have been published on the Department of Finance website and are available at

<http://www.finance.gov.ie/what-we-do/banking-financial-services/financial-services-division-2-eu/insurance-policy-and-0>.

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.

Finally, the Financial Services Ombudsman (FSO) has confirmed to me that complaints relating to issues arising from a change of address on a motor insurance policy would be recorded

as complaints relating to motor insurance generally. Consequently the FSO is unable to confirm any specific findings in relation to this particular issue.

Tax Rebates

104. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if he will review plans for a tax rebate for first-time buyers in view of the Central Bank's changes to the mortgage lending rules; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38327/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy will be aware, the Central Bank remains independent with regard to the formulation of macroprudential policy. The recent alterations that have been announced to the macroprudential rules, including the changes to the minimum Loan-To-Value ratios for first-time buyers, do not materially alter the main policy aims of the Help to Buy incentive.

Notwithstanding the changes proposed from 1 January next year, securing a deposit to qualify for a mortgage will remain a challenge for many first-time buyers. This is particularly true for those with lower incomes or those paying high rents and as a result, struggling to save. The other main aim of the incentive was to encourage the building of additional new homes. By focusing the scheme solely on new builds and self builds, it is hoped that this will encourage the building of additional properties and thereby increase the overall housing stock.

For these reasons I remain committed to the Help to Buy incentive. However, the Deputy will be aware that I have agreed that an independent impact assessment of the scheme will be undertaken and completed by the end of September 2017.

Legislative Measures

105. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance when he will formally publish legislation on the amalgamation of the offices of the Financial Services Ombudsman and the Pensions Ombudsman. [38328/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy may be aware, the Department is progressing the development of the legislation to underpin the amalgamation of the Financial Service Ombudsman and the Pensions Ombudsman. The Government agreed outline Heads of a Bill to provide for the amalgamation of offices in 2015 and both offices have been physically merged in one location. Recent legislative changes have enabled the appointment of the Financial Services Ombudsman as Pensions Ombudsman.

The Heads of Bill on the Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman were published on the website of the Department of Finance on 5 October 2016. The heads were debated at Pre-Legislative Scrutiny on the 27th October 2016 and we await the report of the Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform and the Taoiseach.

The Bill is a priority Bill for my Department, but is a fairly lengthy Bill with nearly 60 heads to be drafted. My staff are working with the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel on the drafting of the Bill. It is hoped that it will be published early in 2017.

Insurance Costs

106. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the practice by some insurance companies to charge up to a 20% premium to cardiac first responders; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38352/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am disappointed to hear that some insurance companies are applying an additional charge to cardiac first responders as it seems inappropriate that people carrying out such a valuable community function should be so treated.

However, neither I nor the Central Bank can directly influence insurance pricing 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 position 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. It should be noted that as Minister for Finance, I am responsible for the development of the legal framework governing financial regulation.

However, I have 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 review of 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, including the issue of transparency of pricing in the insurance industry.

The Working Group provided me with an initial set of emerging recommendations at the end of October 2016 which have been published on the Department of Finance website and are available at <http://www.finance.gov.ie/what-we-do/banking-financial-services/financial-services-division-2-eu/insurance-policy-and-0>. 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.

Banking Sector Data

107. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the number of properties that each of the State backed banks calculate were lost by the owners due to the fact that the owners were wrongly on a tracker mortgage (details supplied); if he will break down this number by PDHs and BTLs; the process by which these numbers were arrived at, that is, does it include voluntary surrenders, repossessions and so on; the extra redress the banks are considering or implementing for these cases; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38400/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy is aware, the Central Bank of Ireland announced in October 2015 that it would conduct a detailed review of Tracker Mortgage portfolios with all the banks under its supervision. The Central Bank sought to conduct a broad examination of tracker mortgage-related issues covering, among other things, transparency of communications with and contractual rights of tracker mortgage borrowers.

This review is currently underway, and the Central Bank is working with the banks to conduct a comprehensive examination of customer mortgage accounts with regard to tracker rates, including any instances where banks may have failed to deliver on their obligations to customers. Such instances may include cases where the bank was not sufficiently clear with customers

on their terms and conditions, or where they have failed to honour contractual commitments.

The Central Bank has laid out a detailed and rigorous process for each institution to follow. The identification of affected customers, implementation of any appropriate rectification actions, as well as the calculation of any appropriate interest redress or compensation, are all processes currently being worked through by the banks. The review also involves oversight of each bank's work by an independent third party, and the establishment of an independent appeals process. Further, the Central Bank continues to review and monitor each institution's progress at every stage. It is possible that different banks will progress through the review process at different speeds.

I expect that the Central Bank, and each of the institutions involved, will provide information periodically on steps taken and progress made. The tracker mortgage review is an ongoing process involving the banks, their regulator and any affected customers; I have no direct role in its implementation. It is therefore not possible, nor appropriate, for me to speculate at this time on the number of customers that may be affected and the deputy will appreciate that this information is not held in my Department.

The table is a brief update from each of the banks in which the State is a shareholder:

AIB

“AIB is conducting a comprehensive review of customer mortgage accounts with regard to tracker rates. This process is ongoing. AIB's review has found the bank fell short on its obligations to some customers. In order to prevent further detriment for the customers identified to date, AIB has in the first instance begun correcting interest rates on these accounts and writing to customers to outline their new interest rates and repayment amounts. Approximately 50% of the impacted customers are EBS and the remainder AIB. You will note that AIB's CEO Bernard Byrne recently told the Joint Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform and Taoiseach that, based on an assessment of the work done to date, 14 customers may have lost their homes as a result of having the incorrect rate applied to their mortgage accounts. AIB is contacting these customers to agree appropriate compensation measures. The process involved an examination of tens of thousands of accounts and is being conducted in accordance with Central Bank of Ireland guidelines. As the review progresses, AIB is commencing refunds to customers who overpaid interest and is paying compensation. Details of a set payment towards the cost of independent professional advice will also be made available to customers and the bank will establish an independent appeals process. An independent third party, KPMG, is reviewing key aspects of AIB's work. The overall review will take some time to complete. AIB has put in place a customer Freephone Helpline 1800 235 460 (Mon-Fri, 8:00am-7:00pm) to assist with any queries its customers may have.”

PTSB

“On 28 July 2015, Permanent TSB Group announced details of its Mortgage Redress Programme (MRP). The MRP was established to address failures by Permanent TSB and Springboard Mortgages Limited (a Group subsidiary) in respect of 1,372 Tracker mortgage accounts. The Group determined that of this population, had the Group's failure not occurred, 22 customers (all Permanent TSB accounts) may have avoided losing ownership of their property. In making this determination, the Bank considered all relevant information available to it, including information relating to the customers affordability as set out by them in any completed Standard Financial Statements, the repayments that the customer was making to their mortgage at the time, the repayment amount which would have been due had the appropriate Tracker interest rate been applied to the mortgage account, the suitability of any alternative repayment arrangements and any other relevant information held by the Bank. Of these 22 accounts, 10

were Home Loan accounts and 12 were Buy To Let accounts. All of these cases (bar one where the property was repossessed having been abandoned) were customer led sales or voluntary surrenders. Each loss of ownership customer was offered a comprehensive redress and compensation package, which included the redress of the mortgage account, a significant minimum compensation amount (€25K for BTLs and €50K for Home Loans) and the compensation may also have included a write-off of any outstanding shortfall balance on the account, a refund of any repayments made to the account since the loss of ownership, a payment in respect of any increase in the property value from the date of sale and in the case of certain Home Loan customers additional supports where the customer is approved for a new mortgage which would be on the appropriate Tracker interest rate. Each Loss of ownership Customer also has the right of appeal to an Independent Review Panel. PTSB is also participating in the industry wide Tracker Review as detailed by the CBI earlier this year. PTSB is fully co-operating with the review which is currently underway.”

BOI

“In 2015 the Central Bank of Ireland announced that it would conduct a Tracker Mortgage Examination with all lenders in Ireland. This examination is underway, and Bank of Ireland is co-operating fully with it.”

Banking Sector Investigations

108. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to leaked documents consisting of thousands of emails, internal memos, and policy documents revealed to media organisations (detail supplied) and published by the organisations on 10 October 2016; his views on the validity and independence of reviews based on the leaked documents; his further views on the matter considering the number of Irish SMEs affected; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38401/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As I have previously answered, Ulster Bank Ireland Limited undertook an independent review into the relevance of these allegations to its corresponding division, namely the Global Restructuring Group Ireland (GRGI). On the 19th December 2014, Ulster Bank published the findings of the independent review by Mahon Hayes Curran into practices at GRGI. The investigation found no evidence to support the allegations and suggested that GRGI’s driving policy was to manage its customers through the cycle, supporting them where possible to return them to viability.

However, it should be noted that Royal Bank of Scotland has indicated publically that ‘For SME customers of Ulster Bank in the Republic of Ireland that were in GRG during the period 2008-2013, we are working to see how we can apply the same support where appropriate. SME customers of Ulster Bank in the Republic of Ireland can contact the CRG Customer Helpdesk if they have any queries’.

The Central Bank is the statutory body with responsibility for the investigation of any such allegations in an Irish context and I consider this as a matter properly for the Central Bank. I am confident that legislative changes since the financial crisis have equipped the Central Bank with an array of investigative, regulatory and enforcement powers to ensure that regulated financial service providers adhere to the requirements of financial services legislation.

These changes include significantly enhanced powers for the Central Bank to gather information under the Central Bank (Supervision and Enforcement) Act 2013 which broadened the Banks’ information gathering and authorised officer powers. It is evident that the Central Bank

is properly undertaking its enforcement role by the recent sizeable settlements in enforcement cases.

I am informed by the Central Bank that while they cannot comment on interactions with regulated firms, they can confirm that Ulster Bank Ireland D.A.C. is engaging with the Central Bank in relation to this matter.

IBRC Mortgage Loan Book

109. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the price at which each of the mortgage and commercial loan books at a bank (details supplied) were sold; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38408/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The IBRC Progress Update Report of May 2016, which is available on the Department of Finance website

(http://www.finance.gov.ie/sites/default/files/Progress%20update%20report_31%20Dec%202015_0.pdf), provides detail of the amount received from overall asset realisations during the liquidation.

I am advised by the Special Liquidators that they are precluded from providing the details sought in relation to the outcome of individual portfolio sales as this is commercially sensitive and confidential information.

Tax Credits

110. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Finance if he will review the case of a person (details supplied) regarding tax credits; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38437/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by Revenue that as the relevant legislation (Section 865 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997) does not permit a repayment of tax, in this instance, for years prior to 2012 they considered that having regard to the circumstances of the case concerned, they could not grant the PAYE tax credit and the related tax repayments for years prior to 2012. The matter is being reviewed further by Revenue and they will be in contact with the person concerned shortly.

Banking Sector Investigations

111. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the number of mortgage holders that have had their tracker mortgages restored to date as a result of the investigation ordered by the Central Bank or previous to this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38486/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy is aware, the Central Bank is undertaking an examination of tracker mortgage related issues.

The Central Bank has indicated that certain lenders have over the past number of years restored tracker mortgage rates to certain customers. Lenders have referenced publically restoring approx. 3,500 customers to tracker rates. Notwithstanding the work previously undertaken

to restore customers to tracker mortgage rates, the Central Bank remained concerned that there may be other tracker-related issues which could be impacting on consumers across the system and as such it decided that a system wide review was necessary. This Central Bank examination is covering among other things transparency of communications with and contractual rights of tracker mortgage customers.

All lenders are currently carrying out internal reviews of their mortgage books, to identify any customers who may have been impacted by a failure to honour a customer's contractual entitlements, or comply with the regulatory requirements regarding disclosure and transparency of information.

While all lenders are currently in the process of carrying out their internal reviews it is important to note that some lenders may have their internal reviews completed sooner than others depending on the size of their mortgage books and the complexities associated with them completing the examination.

The Central Bank has informed me that it will provide an update on progress on the examination before the year end and as part of this update it will be publishing figures on impacted customers identified to date. The Central Bank has also indicated that it can provide a copy of this update to the Deputy.

Customs and Excise Controls

112. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Finance when a drug detection dog will be assigned to Ireland West International Airport, Knock, County Mayo (details supplied); the cost and the timeframe to train a dog and handler; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38509/16]

114. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Finance if the customs division of the Revenue Commissioners has at its disposal adequate resources to carry out checks along the western coastline to prevent narcotics arriving here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38511/16]

115. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Finance when a customs officer will be appointed to Killybegs Port, Killybegs, County Donegal, to ensure that checks are carried out on boats and ships arriving in Killybegs; the reason the port has been left without a customs presence since 2009, in view of the fact that the port is a non-tidal port in which boats can dock and sail at any time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38512/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 112, 114 and 115 together.

The deployment of Revenue staff and resources is a matter for Revenue. I am advised by Revenue that they use a broad range of data, intelligence and analytical technologies to identify and evaluate risk and to confront suspected non-compliance. Revenue currently has approximately 2,000 staff countrywide engaged on activities that are dedicated to targeting and confronting non-compliance. These activities include anti-smuggling and anti-evasion, investigation and prosecution, audit, assurance checks, anti-avoidance, returns compliance and debt collection. There are over 860 Revenue staff currently serving in the Border, Midlands, West Region.

Revenue has an appropriate enforcement presence at all key airports and ports and at other strategic locations throughout the country and places particular emphasis on developing an

intelligence-based focus at both national and regional level, deploying resources to areas of highest risk. Enforcement strength at particular locations is regularly augmented with additional personnel on a risk assessment basis or when particular operations are taking place against illegal activity. I am assured by Revenue that they attach a high priority to combatting the smuggling of controlled drugs and are very active, in conjunction with other relevant agencies, in targeting this criminal activity and those responsible for it.

Revenue deploys two Customs Cutters, two large-scale X-Ray scanners and several mobile scanners. Revenue currently deploys seventeen detector dog teams, nine of which have drug detection capabilities. I am advised by Revenue that the cost of training a dog is estimated at €25,000 and the time to train a team is 8 weeks. The number of dog units is a matter that is kept under ongoing review by Revenue in light of intelligence and overall assumption of risk by them.

As part of the risk focused approach to the discharge of its role in relation to illegal drugs importations, harbours and inlets along the coastline are monitored and evaluated on an ongoing basis from the point of view of the potential for smuggling. This work is supplemented by Revenue's Customs Drug Watch Programme, aimed at encouraging members of the public, coastal and local maritime communities etc. to notify Revenue in confidence of suspect or unusual movements at sea or around the coast through a confidential 24/7 Drugs Watch free phone facility. This is a highly valued and successful programme, as evidenced in October 2016 by the seizure of a large quantity of drugs near Liscannor, Co. Clare following a report through the Drugs Watch Programme.

As regards Killybegs Port, I am advised by Revenue that for operational reasons they are not in a position to comment in detail on the matters referred to by the Deputy as regards this location. However, I am assured by Revenue that the post is fully encompassed by their risk and intelligence focused assessment and intervention programmes. Where necessary, an officer from Donegal Town attends at Killybegs by appointment if physical presence is needed for any particular transaction. Patrols of the port and of the related coastline have appropriate regard for available intelligence and emerging smuggling trends.

I am satisfied that Revenue are allocating their resources to areas of greatest risk, including the detection of drugs. I would urge the Deputy to provide to Revenue any specific information or intelligence he has which would assist in combatting the threat posed by drugs smugglers.

Revenue Commissioners Resources

113. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Finance if he is satisfied with the current level of resources which the customs division of the Revenue Commissioners has at its disposal to detect drugs at airports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38510/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Revenue has primary responsibility for the prevention, detection, interception and seizure of controlled drugs intended to be smuggled or illegally imported into the State but there is a high degree of cooperation between all of the enforcement agencies of the State in the fight against the importation of illicit drugs. In particular, Revenue attaches importance at national level to having good working relationships with the Garda Síochána and the Naval Service. A Joint Task Force arrangement is in place to enhance and support these relationships and there is regular contact and cooperation between these agencies.

I am advised by Revenue that the number of their officers assigned permanently to airports

represents only a small part of the overall effort made by them in conjunction with the other State agencies. Revenue places a strong emphasis on a strong intelligence-led risk analysis focus at regional, national and international level and it deploys whatever resources are required to the areas of highest risk. The Joint Task Force fully supports this flexible approach.

In line with best practice in customs administration worldwide, Revenue regards the development of information and intelligence as critical to the detection of evasion and smuggling, including drug smuggling. This is very important in the case of Ireland and other EU Member States where the operating environment for Customs has been shaped to a significant degree by the introduction of the Internal Market and the related principles of freedom of movement within the EU. Of specific relevance are the abolition of routine and systematic Customs checks on goods and passengers moving within any part of the EU. The approach has of necessity been to balance the freedom of movement principle in regard to people and goods with the need to control smuggling.

Revenue has assigned a Europol Liaison Officer to Europol Headquarters, a Revenue attaché in London and a Country Liaison Officer to the Maritime Operations and Analysis Centre Narcotics in Lisbon. At national level Revenue has signed over forty-three Memoranda of Understanding with various organisations and with international travel and trade service providers.

This pooling of intelligence between the agencies at national and international level accords with best worldwide practice and enhances the focus on counteracting drug trafficking and the dismantling of drug organisations. Revenue has a permanent resource at the main airports comprising officers, trained sniffer dogs and technological supports such as scanners. These are supplemented by specialist staff and supported by Gardai as required. At regional airports and smaller airfields, there are regular, random and targeted interventions, based on information from the intelligence network described above. Overall, Revenue staff are flexibly deployed to airports and other demands as needed, so that the effective resource is much larger than the 214 staff who are permanently assigned to the main airports. Revenue is satisfied that their staffing and organisation are satisfactory and are effective to the highest international standards.

Questions Nos. 114 and 115 answered with Question No. 112.

Revenue Commissioners Powers

116. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Finance the procedures which are applied by the customs division to detect ingested drugs on passengers arriving here via ports and airports, further to the Supreme Court ruling which found that passengers cannot be asked to provide a urine sample; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38513/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by Revenue that suspicion of ingestion of drugs would be based on direct indicators such as intelligence, interview with the passenger, or obvious illness or discomfort. Supplementary and indirect indicators would include searches of baggage or the person, baggage scans, detector dogs, profiling and passenger behaviour. If the level of evidence-based suspicion is high, the Gardai are invited to consider whether the person should be arrested on suspicion of having ingested drugs. Any necessary further tests are then carried out by the Gardai at a suitable place of detention.

The relevant Supreme Court Judgments (DPP v Gormley and DPP v White, judgments delivered together on 6 March 2014 by Mr Justice Clarke, Supreme Court record numbers 107/11 and 92/12) significantly clarified the rights of suspects both in interrogation after arrest, and in the taking of samples after arrest. Revenue reviewed the judgments, and considered that the

rights of the individual would be best protected by ensuring that any samples are taken under specific legal authority and after the suspected person has been arrested. Accordingly an agreed procedure was put in place with the Gardai.

Revenue is satisfied that its procedures are effective for the detection of drugs, while ensuring respect for the rights of the individual.

Property Tax Data

117. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 62 of 26 October 2016, if he will provide a breakdown within each county of the four categories of deferrals and detail the interest rate being applied in each category. [38575/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by Revenue that a breakdown showing revised figures of properties availing of the deferral option under Part 12 of the Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 (as amended), and broken down by deferral category, is provided in the table. The breakdown has been compiled on the basis of Local Authority, the manner in which properties are categorised in Revenue's Local Property Tax register. The total number of deferrals has increased on the previous reply as a result of deferrals that have been allowed since the earlier reply issued.

These figures are provisional and may be revised. Where the number of properties is less than 10, the precise number is not given to protect taxpayer confidentiality.

The deferred tax remains as a charge on the properties in question and will have to be paid before a sale or transfer can be completed. Interest is charged on the deferred amounts at a rate of 4% per annum.

Local Authority	Deceased Liable Person Deferrals	Financial Hardship Deferrals	Personal Insolvency Deferrals	Income Threshold Deferrals
Carlow County Council	<10	<10	11	642
Cavan County Council	13	<10	15	832
Clare County Council	20	<10	17	1,179
Cork City Council	25	<10	16	1,336
Cork County Council	68	28	38	3,229
Donegal County Council	34	<10	19	2,587
Dublin City Council	143	17	89	6,228
Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council	53	10	22	1,512
Fingal County Council	38	18	39	2,453

Local Authority	Deceased Liabile Person Deferrals	Financial Hardship Deferrals	Personal Insolvency Deferrals	Income Threshold Deferrals
Galway City Council	11	<10	15	604
Galway County Council	31	<10	29	1,494
Kerry County Council	34	<10	17	1,233
Kildare County Council	24	15	61	1,916
Kilkenny County Council	17	<10	18	786
Laois County Council	12	<10	25	780
Leitrim County Council	<10	<10	11	322
Limerick City and County Council	37	12	79	1,991
Longford County Council	27	<10	<10	416
Louth County Council	26	<10	19	1,669
Mayo County Council	33	<10	30	1,188
Meath County Council	26	13	34	1,972
Monaghan County Council	16	<10	<10	631
Offaly County Council	<10	<10	13	815
Roscommon County Council	20	<10	11	606
Sligo County Council	21	<10	13	607
South Dublin County Council	42	11	40	2,704
Tipperary County Council	33	<10	19	1,547
Waterford City & County Council	21	<10	29	1,280
Westmeath County Council	12	<10	19	867
Wexford County Council	23	<10	29	1,818
Wicklow County Council	23	14	12	1,362

Local Authority	Deceased Liabile Person Deferrals	Financial Hardship Deferrals	Personal Insolvency Deferrals	Income Threshold Deferrals
Totals	908	225	805	46,606

Central Bank of Ireland Staff

118. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of the vacancies in each functional area of the Central Bank and the percentage that vacancy rate represents of the staffing allocation for that function in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38622/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by the Central Bank that at the end November 2016, it has circa 1,600 employees which is below the original year end plan of 1,695. The Central Bank informs me that it is actively recruiting at present, with well over 100 roles advertised. Overall vacancies are spread across functions, with staffing currently approximately 11% below 2016 approved complement in Financial Regulation, 9% in Central Banking and 4% in Operations. These percentages are based on a point in time, namely end of November 2016. The Central Bank Commission has approved additional complement for 2017, to meet requirements, bringing the targeted number of staff for the end of 2017 to circa 1,800.

The following table, provided by the Central Bank, sets out the number of open roles in each function:

Regulator	Directorate	# Open Roles	% of staffing allocation based on 100% complement
Central Banking	Chief Economist	16	13.4%
Central Banking	Financial Operations	5	6.0%
Central Banking	Resolution and Corporate Affairs	11	6.8%
Central Banking	Senior Management	1	10.0%
Total Pillar figure		33	8.8%
Regulator	Directorate	# Open Roles	% of staffing allocation based on 100% complement
Chief Operations Officer	Direct Reports	6	5.93%
Chief Operations Officer	Currency and Facilities Management	3	1.15%
Chief Operations Officer	Information Management and Technology	11	7.76%
Chief Operations Officer	Human Resources	2	3.25%
Total Pillar figure		22	3.89%
Regulator	Directorate	# Open Roles	% of staffing allocation based on 100% complement

Regulator	Directorate	# Open Roles	% of staffing allocation based on 100% complement
Financial Regulation	Consumer Protection	11	10.27%
Financial Regulation	Credit Institutions	27	12.00%
Financial Regulation	Enforcement	9	7.68%
Financial Regulation	Insurance Supervision	13	8.83%
Financial Regulation	Markets Supervision	22	11.62%
Financial Regulation	Policy and Risk	10	11.16%
Financial Regulation	Senior Management	2	
Total Pillar Figure		94	10.65%
Total number of open roles		149	8.17%
Grads		0	0.00%
Total		149	8.12%

Source: Central Bank of Ireland

EU Directives

119. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the way in which he will comply with the European Union (Anti-Money Laundering Directive: Beneficial Ownership of Corporate Entities) Regulations 2016, statutory instrument number 560 of 2016; the steps that have been taken to ensure that all corporate State bodies comply; and his plans to redraft the statutory instrument to reflect the requirements of the directive and provide more guidance to all Irish corporates as to the meaning of the requirements. [38735/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Article 30 of the 4th EU Anti-Money Laundering Directive (4AMLD 2015/849) requires all EU Member States to put into national law provisions around beneficial ownership information for companies and legal entities that are incorporated within the State. The deadline set for this is June 2017.

In consultation with officials from the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation and the Office of the Parliamentary Council, it was decided that Ireland should transpose Article 30 in the following two stages:

- Stage one, a regulation to was introduced to require companies and legal entities to take all reasonable steps to gather and hold information on their beneficial ownership in their own in-house corporate beneficial ownership registers.

- Stage two, will require companies and legal entities to centrally file this information to a central beneficial ownership register once it is established.

This two stage process is designed to enable corporate entities to identify their beneficial owners in advance of the establishment of the central beneficial ownership register and therefore be in a position to transmit it to the register at the earliest available opportunity after the transposition deadline.

The 'European Union (Anti-Money Laundering: Beneficial Ownership of Corporate Entities) Regulations 2016', (S.I. 560 of 2016) require that all relevant companies and legal entities

incorporated within the State including any State bodies that fall into this category should have regard to the definition of ‘beneficial ownership’ set out in article 3(6) of 4AMLD (2015/849).

The regulations require that any corporate or legal entity that falls within this category must take all reasonable steps to obtain and hold adequate, accurate and current information in respect of its beneficial owners. In order to ensure that all corporate entities are in a position to comply with this statutory instrument, the Companies Registration Office has circulated relevant information in an electronic communication to all registered companies. The circular informed companies of the new requirement to obtain and hold information on their beneficial ownership.

As mentioned above, the completion of the transposition of Article 30 is a two step process and a further statutory instrument to establish a central beneficial ownership register will need to be completed by the end of June 2017. My officials are responding to queries on a case by case basis and are actively planning to work with key stakeholders in advance of the establishment of the central register for beneficial ownership information. My Department cannot provide legal advice on specific cases as the onus ultimately rests on companies and other relevant legal entities to comply appropriately with these new EU transparency measures.

Banking Operations

120. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if the Central Bank will carry out an investigation into the activities of a bank’s global restructuring division (details supplied) following the opening of a compensation scheme by a bank (details supplied) in the United Kingdom in recognition of its actions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38785/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by the Central Bank, that Royal Bank of Scotland has indicated publically that “For SME customers of Ulster Bank in the Republic of Ireland that were in GRG during the period 2008-2013, we are working to see how we can apply the same support where appropriate. SME customers of Ulster Bank in the Republic of Ireland can contact the CRG Customer Helpdesk if they have any queries”.

While the Central Bank cannot comment on interactions with regulated firms, it can confirm that Ulster Bank Ireland D.A.C. is engaging with the Central Bank in relation to this matter.

Property Tax Administration

121. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Finance if consideration was given to home owners who already paid stamp duty on purchasing their houses when the current local property tax, LPT, provisions were being established; if he will consider introducing a tax credit for home owners in these circumstances who are paying LPT in the interests of equality; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38786/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I have no plans to introduce a measure along the lines suggested by the Deputy. The Deputy will appreciate that tax reliefs and exemptions have costs which have to be paid for and their introduction must be considered only where there is a clear economic and social policy need to be addressed.

The report of the 2012 Thornhill group, on which the design of the local property tax (LPT) was based, proposed a tax system that would contain limited exemptions and reliefs. The report cautioned that reliefs create costs which have to be paid for, either by taxpayers who do not ben-

efit from the relief or by reductions in public expenditure. The report specifically recommended against providing reliefs for those who had paid stamp duty. The reasons given were that such relief would not be targeted on need; that the tax structure was known to house purchasers at the time of purchase; that the selling price of the property may have been affected by the stamp duty paid and that the stamp duty revenues would have been spent on the provision of public services.

While some taxpayers had a significant Stamp Duty liability, they may have been able to claim mortgage interest relief on interest of up to €20,000 per annum. Individuals who took out qualifying mortgages from 1 January 2004 to 31 December 2012 can continue to claim mortgage interest relief until end 2017. This relief ceased at end 2012, and no new mortgages taken out from 1 January 2013 have qualified for the relief. The Deputy will also be aware that there is a commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government, which I confirmed in my Budget 2017 speech, to retain mortgage interest relief beyond the current end date on a tapered basis. As legislation currently provides for the relief to continue to end-December 2017, the details of the extension will be set out in Budget 2018.

A system of deferral arrangements is available where there is an inability to pay LPT and certain specified conditions are met, whereby a person may opt to defer, or partially defer, payment of the tax. Where a person qualifies for a full deferral then 100% of the liability can be deferred. Where a person qualifies for partial deferral then 50% of the liability can be deferred and the balance of 50% of the tax must be paid.

VAT Yield

122. **Deputy Regina Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the value of VAT receipts which were collected in County Meath in each of the years 2014, 2015 and to date in 2016. [38796/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): VAT receipts collected by county are published on the Revenue statistics website: <http://www.revenue.ie/en/about/statistics/receipts-county.html>.

Collection for 2016 VAT in Meath to end November is provisionally estimated at €215m.

It should be noted that the amount of tax attributed to a county may not necessarily be an indication of economic activity in that county. The liability of a trader to VAT is generally dealt with by reference to the location of the trader's registered office, even though the economic activity may be carried on in another county. The distribution of tax can also vary from year to year as businesses move premises.

The VAT receipts noted above refer to VAT internal, VAT on imports is not recorded on a basis that allows for a county breakdown.

School Transport Provision

123. **Deputy Colm Brophy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if funding relating to applications for the introduction of new school bus services in suburban areas of Dublin currently without such services will be provided. [38331/16]

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 Depart-

ment.

Currently in the region of 114,000 children, including some 10,000 children with special educational needs, are being transported in over 4,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually.

The purpose of my Department's School Transport Scheme is, having regard to available resources, to support the transport to and from school of children who reside remote from their nearest school.

Under the terms of my Department's Scheme children are eligible for school transport where they reside not less than 3.2 or 4.8 kilometres from and are attending their nearest national school or post primary centre as determined by my Department/Bus Éireann, having regard to ethos and language.

A minimum number of 10 eligible children residing in a distinct locality, as determined by Bus Éireann, are required before consideration may be given to the establishment of a school transport service, provided this can be done within reasonable cost limits. In general, transport services are not established in areas where suitable public scheduled bus services already exist. In such cases children who are eligible for school transport are facilitated with travel permits for these services.

Families of eligible children, for whom no transport service is available, may be eligible for the remote area grant towards the cost of making private transport arrangements.

Families who wish to apply for school transport under the terms of my Department's School Transport Scheme can do so at www.buseireann.ie.

National Educational Psychological Service

124. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an appointment in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38397/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can inform the Deputy that my Department's National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) provides educational psychology service to all primary and post primary schools through an assigned NEPS psychologist and in some cases through the Scheme for Commissioning Psychological Assessments (SCPA), full details of which are on the Department's website. Under this scheme schools can have an assessment carried out by a member of the panel of private psychologists approved by NEPS, and NEPS will pay the psychologist the fees for this assessment directly.

In common with many other psychological services and best international practice, NEPS has adopted a consultative model of service. The focus is on empowering teachers to intervene effectively with pupils whose needs range from mild to severe and transient to enduring. Psychologists use a problem solving and solution oriented consultative approach to maximise positive outcomes for these pupils. NEPS encourages schools to use a continuum based assessment and intervention process whereby each school takes responsibility for initial assessment, educational planning and remedial intervention for pupils with learning, emotional or behavioural difficulties. Teachers may consult their NEPS psychologist should they need to at this stage in the process. Only in the event of a failure to make reasonable progress, in spite of the school's best efforts in consultation with NEPS, will the psychologist become involved with an individual child for intensive intervention or assessment.

This system allows psychologists to give early attention to urgent cases and also to help many more children indirectly than could be seen individually. It also ensures that children are not referred unnecessarily for psychological intervention.

If the parents of the child, the subject of the question, have ongoing concerns in relation to their daughters progress they should, in the first instance, discuss them with the Principal of the school with a view to his raising them with the assigned NEPS psychologist to decide on the appropriate intervention in this case.

National Educational Psychological Service

125. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an educational psychologist assessment will be sought in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38423/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can inform the Deputy that my Department's National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) provides educational psychology service to all primary and post primary schools through an assigned NEPS psychologist and in some cases through the Scheme for Commissioning Psychological Assessments (SCPA), full details of which are on the Department's website. Under this scheme schools can have an assessment carried out by a member of the panel of private psychologists approved by NEPS, and NEPS will pay the psychologist the fees for this assessment directly.

In common with many other psychological services and best international practice, NEPS has adopted a consultative model of service. The focus is on empowering teachers to intervene effectively with pupils whose needs range from mild to severe and transient to enduring. Psychologists use a problem solving and solution oriented consultative approach to maximise positive outcomes for these pupils. NEPS encourages schools to use a continuum based assessment and intervention process whereby each school takes responsibility for initial assessment, educational planning and remedial intervention for pupils with learning, emotional or behavioural difficulties. Teachers may consult their NEPS psychologist should they need to at this stage in the process. Only in the event of a failure to make reasonable progress, in spite of the school's best efforts in consultation with NEPS, will the psychologist become involved with an individual child for intensive intervention or assessment.

This system allows psychologists to give early attention to urgent cases and also to help many more children indirectly than could be seen individually. It also ensures that children are not referred unnecessarily for psychological intervention.

I have made enquiries into the matter and have been advised that the child in question has not previously been brought to the attention of NEPS. I would advise therefore that her parents should raise their concerns, in the first instance, with the Principal of her school with a view to raising them with the assigned NEPS psychologist and discuss the appropriate intervention in this situation.

School Accommodation Provision

126. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the shortage of secondary school places for children in Naas and Sallins, County Kildare; the steps his Department is taking to address this; the timeframe for resolution of this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38291/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): For school planning purposes, my Department plans school provision across some 314 school planning areas. Sallins and Naas towns fall within the Naas school planning area. Currently five post-primary schools serve the Naas school planning area. This includes a new 1,000 pupil, multi-denominational, post-primary school, Naas Community College, which opened in 2015 under the patronage of Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board to meet the need for additional places.

In addition to the Naas Community College project, my Department's Capital Investment Programme (2016-2021) also includes plans for the expansion at St. Mary's Girls Post-Primary School in Naas. My Department is therefore satisfied that sufficient capacity is being made available in the Naas school planning area to cater for the students in the area requiring a post-primary school place.

The demographic data for the Naas school planning area is being kept under review by my Department to take account of updated enrolment data and the impact of existing and planned capacity increases in this area.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

127. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of primary schools in the Dublin north-west area that have special autism units to facilitate children with autism; and the number of children that have been diagnosed with autism in the north west area of Dublin. [38316/16]

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.

The NCSE's Autism Policy Advice report noted that there were almost 14,000 students diagnosed with autism in schools in 2014. The NCSE's Policy Advice on Supporting Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Schools which was published on 15th July 2016 indicates a national ASD prevalence rate of 1.55% or 1 in every 65 students. The Department of Education and Skills 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 Deputy will also be aware that the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENsOs), in consultation with the relevant education partners, is responsible for the establishment of special classes in various geographical areas as required. Special classes are part of a continuum of educational provision that enables students with more complex special educational needs to be educated, in smaller class groups, within their local mainstream schools.

Special classes offer a supportive learning environment to students with ASD who are unable to access the curriculum in a mainstream class, even with support, for most or all of their school day.

Students enrolled in special classes should be included in mainstream classes to the greatest extent possible, in line with their abilities.

The NCSE continues to engage with schools in opening special classes where there is an identified need for special class provision.

Progress in developing this network has been significant and in addition to the special school placements there are 1,153 special classes available, which is an increase of over 100% in the number of special classes which were available in 2011, which was 548. This includes 127 ASD early intervention classes, 525 primary ASD classes and 237 post-primary ASD classes, which represents an increase of approx. 16% on 2015/16 classes for children with autism.

Special class for students with ASD are staffed with a lower pupil–teacher ratio of 6:1 at primary level, and also have Special Needs Assistant support normally amounting to 2 SNAs for a class of 6 children.

With regard to Co. Dublin (city and county), the NCSE has advised that there 119 ASD special classes attached to mainstream primary schools of which 19 are ASD Early Intervention classes.

The Education (Admission to Schools) Bill was published on 6th July 2016. The Bill contains a provision which will empower the NCSE to designate a school for a child who has no school place for reasons related to the child’s special educational needs and for the Child and Family Agency to designate a school for a child who has no school place (other than a child with special educational needs).

In line with recommendations from the NCSE in policy advices provided in 2011, it is the policy of the Department to include a Special Needs Unit in the accommodation brief for new school buildings, unless local circumstances indicate that it will not be required. In addition, the Department may also provide capital funding to schools to establish special needs provision e.g. re-configure existing accommodation to provide a special class where this has been approved or recommended by the NCSE.

The NCSE recently launched guidelines for Boards of Management and Principals of Primary and Post Primary schools which provide information on setting up and organising special classes. These guidelines are available to download from www.ncse.ie.

The NCSE has advised the Department that information in relation to the specific geographical areas of Dublin referred to by Deputy is not readily available.

Schools Building Projects Status

128. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the place that a school (details supplied) is on a waiting list for funding and approval of a new school building; the length of time it is expected for the process to be exhausted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38317/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that a permanent accommodation solution for the school to which he refers, has been identified.

My Department will be in contact with the school authority in due course. However, due to the sensitivity of the position, my Department is unable to comment further at this time.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

129. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an educational psychologist assessment will be sought in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38347/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can inform the Deputy that my Department's National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) provides educational psychology service to all primary and post primary schools through an assigned NEPS psychologist and in some cases through the Scheme for Commissioning Psychological Assessments (SCPA), full details of which are on the Department's website. Under this scheme schools can have an assessment carried out by a member of the panel of private psychologists approved by NEPS, and NEPS will pay the psychologist the fees for this assessment directly.

In common with many other psychological services and best international practice, NEPS has adopted a consultative model of service. The focus is on empowering teachers to intervene effectively with pupils whose needs range from mild to severe and transient to enduring. Psychologists use a problem solving and solution oriented consultative approach to maximise positive outcomes for these pupils. NEPS encourages schools to use a continuum based assessment and intervention process whereby each school takes responsibility for initial assessment, educational planning and remedial intervention for pupils with learning, emotional or behavioural difficulties. Teachers may consult their NEPS psychologist should they need to at this stage in the process. Only in the event of a failure to make reasonable progress, in spite of the school's best efforts in consultation with NEPS, will the psychologist become involved with an individual child for intensive intervention or assessment.

This system allows psychologists to give early attention to urgent cases and also to help many more children indirectly than could be seen individually. It also ensures that children are not referred unnecessarily for psychological intervention.

I have made enquiries into the matter and have been advised that the child in question has not previously been brought to the attention of NEPS. I would advise therefore that her parents should raise their concerns, in the first instance, with the Principal of her school with a view to raising them with the assigned NEPS psychologist and discuss the appropriate intervention in this situation.

Schools Building Projects Status

130. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a new school building (details supplied); the timeframe for the completion of the school; the timeframe by stage and date; if barriers to the completion of the project within this timeframe have been identified to date; the nature of these barriers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38350/16]

131. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an acquisition of land for a new school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38351/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 130 and 131 together.

I wish to advise the Deputy that a permanent accommodation solution for the school to which he refers, has been identified. My Department will be in contact with the school authority in due course. However, due to the sensitivity of the position, my Department is unable to comment further at this time.

Education Grants

132. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of plans his Department has to offer supports for families which fall outside the income limits for a student maintenance or fee grant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38372/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department currently provides more than €400m in student supports to assist some 80,000 disadvantaged students to participate in higher education. Approximately 45% of all undergraduate students in higher education received financial support in the 2015/16 academic year. The principal support is provided for under the statutory based student grant scheme, which makes available means-tested financial assistance to students in further and higher education and which is operated by Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI).

I am also reintroducing, from September 2017, the maintenance grant (worth almost €6,000 per student) for postgraduate students who meet the qualifying conditions for the special rate of grant.

In relation to other supports, students in third-level institutions experiencing exceptional financial need can apply for support under the Student Assistance Fund. This Fund assists students, in a sensitive and compassionate manner, who might otherwise be unable to continue their third level studies due to their financial circumstances. Information on the fund is available through the Access Officer in the third level institution attended.

Tax relief at the standard rate of tax may also be claimed in respect of tuition fees paid for approved courses at approved colleges of higher education including approved undergraduate and postgraduate courses in EU Member States and in non-EU countries. Further information on this tax relief is available from the Revenue Commissioners.

School Transport Review

133. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the review of the school transport scheme will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38392/16]

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.

The review of the concessionary charges and rules element of the School Transport Scheme

committed to under the Programme for Government has been completed. I intend publishing a copy of the Review shortly.

Third Level Staff Data

134. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide a breakdown of all staff employed in third level education to address issues of access among disadvantaged socioeconomic groups or for students with disabilities; if each institution has a full time staff person dealing with this specific area and the implementation of the national access plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38393/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department does not collect data on the total number of staff in third level education that are engaged, in supporting access for under-represented groups.

However, it is my understanding that each publicly funded higher education institution has a full time access and/or a full-time disability officer.

In addition, there will also be other staff members within each institution who support students from disadvantaged backgrounds to access into and successfully complete third level education.

One of the actions in the National Access Plan for Higher Education, 2015-19, is to mainstream access across higher education institutions, so that promoting and supporting access becomes a priority for the institution as a whole, and is not seen to be the sole responsibility of the access office. My Department is currently engaging with the Higher Education Authority to progress this commitment.

Access to Higher Education

135. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of staff employed across higher education institutions to administer the Higher Education Access Route and Disability Access Route to Education schemes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38395/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The HEAR/DARE college admissions scheme is operated and regulated by a number of higher education institutions and not by my Department.

For information on the administration and operation of this scheme, the Deputy may wish to contact the Irish Universities Association.

Student Assistance Fund

136. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount of money spent by each higher education institution under the student assistance fund for the 2016/2017 academic year to date; the amount each institution has remaining in the fund; the amount of applicants per institution for assistance under the fund; the number that received assistance; the number that were refused; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38396/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Student Assistance Fund (SAF) is a component of the Third Level Access Measure (TLAM) co-financed by the European Social Fund and is managed by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) on behalf of the Department. The HEA allocate funding to participating institutions. The total amount of funding allocated to SAF in 2016/17 is €7.99m.

I understand from the HEA that SAF funding for the 2016/17 academic year has recently been allocated to higher education institutions. The type of information requested by the Deputy will not be available until after the end of the current academic year.

However, based on previous years, it is my understanding that almost all of the funding allocated to participating institutions is spent.

Some 15,700 students were assisted through the Fund in 2015/16. It is expected that there will be a similar number of beneficiaries in the 2016/17 academic year.

While the HEA collate data on the number of beneficiaries of the Fund, it does not collect data in relation to the number of applications. However, the recently published Review of the Student Assistance Fund indicates that on average 80% of applicants applying for support are approved.

The recommendations of this review are currently being implemented by the HEA.

Institutes of Technology Funding

137. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the action he will take to assist Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology, and in particular the Mayo campus, which has highlighted the financial difficulties it is facing and the very real possibility that the Mayo campus may close or best case have courses cancelled or scaled back if further funding is not secured; his views on the huge economic and strategic importance of the Mayo campus to County Mayo and surrounding regions and that keeping the facility open cannot be based purely on budget and must recognise those additional benefits to the community; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38411/16]

138. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the action he will take with regard to the funding crisis in the third level sector and in particular, the huge financial difficulties being faced by institutes of technology in view of the recent crisis being highlighted by Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology and with further concerns being highlighted for Waterford Institute of Technology and Tralee Institute of Technology; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38412/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 137 and 138 together.

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 Galway Mayo 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 GMIT, 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. The first of what is expected to be a series of meetings is scheduled for this week between the GMIT executive and the HEA to discuss a number of issues relating to the financial position of the Institute including those which are specific to the Castlebar campus.

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 €36.5m 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 addition, 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.

Schools Building Projects Applications

139. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the action his Department will take to increase pupil capacity in a school (details supplied) in order that the problems outlined by a person will be addressed. [38419/16]

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

that my Department is in receipt of an application for major capital works from the Post Primary school referred to.

In this regard, my Department is currently reviewing the demographic demand in the area serviced by the schools referred to. As the Deputy may be aware my Department's main responsibility is to ensure that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all pupils seeking places. Once this review is completed my Department will be in contact with the school.

Teaching Contracts

140. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if employees re-designated as tutors in order to retain posts but avoid the necessity to register with the Teaching Council are required to complete so-called Croke Park hours, or if they are exempt from same with regard to section 30 of the Teaching Council Act 2001, appendix B, section 2.2 specialised posts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38420/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Additional hours requirements were agreed for all public servants as part of recent collective agreements between Government and the Public Services Committee of ICTU, including the employees in question who were re-designated as tutors. The Public Service Stability Agreement 2013 – 2018 (Lansdowne Road Agreement) contains commitments to the continuing delivery of these hours.

Schools Refurbishment

141. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a school (details supplied) is entitled to window replacements on the older school building; and if this school may be eligible for a grant. [38432/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Department has no record of receiving an application for grant aid for the works in question. The Deputy will be aware that the school prioritised its electrical works project under the Summer Works Scheme (2016-2017).

It is open to the school to apply for grant aid for window replacements under future Summer Works Schemes.

In the meantime the school may utilise its minor works in full or on a phased basis as the grant permits.

School Closures

142. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when he will provide a response to parents of the children of a school to be closed (details supplied) regarding the future of the school site to be shared among two other schools; his plans to assist parents in finding local school places for their children displaced by the closure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38438/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware, my Department acquires land for the establishment of new schools where a future demographic and diversity need has been identified. It was for the purpose of providing school accommo-

dation to meet future requirements for school places needs, that my Department acquired the property, in question. In that regard, it is intended that the property in question will be the permanent location for the second school, referred to by the Deputy. In the interim, it is expected that the first school, referred to by the Deputy, will be located on the property concerned on a temporary basis pending the delivery of its permanent accommodation.

To assist parents and in the interests of minimising disruption to pupils, my Department has written to the various school Patrons in the school area concerned advising of the possible enrolment requests that they may receive and the circumstances associated with such requests and requesting that any pupils who apply to their schools be accommodated where this is feasible. As my Department does not operate a centralised application system for schools, the standard school application procedure applies. Data held by my Department indicates that there are sufficient places within the school planning area and locality to accommodate the current cohort of children in the school that is closing. Correspondence outlining the position has issued both to parents and also to public representatives who made representations on behalf of parents in respect of the school closure.

Preschool Services

143. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department will liaise with an organisation (details supplied) in regard to an application by a school to provide preschool services; the reason the school has been refused permission to date in view of the fact the school has the facilities to provide the service and, by not providing such a service, is at a distinct disadvantage to other schools which do so, resulting in numbers into the school reducing and ultimately jeopardising the future of the school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38463/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that, in general, school authorities have a considerable degree of autonomy in relation to how their premises are managed and utilised at local level. It should be noted that the vast majority of primary school buildings in the country are in private ownership, including the school referred to by the Deputy.

The Department has a general policy of encouraging the use of school facilities by community and other groups where this is possible. However, any proposal for the use of school facilities must be approved by the Patron/owner. I understand that the Patron/owner has not granted approval for the operation of a pre-school on the premises in question.

Proposals to the Minister to allow use of accommodation during the school day have been facilitated in the past, provided that the school's current and future accommodation needs are not compromised and the consent of the patron has been received. I understand that the school has been in contact with the Patron in this regard.

Schools Building Projects Status

144. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will confirm the commitment to the opening of the gaelcholáiste for north Kildare in Maynooth in 2019 as indicated in the school building programme 2016-2021 announced on 17 November 2015 by his predecessor, in view of the fact that it is due to open in 2019; the steps being taken to secure a site; when a design team will be appointed to seek planning permission in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38464/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The new schools which will open in 2017 and 2018 to cater for increased demographic demand nationwide were announced in November 2015. As part of that announcement, it was stated that a Gaelcholáiste to serve the North Kildare area will open in 2019, subject to sufficient viability of the Irish-medium Aonad, which is currently part of Maynooth Community College. The Gaelcholáiste will operate under the patronage of Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board with An Foras Pátrúnachta. In that context, my Department will continue to work closely with the Education and Training Board and An Foras Pátrúnachta in relation to the provision of appropriate accommodation for the establishment of the Gaelcholáiste.

Schools Building Projects Applications

145. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will ensure accelerated delivery of an urgent school building application (details supplied); when the school can expect commencement of the extension for which it has already been waiting 13 years; the criteria the school can provide evidence of in order to ensure prioritisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38466/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The project to which the Deputy refers has reached an advanced stage of architectural planning, Stage 2b, which involves securing the statutory approvals and the preparation of tender documents.

The design team was appointed to the project for the school in question in March 2011. The brief was to provide an extension and refurbishment work on a phased basis with a partial decant of classrooms on the existing site. The project was included in the five year construction programme 2012-16 and was scheduled therein to commence construction in 2014.

Planning permission was granted in January 2014. Since then the Board of Management and its design team have presented a number of proposals to the Department to change the brief to one which involves a single decant and a single phased delivery during construction. This has led to significant delays in the progression of the project. The most recent decant option, which included the provision of significant levels of new temporary accommodation on site involved an additional cost for the project in the region of €2 million – an increase in the overall cost of the project of around 40%.

The additional €2 million cost for the project arising from the Board of Management's single phase decant and construction proposal raised serious questions as to the viability of the project.

A meeting was convened by my Department recently, to which the Board of Management and their Design Team were invited in order to resolve any outstanding issues in this regard to enable Stage 2b to be finalised.

That meeting was held on the 11th November and agreement was reached in relation to a scaling back of the temporary accommodation costs which should now allow the project to progress to the completion of the design stages.

When the revised Stage 2(b) submission has been submitted and approved, my Department will revert to the Board of Management with regard to the further progression of the project to tender and construction stage. As with any project the progression to tender and construction will be contingent on the availability of funding at that time.

Broadband Service Provision

146. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will make funding available to allow for the installation of broadband, the provision of computers and the associated computer room set up costs for a school (details supplied) in Dublin 10; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38467/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The overall policy of my Department is to offer the best quality connectivity to all schools in line with technical solutions available in the market and financial constraints. All post primary schools receive at least 100mbts connectivity. The need to improve broadband connectivity to primary schools is recognised in the new Digital Strategy for schools and the Department will collaborate with DCENR to provide enhanced broadband to all primary schools.

In the case of the school referred to by the Deputy, this school is currently receiving at least 100mbts connectivity from Digiweb, one of the providers on the Post Primary Broadband providers framework.

The new Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020 (Enhancing Teaching, Learning & 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 focused 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.

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 has been committed beginning with an investment of €30m in the current school year (2016/2017) rising to €50m annually towards the end of the Strategy. Oversight and consultative structures for the implementation of the strategy have been finalised and the status of implementation will be communicated to schools and stakeholders on a regular basis. For further information please refer to the Digital Strategy page on the Department website at: <http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Information-Communications-Technology-ICT-in-Schools/Digital-Strategy-for-Schools/Digital%20Strategy%20Information.html/>

Oideachas Gaeilge

147. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Carol Nolan** den an Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna an dtabharfaidh sé sonraí maidir le líon iomlán na ndaltaí atá ag freastal ar iarbhunscoileanna Gaeltachta agus atá ag fáil díolúine ón nGaeilge ó thaobh scrúduithe stáit de; an dtabharfaidh sé briseadh síos ar líon na ndaltaí i ngach iarbhunscoil Ghaeltachta faoi leith a bhfuil an díolúine sin acu; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [38477/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Níl aon cheanglas ann scrúdú a dhéanamh i nGaeilge mar chuid de na scrúduithe stáit don Teastas Sóisearach nó don Ardteistiméireacht. Mar sin féin, is gá do dhaltáí atá rollaithe i mbunscoileanna atá aitheanta ag an Roinn seo staidéar a dhéanamh ar Ghaeilge, seachas sa chás go bhfuil díolúine ag an dalta ó dhéanamh amhlaidh.

I gcora eisceachtúla, féadfar díolúine ó staidéar a dhéanamh ar Ghaeilge ag an leibhéal iarbhunscoile a dheonú de réir imlitir M10/94 ón Roinn. Tá socrúithe den chineál céanna i bhfeidhm ag an leibhéal bunscoile de réir imlitir 12/96 ón Roinn. Leanadh díolúintí a deonaíodh roimhe sin de bheith i bhfeidhm tar éis don dalta aistriú idir scoileanna nó aistriú ón mbunscoil go dtí an iar-bhunscoil.

Is ann do 28 iar-bhunscoil sa Ghaeltacht a raibh 6,212 dhalta san iomlán rollaithe iontu sa scoilbhliain 2015/16. I gcás 204 duine de na daltaí sin, deonaíodh díolúine ó staidéar a dhéanamh ar Ghaeilge dóibh roimhe sin nó deonaíodh díolúine dóibh den chéad uair riamh.

Níl sé beartaithe agam miondealú de réir scoile a thabhairt ar dhaltaí ag a raibh díolúintí mar go bhfuil na figiúirí do na daltaí lena mbaineann chomh beag sin go bhféadfadh go n-aithneofaí daltaí aonair de thimpiste.

Is mar a leanas atá an miondealú ar na díolúintí a bhí ag daltaí sna 28 scoil sin sa scoilbhliain 2015/16:-

Ní raibh dalta ar bith ag a raibh díolúine ó staidéar a dhéanamh ar Ghaeilge ag 13 scoil.

Bhí dalta amháin ag a raibh díolúine ó staidéar a dhéanamh ar Ghaeilge ag 7 scoil.

Bhí triúr daltaí ag a raibh díolúine ó staidéar a dhéanamh ar Ghaeilge ag scoil amháin.

Bhí idir 10 daltaí agus 15 dhalta ag a raibh díolúine ó staidéar a dhéanamh ar Ghaeilge ag 2 scoil.

Bhí idir 25 dhalta agus 45 dalta ag a raibh díolúine ó staidéar a dhéanamh ar Ghaeilge ag 5 scoil.

De na hocht scoil ag a raibh triúr daltaí nó níos mó ag a raibh díolúintí, is trí mheán an Bhéarla amháin a theagascann sé cinn agus teagascann an dá scoil eile roinnt daltaí trí mheán an Bhéarla.

Ceadaítear díolúintí ó fhoghlaim na Gaeilge de réir na soláthairtí atá luaite in Imlitir M10/94, ar a n-áirítear:

- daltaí a fuair oideachas go dtí aon bhliain déag (11) d'aois i dTuaisceart na hÉireann nó lasmuigh d'Éireann

- daltaí a bhí cláraithe cheana féin mar dhaltaí aitheanta i mbunscoil nó in iar-bhunscoil agus iad ag athchlárú tar éis tréimhse a chaitheamh thar lear, ar an gcoinníoll go bhfuil tréimhse 3 bliana ar a laghad ón uair dheireanach a cláraíodh an dalta sa Stát, agus go bhfuil aon bhliain déag, ar a laghad, slánaithe ag an dalta agus

- catagóirí áirithe de dhaltaí a bhfuil riachtanais speisialta oideachais acu.

As an 28 scoileanna atá lonnaithe sa Ghaeltacht

- tá 20 scoil ag teagasc go hiomlán trí mheán na Gaeilge

- tá 6 scoil ag teagasc go hiomlán trí mheán an Bhéarla

- tá 2 scoil ina ndéantar roinnt daltaí a theagasc trí mheán an Bhéarla.

Mar a léiríonn na sonraí, cás eisceachtúil a bhíonn ann nuair a bhíonn díolúine ón nGaeilge ag dalta a bhíonn ag freastal ar scoil sa Ghaeltacht ina mbíonn an teagasc trí mheán na Gaeilge, ach d'fhéadfadh a leithéid tarlú.

Baineann an díolúine le staidéar na Gaeilge ach ní díolúine ó pholasaí teanga na scoile a bhíonn i gceist.

D'fhéadfadh go raibh díolúine faighte ag dalta i scoileanna ina raibh sé/sí cheana. Ina lán ceantair Ghaeltachta, áfach, d'fhéadfadh – i ngeall ar iargúlacht an cheantair - nach bhfuil

rochtain ag an dalta ach aon iar-bhunscoil amháin. Oibreoidh scoileanna i gcomhpháirt le daltaí chun a gcumas Gaeilge a fheabhsú ach beidh sé mar rogha ag an dalta gan staidéar a dhéanamh ar an nGaeilge mar ábhar má bhíonn díolúine aige/aici. Mar shampla, daoine atá tagtha go hÉireann as an nua agus nach bhfuil Béarla mar chéad teanga acu, nó daltaí le riachtanais speisialta oideachais.

Mar thoradh ar athruithe sa daonra tá roinnt mhaith daoine a bhfuil cónaí orthu anois sa Ghaeltacht agus nach í an Ghaeilge an mháthairtheanga acu, mar shampla, daoine a bhfuil cónaí orthu i mbruachbhailte chathair na Gaillimhe, agus na bruachbhailte sin lonnaithe sa Ghaeltacht. D'fhéadfadh, freisin, roinnt daoine atá tagtha go nua go hÉireann a bheith ina gcónaí sa Ghaeltacht.

Schools Amalgamation

148. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the amalgamation of national schools in Cahir, County Tipperary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38487/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that I understand the amalgamation process involving the schools, referred to, will be finalised with the delivery of the major school building project. In that regard, the project concerned is currently at Stage 2(a) of the architectural planning process. Following a successful completion of this stage, the project will proceed to Stage 2(b), Detailed Design, which includes the application for planning permission and other statutory approvals and the preparation of tender documents.

Educational Disadvantage

149. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of all applications for DEIS status for schools in County Tipperary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38488/16]

150. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will include Tipperary town and schools (details supplied) in the DEIS programme 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38498/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 149 and 150 together.

As the Deputy may be aware, a process to review the DEIS Programme, which began last year is nearing completion and it is my intention to publish a new Action Plan for Educational Inclusion in the coming weeks.

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

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

- 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

A new assessment framework is also being developed using centrally held CSO and DES data for the identification of schools for inclusion in a new Programme. The number of schools to be included will be determined by this proposed new identification process, which will assess all schools in the country, including schools in Co. Tipperary. Schools will not be required to submit an application for assessment as the methodology being applied involves the use of centrally held data already available to my Department.

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 the wider Annual Action Plan for Education.

Further information on the DEIS Review process is available on the 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>

Institutes of Technology Expenditure

151. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if Waterford Institute of Technology was running a surplus or a deficit in each of the years 2007 to 2016 to date; the plans in place to deal with the current deficit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38518/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The position with regard to the accounts of Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT) is that for the academic years 2007/08 to 2009/10, the Institute was in surplus while for the period 2010/11 to date the accounts are showing a deficit.

The Higher Education Authority (HEA) has been closely monitoring the financial position of all of the Institutes of Technology (IoTs), including WIT, and has agreed measures with WIT to achieve financial stability through targeted strategic changes within the institute. It is expected that with the implementation of these measures WIT will return the financial position to one of operational breakeven by the end of the academic year 2017/18.

These measures are in line with the HEA's policy framework for vulnerable IoTs. This policy requires an IoT carrying a deficit to produce a three year financial plan which will implement a range of actions to return the Institute to a balanced budget position within a three year period.

Institutes of Technology Funding

152. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has given recent consideration to providing capital funding for an engineering block at Waterford Institute of Technology; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38519/16]

153. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if consideration is being given to provide funding to extend laboratory space for science based subjects at Waterford Institute of Technology; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38520/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 152 and 153 together.

The Department of Education and Skills is aware of the infrastructural challenges faced by Waterford Institute of Technology. The proposed facilities referred to by the Deputy are among the many competing demands on the Department's capital budget for higher education.

The Department has provided over €17m in capital Exchequer funding to Waterford Institute of Technology since 2010. Of this total, €5.4m was allocated to the Institute by means of devolved grants. The purpose of the devolved grant is to facilitate institutions in undertaking small-scale building works, refurbishment works and equipment upgrade and renewal.

Funding for the proposed facilities will be considered within the context of competing demands. I am not in a position to commit to a funding allocation at this point.

Institutes of Technology Expenditure

154. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the money spent by Waterford Institute of Technology through public procurement contracts in each of the years 2007 to 2016 to date, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38521/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The details sought by the Deputy are not readily available in my Department. Officials of my Department have requested the Higher Education Authority to seek to collate the information and I will arrange for it to be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as it is available.

Technological Universities

155. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the way in which a technological university differs from existing universities or institutes of technology; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38522/16]

156. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to rationalise services as part of the merging of institutes of technology and the formation of technological universities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38523/16]

157. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the unique offering that will be provided by technological universities here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38524/16]

172. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he is giving consideration to a change in sequencing to the process of merging institutes of technology as part of an application to become a technological university; if consideration is being given to introduce the international panel of experts work earlier in the process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38731/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 155 to 157, inclusive, and 172 together.

As the Deputy will be aware, the new Programme for Government outlines that this new Government will continue to support the creation of Technological Universities.

This is in line with the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 which provides a framework for the development of the higher education sector to 2030. With regard to the institute of technology sector, the Strategy recommended significant reforms to position the sector to meet national strategic objectives. In particular, the Strategy recommended consolidation within the sector and a pathway of evolution for those consolidated institutes of technology, to allow them to demonstrate significant progress against robust performance criteria and to apply to become technological universities.

A Technological University will be distinguished by a mission and ethos that is aligned and consistent with the current mission and focus of institutes of technology with an emphasis on programmes at levels 6 to 8 and industry focused research. A Technological University will also be expected to play a pivotal role in facilitating access and progression particularly through relationships with the further education and training sector. They will also have a strong regional focus.

The development of technological universities has the potential to deliver greater opportunity to students in these regions, to staff working in the institutions, and to the broader local economy and society.

I would also like to underline that this is much more than a rebranding exercise – the institutions concerned are required to achieve high standards across a range of areas before being designated as technological universities. These include standards relating to the qualifications of staff, the quality of research output, the proportion of students engaged in lifelong learning, and other relevant issues.

The mission and vision for each proposed technological university is developed by the consortia, in consultation with stakeholders including staff and students, and is contained in the implementation plans subsequently developed.

In relation to the legislation, the second Government Legislative Programme of this new Partnership Government was published on 27 September 2016, and the Technological Universities Bill is listed on the Dáil Order Paper and is awaiting Committee Stage.

I recognise that there were a significant number of matters raised previously in respect of the Bill at both Committee and Report Stage, including matters related to the sequencing of the process of merging institutes of technology. It is my intention to consult with all of the relevant stakeholders in relation to both the matters raised during the legislative process and the commitments contained in the Programme for Government.

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

Technological Universities

158. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount which was spent by Waterford Institute of Technology, Institute of Technology, Carlow and his Department to date in 2016 on the merger process as part of the application to become a technological university; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38525/16]

159. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if money was spent on consultancy fees by Waterford Institute of Technology and Institute of Technology, Carlow as part of the merger process or the application to become a technological university; if so, if he will provide a detailed breakdown of costs, the purpose of the work and the name of the company involved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38526/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 158 and 159 together.

As the Deputy will be aware, the new Programme for Government outlines that this new Government will continue to support the creation of Technological Universities.

This is in line with the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 which provides a framework for the development of the higher education sector to 2030. With regard to the institute of technology sector, the Strategy recommended significant reforms to position the sector to meet national strategic objectives. In particular, the Strategy recommended consolidation within the sector and a pathway of evolution for those consolidated institutes of technology, to allow them to demonstrate significant progress against robust performance criteria and to apply to become technological universities.

Technological University for the South-East (TUSE) Consultancy Costs:

The process for designation as a technological university consists of four stages and requires the merger of two or more institutes of technology prior to application for designation as a TU. The Technological University for the South-East project was initiated in 2011 and consists of a consortium of two Institutes of Technology; Institute of Technology Carlow (ITC) and Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT). The TUSE consortium made good progress initially and submitted a Stage 1 expression of interest in 2012. However, following this initial promising start, the consortium encountered a series of challenges and difficulties and did not succeed in finalising a Stage 2 Plan prior to the decision by WIT to suspend merger activities in October 2014.

Following meetings with both Institutes, in early November 2014, the then Minister for Education and Skills announced the establishment of a new process of engagement and consultation, with the governing bodies, staff and students of both Institutes, together with the wider community in the South-East. This process was conducted by Mr. Michael Kelly who met with stakeholders in all of the counties of the region including Local Authorities, Chambers of Commerce, Employers, the Enterprise Development Agencies, Social and Community Groups as well as public representatives. In all some forty meetings took place. The then Minister met with Mr. Kelly on 2 July 2015 and received his report on the outcome of the engagement and consultation process. The total cost incurred in the preparation of this report was €32,782.65 including VAT. The cost of this Report was met by the Department of Education and Skills.

The Minister met with the Chairs and Presidents of the two institutions on 21 July 2015 to discuss the findings and recommendations in the report. The report was then published on 27 July 2015.

As outlined at the time of publication, it was agreed that a project plan for a process of facilitation would be developed by mid-August 2015 for consideration at ITC and WIT Governing Body meetings planned for end-August 2015. The facilitation process was recommended by Mr. Kelly. The Governing Bodies of both institutions held meetings at the end of August and agreed to engage in the proposed facilitation process. The facilitator (Ms. Jane Williams of SIA Partners) was proposed by the Department of Education and Skills and agreed to by the Chairs and Presidents of both institutions.

This facilitation process commenced in September 2015 and was finalised in May 2016. I attach a copy of the final report of this facilitation process for your information. As outlined SIA Partners conducted the facilitation process and have been paid for their work by the Department of Education and Skills. The total amount paid to SIA Partners was €12,779 including VAT. There were no other costs incurred in respect of this facilitation process.

Facilitation Process:

There was strong engagement in the process by both parties and this facilitation process has been an important building block in terms of building trust between the parties and in developing a strong working relationship between the Presidents and Chairs of both institutions. As part of this process, the Presidents of the two institutions, have jointly developed an initial work-plan to support the development of a joint TU proposal.

Actual costs incurred to date in respect of TUSE:

Actual costs to end 2015 by the South East TU consortium amounts to €495,655 which includes funding of €170,000 provided by the HEA thus far to offset costs from the HEIs own resources. The costs incurred during 2016 are being tabulated and will be finalised in early 2017.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

160. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will consider revising the residency rules governing eligibility for the Student Universal Support Ireland, SUSI, grant which prevents Irish citizens returning from non-EU countries from receiving the grant; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that this rule is preventing persons from taking up college places due to hardship issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38528/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): To be eligible for a grant, a “student”, as defined in Section 14 of the Student Support Act 2011, must demonstrate that he/she has been resident in the State for at least 3 years out of the 5 year period ending on the day before the start of their approved course of study.

This requirement takes cognisance of students who wish to take time out to travel or work abroad. Such students can still meet the residency requirement if they have not been outside the State for more than two of the previous five years. It is also possible for a student, who did not meet the residency requirement at the commencement of their studies, to have their eligibility reviewed if they meet the residency requirement during the course of their studies.

Similar and in some cases more restrictive residency requirements apply in other EU Member States. For example, in the UK a student must be resident for the three years prior to commencing his/her studies.

Third Level Funding

161. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 94 of 24 November 2016, if he will provide a breakdown of funding per capita for each third level institution. [38574/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Details on expenditure levels per student are set out in the following table.

The data is in respect of the 2012/13 financial year and forms part of the 2013/14 institutional and sectorial profiles that can be found in the HEA's Higher Education System Performance Report.

The report was published in July 2016 and is available on the HEA's website:

http://www.heai.ie/sites/default/files/final_heai_instit_profiles_2013_14.pdf

Higher Education System Performance Report (July 2016)					
Institutional and sectorial profiles - 2013/14					
Total expenditure per student (2012/13)					
UCD	€ 10,861	AIT	€ 9,120	Other Colleges	€10,129
UCC	€ 10,605	ITB	€ 6,839		
NUIG	€ 10,320	IT Carlow	€ 5,985		
MU	€ 7,331	CIT	€ 8,270		
TCD	€ 12,197	DIT	€ 8,657		
UL	€ 10,016	DKIT	€ 8,724		
DCU	€ 8,584	GMIT	€ 9,048		
		IADT	€ 7,962		
		LYIT	€ 8,458		
		LIT	€ 8,812		
		IT Sligo	€ 9,196		
		IT Tallaght	€ 7,512		
		IT Tralee	€ 9,992		
		WIT	€ 8,197		

Schools Building Projects Status

162. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a design team has now been assigned to move a school building project forward (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38643/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The major building project for the school to which the Deputy refers is currently awaiting the appointment of a Design Team. Officials from my Department have been in contact directly with the Board of Management and have outlined the steps in the appointment process. This project was included in the six year construction programme announced in November 2015 and is listed therein to proceed to tender and construction in 2019-21

School Accommodation

163. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if buildings (details supplied) are being considered for a new school in the Scribblestown and Finglas west area of Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38708/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In November 2015, 13 new schools were announced to open in 2017 and 2018 to meet increased demographic needs, including the primary school to which the Deputy refers, which will open in September 2017.

The building project for the school in question is included in my Department's Six Year Investment Programme 2016-2021 and is listed to proceed to tender and construction in 2018. Pending the delivery of the school's permanent accommodation, the school will open as scheduled in September 2017 in suitable interim start-up accommodation.

Following completion of the patronage process, which is currently underway, a patron will be appointed to this school. There is close interaction between the Department and the patron in relation to the practical arrangements to ensure that all is in place for the new school to open by its planned establishment date. In that context, the Department will liaise closely with the patron in relation to start-up accommodation options.

School Transport

164. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding inspections for buses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38713/16]

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.

Bus Éireann has advised that it engages the services of the Freight Transport Association (FTA) to conduct inspections on school buses that are utilised to provide services on its behalf under the Department's School Transport Scheme nationally. The FTA are internationally recognised experts in the field of vehicle maintenance systems and safety standards.

The inspections arranged by Bus Éireann and carried out on both the Bus Éireann and Private Operator owned vehicles by the FTA are designed to complement the Road Safety Authority annual statutory testing regime as an additional safety measure and also assess the compliance of private companies to the standards required under Contract. These vehicle inspections assess vehicle condition, safety, and maintenance standards and involve a proportion of each fleet annually, both Bus Éireann and Private Operator owned vehicles.

Private Operators who have signed a Contract with Bus Éireann to operate school transport services have agreed as part of their contract to meet the standards required by Bus Éireann. They have also agreed that Bus Éireann may conduct inspections, which includes maintenance system and fleet, at any time, to check that their performance is consistent with their contractual obligations.

The CVRT roadworthiness test is a check on minimum roadworthiness standards at a specific point in time. The CVRT test however does not provide a warranty as to the roadworthiness of the vehicle in future.

Bus Éireann operates on the basis of working to a higher standard that incorporates compliance with the minimum national standards and also industry best practice.

School Accommodation

165. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the €20 million spent on prefabs across the State refers to rental or to upgrade or replacement; if he will provide a breakdown of the spend and a comparison over each of the past three years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38716/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The 2016 allocation for temporary accommodation is €19.0 million. This allocation is in respect of rental only and does not include a provision for prefab upgrade or replacement as referenced by the Deputy.

The corresponding spend for each of the past three years is as follows:

2015 €18.0 million

2014 €16.4 million

2013 €26.0 million

Teachers' Remuneration

166. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 226 of 15 November 2016, if he will reverse a pay deduction to some ASTI members who opted out of supervision and substitution duties before the Haddington Road agreement in view of the fact that some members have signed, opt out contracts in place (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38723/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Supervision and substitution duties are compulsory for all teachers since the Haddington Road Agreement. As part of the S&S scheme finalised at this time 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.

The ASTI directive instructed its members to withdraw from the Supervision and Substitution Scheme. The opt-out is an element of the S&S scheme and ASTI directed all members to withdraw from that scheme in its entirety. Therefore, the 'opt-out' provided for under the scheme did not apply to ASTI members who were subject to the directive while that directive was in force. ASTI suspended its directive following one day of withdrawal from the S&S scheme (on 7 November 2016). The S&S scheme is being operated by ASTI members since the date of suspension and accordingly, the opt-out is again being applied to ASTI members since that date.

Where schools were forced to close to students as a result of ASTI member teachers' withdrawal from the S&S scheme, ASTI members who did not make themselves available for S&S will not be paid for those days.

It is normal industrial relations practice that, where workers in industrial action withdraw from core elements of their work, resulting in the closure of the workplace, those workers would not be paid for those days.

Institutes of Technology Funding

167. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the core State

funding awarded to Waterford Institute of Technology in each of the years 2007 to 2016 to date in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38726/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department allocates the total recurrent funding allocation to the Higher Education Authority (HEA) for direct disbursement to the HEA designated higher education institutions (HEIs) including the Universities and Institutes of Technology. The HEA allocates the funding (block grant funding) to institutions and it is then a matter for the individual institution as to how that funding is allocated internally. The HEA allocates the available funding based on a Recurrent Grant Allocation Model which is driven primarily by student numbers weighted by the relative costs of providing education in different disciplines with additional performance mechanisms built in to reflect outcomes such as those relating to access, skills-based provision and research.

The following table details the recurrent grant funding issued to WIT for the years 2007 to 2016.

Waterford IoT									
Fees and Grants									
2007 -2009	2007 Core Grant	2007 Fees	2007 Total	2008 Core Grant	2008 Fees	2008 Total	2009 Core Grant	2009 Fees	2009 Total
	€ 38,989,791	€ 9,661,257	€ 48,651,048	€ 40,134,565	€ 10,203,661	€ 50,338,226	€ 38,073,182	€ 9,069,804	€47,142,985
2010-2012	2010 Core Grant	2010 Fees	2010 Total	2011 Core Grant	2011 Fees	2011 Total	2012 Core Grant	2012 Fees	2012 total
	€ 31,892,806	€ 9,798,336	€ 41,691,142	€ 29,796,639	€ 10,403,871	€ 40,200,510	€ 30,309,739	€ 7,684,199	€37,993,938
2013-2015	2013 Core Grant	2013 Fees	2013 total	2014 Core Grant	2014 Fees	2014 total	2015 Core Grant	2015 Fees	2015 total
	€ 29,551,189	€ 5,612,383	€ 35,163,572	€ 26,525,849	€ 5,325,110	€ 31,850,958	€ 27,135,108	€ 3,300,489	€30,435,597
2016 (Provisional)	2016 Core Grant	2016 Fees	2016 total						
	€ 26,460,308	€ 6,221,957	€ 32,682,265						

Technological Universities

168. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the new funding model that will pertain to technological universities; if they will be allowed to borrow; if they will be allowed to access European Investment Bank funding; if they will receive baseline funding for research and development; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38727/16]

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

Position of Technological Universities Bill:

The second Government Legislative Programme of this new Partnership Government was published on 27 September 2016, and the Technological Universities Bill is listed on the Dáil Order Paper and is awaiting Committee Stage. The main purpose of the Bill is to provide for the establishment of technological universities, a new type of higher education institution to be formed through the consolidation and merger of existing institutes of technology.

Matters pertaining to Budgets, Borrowing, Guaranteeing and Underwriting for technologi-

cal universities are detailed in the Technological Universities Bill.

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

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

Student Data

169. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide figures on student enrolment and numbers at Waterford Institute of Technology for each of the years 2007 to 2016 to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38728/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy has sought information in relation to student enrolments and numbers attending Waterford Institute of Technology for each of the years 2007 to 2016. The relevant information is detailed in the following tables. All details provided are in relation to the academic years 2007/2008 through to 2015/2016 which are the most up to date figures available.

Total Enrolments in Waterford Institute of Technology

Academic Year	2007/2008	2008/2009	2009/2010	2010/2011	2011/2012	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016
Total	7,539	7,953	7,840	8,191	8,025	8,307	8,201	7,980	7,792

Total Full-time Undergraduate Entrants in Waterford Institute of Technology

Academic Year	2007/2008	2008/2009	2009/2010	2010/2011	2011/2012	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016
Undergraduate Full Time Entrants	1,776	1,852	1,892	2,083	1,994	2,106	2,010	1,844	1,906

Third Level Funding

170. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the percentage of core funding awarded to each university in the State for research and development for each of the years 2009 to 2016 to date in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38729/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department allocates the total recurrent funding allocation to the Higher Education Authority (HEA) for direct disbursement to the HEA designated higher education institutions (HEIs) including the Universities and Other Colleges and the Institutes of Technology.

The HEA allocates the available funding based on a Recurrent Grant Allocation Model which is driven primarily by student numbers weighted by the relative costs of providing education in different disciplines with additional performance mechanisms built in to reflect outcomes including research. Each year, approximately 20-25% of the core grant (excluding free fees funding) is allocated on the basis of research criteria.

The HEA allocates the total funding to institutions and it is then a matter for the individual institution as to how that funding is allocated internally. The funding allocated covers teaching, research and supporting activities and the internal allocation of funds between teaching and research is a matter for each institution to determine.

Institutes of Technology Funding

171. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he is giving consideration to the introduction of a stability and equity fund for institutes of technology; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38730/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Higher Education Authority (HEA) recently undertook a Financial Review of the Institutes of Technology (IoTs) in order 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 included an examination of 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 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 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.

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, 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 addition, 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.

Question No. 172 answered with Question No. 155.

Quality and Qualifications Ireland

173. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the engagement his Department has with Quality and Qualifications Ireland, QQI, regarding the implementation schedule for the international education mark; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38732/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Legislative amendments are necessary to facilitate the introduction of the International Education Mark (IEM). These amendments will be contained in the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Amendment) Bill. The Heads of this Bill are currently being prepared by my Department in consultation with Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI). It is anticipated that the IEM will be introduced in 2018.

Social Insurance Refunds

174. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will rectify a long-standing anomaly in relation to a PRSI overpayment and underpayment of pension contribution in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38782/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I refer to the matter raised by the Deputy. Following consultations with the Department of Social Protection a protocol has been agreed to address the misclassification of PRSI and the underpayment of pension. The Department of Social Protection will refund the Employee PRSI for the statutory four year period and my Department will refund the employee PRSI for the relevant years prior to the four year statutory period (i.e. non statutory years).

Overpayments of PRSI for the entire period will be taken into account and balanced against the pension underpayment for the same period.

Officials in my Department are making arrangements to issue the relevant documentation

regarding the misclassification of PRSI to the person referred to by the Deputy. When the required documentation has been received in my Department, the case will be processed as soon as possible. If any refund of PRSI is due when the balancing against the pension underpayment is completed, it will be issued to the person referenced.

Special Educational Needs

175. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the funding schemes that are available to schools and preschools that need to acquire agility and sensory play equipment for students with special education needs. [38793/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): On approval of a special class in a school my Department provides lump sum grant aid (€6,500 per class) towards the purchase of educational aids and equipment for special needs pupils enrolled in that class. My Department also provides lump sum grant aid (€7,000 per room) towards the purchase of equipment for schools with approval for a multi-sensory room. This funding is provided on a devolved basis and it is a matter for the school authority to decide on the items to be purchased.

Grant aid may also be made available to schools under the Loose Furniture & Equipment Scheme to fund the purchase of special items of furniture for special needs pupils. This scheme applies to all children who are diagnosed as having special needs.

Early childhood education and care services are delivered outside the formal education system by a diverse range of private, community and voluntary interests. Government investment in such provision is primarily implemented by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

School Staff

176. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will consider the special circumstances in the case of a school (details supplied) and allocate a second teacher as one teacher is now in a class of 17 pupils spread over eight classes; and if he will expedite the matter. [38801/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The criteria used for the allocation of teaching posts for the 2016/2017 school year is set out in the Staffing Schedule (Circular 0007/2016) which is available on the Department website. The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the 30 September 2015. The staffing schedule also includes an appeals mechanism for schools to submit an appeal under certain criteria to an independent Appeals Board.

The school referred to by the Deputy submitted an application for consideration by the Appeals Board at its October meeting under the Small Schools criteria. The requirements set out in the staffing circular under this criteria state that the school must have the required enrolment on 30th September 2016 for the appointment of an additional teacher for September 2017 in order to be granted an appeal post for this school year. In the case of this school, an enrolment of 19 was required on 30th September 2016 to meet this criteria. As the school had an enrolment of 17 on that date, the Appeals Board determined that the appeal did not satisfy all of the published criteria as set out in Circular 0007/2016. The Appeals Board operates independently of the Department and its decision is final.

The measure announced in Budget 2017 provides a capacity for one teacher mainland schools to make an appeal to the Staffing Appeals Board for an extra teacher, where the single teacher has children across 6 or more class groups. Before a school can make an appeal to the Staffing Appeals Board it must have a minimum enrolment of 15 pupils. The detailed arrangements for this measure will be set out in the staffing schedule Circular for the 2017/18 school year i.e. the date this measure is effective from. The circular will be published early in 2017.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

177. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will ensure that consideration is given to students applying to SUSI for higher education grants where their family income has decreased significantly in 2016, and where the income of the previous year is normally taken into consideration (details supplied); and his views on whether changed financial circumstances in the current year must be reflected in the decisions. [38823/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Applications for a maintenance grant are means tested based on the reckonable income from the previous tax year. However, article 32 of the Student Grant Scheme provides for a review of eligibility during the academic year, if there is a permanent change in circumstance in respect of certain criteria specified in the scheme. A drop in reckonable income which is likely to obtain for the duration of the approved course or for the foreseeable future, would be an example of a change in circumstance that can be reviewed under article 32.

If the students to which the Deputy refers, have experienced a reduction in reckonable income and can provide satisfactory documentation to confirm that the reduction in income is permanent, then they can request SUSI to review their applications under the change in circumstance article.

School Accommodation

178. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when an application for additional accommodation in a school (details supplied) will be processed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38882/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm that the school referred to by the Deputy has submitted an application to my Department for additional accommodation. The application concerned is currently being assessed and a decision will be conveyed to the school authority in due course.

Nitrates Usage

179. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will extend the transitional agreements to allow pig and poultry farmers to spread their slurry and litter under the same terms as they are allowed to do up until the end of 2016 as the review of the nitrates regulations will not take place until 2017 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38353/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The European Union (Good Agricultural Practice for Protection of Waters) Regulations 2014, as amended, give legal effect in Ireland to the Nitrates Directive and to our Nitrates

Action Programme (NAP). The objective of the Regulations is to protect ground and surface waters, including drinking water sources, primarily through the management of livestock manures and other fertilisers. The current arrangement in Ireland's Nitrates Action Programme, as negotiated with the European Commission, whereby the intensive sectors (pig, poultry and mushroom composts) are allowed to apply manures in excess of crop requirement is due to expire at the end of this year.

The arrangement was put in place in 2006 to assist the industry to comply with the regulations and has been moving the industry towards full compliance over the intervening 10 years. However, in order to allow time for all possible options to be explored during the forthcoming Nitrates Action Programme review, pig slurry imported in the closed period from 2017 and not applied by the year - end will be treated as inventory for application in the following year rather than being considered as applied in the year of importation.

My Department, in conjunction with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, has commenced the process of review of the Nitrates Action Programme prior to formal engagement with the European Commission with a view to having a new Nitrates Action Programme in place by 2018 to run up to 2021. A request for a new nitrates derogation will be submitted to the Commission as part of the review process. A full consultation process will be carried out in early 2017 as part of this review and any issues raised by stakeholders will be considered as part of that process.

Motor Tax Yield

180. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the amount of revenue that has been raised by commercial motor tax for each of the years 2012 to 2016 to date. [38501/16]

182. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the amount that has been lost in revenue by the introduction of cuts to commercial motor tax since budget 2015. [38503/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 180 and 182 together.

Gross motor tax receipts from goods vehicles for 2012 through to 2015 and to the end of November 2016 are shown in the following table:

Year	Gross receipts (€)
2012	146.3m
2013	163.8m
2014	176.6m
2015	173.2m
2016 (to 30 November)	128.0m

The motor tax rates for goods vehicles announced in Budget 2016 took effect for vehicle licences taken out with a commencement on or after 1 January 2016. The reduction in receipts for the eleven month period to the end of November 2016 was €36m, compared to the same period in 2015 when receipts from goods vehicles were €164m.

Motor Tax Yield

181. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the amount of revenue that has been raised by private motor tax for each of the years 2012 to 2016 to date. [38502/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Gross motor tax receipts from private vehicles for 2012 through to 2015 and to the end of November 2016 are shown in the following table:

Year	Gross receipts (€)
2012	873.2m
2013	928.8m
2014	952.6m
2015	921.6m
2016 (to 30 November)	827.5m

Question No. 182 answered with Question No. 180.

Commission on Domestic Public Water Services

183. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if Ministers and Deputies who sit on the Expert Commission on Domestic Public Water Services are paid extra for this; if so, the amount; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38532/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Expert Commission was made up of national and international experts whose experience covered areas such as environmental matters, law, economics, the customer perspective, the water sector and the regulatory system. The members of the Expert Commission on Domestic Public Water Services were:

- Mr Kevin Duffy, former Chairman of the Labour Court;
- Dr Xavier Leflaive of the Environmental Directorate of the OECD;
- Mr Peter Peacock, Chair of the Customer Forum for Water Scotland and former Scottish Minister;
- Mr Bill Emery, Chair of the Northern Ireland Utility Regulator;
- Mr Brendan O'Mahony, Chair of the National Federation of Group Water Schemes;
- Ms Sarah Hendry, academic lawyer specialising in water and environmental law, University of Dundee, Scotland;
- Dr. Andrew Kelly, founder and executive Director of EnvEcon; and
- Ms Gritta Nottelman, strategy consultant for Waternet, the only water company in the Netherlands that is dedicated to the entire water cycle.

There were no Ministers or TDs on the Expert Commission on Domestic Public Water Services.

Local Authority Housing

184. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if the funding for amalgamation works in senior citizen complexes will be continued for 2017 (details supplied); if there is a commitment to funding for particular amalgamation projects in the Dublin north west area which are expected to take place in the near future, namely, Glasanaon Court and Hampstead Court. [38315/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The amalgamation works in senior citizens complexes, known as the 2 into 1 programme, has continued over recent years and is regarded as very successful.

It is my intention to continue funding such works in 2017, subject to budgetary provision in the Revised Estimates Volume, due for publication later this month. I can advise the Deputy that proposals from Dublin City Council in respect of properties for amalgamation in Glasanaon Court and Hampstead Court are awaited.

Local Authority Housing Waiting Lists

185. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if all pre-2011 RAS tenants are eligible to remain on their local authorities housing lists and have access to allocations from the primary housing list or choice based letting systems. [38362/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Housing Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2009 gives legislative recognition to rental accommodation availability agreements as a form of social housing support. Consequently, since 1 April 2011, RAS tenants are now considered to be in receipt of social housing support and should not generally remain on housing waiting lists for new applicants for social housing. In recognition that RAS tenants may have had reasonable expectations in regard to retaining access to traditional local authority rented accommodation, guidance issued by the Housing Agency in 2011 recommended that there should be a special transfer pathway for pre-2011 RAS tenants to other forms of social housing support. The arrangement effectively allows these households to be designated as a 'transfer' applicant and to maintain their position for allocation as they had on the main waiting list.

Where a vacant property arises, it is a matter for individual housing authorities, in accordance with their allocation schemes, to determine whether the allocation is made to a household on the main waiting list, or to a transfer applicant, such as a household from RAS, and the method of such allocation. It is open to housing authorities to specify in their allocation schemes the proportion of allocations which will be reserved for transfers, and within this, how many may be reserved for households seeking transfers to other forms of social housing support.

Local Authority Housing Mortgages

186. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will review the case of a person (details supplied); if there is a way in which he can intervene in this case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38399/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): To ensure effective targeting of limited resources, local authority house purchase loan finance continues to be available to first time buyers only. The Housing (Local Authority Loans) Regulations 2012 are kept under ongoing review. There are no plans, at this time, to

alter the Regulations in this regard. The option currently available for non-first time buyers is to seek home loan facilities from one of the commercial lending institutions.

In relation to the specific case raised, I wish to advise that section 63(3) of the Local Government Act 2001 provides that, subject to law, a local authority is independent in the performance of its functions. Section 6 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 specifically provides that my power as Minister to issue policy directions and guidelines to housing authorities in relation to their housing functions shall not be construed as enabling me to exercise any power or control in relation to any individual case with which a housing authority is or may be concerned.

Local Authority Staff Remuneration

187. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the reason some local authorities still have health and safety officers on the old clerical pay grades, in particular, Dublin City Council which has nine health and safety officers on the old grades; when these health and safety officers will be moved to the grade commensurate with their title of health and safety officer in line with the provisions of his Department's circular which states that new entrants should be on the appropriate pay scale of a senior executive officer (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38418/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Under section 159 of the Local Government Act 2001, each Chief Executive is responsible for staffing and organisation arrangements necessary for carrying out the functions of the local authorities for which he or she is responsible.

In early 2010, my Department sought to standardise arrangements for the Head of Health and Safety post across the local government sector. My Department issued circular LG(P) 05/10 in this regard which declared the qualifications for the post of Health and Safety Officer.

Confirmation was subsequently issued by the Local Government Management Agency (Local Government Management Services Board, as it was then) that the salary scale for the Head of Health and Safety post was that of Senior Executive Engineer. It should be noted that this applied only to the post of Head of Health and Safety. Other staff engaged in health and safety were to be graded according to the nature of their duties and the level of responsibility attending to their particular role and the application of their role and responsibilities reflecting the size and diversity of the activities being undertaken by an individual local authority.

I understand, in respect of Dublin City Council, that this matter is currently the subject of a conciliation hearing with the Workplace Relations Commission and is therefore being dealt with by the appropriate industrial relations mechanisms of the State.

Pyrite Remediation Programme

188. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 28 of 17 November 2016, if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the pyrite report specifically recommended prioritising properties with a damage condition rating of one with progression and two when combined with certain infill test results and not as is consistently stated, that the scheme provides for only properties with a damage condition rating of two and one with progression in exceptional circumstances; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38436/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): One of the key recommendations of the Report of the Pyrite Panel (June 2012) was the development of a protocol which would facilitate the testing and categorisation of dwellings in order to establish if there is reactive pyrite in sub-floor hardcore material and whether it has caused pyritic heave. In response to this particular recommendation, I.S. 398-1:2013 - Reactive pyrite in sub-floor hardcore material – Part 1: Testing and Categorisation was published by the National Standards Authority of Ireland in January 2013. I.S. 398-1:2013 is a national standard which provides the means by which dwellings, which may be affected by pyritic heave, can be tested and categorised; it is this standard, not the Report of the Pyrite Panel, which introduced the concept of Building Condition Assessments and the means by which Damage Condition Ratings could be assigned.

In this regard, the definition of significant pyritic damage as set out in section 4 of the Pyrite Resolution Act 2013 is also consistent with the meaning provided in I.S. 398-1:2013 and with the traffic light system used by the Pyrite Panel as a means of prioritising pyrite remediation works in recognition of the expensive and intrusive nature of pyrite remediation and the unpredictability of pyritic heave. Dwellings with a Damage Condition Rating of 1 (with progression), which is consistent with pyritic heave and where the hardcore is susceptible to significant or limited expansion, fall within the meaning of significant pyritic damage as do those with a Damage Condition Rating of 2. This is equivalent to the “red category” used by the Pyrite Panel to signal that remediation works should be carried out.

The Act provides the statutory framework for the establishment of the Pyrite Resolution Board and for the making of a pyrite remediation scheme to be implemented by the Board with support from the Housing Agency. The pyrite remediation scheme is a scheme of “last resort” and is limited in its application and scope. In this context, section 14(4) of the Act explicitly provides that the Board may exclude dwellings with a damage condition rating of 1 (with progression). This ensures that, having regard to available resources, the focus of the scheme is on dwellings which are most severely damaged by pyritic heave.

International Conventions

189. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he sought legal opinion from the Attorney General on whether the strategic housing section of the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Bill 2016 complies with Ireland’s EU and international obligations under the Aarhus Convention; and if so, if he will publish this advice. [38444/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): As with all legislation, my Department has worked in conjunction with the Office of the Attorney General in the preparation and drafting of the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Bill 2016.

In this regard, my Department has obtained legal advice from the Attorney General to that effect that the proposed arrangements relating to the strategic housing development provisions are compliant with the requirements of the UNECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters, commonly referred to as the Aarhus Convention, with Directive 2003/35/EC on Public Participation and Access to Justice in Certain Environmental Matters and Directive 2011/92/EU on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment, commonly referred to as the EIA Directive.

As the Deputy will appreciate, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2014, legal advice obtained by Government Departments is not released or published as it is legally privileged.

Local Authority Staff Remuneration

190. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the treatment of pension related deductions from local authority staff with regard to the funding of local authorities; the changes that have taken place in this treatment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38494/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2009 (FEMPI) introduced the pension related deduction (PRD) for public servants. Local authorities deduct PRD from the salaries of their employees and to date have retained the amounts collected as part of their income, using this income to help fund the services they provide. This approach was adopted by agreement in the interests of administrative efficiency and to avoid creating a circular flow of funds to and from the Exchequer.

The Lansdowne Road Agreement introduced changes to the PRD exemption thresholds, resulting in a reduction in PRD income being retained by local authorities and, therefore, impacting the overall level of funding available to the local government sector. It is expected that €18.6m in dedicated funding will be paid to the local government sector in 2016 as a once-off measure to mitigate the impact of reduced PRD income.

For 2017 onwards, an adjustment is being made to the Local Property Tax (LPT) baseline of each local authority, which will now include an additional amount equivalent to the PRD income retained by local authorities in 2014. The inclusion of PRD in increased LPT funding baselines helps protect local authority income in the future. It means that, from 2017 onwards, local authorities will no longer retain PRD locally, thus reversing the previous approach. I am satisfied that this decision reduces the risk to local government funding that would otherwise arise from declining PRD income.

Urban Renewal Schemes

191. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if the working group established to deliver a new urban renewal scheme to regenerate central urban areas has considered a site (details supplied) which is now under a CPO for inclusion in any further renewal scheme. [38496/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): As outlined in the reply to Question No. 77 of 17 November 2016, the Urban Renewal Working Group has been established to identify a series of specific actions as early as possible, aimed at facilitating the regeneration of our urban centres, many of which have been adversely impacted by our recent economic difficulties. It is intended that the new measures will complement the existing regeneration programme under my own Department's Social Housing Capital Programme, as well as other social regeneration initiatives already under way.

The Working Group will seek to deliver a new urban renewal scheme to regenerate central urban areas in our cities and towns, which will address urban decay and associated issues relating to social housing, poverty, segregation, unemployment, crime, anti-social behaviour,

etc. The Group's deliberations are continuing, but proposals for specific regeneration measures have yet to be developed.

With regard to the site in question, I understand that Dublin City Council acquired the leasehold interest in the Ballymun Shopping Centre in 2014, and a Compulsory Purchase Order was made to acquire the interest in several units in the Centre. The Order was lodged with An Bord Pleanála who advised the Council on 23rd November 2016 that it could proceed to confirm the CPO. I gather that the notice of that confirmation will be advertised in a national paper in the coming weeks.

I understand the purpose of the CPO is for the renewal and regeneration of Ballymun in line with its designation as a key district centre in the Dublin City Development Plan 2011-2017. However, as the Deputy will be aware, as Minister, I am specifically precluded under section 30 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, from exercising any power or control in relation to any particular planning case with which a planning authority, including An Bord Pleanála, is or may be concerned. The handling of the planning application is a matter for the relevant planning authority, Dublin City County Council in this instance, and I have no function or remit in this regard.

Local Authority Expenditure

192. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the amount of compensation paid out by local authorities in the past three years for damage caused by potholes in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38516/16]

193. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the total amount of insurance claims paid out by local authorities in the past three years in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38517/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 192 and 193 together.

Details of compensation amounts and insurance claims paid by local authorities are matters for individual local authorities. The information requested is not available in my Department.

Private Rented Accommodation Data

194. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the latest figures from the Residential Tenancies Board or elsewhere on the estimated number of tenants in the private rental market in rent arrears; and if he will provide absolute numbers and figures as a percentage of the overall market. [38538/16]

195. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the latest figures that his Department has for the landlord sector, including the number of properties it estimates are owned by smaller landlords who have one, two or three registered properties; the number owned by larger landlords who have more than three registered rental properties; and the number owned by very large institutional investors, such as real estate investment trusts, REITs. [38539/16]

198. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of landlords, tenants and tenancies registered in each of the years

from 2000 to 2016 to date in tabular form. [38564/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 194, 195 and 198 together.

The Residential Tenancies Act 2004 regulates the landlord-tenant relationship in the private rented residential sector and sets out the rights and obligations of landlords and tenants. The Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) was established as an independent statutory body under the Act to operate a national tenancy registration system and to resolve disputes between landlords and tenants. I have no function in relation to the operational matters of the Board.

The Act provides that landlords in the sector must apply to register the tenancy of a dwelling with the RTB within one month of the commencement of the tenancy. There are currently over 325,500 tenancies registered with the RTB, comprising over 174,500 landlords and over 516,500 tenants. Details of the numbers of tenancies registered each year are provided in the RTB Annual Reports available at

<http://www.rtb.ie/media-research/publications/annual-reports>.

A study by DKM economic consultants commissioned by the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) and published in 2014, reported that the majority (65%) of landlords own just one property, a further 17% have two properties, 9% own three properties and 10% own more than three properties. The results of Census 2016, when available, will assist in providing an updated overview of housing tenure in Ireland, including the rented sector.

In relation to the numbers of properties owned by individual landlords registered with the RTB, my Department does not hold or collate the information requested. The Clerk of the Dáil has requested that arrangements be put in place to facilitate the provision of information by State Bodies to members of the Oireachtas. Following the issue of Circular LG (P) 05/16 on 20 September from my Department, the RTB have set up a dedicated email address for this purpose at OireachtasMembersQueries@rtb.ie.

In 2015, the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) received 4,023 applications for dispute resolution and a total of 1,260 (32%) of these related to rent arrears or rent arrears and overholding. This was the most common issue in dispute in 2015, followed by Invalid Notice of Termination at 23% and Deposit Retention at 22%.

Tenant Purchase Scheme Eligibility

196. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to have carer's allowance included as reckonable income to qualify under the tenant purchase scheme. [38543/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Provision was made in the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014 for a new incremental tenant purchase scheme for existing local authority houses. Following the necessary preparatory work the new Scheme came into operation on 1 January 2016. The Scheme is open to eligible tenants, including joint tenants, of local authority houses that are available for sale under the Scheme. To be eligible, tenants must meet certain criteria, including having been in receipt of social housing support for a minimum period of one year and having a minimum reckonable income of €15,000 per annum. The minimum reckonable income is determined by the relevant housing authority in accordance with the detailed provisions of the Ministerial Direction issued under Sections 24(3) and (4) of the 2014 Act. In its determination of the mini-

mum reckonable income housing authorities can include income from a number of different sources and classes such as from employment, private pensions, maintenance payments and certain social welfare payments, additional to employment income.

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

Consequently, a number of social welfare payments, including Carer's Allowance, are disregarded for the purposes of determining the reckonable income. A list of these payments can be viewed on my Department's website at the following link:

<http://www.environ.ie/search/category/housing/sub-topic/incremental-purchase-scheme/topic/activity/topic/guidelines>.

In line with the commitment given in the Programme for a Partnership Government, and reaffirmed in Rebuilding Ireland - Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, I intend to undertake a review of the scheme following the first 12 months of operation and to bring forward any changes to the terms and conditions of the scheme which are considered necessary based on the evidence gathered at that stage. I expect this review to be completed during the first quarter of 2017.

Electoral Commission Administration

197. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 286 of 18 October 2016, if he will provide a further update as to when the Boundary Review Commission, established to examine the boundary between counties Kilkenny and Waterford, is expected to publish its concluding report in view of the fact that the results of the Roscommon-Westmeath border have been published in recent days and that it is now eight months past the initial deadline for publication of 31 March 2016; the amount of money spent to date or the amount of funding approved by his Department on the process in respect of the Carlow-Kilkenny examination only from establishment in 2015 to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38557/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The review referred to is one of 4 boundary reviews which were initiated together. The report of the Athlone Boundary Committee was submitted on 10 November and subsequently published. The chairpersons of the committees which are reviewing the boundaries at Carlow, Drogheda and Waterford have indicated that these reports will be submitted in the coming weeks. I will be considering all the reports carefully and I intend to address them as part of the overall report on local government matters which I will be submitting to Government and the Oireachtas in 2017 under the Programme for a Partnership Government.

Support services for all four reviews are being provided and funded collectively. The overall estimated cost is some €87,500, of which some €41,316 has been paid to date.

As the committees are independent in the performance of their functions, it is not appropriate for me to comment further on the matter.

Question No. 198 answered with Question No. 194.

Questions - Written Answers
National Spatial Strategy

199. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the status of the national spatial strategy with specific reference to Clonmel, County Tipperary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38581/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The current National Spatial Strategy (NSS) was published in 2002 and was Ireland's first national strategic spatial planning framework, setting an overarching planning framework. The Strategy remains in force and as a result of the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2010, its statutory role and influence has been strengthened by new requirements for local authority and regional plans to align with the NSS and any successor. Bearing in mind the elapse of time as well as the changed circumstances and new challenges that have emerged in the planning arena since the NSS was adopted, work is underway on the preparation of a successor to the NSS, the National Planning Framework, for which a roadmap on its preparation is available on my Department's website at:

http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/towards_a_national_planning_framework_december_2015.pdf.

Consultation is a critical element in the transparent design and delivery of the National Planning Framework. Successful preliminary consultation with key stakeholders was undertaken in June 2016. A national public consultation strategy is currently being devised to run in early 2017.

The National Planning Framework will act as the strategic planning context for relevant Government policies and investment in housing, water services, transport, communications, energy, health and education infrastructure, as well as the preparation by the three new Regional Assemblies of their new regional spatial and economic strategies, and for planning authorities and An Bord Pleanála. In this context, I am consulting with colleagues in other Departments and agencies in order to inform the National Planning Framework, in recognition of the whole-of-Government approach and the challenges and opportunities that exist to better align place making, investment priorities, employment and environmental strategies.

It is intended that an emerging draft National Planning Framework will be prepared by the first half of 2017 for submission to the Oireachtas for approval. It would be inappropriate at this early stage to comment on the likely content of the Framework, until sufficient preparatory and consultative work has been undertaken.

Water Services Expenditure

200. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the amounts paid by his Department in grants and supports for those operating private or group water schemes for each of the years 2011 to date in 2016, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38582/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The information requested is being compiled and will be provided to the Deputy in accordance with Standing Orders.

Library Services Funding

201. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will provide a list of the library services applying to his Department for funding for the open library initiative in 2017; the locations that were included in these applications; the amounts applied for in each application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38648/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): ‘My Open Library’ is an initiative under Opportunities for All, the national public library strategy 2013-20 17 and is part of a strategy to address customer demand. It allows library members the freedom and flexibility to use the library at times that suit them. It provides additional opening hours from 8am to 10pm, seven days-per-week, ensuring access to library services for users who cannot avail of them during regular staffed hours. It is planned to extend the ‘My Open Library’ pilot to a further 23 branches from January 2017, following a successful initial trial in Tullamore, Banagher and Tubbercurry libraries from November 2014. The library branches operating the service, the indicative cost of each and the indicative Department contributions are detailed in the following table.

County	Library Branch	Indicative Cost	Indicative Department Contribution
Carlow	Mhuine Bheag	€36,000	€27,000
Cavan	Johnstown , Cavan	€85,000	€63,750*
Clare	Ennis	€79,138	€59,355
Donegal	Buncrana	€80,070	€60,054*
Dun Laoghaire Rathdown	Deansgrange	€27,200	€20,400
Galway	Oranmore	€82,550	€61,915
Galway	Ballinasloe	€24,400	€18,300
Kilkenny	Castlecomer	€70,681	€53,010
Laois	Portarlinton	€41,550	€31,165
Limerick	Cappamore	€50,000	€37,500
Longford	Ballymahon	€31,610	€23,710
Louth	Ardee	€252,650	€189,490
Mayo	Swinford	€46,500	€34,875
Mayo	Ballina	€81,000	€60,750
Meath	Trim	€80,800	€60,600
Monaghan	Carickmacross	€64,100	€48,075
Offaly	Ferbane	€73,750	€55,315
Offaly	Edenderry	€67,150	€50,365
Tipperary	Nenagh	€79,335	€59,500*
Waterford	Dungarvan	€58,500	€43,875
Westmeath	Moate	€43,536	€32,650
Wexford	Gorey	€40,430	€30,325
Wicklow	Arklow	€25,400	€19,050

* The indicative amounts for Johnstown, Buncrana and Nenagh are VAT inclusive. All other allocations are net of VAT; however, the Department’s contribution will cover the VAT element.

Commercial Rates

202. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the assistance and supports available to retailers in circumstances in which a local business finds itself in difficulty with rates payments due to years of austerity and a build up of hard core debt and in which the repayment arrangement is in fact placing the retailer further into debt; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38653/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Local authorities are required by legislation to levy rates on any property used for commercial purposes in accordance with the details entered in the valuation lists prepared by the independent Commissioner of Valuation under the Valuation Acts 2001 to 2015. The annual rate on valuation (ARV), which is applied to the valuation for each property determined by the Valuation Office to obtain the amount payable in rates, is decided by the elected members of each local authority in the annual budget and its determination is a reserved function.

Local authorities work closely with ratepayers experiencing difficulty in the payment of commercial rates. In this regard, local authorities are facilitating the payment of commercial rates by instalments and work with businesses to put in place flexible payment options that reflect capacity to pay.

Local Authority Housing Data

203. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of houses and apartments purchased by each local authority in 2015 and to date in 2016, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38712/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Under my Department's Social Housing Capital Investment Programme, funding is provided to local authorities to deliver additional social housing stock through new construction projects and through the acquisition of new and previously owned houses/apartments. Details on properties purchased by local authorities for letting to those on their social housing waiting list are available on my Department's website at the following link:

http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/attachments/1c1-la-acq-by-area_4.xlsx

Information on quarter three of 2016 is currently being finalised and will be published shortly, while details for the entirety of 2016 will be available in early 2017.

Library Services Staff

204. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his views on the roll-out of unstaffed libraries; his further views on the important role of library staff; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38738/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The 'My Open Library' service is an initiative under Opportunities for All, the national public library strategy 2013-2017. It forms part of the overall strategy to address customer demand and grants members the freedom and flexibility to use the library at the hours that suit them best.

The initial 'My Open Library' pilot was introduced in Tullamore, Banagher and Tubbercurry libraries from November 2014. I am satisfied that the learning from the pilots, and the very positive feedback from library users, justifies extending the pilot phase to a further 23 library

branches from January 2017. Learning from the extended pilot phase will inform and shape the future development and implementation of the service across the broader library network.

Feedback from users has been very positive. 'My Open Library' has made community spaces and collections available to library members and communities, providing access to commuters, students and families at times when the library would be otherwise unavailable. Each library running the service is now open to the community for 98 hours per week.

There will be no reduction in staffing levels or staffed hours as a result of the 'My Open Library service.' Professional and skilled library staff are vital for a successful library service and my Department is working with local authorities to enhance staffing resources and extend staffed library hours.

Local Authority Housing Data

205. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of houses the local authority purchased off the open market in each of the years 2014 to 2016 to date in tabular form. [38809/16]

206. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the average price that the local authority paid for properties purchased in each of the years 2014 to 2016 to date by county in tabular form. [38810/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 205 and 206 together.

Under my Department's Social Housing Capital Investment Programme, funding is provided to local authorities to deliver additional social housing stock through new construction projects and through the acquisition of new and previously owned houses/apartments. Details on properties purchased by local authorities for letting to those on their social housing waiting lists are available on my Department's website at the following link:

http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/attachments/1c1-la-acq-by-area_4.xlsx.

Information on quarter three of 2016 is currently being finalised and will be published shortly, while details for the entirety of 2016 will be available in early 2017.

My Department does not routinely collect or publish information on the average cost incurred by local authorities in purchasing properties for social housing use and local authorities operate with delegated sanction for the majority of acquisitions they undertake. However, from an examination of the funding provided by my Department to local authorities in 2015 and 2016 for the purchase of properties for social housing use, the average cost per unit across the four Dublin authorities was circa €227,000 and across the other authorities was circa €144,000.

Emergency Accommodation Data

207. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the amount his Department paid on bed and breakfast accommodation due to the severe housing crisis in each of the years from 2014 to 2016 to date by county in tabular form. [38811/16]

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

Coveney): My Department's role in relation to homelessness involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of housing authorities in addressing homelessness at local level. My Department does not fund any service directly but provides funding to lead housing authorities on a regional basis. Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of accommodation and related services for homeless persons rests with individual housing authorities. The purposes for which housing authorities may incur expenditure in addressing homelessness are prescribed in Section 10 of the Housing Act 1988. Under Section 10 funding arrangements, housing authorities must provide at least 10% of the cost of services from their own resources. Housing authorities may also incur additional expenditure on homeless related services outside of the Section 10 funding arrangements. Accordingly, the specific amounts incurred by individual housing authorities in relation to B&B type accommodation are a matter for the housing authorities concerned.

Emergency Accommodation Data

208. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of families who were in bed and breakfast accommodation in September and October 2016 by county in tabular form. [38812/16]

209. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of one parent families that are in bed and breakfast accommodation in September and October 2016 by county in tabular form. [38813/16]

210. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of children that are in bed and breakfast accommodation due to the severe housing crisis in September, October and November 2016 by county in tabular form. [38814/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 208 to 210, inclusive, together.

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 State-funded emergency accommodation arrangements 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>.

The reports contain details of adult individuals and households with dependents placed in emergency accommodation. While the reports contain details of the numbers of individual adults availing of various broad categories of emergency accommodation, they do not provide details specifically in relation to B&B accommodation. That level of detail is not available in my Department and is a matter for the individual housing authorities.

Pyrite Remediation Programme

211. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of properties which have received a damage condition rating of one and those that have received a damage condition rating of two per estate; the number of applications which have been accepted onto the scheme, remediated, and approved for remediation;

and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38822/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Damien English): The latest figures available from the Pyrite Resolution Board indicate that 1,458 applications have been received under the pyrite remediation scheme, of which 1,077 have been approved for inclusion in the scheme as follows: -

- 275 are at remedial works planning stage,
- 44 are at tender / tender analysis,
- 35 are at tender decision,
- 211 are under remediation, and
- 512 are complete.

The pyrite remediation scheme is a scheme of “last resort” and is limited in its application and scope. The scheme is applicable to dwellings which are subject to significant damage attributable to pyritic heave established in accordance with I.S. 398-1:2013 - Reactive pyrite in sub-floor hardcore material – Part 1: Testing and categorisation protocol. It is a condition of eligibility under the scheme that an application to the Board must be accompanied by a Building Condition Assessment with a Damage Condition Rating of 2. Dwellings which do not have a Damage Condition Rating of 2 are not eligible to apply under the scheme.

Given that the scheme does not apply to dwellings which have a Damage Condition Rating of 1, the Pyrite Resolution Board does not maintain records on the number of properties that fall into this category. Nevertheless, the latest figures from the Board indicate that 10 dwellings, which had a Damage Condition Rating of 1 when their building condition assessments were first completed, and which were refused under the scheme, have now progressed to a Damage Condition Rating of 2; these dwellings, which are located across 5 different estates, have now been included in the pyrite remediation scheme following the submission of new applications. Details on individual estates, including the number of dwellings in each estate, are not provided to my Department under the agreed reporting arrangements with the Pyrite Resolution Board.

Environmental Policy

212. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he has written to the European Commission to notify it that the Government plans to introduce legislation to ban microbeads; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38865/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I informed Commissioner Vella by letter on 25th November last of my recent announcement that Ireland is beginning a process which will lead to a legislative ban on all products which contain microbeads in 2017. I subsequently forwarded a copy of my letter to Senator Grace O’Sullivan, who had tabled legislation on the issue in the Seanad. The proposed legislative ban will be part of wide ranging legislation on the marine environment which will also contain legal provision for the designation of a broad range of marine protected areas. In addition, this legislation will also make necessary amendments to the Dumping at Sea Acts.

I expect my Department to begin a consultation on the proposed ban on microbeads shortly, involving engagement with all of the relevant stakeholders. I am conscious that any proposed

ban has to be compatible with EU rules on the single market.

I would emphasise that because the issue of marine litter is transboundary in nature, the most effective solutions will be those which have the widest scope of implementation. In this regard, we will continue to engage with and support relevant initiatives at EU and OSPAR level. We will also work closely with the EU Commission on the issue of micro plastics as part of their wider plastics strategy in 2017.

Ireland will also continue to undertake significant research in this matter which will underpin a science-led approach in policy formulation and continue to support programmes which will heighten awareness of the problem and lead to positive societal behaviour change in this matter.

Water and Sewerage Schemes Funding

213. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the total amount of money given on the rural water programme, private well grants and new group water schemes funding per annum from 2010 to date in 2016 on a county basis, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38871/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The information requested is being compiled and will be provided to the Deputy in accordance with Standing Orders.

Social Insurance

214. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a widow in receipt of a widow's pension and rental income is exempt from paying PRSI. [38711/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Widows or widowers aged under 66 who are in employment generally pay PRSI contributions at Class A in line with other employees. Where such employees have rental income, they also pay PRSI at Class K (4%).

Widows or widowers aged under 66 who are self-employed pay PRSI contributions at Class S (4%) in line with other self-employed. Class S also applies to any rental income the self-employed may have.

Widows or widowers aged under 66 who are not in employment or self-employment but who have rental income pay PRSI contributions at Class S or Class K on that income. Class K applies where the widow or widower is in receipt of an occupational pension or survivors occupational pension.

PRSI is not payable at any rate on occupational pensions or survivors occupational pensions. Widows or widowers aged 66 and over do not pay PRSI on any income including rental income.

A range of social welfare entitlements are available for widows - none of which are subject to PRSI. Widows or widowers may qualify for widow's, widower's or surviving partner's contributory pension, provided they satisfy the required qualifying conditions including meeting the condition relating to the number of paid PRSI contributions. In cases where they have insufficient paid PRSI contribution and have no children, they may qualify for the means tested widow's, widower's or surviving partner's non-contributory pension. Increases may be pay-

able for dependent children, where aged over 66 and over 80, as well as living alone allowance. The fuel allowance and the household benefits package may also be available. Widows, widowers or surviving civil partners with one or more dependent children living with them, may also qualify for a once-off widowed or surviving civil partner grant of €6,000.

Question. No. 215 withdrawn.

Invalidity Pension Payments

216. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Social Protection when an invalidity pension will be granted to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38288/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): An application for invalidity pension (IP) was received from the lady concerned on 5 October 2016. This lady is in receipt of a State pension with effect from 28 November 2016 and has been awarded IP with effect from 06 October 2016 to 27 November 2016. Payment of arrears due from 06 October 2016 to 27 November 2016 (less any overlapping social welfare payment and/or outstanding overpayment) will issue to her nominated bank account on 08 December 2016. The lady in question was notified of this decision on the 30 November 2016.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Payments

217. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason persons in receipt of illness benefit are exempt from receiving the Christmas bonus; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38293/16]

218. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will consider awarding the Christmas bonus to persons in receipt of illness benefit, especially considering that some persons have been in receipt of this payment long term; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38294/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I propose to take Questions Nos. 217 and 218 together.

Payment of the 85% Christmas bonus to recipients of a long term Social Welfare payment, commenced in the first week of December. The payment of the bonus, at an estimated cost of over €220 million, will benefit approximately 1.2 million recipients including domiciliary care allowance recipients, social welfare pensioners, the long term unemployed, carers, people with disabilities and lone parents. It is intended that the bonus will benefit those who rely either wholly or mainly on their social welfare payments for financial support.

Illness benefit (IB), is primarily a short-term scheme and as such has never been a qualifying payment for the purpose of the Christmas bonus, recipients of long-term disability payments are eligible.

I hope this answers the Deputy's questions.

Carer's Benefit Applications

219. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an application for a carer's benefit in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38295/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I confirm that the Department received an application for carer's benefit from the person concerned on the 20 October 2016. The application is currently being processed and once completed, the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Pension Provisions

220. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Social Protection if there will be other instances in State pension, or otherwise, in which entitlement to pension payments on death of an LGBT spouse or a widow's pension payment is disregarded due to the inability to enter into a civil partnership or marriage, in view of the fact the law to provide such was not yet enacted and in view of the facts of a recent case (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38314/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I am informed that the case referred to by the Deputy is an occupational pension scheme, which had a requirement that potential payees under the Widows benefits element be notified before a certain time. I understand that the European Court of Justice very recently ruled that there was no discrimination involved in the case.

Entering into a marriage or civil partnership is a legal act, which confers both rights and obligations on both parties. Widows, widowers and surviving civil partners who become bereaved, therefore, in addition to the personal loss of their life partner, also lose someone who had legal duties towards them, and depending on the circumstances, may suffer financial loss as a result of that bereavement. It is on this basis that the social welfare code provides a pension to them, subject to certain conditions.

This scheme has evolved over time. While originally just for widows, an equivalent payment was subsequently introduced for widowers. More recently, with the introduction of civil partnership, my Department extended an equivalent support to surviving civil partners from 2011, when the provisions of the Civil Partnership and Certain Rights and Obligations of Cohabitants Act 2010 came into force. The scheme now also includes bereaved spouses of legally married same-sex couples.

While the introduction of marriage equality legislation is a welcome step forward, it cannot have the effect of making previous relationships, which ended through bereavement before its introduction, marriages in the legal sense. It is not possible legally to retrospectively marry people, or to make them civil partners after the death of one of the couple.

There is no age criteria attached to the Widows, widowers and surviving civil partner's pension, or criteria requiring such a marriage or civil partnership to have been entered into before a certain age. Provided a person was legally married or in a civil partnership at the time of the bereavement, and provided the other conditions such as PRSI are met, a person may qualify for a payment.

As regards the State pension, a pensioner's partner may qualify for an Increase for a Qualified Adult if they are wholly or mainly maintained by them. This payment can be made regard-

less of whether they are married, in a civil partnership, or simply cohabiting. A cohabitant is one of two adults (whether of the same or opposite sex) who live together as a couple in an intimate and committed relationship and who are not close relatives.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications

221. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an application for a domiciliary care allowance in respect of persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38322/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): An application for domiciliary care allowance was received from this lady on the 21st July 2016. This application satisfied the qualifying conditions for the allowance and a letter issued on the 9th November 2016 advising of the decision to award the allowance from 1st August 2016, the month following receipt of the application, as per the relevant legislation.

In order for backdating to be considered, it is required that good cause for the delay in submitting the application is shown. Where good cause is demonstrated, the application can be backdated by a maximum of 6 months. In the case of an application requesting backdating, the applicant may submit additional information and ask to have the decision reviewed, and/or they may appeal the decision directly to the Social Welfare Appeals Office.

Rent Supplement Scheme Appeals

222. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an appeal on a rent supplement in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38323/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was referred to an Appeals Officer on 8th November 2016, who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

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

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Invalidity Pension Applications

223. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an application for an invalidity pension in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38324/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Invalidity pension (IP) is a payment for people who are permanently incapable of work because of illness or incapacity and who satisfy the pay related social insurance (PRSI) contribution

conditions.

The Department received a claim for IP for the lady concerned on the 23 November 2016. The claim will be processed as quickly as possible and she will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Overpayments

224. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Social Protection the policy in respect of recouping an overpayment to a person that is now deceased; if there is a Statute of Limitation; the appeals process in place; the way in which it is decided to apportion the overpayment to the deceased family; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38349/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Department of Social Protection makes every effort to ensure that the right person is paid the right amount of money at the right time. These principles are an integral part of the day-to-day work of my Department. Where overpayments of benefit or assistance arise, my Department seeks full recovery as quickly as possible.

The Social Welfare (Consolidation Act) 2005 makes provision for the recovery of any sum overpaid from the estates of deceased persons. In seeking recovery from the estate, the circumstances giving rise to the overpayment are taken into account by my Department, together with any views expressed by the personal representatives and/or family of the deceased persons. A social welfare debt will not become statute barred for recovery under these statutory provisions. Any person who has a material interest in such cases and who is dissatisfied with a decision giving rise to an overpayment of benefit or assistance, has a right of appeal to the Social Welfare Appeals Office.

Sections 335(a) and (b) of the Act provides that any benefit or assistance overpaid is repayable and that this obligation extends to any other person to whom the benefit was paid on behalf of that person, or the personal representative of that person. In general, the personal representative or the solicitor of the deceased person's estate will contact my Department to arrange settlement of the outstanding overpayment. In every case the value of the estate is reduced by the funeral and legal expenses for which the estate is liable and recovery of the overpayment is then sought from the remaining assets. The issue of apportionment does not arise. Where insufficient assets are available to repaid the outstanding sums, the Department has powers to consider the write-off or write-down of the balance of the outstanding overpayment to reflect the circumstances.

In the event that the monies are not recovered by agreement, Section 339 (4) of the 2005 Act provides that civil proceedings can be taken within 6 years from the date on which the notice of intention to distribute the estate or the schedule of assets was received.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Data Collection

225. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the instances in which persons' personal information is shared with third party companies; if PPS numbers, for instance, are treated with confidentiality; his Department's policy on sharing PPS numbers and

personal details with contracted companies such as in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38363/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): My Department contracts with a range of third parties including private companies to act as its agent for the purposes of transacting its business and with whom it shares customer information. These include my Department's branch offices, the Local Employment Service (LES) companies as well as the JobPath companies.

As the Deputy will be aware, JobPath is an employment activation service that supports people who are long-term unemployed and those most at risk of becoming long-term unemployed to secure and sustain paid employment. The JobPath service supplements the internal case management capacity of the Department's Intreo offices and that delivered under contract by Local Employment Service companies.

Shared information may include such things as the person's PPS number, name, contact details, gender, education, work experience and welfare claim details. All such information is treated confidentially. The purpose of sharing this information is to assist in the development of tailored personal progression plans for individual jobseekers in order to support them back into paid employment.

The JobPath companies may use personal data only for the purposes of delivering the services for the Department. Employees of the JobPath companies, and their subcontractors, are subject to the same data protection laws as departmental staff. Data is transmitted securely from the Department to the companies using secure Departmental approved transmission channels. The JobPath companies are registered with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner and are subject to the provisions of data protection legislation. The providers are obliged to observe the principles of data protection, which requires that personal data is used solely for the purposes for which it is collected. Any breach or suspected breach of the data protection legislation will be a matter for the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications

226. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a domiciliary care allowance award in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry will be backdated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38402/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): An application for domiciliary care allowance was received from this lady on the 21st July 2016. This application satisfied the qualifying conditions for the allowance and a letter issued on the 9th November 2016 advising of the decision to award the allowance from 1st August 2016, the month following receipt of the application, as per the relevant legislation. In order for backdating to be considered, it is required that good cause for the delay in submitting the application is shown. Where good cause is demonstrated, the application can be backdated by a maximum of 6 months. If this lady considers that there is good cause for the delay in making her claim and wishes to have the backdating of payment considered, she should submit additional information and ask to have the decision reviewed, or she may appeal the decision directly to the Social Welfare Appeals Office.

One-Parent Family Payment Payments

227. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Social Protection if maintenance payments due by a person (details supplied) will be deducted from their benefit payment and paid to the person's spouse. [38417/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The issue of maintenance payments is first and foremost a private matter for the persons concerned under Family Law.

Where a lone parent is in receipt of the One-Parent Family Payment (OFP), my Department has a statutory requirement to carry out an assessment against the Liable Relative (other parent) and issue a Determination Order for them to pay a contribution either to my Department or to the lone parent, if the criteria is met. These provisions do not replace the obligations of parents under Family Law in relation to maintenance.

With respect to the case referred to by the Deputy, the Department carried out an assessment, as required. Based on this assessment, the person was found to have no current liability to my Department due to insufficient income. As in all such cases, my Department will keep the liable relative's circumstances under review over the course of the OFP payment to the other relative.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Appeals

228. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will expedite an appeal to a decision for arrears of domiciliary care allowance to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38439/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 1st November 2016. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought. When these papers have been received from the Department, the case in question will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral appeal hearing.

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

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy. If you require further assistance with this query following the outcome of the appeal don't hesitate to contact my office.

Family Income Supplement Appeals

229. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection to set out the status of a family income supplement in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38440/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The person concerned applied for family income supplement (FIS) on 6th July 2015. The claim was refused by a deciding of-

ficer (DO) on the grounds that the person concerned was not working the required number of hours in order to qualify.

The person concerned appealed this decision and the appeal was allowed by an appeals officer (AO) in November 2016.

Unfortunately, the family income had not been fully assessed at the time of the original claim as it was considered by the DO that the claim was invalid due to the issue with the number of hours being worked. The claim is currently being examined by a DO in order to determine the correct rate of FIS due. The DO may need to get further clarification from the person in question on information already to hand in order to complete this as soon as possible. Once the correct rate of FIS has been determined, the decision of the AO will be implemented without delay and all arrears due will be issued.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the deputy.

Homeless Persons Data

230. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Social Protection whether his Department provides the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government with the number of homeless adults and children in his Department's funded accommodation services; and if he will engage with his counterparts in the Departments of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government and Children and Youth Affairs and supply these figures from January 2017 to ensure that they are included in the Department of Housing, Planning, Community, and Local Government official monthly homeless figures. [38443/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As the Deputy is aware from the response to an earlier parliamentary question, the New Communities Unit (NCU) of my Department offers assistance to families who are primarily non-Irish, homeless and generally without recourse to any weekly income. The main focus of this unit is to ensure that families who have an entitlement receive an income maintenance payment, under the terms of the relevant legislation.

In addition, non-Irish homeless families have been referred to this unit directly by the Central Placement Service, operated on behalf of the four local authorities by Dublin City Council, and the staff in the NCU have facilitated booking these people into emergency accommodation. This accommodation is not funded by the Department of Social Protection, rather, it is sourced and funded by Dublin City Council under Section 10 of the Housing Act (1988).

The practice, whereby staff in the NCU act as booking agents in such circumstances, is a residual one from when the NCU was based in the HSE. Officials from my Department are considering the appropriateness and nature of the NCU's involvement in the delivery of this service at present.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

School Meals Programme

231. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Social Protection to outline the provisions to be taken to ensure the successful roll out of the schools meals scheme as announced in budget 2017; if storage, waste and administrative costs have been factored into the funding announced in 2017; the way in which the scheme will be administered by the participating

schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38472/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The school meals programme provides funding towards the provision of food to schools and organisations benefitting over 200,000 children at a total cost of €42 million in 2016. As part of Budget 2017, I announced an additional €5.7 million for school meals which will benefit over 50,000 children.

Additional funding is being provided to DEIS schools already participating in the scheme to provide breakfast and lunch to pupils. My Department has also written to some 50 DEIS schools not participating in the scheme and invited them to join. To date, 11 additional DEIS schools have expressed an interest in joining the scheme. The additional funding provided in Budget 2017 also provides some provision towards the extension of the scheme to breakfast clubs in non-DEIS schools from September 2017. This is the first time in many years that increased payments will be provided to schools outside of DEIS.

More than 50,000 children will benefit from the increased funding providing breakfasts and lunches. Of these, some 35,000 extra school breakfasts will be provided in non-DEIS schools from the start of the new school year and will be expanded in future years.

Officials in my Department are engaging with colleagues in the Department of Education and Skills regarding the provision of the additional funding to schools for the next school year and priority will be provided to those schools where there is most need.

Funding is provided directly to participating schools/organisations which are responsible for the operation and administration of their school meals project. The scheme is administered by schools in a variety of ways and depends on the needs, capabilities and resources of the schools/groups. Examples of delivery modality include full canteen services, purchase of prepared meals by the school from specialist school meals suppliers or from local suppliers and purchase and preparation of meals by school/group staff or volunteers. Funding under the programme is provided for food costs only and does not cover storage, waste, administration or any other non-food costs.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pension (Contributory) Eligibility

232. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will restore the average PRSI contributions required to qualify for the contributory old age pension to the levels applicable prior to the financial crisis and whereby such a move would be in line with the restoration of wages and salaries under the Haddington Road agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38476/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The overall concern in recent years has been to protect the value of weekly social welfare rates. Expenditure on pensions, at approximately €7 billion each year, is the largest block of expenditure in my Department in the Estimate for 2016, representing approximately 35% of overall expenditure. Due to demographic changes, my Department's spending on older people is increasing year on year. Maintaining the rate of the State pension and other payments is critical in protecting people from poverty.

There are three main pensions paid by my Department to people aged 66 and over, namely the State pension contributory (which is based on PRSI contributions), the State pension non-contributory (which is based on means), and the Widows/Widowers/Surviving Civil Partners Contributory pension (which is based on PRSI contributions, and is also payable at a lower rate

before 66).

The State pension contributory (previously called the Old Age Contributory Pension) was introduced in 1961, and is funded by PRSI contributions, on a pay-as-you go basis. Since its introduction, the rate of payment has been based on the 'yearly average' test.

These rates are banded, and those bands have been amended from time to time, most recently in 2012. There have been no changes in the structure of the bands since then, aside from increases in the rates, which are passed on pro-rata to the reduced rates.

As provided for in Budget 2012, from September 2012, new rate bands for State pension (contributory) were introduced. This resulted in one of bands (in respect of those with a yearly average of 20-47 contributions), being replaced with three bands (in respect of yearly averages of 40-47, 30-39, and 20-29 respectively). The changes did not impact upon whether someone qualified for a pension, nor whether they would qualify for the full rate. These additional bands more accurately reflect the social insurance history of a person and ensure that those who contribute more during a working life are likely to benefit more in retirement than those with lesser contributions.

Prior to these changes, in the period from 2000-2012, someone with a yearly average of 47 contributions qualified for the same rate of payment (98% of the maximum rate) as someone with a yearly average of 20 contributions, despite generally their much more significant PRSI record, and this was regardless of their means. A person with an average of 48-52 PRSI contributions per year over their working life received a weekly State pension of only €4.50 more than someone with a yearly average of 20 PRSI contributions. Aside from the lack of equity involved, this was a significant disincentive to longer working, as in most cases, contributions paid by people in their sixties had no impact upon the rate of their State pension upon retirement.

The principle that the rate of a State pension contributory should reflect the PRSI contributions paid over a working life needs to be adhered to so that we can fund such pensions into the future. Given the requirement to make savings in recent years, it was considered more equitable to address this disparity, than to reduce the rate of payment for all pensioners by an across the board cut in payment rates. Such a cut would not just have penalised those who had paid into the system over the course of their lives, but it would also have reduced the incomes of the most vulnerable pensioners, who do not generally receive reduced rate contributory pensions, but rather receive a non-contributory pension, or a maximum rate contributory pension if they have the required contributions.

For those with insufficient contributions to meet the requirements for a full rate State pension (contributory), they may qualify for a means tested State pension (non-contributory) which has a maximum personal rate of €222, or just over 95% of the maximum rate of the State pension (contributory). Alternatively, if a person's spouse or civil partner is in receipt of a State pension (contributory) they may instead qualify for an Increase for a Qualified Adult of up to €209, which is just less than 90% of the maximum personal rate of the State pension (contributory).

It is estimated that the cost of reverting to the rate-bands which existed between 2000 and 2012 would be over €50 million in 2017, and that this will rise at a rate of some €10 m annually.

In 2008, the maximum personal rate of the contributory pensions was €223.30, and the maximum rate for the non-contributory pension was €212. Despite negative inflation in the intervening period, these payments have already been increased by €10, before taking into account a further €5 increase next year. While reverting to the 2008 rates of payments would be

of benefit to pensioners who have significant other means and who contributed less to the Social Insurance Fund, it would be of no benefit to those who contributed to the system all their lives, nor would it be to that half of our elderly who rely solely on the State pension for their income. I am satisfied that the across the board increases, which benefit everyone, have been a more appropriate approach in Budget 2017.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Pension Provisions

233. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Social Protection to outline the compensation he is putting in place for former workers at a company (details supplied) with unpurchased pensionable years as part of their overall compensation package; the details of such compensation; the way in which and when it will be paid; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38500/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I do understand that the members concerned are anxious that these matters are settled in a timely manner. I want to reassure the Deputy that it is my intention to try and resolve the outstanding issues in relation to the company's pension schemes as quickly as possible but unfortunately the issues involved are quite complex and are taking time to tease through. Officials of my Department are currently examining all options available and are in advanced discussions with the mediator of the settlement to facilitate a resolution that is both in keeping with applicable law and public financial procedures. Every effort is being made to bring this to a conclusion as soon as possible.

I hope that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits Waiting Times

234. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding waiting times for social protection applications (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38547/16]

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

-	Social Welfare claims by average waiting times (weeks) 31 October 2016
Scheme	Average Waiting Time
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

-	Social Welfare claims by average waiting times (weeks) 31 October 2016
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

-	-	Average Appeal processing times (weeks) by scheme 01/01/2016 – 31/10/2016
-	Summary Decisions	Oral Hearings
Carers Allowance	17.9	21.9
Carers Benefit	20.3	22.4
Child Benefit	22.6	39.9
Disability Allowance	14.7	20.3
Domiciliary Care Allowance	24.2	30.6
Invalidity Pension	22.3	29.7
State Pension (Contributory)	25.6	45.4
State Pension (Non-Contributory)	23.2	33.5
Jobseeker's Allowance (Means)	16.4	25.5
Jobseeker's Allowance (Payments)	15.9	21.2

Carer's Allowance Appeals

235. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a carer's allowance payment will be made to a person (details supplied) in view of the fact this was approved by the Social Welfare Appeals Office some time ago; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38566/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As a result of an appeals officer's decision, carer's allowance was awarded to the person concerned on 5 December 2016 and the first payment will issue to her nominated bank account on 29 December 2016. Arrears for the period 12 November 2015 to 28 December 2016 will issue shortly.

The person concerned was notified on 5 December 2016 of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Payments

236. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Social Protection to set out the number

of persons in respect of whom domiciliary care allowance was being paid up to their 16th birthday, and, having reached this birthday, applied for disability allowance, but were refused on the basis that they did not meet the requirement for each of the years 2013 to 2016 to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38641/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Domiciliary care allowance (DCA) is paid in respect of children who have a disability requiring care and attention substantially in excess of that needed by a child of the same age without the disability. The need for the additional care and attention must be likely to last for at least 12 months. DCA, which is not means-tested, is payable in respect of qualified children to age 16 years, after which they may apply for disability allowance (DA) in their own right.

However, the qualifying conditions for DA are very different to DCA. To qualify for a DA payment a person must: be substantially restricted in undertaking suitable employment; be aged between 16 and 65; satisfy a means test; and be habitually resident in the State. Therefore a child is not automatically entitled to DA because a DCA was in payment.

My department does not maintain statistics on how many people whose DCA ceases at age 16, apply for DA and go on to qualify for a DA payment.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Payments

237. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Social Protection to outline the position regarding the situation in which domiciliary care allowance is being paid in respect of a person until the 16th birthday, and the parent in this situation is granted carer's allowance to care for the person who obviously requires full-time care, and arising from the fact that the person has turned 16 years of age, all payments are cut off; the reason the person may not be provided with disability allowance in view of the fact that domiciliary care allowance was deemed necessary up to the date of the 16th birthday; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38642/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Domiciliary care allowance (DCA) is paid in respect of children who have a disability requiring care and attention substantially in excess of that needed by a child of the same age without the disability. The need for the additional care and attention must be likely to last for at least 12 months. DCA, which is not means-tested, is payable in respect of qualified children to age 16 years, after which they may apply for disability allowance (DA) in their own right. Carer's allowance (CA) may be payable in addition to DCA where all the conditions are satisfied.

The qualifying conditions for DA are different to DCA. To qualify for a DA payment a person must: be substantially restricted in undertaking suitable employment; be aged between 16 and 65; satisfy a means test; and be habitually resident in the State. Therefore a child is not automatically entitled to DA at age 16 simply because a DCA was in payment.

It is a condition for receipt of a carer's allowance (CA) that the person being cared for must have a disability whose effect is that they require full-time care and attention.

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

Moreover, a person's eligibility for DCA, DA and CA may change over time. My Department periodically reviews claims in payment to ensure that there is continued entitlement. CA cases where DCA is stopping due to the child reaching 16 years are not automatically reviewed at that time. Reviews of CA are selected based on various parameters including where medical advice indicates or where there is any other indication that any relevant circumstances may have changed. In addition, some reviews are randomly selected.

Following examination of all available evidence, where it is decided that a care recipient no longer requires full-time care and attention, the carer is given ample time to provide additional evidence before payment of CA is stopped. The person receiving an adverse decision is also offered the right of appeal to the independent social welfare appeals office. The options to have an adverse decision reviewed by a deciding officer or to appeal it are available across all the schemes operated by my department.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Rental Accommodation Scheme Payments

238. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Social Protection to outline the proposed changes to the way rent allowance is being paid (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38655/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Rent supplement is currently supporting approximately 49,700 tenants at a total cost of €267 million this year. The strategic policy direction of my Department is to return rent supplement to its original purpose of being a short-term income support scheme. Under the new Housing Assistance Payment (HAP), responsibility for the provision of rental assistance to those with a long-term housing need will transfer to local authorities, under the auspices of the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (DHPCLG).

From 1st December 2016, the HAP scheme is now operational in 28 of the 31 local authority areas, having commenced on a statutory basis in nine further local authority areas; Cavan, Kerry, Laois, Leitrim, Longford, Roscommon, Westmeath, Wexford and Wicklow. It is expected that HAP will be fully rolled out to the remaining Dublin areas from 1 March 2017.

In local authority areas where HAP is in place, new applicants assessed as requiring social housing support will be considered for HAP rather than rent supplement. Under HAP the local authority pays the rent directly to the landlord and the HAP recipient will then pay a rent contribution to the local authority. The rent contribution is a differential rent, which is set by the local authority based on income and the ability to pay.

DSP will continue to provide rental support, under the rent supplement scheme, to those with a short-term need, generally because of a temporary loss of employment.

The implementation of the HAP is a key Government priority and a major pillar of the Social Housing Strategy 2020 and the Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness – Rebuilding Ireland – which has committed to an accelerated target of 15,000 HAP tenancies in 2017. The Department is fully engaged in the development of HAP and officials in my Department work closely with colleagues in DECLG and the local authorities to ensure the successful implementation of the scheme.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Community Services Programme

239. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Social Protection to set down the number of first-time applications submitted seeking funding from the community services programme in County Tipperary in the past 12 months; if there are plans to increase the number of community services programme funded projects; if so, when; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38693/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Community Services Programme (CSP) is designed to address locally identified gaps in the provision of services to communities and to utilise the potential of community assets and resources that are already in place to support of delivery of services and to improve community well-being. Funding is provided to support the employment of staff to deliver the service.

There are currently 10 service providers receiving funding from the CSP for 31.5 full-time positions in County Tipperary.

Pobal is contracted by the Department to undertake the financial and contract management for the CSP. To date in 2016, Pobal has been requested to work with 10 new social enterprises to undertake an in-depth business planning process to determine the overall suitability and the resource requirements of their proposal in line with CSP criteria. One of these organisations is based in County Tipperary.

Following the announcement of an additional €1 m for the CSP budget, funding of €46 m will be provided for the programme in 2017. The increased funding will allow for a small number of new companies to be supported. Further information on the criteria for these new projects will be available in early 2017.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Applications

240. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a decision has been made on a disability allowance application in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38699/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): This man has been awarded disability allowance with effect from 22 June 2016. The first payment will be made by his chosen payment method on 21 December 2016.

Arrears of payment due will issue as soon as possible once any necessary adjustment is calculated and applied in respect of any overlapping payments or in respect of outstanding overpayments (if applicable).

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Invalidity Pension Applications

241. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a decision on an invalidity pension will issue to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38707/16]

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

To qualify for IP a claimant must, inter-alia, have at least 260 (5 years) paid PRSI contributions since entering social insurance and 48 contributions paid or credited in the last complete contribution year before the date of their claim. Only PRSI classes A, E or H contributions are reckonable for IP purposes.

The gentleman referred to is in receipt of disability allowance (DA) since the 01 February 2012. He is not eligible for credited contributions for the period while he is in receipt of DA due to a gap in his insurance record for a number of years immediately prior to his DA application.

A claim for IP was received from him on the 17 October 2016. He was refused IP on the grounds that the contribution conditions for the scheme were not satisfied. Specifically, he does not have 48 contributions paid or credited in the reckonable year, 2015 in this case. He was notified on 21 November 2016 of this decision, the reason for it and of his right of review and appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Renewals

242. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection to set out the status of a review on a disability allowance in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38745/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): I can confirm that this lady is in receipt of disability allowance (DA) from my department. We received a request from her to review her claim due to the fact that her financial circumstances had changed. The claim was referred to a social welfare investigative officer (SWI) for a review of her means and circumstances. Following on from that we requested some information which we have now received. The deciding officer will make a decision on the claim as soon as possible and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pension (Contributory) Eligibility

243. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will re-examine changes which were made to the eligibility criteria for the contributory pension system in 2015, whereby contributions were averaged over the working years; and when he will address this issue as it is currently a severe disadvantage for women who have worked in the home for periods of time. [38751/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The overall concern in recent years has been to protect the value of weekly social welfare rates. Expenditure on pensions, at approximately €7 billion each year, is the largest block of expenditure in my Department in the Estimate for 2016, representing approximately 35% of overall expenditure. Due to demographic changes, my Department's spending on older people is increasing year on year. Maintaining the rate of the State pension and other payments is critical in protecting people from poverty.

There are three main pensions paid by my Department to people aged 66 and over, namely the State pension contributory (which is based on PRSI contributions), the State pension non-contributory (which is based on means), and the Widows/Widowers/Surviving Civil Partners Contributory pension (which is based on PRSI contributions, and is also payable at a lower rate before 66).

The State pension contributory (previously called the Old Age Contributory Pension) was introduced in 1961, and is funded by PRSI contributions, on a pay-as-you go basis. Since its introduction, the rate of payment has been based on the 'yearly average' test.

These rates are banded, and those bands have been amended from time to time, most recently in 2012. There have been no changes in the structure of the bands since then, aside from increases in the rates, which are passed on pro-rata to the reduced rates.

As provided for in Budget 2012, from September 2012, new rate bands for State pension (contributory) were introduced. This resulted in one of the bands (in respect of those with a yearly average of 20-47 contributions), being replaced with three bands (in respect of yearly averages of 40-47, 30-39, and 20-29 respectively). These additional bands more accurately reflect the social insurance history of a person and ensure that those who contribute more during a working life are likely to benefit more in retirement than those with lesser contributions.

Prior to these changes, in the period from 2000-2012, someone with a yearly average of 47 contributions qualified for the same rate of payment (98% of the maximum rate) as someone with a yearly average of 20 contributions, despite generally their much more significant PRSI record, and this was regardless of their means. A person with an average of 48-52 PRSI contributions per year over their working life received a weekly State pension of only €4.50 more than someone with a yearly average of 20 PRSI contributions. Aside from the lack of equity involved, this was a significant disincentive to longer working, as in most cases, contributions paid by people in their sixties had no impact upon the rate of their State pension upon retirement.

The principle that the rate of a State pension contributory should reflect the PRSI contributions paid over a working life needs to be adhered to so that we can fund such pensions into the future. Given the requirement to make savings in recent years, it was considered more equitable to address this disparity, than to reduce the rate of payment for all pensioners by an across the board cut in payment rates. Such a cut would have reduced the incomes of the most vulnerable pensioners, who do not generally receive reduced rate contributory pensions, but rather receive a non-contributory pension, or a maximum rate contributory pension if they have the required contributions.

For those with insufficient contributions to meet the requirements for a full rate State pension (contributory), they may qualify for a means tested State pension (non-contributory) which has a maximum personal rate of €222, or just over 95% of the maximum rate of the State pension (contributory). Alternatively, if a person's spouse or civil partner is in receipt of a State pension (contributory) they may instead qualify for an Increase for a Qualified Adult of up to €209, which is just less than 90% of the maximum personal rate of the State pension (contributory).

It is estimated that the cost of reverting to the rate-bands which existed between 2000 and 2012 would be over €50 million in 2017, and that this will rise at a rate of some €10 m annually.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

244. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection when payment will commence in respect of a carer's allowance application that was awarded after an appeal on the part of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38753/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As a result of an appeals officer's decision, carer's allowance was awarded to the person concerned on 5 December 2016 and the first payment will issue to her nominated bank account on 8 December 2016. Arrears for the period 3 December 2015 to 7 December 2016 have also issued.

The person concerned was notified on 5 December 2016 of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Pensions Legislation

245. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Social Protection to outline his plans to review the minimum funding standard provisions in the 1990 Pensions Act (as amended), particularly if it is having unintended and harmful consequences for defined benefit pension schemes and if it is distorting investment decisions without protecting pensioners. [38754/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The funding standard provides the regulatory mechanism for ensuring that a defined benefit (DB) pension scheme can live up to the promised level of pension benefits and a benchmark against which the health of a scheme can be tested. The funding standard is a wind-up standard, and is intended to approximate the monies needed to secure the benefits if the scheme was wound up and the accrued benefits bought out. Any reduction in the funding standard would not improve a scheme's ability to pay the benefits as they fall due.

In the first instance it is the responsibility of the trustees of a pension scheme to ensure compliance with the funding standard and other obligations set out in the Pensions Act 1990, as amended. The existence of the funding standard is not the central issue in relation to whether a scheme is properly funded. The responsibility rests with the employer and the trustees for ensuring that the scheme is properly funded and managed.

Public companies are obliged to report on any defined benefit schemes in their annual financial statements. The basis of these calculations is defined in the relevant accounting standards and is independent of the Irish funding standard.

The Pensions Authority is the independent body responsible for regulating the funding standard. If a scheme does not meet the funding standard, a funding proposal must be submitted to the Authority in accordance with the time limits detailed in the Pensions Act. It should be noted that the Irish funding standard is less demanding in comparison to almost all other European countries. Accordingly, I have no plans to review it.

The Pensions Authority requires that, in setting investment policy, the trustees of a DB scheme must have regard to the need to satisfy at regular intervals the minimum funding standard set down in the Pensions Act. However a number of steps have been taken to reduce the risks to pension scheme members caused by market volatility.

The Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2012 required a DB scheme to hold additional funding in the form of a 'risk reserve' by 2023. This function of this 'risk reserve' is to provide some

protection and long term stability for scheme members against future volatility in financial markets. Additionally, and in appropriate circumstances, the regulator may approve scheme funding proposals that provide for the recovery of their schemes funding over longer periods that was previously the case.

In order to provide increased investment options for pension schemes the Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2010 and 2011 introduced the option for trustees to purchase sovereign annuities. Pension schemes that purchase sovereign annuities or the underlying bonds benefit from a reduction in their liabilities under the funding standard. Buying sovereign annuities for the pensioners has the effect of reducing pensioner liabilities under the funding standard and provides additional funds for the other members of the scheme.

The situation of defined benefit funding is being actively monitored by the Department and the Pensions Authority.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disablement Benefit

246. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will reopen an application for benefit in respect of a person (details supplied) with a view to granting them the benefit; and if he will expedite a positive response. [38802/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Disablement benefit is one of the payments under the occupational injuries benefit scheme operated by my Department. It covers people who are or were engaged in employment that is/was insurable for occupational injuries and who suffer a loss of physical or mental faculty as a result of an occupational injury or prescribed occupational disease.

The scheme was introduced and took effect from 1 May 1967. Only injuries or diseases occurring on or after that date are covered under this scheme.

The person concerned made an application for disablement benefit in respect of a disease he contracted from employment that ceased prior to 1 May 1967.

As he was not engaged in insurable (occupational injuries) employment at the time that the disease was contracted, his application for disablement benefit was disallowed. The person concerned appealed the decision but the appeal was disallowed by the independent Social Welfare Appeals Office .

Under Social Welfare legislation, the decision of an appeals officer is final and conclusive and may only be reviewed in the light of relevant additional evidence or new facts.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Jobseeker's Allowance Payments

247. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a Christmas bonus is payable to a person (details supplied) who is in receipt of a jobseeker's allowance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38805/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): A Christmas Bonus payment of

85% of the appropriate weekly amount is to be paid to all customers on a long term Social Welfare payment. In order to qualify for this bonus the person concerned must have been in receipt of a Jobseekers Allowance payment in excess of 390 days.

In the case of this person he has been paid a total of 266 days and therefore does not have an entitlement for this year's Christmas Bonus.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

248. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a decision on a carer's allowance will issue to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38818/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): An application for Carer's Allowance (CA) was received from the person concerned on 7 September 2016.

It is a condition for receipt of a CA that the person being cared for must have a disability whose effect is that they require full-time care and attention.

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

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

The person concerned was notified on 28 October 2016 of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal. She requested a review of this decision and submitted additional evidence in support of her application.

Following this review, the application was awarded to her on 2 December 2016 and the first payment will issue to her nominated post office on 8 December 2016. Arrears for the period 7 September 2016 to 7 December 2016 have issued by cheque.

The person concerned was notified on 2 December of this decision.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Appeals

249. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding an appeal by a person (details supplied) which was furnished on 17 May 2016 and wherein a decision was made on 22 November 2016 without an oral hearing being afforded to this person; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38830/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that the appeal relating to the Illness Benefit application of the person concerned was initially disallowed by an Appeals Officer by way of a summary decision.

A summary decision may be made where an Appeals Officer is of the opinion that the case

is of such a nature that it can be determined on the basis of documentary evidence and without oral hearing.

However, the file has been recalled from the Department of Social Protection and will be returned to the Appeals Officer to determine if the appeal should be reviewed and if an oral hearing should be convened in order to facilitate that review.

The person concerned will shortly be informed of the Appeals Officer's decision.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Passport Applications Fees

250. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will reduce the cost of passports for old age pensioners; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38448/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): A decision was taken in the 2005 budget to exempt applicants aged 65 and over from the passport fee. In 2011 the Government decided in light of the budgetary situation to discontinue the exemption and to apply the same ten-year passport fee to all applicants aged eighteen years or over.

The annualized fee for a standard ten year Irish passport compares favourably with many other jurisdictions. At €8 per year, the Irish passport fee compares with approximately €9.60 for a French passport, €9.40 per year for a British passport, €9.90 per year for an American passport and €16.70 per year for an Australian passport.

Given that the shortfall in revenue would have to be met by the taxpayer I do not have any plans at this time to reduce the fee charged to older applicants.

Humanitarian Aid Provision

251. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if any of the money allocated to Irish Aid for 2017 will be used to specifically support the Yazidi people; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38468/16]

252. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if any consideration has been given at national, EU or international level to support a comprehensive programme of resettling and rebuilding of Sinjar, Iraq; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38469/16]

253. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the efforts are being made by the European Union and the international community to reconstruct Sinjar, Iraq and to support and assist the Yazidi community to safely return to Sinjar following the brutal assault by ISIS in August 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38470/16]

254. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the discussions that he has had with his EU counterparts specifically regarding the Yazidi community that has been recognised as having been subjected to genocide by ISIS; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38471/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take

Questions Nos. 251 to 254, inclusive, together.

Ms Nadia Murad, a survivor of the Daesh atrocities against the Yazidis, visited Ireland and met with a number of Deputies, and the Tánaiste as well as senior officials in my own Department in my absence on official business. I want to pay tribute to Ms Murad's extraordinary bravery and her leadership in campaigning to protect and uphold the rights of her people.

I wish to record my absolute and unreserved condemnations of the vile and criminal acts committed against the Yazidis by the terrorist group Daesh. These crimes continue to this day, against Yazidis held captive by Daesh.

In September 2015, Ireland addressed UN Human Rights Council on the findings of the UN Commission of Inquiry report which stated that the crime of genocide had been committed against the Yazidis, saying "the Commission's report details unimaginable crimes. The suffering of the victims of Daesh's terrorism and hatred is laid bare before this Council in the report. This Council and the membership of the United Nations have an inarguable duty to end these crimes and work to achieve justice and accountability for the victims of these crimes.

Ireland has long made clear its full support for referral of the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court. Together with over 50 Member States of the United Nations, Ireland co-sponsored a proposed resolution to this effect in 2014. Ireland regards the failure of the proposed resolution as a breach of the Security Council's obligations under the UN Charter. Ireland repeats its call for the Security Council to uphold international law and act on this report by referring the situation in Syria to the Court. It is intolerable that the terrorist perpetrators of the most heinous crimes would be granted impunity by the action of any member of the United Nations.

Ireland urges that all States engaged in countering Daesh in Syria and Iraq should place the protection of civilian populations, especially minorities at particular risk from Daesh's murderous ideology of hate, as a priority in their instructions to members of their security forces ."

I have previously informed the Oireachtas that it is our policy that the responsibility for a legal determination of the crime of genocide is a matter for a legally competent and internationally recognised court. I regard the report of the Commission of Inquiry and its findings of genocide as authoritative and I repeat our long-standing demand that the Security Council fulfil its obligations under international law and act to ensure that the Yazidis can seek accountability for Daesh's crimes before the International Criminal Court or another legally competent international tribunal. There can be no impunity for the horrific crimes committed against the Yazidis.

Given the continuing conflict and the ongoing threat of terrorism in Sinjar and Nineveh, the resettlement of the Yazidis and other minority populations in their ancient homelands remains too dangerous to implement immediately. However, this must be a priority for Ireland and its international partners, together with international action to ensure the protection of these populations after their return to their homes.

Funding from the Irish Aid programme, managed by my Department, has been provided to meet the urgent needs of the most vulnerable people inside Iraq, particularly in besieged and hard-to-reach areas, and those who have been displaced internally, or who have fled to neighbouring countries. Funding is channelled through Irish Aid's NGO partners and UN organisations, who are best placed to respond, and is used to provide humanitarian supplies and urgently needed access to food, health, water and sanitation services, with a particular focus on the protection of children, women and the most vulnerable.

So far in 2016, Ireland has provided €1.5 million to Iraq, channelled through the UN Iraq

Humanitarian Pooled Fund, to provide life-saving assistance to the estimated 10 million people affected by violence in Iraq. The Humanitarian Pooled Fund supports the implementation of the Iraq Humanitarian Response Plan, which aims to meet the critical needs of displaced people. In Erbil and Dahuk Governorates, in particular, this includes members of the Yazidi community.

In addition, in October, the Irish Government dispatched 80 tonnes of humanitarian relief supplies under the Rapid Response initiative. The relief items, which included blankets, jerry cans, cooking sets, water tanks, tarpaulins and shelter kits, at a total approximate value of €462,813, were donated to Oxfam for distribution to conflict-affected communities.

During 2015, Ireland also provided €1 million to the Iraq Humanitarian Pooled Fund and €250,000 in support of UNICEF's Iraq Strategic Response Plan, which prioritised the protection of civilians displaced by conflict, as well as €330,000 to Christian Aid Ireland to support activities promoting the protection of displaced women and girls in the Kurdish region of northern Iraq, where the Yazidi population is concentrated.

Ireland continues to closely monitor the situation in Iraq, and given its complexity and severity, it is likely that further support will be provided to affected communities in the coming months.

Passport Services

255. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the steps that first time adult applicants for passports, who are requested to present a photocopy of their public services card, PSC, but do not have a PSC can take, in view of the fact that to acquire a PSC a copy of a current passport is required; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38484/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As of 29 March 2016 all first-time passport applicants aged eighteen and above who are resident in Ireland are required to present a photocopy of their individual Public Services Card (PSC) for identification purposes.

The measure has been important in enhancing protection against fraud and identity theft and in upholding the integrity of the Irish passport. It also ensures that the identity of first-time applicants for Irish passports continues to be verified to a high standard.

First-time adult passport applicants who do not currently have a PSC can obtain one through a secure process of in-person registration via their local Department of Social Protection office. Details of documents needed to complete the PSC registration process and of an online appointment booking service are available via the website www.MyWelfare.ie.

While the basis for issuing a PSC is a matter for the Department of Social Protection and that department must be satisfied as to the identity of a person applying, it is my understanding that a passport is not the only form of identification that is acceptable.

Human Rights

256. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has requested the Irish ambassador to the United States to report on the issue of Standing Rock Reservation, the protests taking place and the reported emergency evacuation order by North Dakota; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38550/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Standing Rock Reservation, particularly with regard to the planned Dakota Access Pipeline, is a matter for the authorities in the state of North Dakota and the US Federal Government. As the Government has no locus standi in this matter, I do not propose to ask our Ambassador in Washington DC to become engaged on the issue.

Human Rights Cases

257. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will request the Government of Pakistan to pardon a person (details supplied); if he will highlight their case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38567/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I remain very concerned about this case and my Department avails of every opportunity to convey our concerns at this conviction. The case is expected to come before the Supreme Court of Pakistan for review in the near future.

Ireland does not have a resident Embassy in Pakistan, and our Embassy in Turkey is accredited to Pakistan. The Irish Ambassador in Ankara has raised this case with the Pakistani authorities on a number of occasions. Officials in my Department have also raised this case, and our concerns regarding the blasphemy laws and persecution of Christians generally, with the Embassy of Pakistan in Dublin.

I personally raised Ireland's concerns on the blasphemy laws with my Pakistani counterpart most recently on the margins of the UN General Assembly in September 2016, and also with the Pakistani Chargé d'affaires en pied in January 2016. It should be noted, however, that the Irish Government cannot intervene in the judicial processes in other countries.

The European Union also continues to raise this conviction with the Pakistan authorities.

Ireland strongly condemns all forms of persecution on the basis of religion or belief, irrespective of where they occur or who the victims are. We attach great importance to combatting all forms of discrimination based on religion or belief and incitement to religious hatred. We firmly believe in tolerance, non-discrimination, freedom of expression, freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief. Ireland is deeply concerned by the persecution of Christians.

Ireland will also continue to raise the issue of the persecution of Christians, through its official bilateral contacts with Pakistan, stressing the responsibility of the government to protect all citizens and minorities, irrespective of their religion or belief.

EU Enlargement

258. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the position regarding Serbia, Montenegro, FYR Macedonia and Iceland becoming members of the EU; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38749/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Ireland is a strong supporter of the accession process, viewing it as a transformative driver for peace, stability and prosperity. We support the aspirations of the countries involved in the accession process, including Serbia, Montenegro and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Ireland welcomed the publication by the Commission of the latest annual progress reports on

each of the five candidate and two potential candidate countries on 9 November. The detailed reports give a ‘state of play’ assessment on the preparations for Union membership in each accession country across the *acquis communautaire* and set out guidelines on reform priorities.

Serbia was granted candidate status for EU membership in March 2012, and accession negotiations were opened in 28 June 2013, during the Irish EU Presidency. To date, four chapters have been opened, including the two ‘fundamentals first’ chapters on Judiciary and Fundamental Rights (Chapter 23) and on Justice, Freedom and Security (Chapter 24) in July of this year. It is expected that further chapters will be opened before year-end. Serbia has finalised rule of law action plans, reached key agreements with Kosovo, and been pro-active in developing regional co-operation with its neighbours. It has also embarked on an ambitious economic reform agenda.

We are pleased with the substantial progress made by Serbia so far on its European path, and we agree with the Commission’s report that there is still a need for further reform, including in the areas of public administration and the business environment. The Serbian government has demonstrated their commitment to EU accession at political level by making it a priority goal in their programme for government.

Montenegro was granted candidate status in 2010. Accession negotiations began in 2012, and 24 chapters have been opened. The Commission’s report recognises the considerable work on alignment with and preparation for the implementation of the *acquis*, which has already taken place. It acknowledges the constructive role which the country plays in enhancing regional cooperation. Advances in the rule of law have been made and the legal and institutional framework have been strengthened. The report recommends that Montenegro should now focus on its economic and monetary policy.

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, as it is called in the EU negotiations (though we use the name “Macedonia” in our bilateral relations) has been a candidate country since 2005. However, the opening of accession negotiations has been stalled, first as a result of difficult bilateral issues with neighbours and then by the ongoing political crisis. It is now contingent on the continued implementation of the Pržino agreement (2015) and substantial progress in the implementation of the “Urgent Reform Priorities”. Having been postponed twice already this year, elections are now scheduled to take place on 11 December. We hope they will be free and fair and that the renewed opportunity they represent for the country to mitigate the divisive political culture in Macedonia and enhance its capacity to implement much needed reforms will be seized.

Iceland applied for EU membership in 2009 and was granted candidate status in 2010. However, negotiations were halted after elections in 2013 and in March 2015 the then government requested that “Iceland should not be regarded as a candidate country for EU membership”. Elections took place in October 2016 and no change in Iceland’s EU aspirations has yet been signalled by the new government.

The Commission’s progress reports are still being examined in detail at official level and it is hoped that Ministers will be able to reach agreement on an appropriate response at the General Affairs Council on 13 December. For the sake of completeness, the countries which will be under consideration, in addition to those mentioned in the Deputy’s question, are Turkey and Albania (candidate countries), together with Bosnia & Herzegovina and Kosovo (potential candidates).

Passport Applications Data

259. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of first-time applications for Irish passports in the past three years to date in 2016 by county and jurisdiction, including the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38781/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The number of first time passport applications, broken down by ‘county of birth’ of applicants in Ireland and Northern Ireland, are set out in the following tables for 2014, 2015 and up to the end of November this year. Overall totals for the same periods are presented in respect of first-time applicants born in Great Britain.

The figures are for all first-time applications received, including those for infants and children.

First Time Passport Applicants

Applications received by ‘County of birth’			
Born in Ireland			
-	2014	2015	2016
Carlow	104	93	92
Cavan	2,019	2,089	2,043
Clare	177	150	161
Cork	9,426	9,042	9,176
Donegal	2,461	2,563	2,444
Dublin	30,557	31,009	29,584
Galway	6,290	6,147	6,039
Ireland	109	87	119
Kerry	1,960	1,906	1,829
Kildare	180	140	159
Kilkenny	2,159	2,161	2,152
Laois	2,178	2,251	2,101
Leitrim	86	67	60
Limerick	5,526	5,316	5,411
Longford	67	80	65
Louth	3,910	4,093	3,931
Mayo	2,421	2,217	2,155
Meath	137	144	117
Monaghan	232	196	177
Offaly	156	149	129
Roscommon	133	119	124
Sligo	1,748	1,848	1,765
Tipperary	4,585	1,539	1,519
Unidentified	1	3	5
Waterford	2,438	2,512	2,440
Westmeath	2,620	2,721	2,839
Wexford	2,436	2,408	2,463
Wicklow	123	109	130
Totals	81,239	81,159	79,229

Applications received by 'County of birth'			
Born in Ireland			
% change on previous year		-0.10%	-2.38%

Applications received by 'County of birth'			
Born in Northern Ireland			
-	2014	2015	2016
Antrim	8,369	9,507	13,245
Armagh	2,602	2,841	3,627
Belfast	226	153	525
Derry	4,341	4,666	5,563
Down	3,947	4,721	5,562
Fermanagh	1,060	1,280	1,667
Tyrone	1,280	1,326	1,830
Totals	21,822	24,494	32,861
% change on previous year		12.24%	34.16%

Applications received by 'Place of birth'			
Born in Great Britain			
-	2014	2015	2016
Totals	7,229	7,387	14,978
% change on previous year		2.19%	102.76%

Humanitarian Aid Provision

260. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the efforts he has undertaken in regard to the conflict in Syria and the humanitarian crisis there; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38807/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe McHugh): The continuing conflict in Syria has generated the most serious humanitarian crisis in the world today.

The Government is strongly committed to responding to the humanitarian needs of the Syrian people. Since 2012, Ireland has provided more than €62 million in humanitarian assistance to Syria and the region. This is Ireland's largest response to any humanitarian crisis ever.

Of the €20 million in assistance provided by the Government so far in 2016, €14 million has been delivered through the Irish Aid programme, managed by my Department, and €6 million through the Department of Agriculture's support to the World Food Programme's Syria response.

Irish Aid funding seeks to meet the needs of those inside Syria, particularly in besieged and hard-to-reach areas, and those who have fled to neighbouring countries. Funding is channelled through NGO, UN and International Red Cross and Red Crescent partners. These partners provide supplies and urgently-needed health, education, water and sanitation services, as well

as implementing measures to protect children and vulnerable families.

In addition, members of Ireland's Rapid Response Corps have been deployed to the Balkans and Middle East, providing much needed additional capacity to UN agencies responding to migration challenges resulting from the Syrian conflict.

At a political level, both Minister Flanagan and I have focused on this crisis in discussions in recent months at the EU, UN, and with our civil society partners.

The crisis in Syria is a regular item on the agenda of the EU Foreign Affairs Council. Minister Flanagan and his colleagues held extensive discussions with the UN Special Envoy de Mistura on 17 October, underlining continuing strong support for his work. The crisis was discussed again at the meeting of the Council on 14 November.

In September, the European Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management, Christos Stylianides, visited Dublin and briefed Minister Flanagan on the EU's Humanitarian Initiative for Aleppo. Minister Flanagan also had an opportunity to discuss the Syrian conflict with U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry on 30 October, and he addressed efforts to renew the political process during his recent trip to the Gulf, where he met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the United Arab Emirates and the Deputy Foreign Minister of Saudi Arabia.

On 21 November, the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Peter Maurer, visited Dublin and provided us with an update on his organisation's critical humanitarian work in Syria, which is strongly supported by Ireland.

I also met with the CEOs of Ireland's 10 largest development NGOs in the last two weeks, many of whom receive funding from my Department to respond to the crisis in Syria, and assured them of our continued commitment.

We continue to monitor the situation in Syria very closely and are ready to provide further assistance to the Syrian people in the coming months.

Ministerial Meetings

261. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on his meeting in Paris with his French counterpart; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38824/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): During a two-day visit to France last week, I met the French Foreign Minister, Mr Jean-Marc Ayrault, over a working breakfast at the Quai d'Orsay on Thursday 1 December. The meeting was very cordial and underscored the strength and range of the many links between Ireland and France. Mr Ayrault made a particular point, both in the meeting and at the following press conference, of thanking Ireland for its solidarity in response to the terrorist attacks suffered by France over the past two years.

We discussed Brexit at some length, and agreed that while we both wished to ensure the closest possible relationship between the EU and the UK, our primary objective was the maintenance of the unity and integrity of the Union itself. We both looked forward to greater clarity from the UK side in regard to its negotiating objectives. I took the opportunity to underline once ago the particular challenges Ireland faces in relation to the Common Travel Area, Northern Ireland and North-South connections. Mr Ayrault made clear his understanding of the importance and sensitivity of these questions and his support for maintaining the many gains of

the peace process.

We agreed that the European Union needs to re-connect with citizens through the effective implementation of concrete commitments already made, but also through more positive messaging.

We also discussed a number of international issues, including the possible implications of the recent election of US President-elect Trump; Ukraine and Russia; and Syria. Mr Ayrault briefed me on the French initiative on the Middle East Peace Process and his plans for a possible further meeting before the end of the year.

We also reviewed some issues concerning the United Nations.

I brought the Minister up to date on the work under way in regard to the implementation of the recent Dáil motion concerning the transfer to Ireland of some of the unaccompanied minors recently taken from the irregular encampment at Calais.

Northern Ireland

262. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status and implementation of the Fresh Start Agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38825/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Full and timely implementation of the Agreement is a key priority for the Government and this is reflected by its inclusion in the new Programme for Government. The Government continues to work closely with all relevant stakeholders in this regard.

Progress on implementing the provisions of both the Fresh Start and Stormont House Agreements are considered at periodic review meetings. These are attended by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the First and deputy First Ministers and, where relevant to her portfolio, the Northern Ireland Minister for Justice. I represent the Government at these meetings.

The last review was held on 29 June 2016, and the next meeting is scheduled for 14 December. These review meetings are important in providing political direction and momentum for the full implementation of the Agreements.

There has been sustained progress with the implementation of the Fresh Start Agreement over the last year, with each administration actively pursuing the necessary work to fulfil the respective commitments.

Together with the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality, I hosted a trilateral ministerial meeting on enhancing law enforcement co-operation on the island, as envisaged by the Fresh Start Agreement, in Farmleigh on 21 December 2015. This meeting, which included the two Governments and the Northern Ireland Executive, also launched the Joint Agency Task Force on cross-border crime.

The Joint Agency Task Force quickly became fully operational and is progressing its work to tackle cross-jurisdictional organised crime and bring to justice those involved in it. The Task Force builds on existing operational arrangements to tackle organised crime, including that linked to paramilitarism, on a cross-border basis. The Task Force reports on its work to the two Justice Ministers within the framework of their regular meetings under the Inter-Governmental Agreement on Criminal Justice Co-operation, as provided for in the Fresh Start Agreement.

The Government is meeting its commitments as regards infrastructure projects under the Fresh Start Agreement. This includes a contribution of €25 million from the Irish Government in 2019 for the upgrading of the A5 Western Transport Corridor road project, which is in addition to the €50 million previously committed. The Government's committed funding of €2.5 million to the North West Development Fund has been provided and is to be matched by the NI Executive. Discussions are continuing at senior official level with the Northern Ireland Executive regarding co-operation on other infrastructure projects, including the Narrow Water Bridge project and the Ulster Canal and exploring financing options for future border infrastructure projects.

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

On 13 September, I signed an international agreement with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to establish the Independent Reporting Commission (IRC). The Fresh Start Agreement provides that the IRC will report annually on progress towards ending continuing paramilitary activity connected with Northern Ireland. These reports will inform future Northern Ireland Executive Programme for Government commitments through to 2021. The Government will shortly bring forward legislative proposals before the Oireachtas to establish the IRC in law. The aim is to get the IRC established and up and running as soon as possible.

The NI Executive and the British Government are also proceeding with implementation of their respective commitments under the Fresh Start Agreement. The Executive signed off on the 2016-17 Budget last December and the Welfare Bill implementing the relevant provisions in the Agreement passed into UK law on 25 November 2015. The UK Treasury has also approved the release of monies from the Stormont House Agreement funding to support integrated education.

The institutional reforms provided for under the Fresh Start Agreement have also been implemented, including the reduction in the number of Executive Ministries from 12 to 9 and the option for parties entitled to a place in the Executive to instead designate as part of the formal opposition in the Assembly. This option was taken up by both the UUP and SDLP following the Assembly election last May.

In June, the Co-Chairs and members of the Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition Commission were appointed by the Northern Ireland Executive and the Commission is now progressing its work, as foreseen in the Stormont House Agreement and reiterated in Fresh Start.

With regard to the establishment of a framework for dealing with the legacy of the past, as envisaged in the Stormont House Agreement but on which final agreement could not be reached during the Fresh Start Agreement talks, the Government remains committed to the full implementation of these commitments.

I am continuing to engage with the Secretary of State and with the Northern Ireland Executive and other parties in Northern Ireland, to see how we can find a route to a final agreement on legacy issues. While there remain a number of outstanding issues, there is an urgent need to achieve progress - so that the institutions can be established and start working to meet the needs of victims and survivors and support broader societal healing and reconciliation. I am therefore working to secure the necessary political agreement to get the legacy bodies established and up

and running as soon as possible.

Protected Disclosures

263. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the channels available to members of the public that are not employees to make a protected disclosure in instances in which they have a belief they have evidence of significant wide spread or systemic malpractice and policy failure in areas of the public service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38434/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy may be aware, my Department is responsible for the Protected Disclosures Act 2014, which provides statutory protections to workers in the private, public and not-for-profit sectors against reprisals in circumstances where they disclose information related to wrongdoing that has come to their attention in connection with their employment. The term “worker” in this case includes employees, contractors, agency workers, people gaining work experience, and trainees. It also covers members of the civil service, An Garda Síochána and members of the defence forces.

Members of the public who have no connection with the relevant workplace are not covered by the provisions of the Act (including its protections) and cannot therefore make ‘protected disclosures’ under the legislation. However, in bringing forward evidence of malpractice or policy failure in the public service, a number of reporting channels are open to them. For example, in cases of suspected fraud or criminality, the matter can be reported to An Garda Síochána. Various regulatory bodies, such as the Data Protection Commissioner, the Health and Safety Authority, and the Health Information and Quality Authority, are empowered to investigate and sanction inter alia public bodies for legislative or regulatory breaches in their respective sectors.

In addition, under the statutory framework governing his office, the Ombudsman can also initiate an investigation to ensure that problematic issues in a particular sector are addressed and/or matters of significant public interest are brought to the attention of the public. Furthermore, as well as assisting workers seeking to make protected disclosures under the Act, Transparency International Ireland’s ‘Speak Up Helpline’ also offers information, referral advice and advocacy support for other witnesses and victims of corruption and other wrongdoing on a confidential basis.

Garda Station Closures

264. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide a county update on the number of closed Garda stations that have been sold since 2011; the total revenue raised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38869/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán Canney): I am advised by the Commissioners of Public Works that the following 37 former Garda stations have been sold since 2011 with a total value of €2,895,100 raised for the Exchequer.

Garda Stations

Cavan	Finea former Garda station
Cavan	Tullyvin former Garda station
Clare	Carrigaholt former Garda station
Clare	Labasheeda former Garda station
Cork	Inchigeela former Garda station
Cork	Mallow Road former Garda station
Cork	Meelin former Garda station
Donegal	Churchill former Garda station
Galway	Lettermore former Garda station
Kerry	Lauragh former Garda station
Kildare	Carbury former Garda station
Kilkenny	Inistioge former Garda station
Kilkenny	Johnstown former Garda station
Kilkenny	Ballyragget former Garda station
Laois	Ballinakill former Garda station
Laois	Ballacolla former Garda station
Leitrim	Cloone former Garda station
Leitrim	Kiltyclogher former Garda station
Leitrim	Dromod former Garda station
Limerick	Doon former Garda station
Longford	Newtowncashel former Garda station
Mayo	Lahardane former Garda station
Meath	Kilmessan former Garda station
Meath	Longwood former Garda station
Meath	Crossakiel former Garda station
Offaly	Geashill former Garda station
Sligo	Aclare former Garda station
Sligo	Easkey former Garda station
Tipperary	Grangemockler former Garda station
Tipperary	Ballinure former Garda station
Tipperary	Dundrum former Garda station
Westmeath	Ballymore former Garda station
Westmeath	Rathowen former Garda station
Westmeath	Ballinahowen former Garda station
Wexford	Baldwinstown former Garda station
Wexford	Ballywilliam former Garda station
Wexford	Kiltealy former Garda station

Garda Station Expenditure

265. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the annual cost of security and maintenance on closed Garda stations that have not been sold by county in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38870/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán

Canney): The full annual cost of security and maintenance on closed Garda stations in 2015 was €172,468.33. A breakdown of this figure on a county by county basis is not readily available in the time available.

Garda Expenditure

266. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide a breakdown of the monthly rental costs including penalties incurred on An Garda Síochána's regional headquarters at Harcourt Square, Dublin 2, from January 2011 to date in 2016. [38354/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán Canney): The monthly rental costs incurred in respect of the accommodation provided to An Garda Síochána in Harcourt Square have not varied since 2011 and amount to €411,129 per month. There is no provision for rental penalties under the terms of the leases for the Harcourt Square complex.

Public Sector Pay

267. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his views on the different set of circumstances that the Labour Court recommendation on Garda pay has created for expenditure but also for limiting the pay improvements in 2017 to €290 million; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38364/16]

268. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he or his Department are considering bringing forward the €1,000 State employee payment as reported in a newspaper (details supplied) on 28 November 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38365/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 267 and 268 together.

The Government has accepted the recommendations from the Labour Court as the basis for resolving the dispute over Garda pay. The cost of the proposed settlement, should it be accepted by the relevant Associations, will be met through agreed budgetary parameters.

The wider implications of the recommendation in relation to the continued operation of the Lansdowne Road Agreement as it applies to all public servants across the public service has received careful consideration and assessment by the Government. On foot of those considerations, the Public Services Committee of ICTU has accepted my invitation to discussions under Section 6 (oversight and governance arrangements) of the Lansdowne Road Agreement. These discussions, which are expected to conclude before the end of January next, will seek to address the anomalies arising for other parties to the Lansdowne Road Agreement from the recent recommendations issued by the Labour Court in relation to the Industrial Relations disputes with members of An Garda Síochána.

The priorities for Government in upcoming discussions will be to:

- secure the continued implementation of the Lansdowne Road Agreement;
- maintain the productivity, industrial peace and stability provided by the Agreement, which are of critical importance to the country and its international reputation; and

- to ensure that issues of mutual concern to the parties are addressed in a fair and reasonable way but, above all, in a manner that safeguards existing government expenditure commitments and the broader fiscal position.

I am not going to speculate on any outcome to such discussions.

Flood Relief Schemes

269. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform further to Parliamentary Question No. 152 of 24 November 2016 the name of the appointed consultant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38369/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán Canney): The River Feale Certified Drainage Scheme was constructed by the Commissioners of Public Works between 1951 and 1957. The scheme included the dredging of the Cashen Estuary and comprises of 295kms of river channels, 144 kms of flood defence embankments, 338 bridges/culverts, 193 sluice structures and 1 pumping station located on the River Brick, which was constructed in more recent years. The objective of this scheme was to protect agricultural land from inundation by high tides and to provide drainage outfall to the benefitting area of the scheme. In accordance with Section 37 of the 1945 Arterial Drainage Act, it is incumbent on this Office to maintain the scheme in proper repair and effective condition. The scheme is maintained by a direct labour workforce

On 26 October of this year, following an open procurement process on E-Tenders, the Government's procurement portal, and also published on OJEU - the Official Journal of the European Union - this Office accepted a tender from Black and Veatch Ltd., Redhill, Surrey, England, in partnership with Nicholas O'Dwyer Ltd., Nutgrove Office Park, Dublin, for the provision of consultancy services for the Cashen Estuary Drainage Project.

Stage 1 of this project will consist of identifying the key environmental issues in the study area, which may impact upon possible options and/or which may impose constraints on the viability and/or design of these options; assessing options for, and then develop and design, viable, cost-effective and sustainable options for the Study Area to return the Feale Catchment Drainage Scheme (CDS) to proper repair and effective condition; carrying out an Appropriate Assessment (AA) and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) screening and preparing an Analysis Report for each viable option and Optioneering Report detailing modelling outputs of agreed options and outline design of viable options.

Public Procurement Contracts

270. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will review the area of public procurement in which it is impossible for small businesses in the locality of a Government institution or facility to participate in the tendering process to be awarded the contract to provide goods and services. [38404/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Public Procurement is governed by EU and National rules. The aim of these rules is to promote an open, competitive and non-discriminatory public procurement regime which delivers best value for money. It would be a breach of the EU rules for a public body to discriminate against or favour particular candidates on grounds such as locality, nationality, organisation size, etc. and there are legal remedies which may be used against any public body infringing these rules.

However, there is a recognition at EU Level of the need to promote and facilitate SME participation in public procurement. The new EU Directives on Procurement, transposed into Irish law last May, are intended to make it easier for businesses and SMEs to tender for public sector procurement contracts. Measures specifically designed to improve access for SMEs and start-ups include:

- financial capacity criterion is now less demanding; it is generally limited to twice contract value;
- eprocurement;
- the discretion to divide public contracts into lots, with the proviso that opting not to divide a contract into lots must be explained in the procurement documents; and - provision for “consortia bidding” to encourage SME involvement.

A number of these measures had been accelerated into policy in 2014 in advance of the transposition of the new Directives by Circular 10/14, issued by the Office of Government Procurement (OGP). The reform of public procurement across the public service is on-going and will continue to provide opportunities to the SME sector to win business. The OGP works with industry to ensure that winning government business is done in a fair, transparent and accessible way and to ensure that government procurement policies are business friendly. It does this by facilitating quarterly meetings of an SME Advisory Group, chaired by my colleague, Minister of State Eoghan Murphy who has responsibility for public procurement, so that the voice of Irish SMEs (including ISME, IBEC, SFA, Chambers Ireland, and CIF) can be heard by Government. SMEs are also encouraged to register of the Government’s etenders portal so that they can be notified of upcoming tendering opportunities.

The OGP works with the SME industry representative bodies as well as the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, InterTrade Ireland and Enterprise Ireland to promote the engagement of SMEs in public procurement. Evidence of the work and co-operation in the area can be seen in some of the following events organised by InterTrade Ireland and supported by the OGP in 2016:

- thirteen “Go-2-Tender” workshops attended by 179 businesses; and
- two “Meet the Buyer” events were held in 2016, one in Belfast and a new Regional/Opportunity driven approach was piloted in Cork. These events were attended by over 900 businesses and buyers from across the public sector, North and South, which focused on the opportunities for SMEs with major public sector buyers across the island

Similar events took place in 2015 and more are planned for 2017.

Minister of State Murphy launched the OGP’s Public Service Spend and Tendering Analysis for 2014 Report in September. The data analysed indicates that 95% of the State’s expenditure is with firms within the State and the majority of the spend analysed is with SMEs. Equally important, in terms of SME access to government business, is the report’s highlighting that, in the majority of spend areas, the typical tender value is less €100,000. The OGP has also conducted an analysis of the 94 Framework Agreements it has concluded to date. The data shows that 68% of Framework members are SMEs and 63% of the Frameworks had multiple lots, facilitating SME access. These findings show that SMEs are successful in Public Procurement competitions in Ireland and the initiatives outlined will ensure they continue to compete and be successful in future Public Tendering opportunities.

Public Parks Conveniences

271. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the Office of Public Works will improve toilet facilities at the Phoenix Park for families using the park; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38554/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán Canney): The Commissioners of Public Works provide public toilet facilities at the Phoenix Park Visitor Centre. These toilets are well maintained and hygiene standards are checked and recorded regularly by the incumbent concessionaire of the café. It will, in time, be necessary to provide greater toilet capacity to deal with the steadily increasing visitor numbers to the Phoenix Park.

Drainage Schemes

272. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if a person (details supplied) in County Kerry will be reimbursed for remedial works they had to carry out on their lands following the construction of a roadway by the Office of Public Works; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38650/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán Canney): The location referred to by the Deputy forms part of the Maine Catchment Drainage Scheme (CDS) which was carried out by the Office of Public Works (OPW) under the Arterial Drainage Act, 1945. The River Maine CDS consists of 228 km of channel, 96 km of embankment, 130 bridges and 210 sluice outfall structures. The OPW has a statutory responsibility for the maintenance of this scheme.

OPW constructed a haul road to facilitate access to repair a breached flood defence embankment on this scheme. At the time, this Office also undertook some remedial works (including placing top soil on the haul road) to restore the land in question. OPW is not aware of works that the land owner had to undertake himself, nor is it aware of any payments that were withheld. If the land owner has a specific claim for reimbursement or compensation from this Office, he should submit it and it will be given consideration under the terms of the Arterial Drainage Acts 1945 and 1995.

Departmental Staff Promotions

273. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the processes he has in place to ensure his Department's approval is given before the commencement of any administrative process for internal promotion competitions within any Department or agency of the Government; if these processes have been reviewed in view of events at Horse Racing Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38799/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Government Departments have been working under delegated sanction arrangements for their recruitment and staffing issues since 2015. Under these arrangements, which are in place for most central Government department and offices, there are multi-annual pay ceilings agreed and set and thereafter decisions about recruitment and promotion and overall grade composition up to an including Principal Officer level are devolved. Departments and offices are required to honour the pay ceilings and comply with workforce planning obligations.

As the Deputy will be aware, in general, selection competitions within the Irish Civil Service take place by way of;

- competitions confined to particular Departments (Internal promotion) or
- from competitions open to candidates from all Departments (Interdepartmental promotion) or
- from open competitions to all eligible candidates including members of the public

Candidates who are successful at a competition are ranked in order of merit and are placed on panels to await appointment when and if a vacancy arises. Recruitment and promotions are made on the basis of an agreed method of sequence. Within the civil service, sequences vary for each grade and usually involve a combination of open, interdepartmental and internal panels. Qualification and placement on a panel is not a guarantee of appointment to a position.

I understand that sections 21 and 22 of the Irish Horseracing Industry Act, 1994 set out the manner in which both the CEO and staff can be appointed to Horse Racing Ireland. In the case of the CEO, the appointment is approved by the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine with my consent. However, I have no responsibility in respect of the internal administrative processes of Horse Racing Ireland.

Defence Forces Personnel

274. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the interactions, including dates of contact, dates of meetings and so on which his Department has had with the Department of Defence or with the Defence Forces in regard to the possible future appointment of a captain NS in the Naval Service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38800/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): My Department has recently received correspondence from the Department of Defence on this matter and will respond to that Department in due course.

Animal Welfare

275. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if her attention has been drawn to an incident on 26 November 2016 (details supplied) during which a number of dogs were put down after breaking into the club compound and killing a number of hares; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38358/16]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department is aware of the occurrence of a recent incident relating to hares captured and in captivity for the meeting in question. It is understood that the meeting was scheduled to take place on 10 and 11 December but that, following the incident, the coursing club has proposed that it be rescheduled for next January. While full details are not clear at this stage, I have asked for a comprehensive report on the incident from the Irish Coursing Club (ICC) from both the perspective of the ICC and of the local coursing club. Officials of my Department are separately investigating the matter locally and have visited the club on several occasions over recent days.

In the meantime, pending completion of investigations and full consideration of the matter,

I have directed the ICC, without prejudice, that the rescheduled meeting should be suspended and that no further hares should be captured for the meeting.

Motor Tax Collection

276. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the status of proposals to give the motor tax renewal scheme to post offices; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38361/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Michael Ring): The Post Office Network Business Development Group, chaired by Mr. Bobby Kerr, was established in late 2014 to examine the potential for new and existing Government and commercial business that could be transacted through the post office network, and to identify new business opportunities for the network. The final report of the Business Development Group, which was published in January of this year, made a number of recommendations to support the future sustainability of post offices. The provision of an additional payment option for motor tax through the Post Office Network is one of the key recommendations suggested by the Group. My officials are currently working with officials from the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government on the potential for a motor tax renewal service to be offered through the post office network. A number of options are currently under active consideration.

I intend to report to Government on this matter in the coming weeks, along with progress made on other recommendations from the final report of the Business Development Group.

Buiséad Údarás na Gaeltachta

277. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den an Aire Ealaíon, Oidhreachta, Gnóthaí Réigiúnacha, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta cad iad na céimeanna atá tógtha aici lena chinntiú go n-úsáidfean an t-airgead breise a cuireadh ar fáil d'Údarás na Gaeltachta don bhliain 2017 le haghaidh comharchumainn agus eagraíochtaí pobalbhunaithe eile chun cur leis an mbundeoantas reáchtála do na heagraíochtaí seo seachas aon ghníomhaíocht eile; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [38578/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Seán Kyne): Ós rud é gur eagraíocht neamhspleách reachtúil é Údarás na Gaeltachta, tuigfidh an Teachta gur faoin eagraíocht féin atá sé breithniú a dhéanamh ar chonas an chistíocht a chuirtear ar fáil dó go bliantúil a chur chun fóinimh i gcomhthéacs na gcúramaí atá sainithe dó, lena n-áirítear na cúramaí a bhaineann leis an bpróiseas pleanála teanga agus forbairt pobail araon. Ar ndóigh, i gcomhthéacs fheidhm mo Roinne mar a bhaineann sé le rialú corparáideach an Údaráis de, leagtar amach, ar bhonn bliantúil, sa litir cheadúcháin agus i bhfoirm Comhaontaithe Leibhéil Seirbhíse, an clár oibre don bhliain, na táscairí feidhmíochta a bhaineann leis, de réir mar is cuí, agus an t-allúntas airgeadais atá á chur ar fáil ón Státhchiste ina leith, chomh maith le coinníollacha ábhartha an mhaoinithe sin.

Historical Records

278. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the efforts being made to keep a document (details supplied) within the own-

ership of the State; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38598/16]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): There exist a number of historically important original documents in the possession of the State written by the individual, referred to by the Deputy. Following consultation with the relevant institutions under the aegis of my Department, it is a shared view that the amount being sought for this document – between €1m and €1.5m - was not justifiable in terms of expenditure of public moneys and in the context of historical material already held.

Scéim na gCúntóirí Teanga

279. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** den an Aire Ealaíon, Oidhreachta, Gnóthaí Réigiúnacha, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta cén fáth go bhfuil gearradh siar breis agus €41,000 déanta ar dheontas Muintearas (Iarthar/Iar-Thuaisceart agus Contae na Mí) i leith Scéim na gCúntóirí Teanga don scoilbhliain 2016/2017 ach, ag an am céanna, go bhfuil moladh déanta aici 13 scoil bhreise a bheith i gceist faoin scéim (4 cinn i nDún na nGall); an ndéanfaidh sí cur síos ar an gclár ama do na poist úra seo atá geallta ag an Aire Stáit agus ar cathain a bheidh siad ar fáil; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [38671/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Seán Kyne): Mar is eol don Teachta, tá deontas de bhreis ar €548,600 in iomlán ceadaithe agam do Mhuintearas Teo don scoilbhliain 2016/17 le cumasú dóibh beartais Scéim na gCúntóirí Teanga a chur i bhfeidhm thar ceann mo Roinne i nDún na nGall, i gceantar an Iarthair agus i gCo na Mí. Níl aon ghearradh siar déanta ar an maoiniú ó 2015/2016 ná ar na scoileanna atá páirteach. Mar atá ráite agam cheana, t á mé sásta i bprionsabal cúnaimh a chur ar fáil i gcás scoileanna agus cúntóirí breise áirithe ach gach cás ar leith a bheith pléite le mo Roinn se agus aontaithe i gcomhar leis an Roi nn Oideachais agus Scoileanna. Ina thaobh sin, tá iarrtha agam ar oifigigh mo Roinne anailís a dhéanamh ar riachtanais na scoileanna breise i nDún na nGall agus moltaí ina thaobh sin a chur faoi mo bhráid go luath.

Ar ndóigh ní miste a mheabhrrú don Teachta go bhfuil sé aontaithe leis an Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna go ndéanfar athbhreithniú iomlán ar Scéim na gCúntóirí Teanga mar chuid den Pholasaí don Oideachas Gaeltachta 2017-2022 a foilsíodh le déa naí.

Disability Support Services Provision

280. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the provision of transport to a person (details supplied) and other day services for adults with learning difficulties who lose their transport once they turn 18 years of age; if he will extend this transport provision above 18 years of age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38292/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The provision of transport to adults with a disability attending HSE-funded day services is not a core health service, and the HSE endeavours to ensure that all service users access public transport, including rural transport services, if possible. In recognition of the challenges which some service users experience in relation to accessible transport, some transport is provided by disability service providers on a case by case basis as resources allow. Service providers are continuously reviewing their transport arrangements to ensure that they are used as effectively and equitably as possible within available resources, and will continue to keep the matter under review.

As the Deputy's question relates to a service matter, I have arranged for the question to be

referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Health Services Provision

281. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the policy of the HSE on the services provided by chiropractors privately; if there is any equivalent service from the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38282/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Chiropractors are not a regulated health profession and are not employed in the public health sector. Neuromuscular and musculoskeletal services are provided in the public health service by physiotherapists in both hospital and community care settings. Neither the Minister nor the HSE has any role in the provision of services by chiropractors in the private sector.

Ambulance Service Staff

282. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 564 of 15 November 2016, the reason the subsequent response issued by the Ambulance Service does not include the data requested in respect of staff turnover rates within the service; if this information will be provided specifically within the past five-year period, by year, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38299/16]

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

Community Drug Schemes

283. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if he will review the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38319/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply.

HSE Correspondence

284. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the delay by the HSE in responding to a submitted representation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38326/16]

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.

Vaccination Programme Data

285. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Health the advertising budget for the years 2010 to 2015 for immunisation programmes by sector (details supplied). [38332/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the question being asked by the Deputy relates to a service matter I have referred the question to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply.

Vaccination Programme

286. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Health the cost of the Gardasil vaccination programme administered by the HSE on behalf of his Department for each of the years 2010 to 2016 to date. [38333/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the question being asked by the Deputy relates to a service matter I have referred the question to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply.

Vaccination Programme Data

287. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Health the projected number of persons annually that will be saved as a result of the Gardasil vaccination programme and any research documents to support any claims; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38334/16]

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

Each year in Ireland around 300 women are diagnosed with cervical cancer and there are approximately 70 deaths per year. The HPV vaccine protects against two high risk types of HPV (16 & 18) that cause 73% of all cervical cancers. Vaccinated women and girls will still be at risk from other high risk types of HPV that can cause cervical cancer and will therefore need to continue to have regular cervical smear tests. NIAC recommended that the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine be given to all girls aged 12-13 in 2009 and in September 2010 the HPV vaccination programme was introduced for all girls in first year of second level schools.

Vaccination Programme

288. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Health his views on whether the success of the current smear test as administered by the HSE may be interpreted as justifying the success of the Gardasil vaccine. [38335/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In 2009 the National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC) recommended HPV vaccination for all 12 year old girls to reduce their risk of cervical cancer and in September 2010 the HPV vaccination programme was introduced for all girls in first year of second level schools. The programme provides vaccination for all first year girls. In September 2011 a catch up programme started for all girls in second level school and the 2013/2014 campaign was the final year of this programme.

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

Cervical Check is a national screening programme to prevent and control cervical cancer. The programme provides smear tests to women between the ages of 25 and 60. As the girls vaccinated under this programme have not reached the age of 25 it is not possible yet to assess the success of the HPV vaccine in reducing the incidence of cervical cancer in Ireland.

Medical Card Eligibility

289. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the status of his plans to extend the entitlement to a medical card for all children in receipt of the domiciliary care allowance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38343/16]

335. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health when children who are recipients of domiciliary care allowance will be approved for full medical cards without assessments, as promised in July 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38545/16]

386. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the provision of medical cards for persons in receipt of the domiciliary care allowance; when they will receive their medical cards; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38827/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 289, 335 and 386 together.

I have recently received permission from Government for my Department to prepare the Heads and General Scheme of a Bill to give children in receipt of DCA automatic entitlement to a medical card. This new legislation will effectively mean that all children in respect of whom a DCA payment is made will automatically qualify for a medical card and, therefore, no longer be subject to the medical cards means test at any point in the future while in receipt of DCA. It is my objective to have this legislation prepared and brought before the Oireachtas as quickly as possible. In addition to the preparation of the legislation, I have asked the HSE, so that the proposal can be implemented in a smooth and efficient manner, to commence the process of planning for the requirements of the scheme and how the cards will issue.

Ministerial Hospital Visits

290. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the purpose of his visit to University Hospital Waterford on 28 November 2016; the reason it was an unannounced visit; the detail of the persons who accompanied him on his visit; the detail of the persons he met and the topics discussed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38357/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Since taking office I have embarked on a series of hospital visits and have found them extremely beneficial. I had announced many times my intention to visit University Hospital Waterford and was pleased to be able to do on the 28th November. Along with my Government colleague, Minister Halligan, I met with the

Executive Management Board, a group of cardiologists and a broad range of staff with whom I discussed a number of the services provided at the hospital including the increased attendances at the Emergency Department and the additional support being made available to the hospital under this year's Winter Initiative, cardiology services and plans for the new palliative care unit as well as recruitment efforts currently underway. I was accompanied by senior officials from my Department's Acute Hospitals Policy Division and Press Office, my Special Adviser and HSE senior officials.

Hospital Appointments Status

291. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38370/16]

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.

Health Services Staff Recruitment

292. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the reason a psychologist has not been appointed to County Kildare for children requiring such services; if his attention has been drawn to the large demand for such services in an area with a disproportionately large young population; if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that County Kildare is now the fourth most populated county; if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that no philological services have been available for at least 18 months and many urgent cases are being neglected; the number of such posts and the locations that are vacant; the waiting list for such services by area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38371/16]

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.

Hospital Waiting Lists

293. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the longest period for which children in County Wexford are waiting on occupational therapy services; the average length of time children in County Wexford are on the waiting list for occupational therapy; if there are guidelines for waiting lists for children awaiting occupational therapy; if so, if the guidelines are currently being met; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38374/16]

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.

Medicinal Products Availability

294. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Health the policies he and his Department are pursuing to ensure that the drug Orkambi will be available for cystic fibrosis pa-

tients here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38375/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines in the community drugs schemes, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013.

In reaching its decision, the HSE examines all the evidence which may be relevant, in its view, for the decision (including the information/dossier submitted by the company) and will take into account such expert opinions and recommendations that it may have sought at its sole discretion (for example, from the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics).

In considering an application, the HSE will also have regard to Part 1 and Part 3 of Schedule 3 of the 2013 Act. Part 3 requires the HSE to have regard to the following criteria:

- the health needs of the public;
- the cost-effectiveness of meeting health needs by supplying the item concerned rather than providing other health services;
- the availability and suitability of items for supply or reimbursement;
- the proposed costs, benefits and risks of the item or listed item relative to therapeutically similar items or listed items provided in other health service settings and the level of certainty in relation to the evidence of those costs, benefits and risks;
- the potential or actual budget impact of the item or listed item;
- the clinical need for the item or listed item;
- the appropriate level of clinical supervision required in relation to the item to ensure patient safety;
- the efficacy (performance in trial), effectiveness (performance in real situations) and added therapeutic benefit against existing standards of treatment (how much better it treats a condition than existing therapies); and
- the resources available to the HSE.

I am advised that, at the HSE's request, the NCPE carried out an assessment of the manufacturer's economic dossier, submitted in March 2016, on the cost effectiveness of Orkambi. This dossier included details on all relevant costs and cost offsets, such as those associated with hospitalisation, disease management costs, intravenous antibiotics, adverse events and any additional costs arising in patients not taking Orkambi.

The NCPE has completed its health technology assessment. This was submitted to the HSE in June 2016 and is available on the NCPE website. The NCPE determined, following an evaluation of the economic dossier, that the manufacturer failed to demonstrate cost-effectiveness or value for money from using the drug. The NCPE has confirmed that all relevant costs were included in the analysis.

The HSE has recently completed its most recent round of negotiations with the manufacturer. On foot of this, the HSE's Drugs Committee, having considered the NCPE recommendation and other expert advice, is in the process of sending its latest recommendation on the cost-effectiveness of Orkambi to the HSE Directorate. The HSE Directorate will then make a decision, taking into consideration the manufacturer's latest price offer. This decision will be made on objective scientific and economic grounds, in line with the 2013 Act.

I share the HSE's disappointment that the manufacturer in this case has maintained a very high price in negotiations on the potential reimbursement of Orkambi for Irish patients.

I appreciate that this is a very stressful time for cystic fibrosis patients and their families. However, I want to assure them that I do not consider this to be the end of the process. I would strongly urge the manufacturer in this case to fundamentally reconsider its position and to table a pricing proposal that can facilitate the provision of Orkambi for Irish patients, at a price that represents value for money for the health service and the taxpayer.

I would also like to inform the Deputy that I have written to the Health Ministers in England, Scotland, Canada and Australia, asking them to collaborate to try and make progress on accessing Orkambi at a cost effective price for cystic fibrosis patients in each of their countries.

Departmental Reports

295. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of reports that have been commissioned by him since his appointment; the number that have been received by him; the number outstanding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38377/16]

296. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number and cost of all reports commissioned by him, his predecessors, or his Department, in each of the years 2011 to date in 2016 in tabular form; the topics they are investigating; the date of completion; the date of publication; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38378/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 295 and 296 together.

Since my appointment as Minister for Health I have not directly commissioned any reports.

The Department does not collect data in a manner which would allow the Deputy's second question to be answered in full. Published reports for the years in question are available on the Department's website at: <http://health.gov.ie/publications-research/publications/>. Presented in the table below are details from the Department's A7 expenditure for consultant reports commissioned by the Department from March 2011 to December 2015 together with associated costs and publication status as of the latter date. Data for 2016 are not yet available and will be collated and forwarded as soon as possible.

It is the policy in my Department only to engage the services of external consultants where it is felt to be appropriate and cost-effective, taking account of Government decisions and policy including procurement protocols on the matter. Should the Deputy have a particular report for which details are required please provide details to my office and I will arrange for the matter to be followed up.

Year Commenced	Organisation/ Consultants	Name of Report	Status as at De- cember 2015	Cost to Decem- ber 2015
2015	Amarach Re- search	Alcohol Label- ling Research	Report being drafted.	€86,138
2015	NUIG	Suite of Litera- ture Reviews to support National Clinical Guide- lines	Work com- menced	€159,645

Year Commenced	Organisation/ Consultants	Name of Report	Status as at De- cember 2015	Cost to Decem- ber 2015
2015	UCC	Systematic literature review National Early Warning Score update	Ongoing	€22,743
2015	ICF Consulting Services/DKM Economic Consultants	An assessment of the economic costs of smoking in Ireland	Ongoing	€12,449
2015	Prospectus	Code of Conduct for Health and Social Service Providers	Extracts will be published within clinical guidelines	€86,138
2015	UCD	Clinical Handover Guideline	Work ongoing	€86,292
2015	DCU	Management of the Acute Adult Asthma Patient – provision of research	Extracts to be published within clinical guideline	€9,973
2015	DCU	Paediatric Early Warning Score – Pre-implementation research	Extracts to be published within clinical guideline	€24,000
2015	INDECON Economic Consultants	Analysis of potential measures to encourage the provision of Primary Care facilities	Work ongoing	€0
2015	DKM Economic Consultants	Analysis of potential measures to encourage the provision of Nursing Homes and Community Nursing Unit facilities	Work ongoing	€40,221
2014	DCU School of Nursing	Report to support the Taskforce on Staffing and Skill mix for nursing	Will be used to inform the final Report on the Taskforce on Staffing and Skill Mix	€7,418

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Year Commenced	Organisation/ Consultants	Name of Report	Status as at De- cember 2015	Cost to Decem- ber 2015
2014	DCU School of Nursing	Literature Review and Nursing Work- force Evalua- tion to Support the Taskforce on Staffing and Skill Mix	Will be used to inform the Re- port of the Task- force on Staffing and Skill Mix	€19,845
2014	Crowe Horwath	Thematic Analysis of Submissions in response to a Public Con- sultation on the White Paper for Universal Health Insur- ance	Published on Department's website	€39,176
2014	NUI Galway	Systematic literature review Maternity Early Warning Score	Extracts pub- lished within clinical guide- line	€23,935
2014	DCU	Systematic literature review Paediatric Early Warning Score	Extracts will be published within clinical guide- line	€20,095
2014	UCC	Systematic literature review Clinical Practice Guidance	Published on Department's website	€20,712
2014	Sinéad Shannon	Review of the international evidence and lit- erature on selec- tion criteria for the Outcomes Framework	Ongoing	€5,000
2013	Prospectus Strategy Con- sultants	Review of Staff- ing Resources and Organisa- tional Structure of the Depart- ment of Health	Report com- pleted but not published, for Department's use only	€72,940
2013	Deloitte and Touche Consul- tants Ltd	Review of the Nursing Homes Support Scheme	Ongoing	€36,900

Year Commenced	Organisation/ Consultants	Name of Report	Status as at De- cember 2015	Cost to Decem- ber 2015
2013	Matheson Ormsby Pren- tice	Legal Research and advisory services on the design and implementation of an insurance based health system provid- ing universal coverage in Ireland	Not Published	€123,000
2013	Prof Oonagh Walsh	Report on sym- physiotomy in Ireland, 1944- 1984	Not published	€49,500
2013	Ernst & Young	Reports relating to the develop- ment of the Pro- gramme Man- agement Office (cost includes a range of consul- tancy services)	Ongoing – inter- nal reports	€79,212
2013	Dr Sinead Hana- fin & Associates	Review of the Traveller Health Advisory Com- mittee	Finalised	€6,150
2013	Prospectus	Overview of the development of the Health & Wellbeing Programme	Finalised	€15,156
2013	Research Mat- ters	Provision of Re- search Manage- ment Services	Ongoing	€74,490
2013	Institute of Pub- lic Health	Analysis re Consultation (Tobacco Prod- ucts Directive)	Completed - not yet published	€5,000
2013	Professor Ham- mond	Research on Standardised Packaging- Irish Context	Ongoing	€5,000

Questions - Written Answers

Year Commenced	Organisation/ Consultants	Name of Report	Status as at De- cember 2015	Cost to Decem- ber 2015
2013	CJP Consultants	Preparation of report on the efficacy of minimum pricing and other public policies for alcohol.	Published on website	€31,488
2013	Advertis- ing Standards Authority of Ireland	Annual Report of the Alcohol Marketing Communications Monitoring Body (AM-CMB)	Published	€21,115
2012	McGee Pharma International	Labelling of Medicinal Products in both Irish and English	Completed	€13,644
2012	Goodbody Stockbrokers and Matheson Ormsby Pren- tice Solicitors	Further Analysis of Options in relation to the restructuring of the Irish Private Health Insurance Market	Report com- pleted	€62,349
2012	Department of Public Expendi- ture and Reform with the assis- tance of PwC	Review of the Department of Health's Parliamentary and Legislative Processes	Report com- pleted but not published - for Department's use only	€18,020
2012	Department of Public Expendi- ture and Reform	A survey of experience and qualifications in the Department of Health	Report com- pleted but not published - for Department's use only	None
2012	Michael Collins Associates	Supplementary Report and Addendum on Cost Comparison for the Dolphin Review Group	Completed not published, commercially sensitive	€12,423

Year Commenced	Organisation/ Consultants	Name of Report	Status as at De- cember 2015	Cost to Decem- ber 2015
2012	John Martin	Further assess- ment of plan- ning issues in relation to proposed sites for the Dolphin Review Group	Published	€6,000
2012	Simon Clear	Further assess- ment of plan- ning issues in relation to proposed sites for the Dolphin Review Group	Published	€9,475
2012	The Department of Epidemiol- ogy and Public Health, UCC, in conjunction with the Cen- tre for Health Policy and Man- agement, TCD.	The Efficiency Review of the BreastCheck Screening Pro- gramme	Published	€71,270
2012	Mr Gerard Mul- laly	Reforming Chronic Care: Financing and Delivering Inte- grated Chronic Care	Not published	€5,227
2012	Mr Gerard Mul- laly	The Integrated Continuing Care System (ICCS): Reforming Elderly Care in Ireland	Not published	€7,558
2012	Matheson Ormsby Pren- tice	Options Ap- praisal of multi- payer universal health insurance models: Prelimi- nary advice	Not Published	€6,150

Year Commenced	Organisation/ Consultants	Name of Report	Status as at De- cember 2015	Cost to Decem- ber 2015
2012	Department of Health / SIRA Consulting	Report on the baseline measurement of the administrative burden from the Department of Health (as part of a cross Departmental project coordinated by Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation)	Published 2013	€14,000
2011	Goodbody Stockbrokers and Matteson Ormsby Prentice Solicitors	Commissioned to undertake a review of the Irish Private Health Insurance Market in Relation to the options which may exist for re-balancing	Report completed	€300,000

Departmental Meetings

297. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of meetings that have taken place with the chief executive officer of the HSE, or other senior HSE directors, since his appointment; the decisions taken as a result of those meetings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38379/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): There is daily engagement between senior Departmental Staff and their counterparts in HSE. I personally have taken part in over thirty meetings with the HSE, the majority of which have focussed on the implementation of Winter Initiative and Emergency Department overcrowding, and the implementation of the Waiting List action plan. These meetings include the Director General and the relevant National Directors. I also attend meetings of the ED Taskforce with the Director General and National Directors.

In addition, my Department has a monthly meeting with senior HSE staff to review ongoing performance issues and effective implementation of remedial actions.

Hospital Overcrowding

298. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide a report on the current activities being undertaken as part of the 2016-2017 winter initiative; the amount that has been expended to date; the amount that remains from the originally allocated budget; the

progress that has been made in terms of reducing the number of persons waiting on trolleys; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38380/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): It is unacceptable that patients wait on trolleys for long periods especially elderly and vulnerable patients. Over the coming months it is essential that the health service plans effectively for expected surges in emergency care demand. My Department, working with the HSE, has been driving a range of measures to improve patient ED experience times.

Following the formation of Government an additional €40 million was provided to assist in the management of winter pressures. Utilising this additional funding the HSE developed the Winter Initiative Plan 2016 – 2017 which was published in September. Key aspects of this plan are being implemented at hospital and community services level across the country.

I have been advised by the HSE that as of 2 December 2016, the remaining balance of the winter initiative to be spent is €6.6m. The HSE are confident the remainder of the funding will be fully spent by the end of the year in order to help as many patients as possible.

One of the key targets of the Winter Initiative is to reduce delayed discharges nationally from 638 at the commencement of this initiative to less than 500 by the end of the year. The HSE is on course to meet this target with the number of delayed discharges nationally now at 525, as of end November. Over 4,100 patients have availed of Community Intervention Team services, meaning that these patients were able to avoid hospital or be discharged earlier from hospital.

Also under the Initiative, over 3,300 patients have availed of aids and appliances, enabling them to be discharged from hospital sooner. 420 additional homecare packages have been made available and 190 additional transitional care beds have been approved since early October. These have enabled patients to be discharged from hospital back to their homes or to alternative transitional care centres. In addition, 18 step-down beds have opened in the Mercy Hospital in Cork.

On 1 December the HSE convened a Winter Initiative Health Summit where I met with Hospital Group CEOs, as well as hospital and Community Health Organisation managers, to reinforce the importance of driving key performance improvements across primary, acute and social care to reduce ED overcrowding and to plan for expected surges in demand in our EDs in the New Year.

I can assure the Deputy that there is a very strong focus on reducing ED overcrowding in all my interactions with the HSE, hospitals and the wider health service.

Hospital Waiting Lists

299. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number of children in County Wexford on a waiting list for occupational therapy; the number of children in County Wexford awaiting occupational therapy services for up to 12 months, up to 24 months and up to 36 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38381/16]

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.

Hospitals Expenditure

300. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the total amount of money spent on cyber and IT security by each hospital across all seven hospital groups for each of the years 2013 to 2016 to date in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38382/16]

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

Ambulance Service

301. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health the amount of money ring-fenced under budget 2017 for the progression of the new ambulance station in Edenderry, County Offaly, as was committed to by the Minister for State with responsibility for health promotion in a recent local meeting with the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38384/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I can confirm that considerable progress has been made on the Edenderry ambulance base project to date. A design team has been appointed, the design is being progressed and planning permission has been received. At the request of my colleague, the Minister for State for Health Promotion, Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy, I am due to meet a deputation, together with senior HSE officials, to discuss the project later this month. I understand that the Minister for State for Health Promotion's recent commitment was that she would seek to arrange this meeting and I am very happy to facilitate her and her colleagues in this regard.

The HSE has recently submitted its Capital Plan for 2017. This Plan is currently being reviewed by my Department and requires my approval with the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

Services for People with Disabilities

302. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health the action plan that has been put in place as a result of local meetings with HSE management in order to address the ongoing issues affecting children in counties Laois and Offaly with disabilities; the timeframe for resolution of these matters; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38388/16]

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

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

Ambulance Service

303. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health the number of ambulances that will

operate out of the new station in Edenderry, County Offaly, when it is completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38389/16]

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

Ambulance Service

304. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health the number of ambulances that will be accommodated at the temporary accommodation for the ambulance service in north Offaly; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38390/16]

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

Services for People with Disabilities

305. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health the number of private or agency psychologists who are currently employed to advance the progressing disability services initiative; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38391/16]

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

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

Home Care Packages Funding

306. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health when funding will be made available to fund those persons who find themselves in a situation with the home care packages which are being sanctioned at present whereby hours are being allocated, and the HSE is then advising persons that funding to fund those hours is not available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38398/16]

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.

Drug Treatment Programmes

307. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the reason there is a waiting list of between 13 and 20 months in County Kildare to get on a methadone programme despite the fact that there is no local drugs task force; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[38405/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): The South Western Regional Drugs and Alcohol Task Force is responsible for working with communities in County Kildare in order to co-ordinate the implementation of the National Drugs Strategy in the area.

As the specific issue raised by Deputy is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Addiction Treatment Services

308. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health his plans to cut funding for addiction services in counties Kildare and west Wicklow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38406/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): Reflecting the Government's commitment to a health-led response to drug use, an additional €3m in funding has been provided in the 2017 budget to increase support for interventions aimed at improving the health outcomes of those affected by addiction.

In relation to Kildare and West Wicklow, the Department of Health has provided Drugs Initiative funding of €102,820 to the South West Regional Drug and Alcohol Task Force this year. A further €696,497 has been provided to the Task Force by the HSE in 2016, giving a total of €799,317 for the year. This is the same level of funding provided from both sources in 2014 and 2015 and will be maintained at this level in 2017.

I have asked the HSE to investigate the position in relation to the provision of funding for addiction services more generally in Kildare and west Wicklow and to reply to the Deputy directly.

Occupational Therapy

309. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of waiting lists for children for occupational therapy assessments (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38415/16]

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.

Services for People with Disabilities

310. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health when funding for nursing care to enable two persons (details supplied) attend school will be provided in view of the commitment given by him in early October 2016 that this funding was available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38421/16]

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.

With regard to this particular matter, the Minister has met and been in contact with a number of parents concerned about this issue and has asked the HSE to work to resolve it. Accordingly I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Mental Health Services Report

311. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the status of the implementation of each of the recommendations of 15.1.1 to 15.1.9, inclusive, of a Vision for Change; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38425/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): Significant progress has been made on implementation of *A Vision for Change*, underpinned by the substantial additional funding provided by Government since 2012. Including funding agreed in the recent Budget, the HSE budget for mental health services will be in the region of €850m next year for mental health. All aspects of adult and child and adolescent services are being developed, including acute and community based services, along with forensic mental health services. Detailed service improvements are reflected each year in the HSE National Service Plans and the HSE Mental Health Division Operational Plans, available on the HSE website.

The HSE National Forensic Mental Health Service provides specialist forensic services to those referred from the Irish Prison Service, and the Youth Justice Service. It also provides consultation and advice to An Garda Síochána, and the Courts Service of Ireland. Every effort is made to ensure that forensics mental health care provision is in accordance with the recommendations of *A Vision for Change*, including legal considerations and person-centred and recovery-based approaches on an inter-agency basis.

In relation to Recommendation 15.1.1, all prisoners are medically assessed on committal to prison. This includes a mental health assessment which can be employed to develop an individual care plan. Where clinically indicated, the prisoner is referred to a forensic clinician who, subject to his/her findings, may make certain recommendations to the Governor for the care of the prisoner. Prisoners on release, are entitled to be referred to the HSE mental health services in the normal way.

In regard to 15.1.2, the National Forensic Mental Health Service (NFMHS) at the Central Mental Hospital (CMH) at Dundrum provides a Mental Health Prison In-Reach and Court Diversion Service (PICLS) programme to the Irish Prison Service. The diversion system ensures as far as possible that those people presenting before the courts, or indeed at an earlier stage of the criminal justice system, where the infraction is a reflection of an underlying mental illness, are referred and treated appropriately. This approach has reduced the number of mentally ill people committed to prison, under sentence. An Interdepartmental Group is looking at what further improvements can be made on the issue of persons with mental illness and their interaction with the Criminal Justice System.

The recommendation reflected in 15.1.3 refers to increasing community based forensic mental health teams. Full multi-disciplinary teams will be established in 2017 connected to

Castlerea, Limerick and Cork prisons.

Planning permission for a new modern Forensic mental health facility in Portrane to replace the Central Mental Hospital in Dundrum, was granted in June 2015. Phase 1 of the project comprises a new 120-bed hospital, as reflected in Recommendation 15.1.4, along with a new 10-bed Child and Adolescent Mental Health unit (Recommendation 15.1.6) and a new 10-bed Mental Health Intellectual Disability unit (Recommendation 15.1.7). I was pleased to secure the significant additional capital funding in Budget 2017, to allow construction to commence on Phase 1 early next year, with a view to the new facilities coming on-stream in 2019. Phase 2 of the project envisages the provision of regional Intensive Care Rehabilitation Units, as resources allow over the longer term.

In relation to 15.1.5, there are a number of prison based multi-disciplinary groups that provide information and support in the area of mental health to prisoners. There are consultant-led forensic mental health in-reach teams in all the prisons in Ireland at present except for Castlerea where it is hoped to provide an appropriate service in early 2017. The Irish Prison Service (IPS) is seeking to advance a robust system that would see integration and further development of services with statutory and voluntary partners. Mental health service provision in prisons must form part of the overall community response to this cohort of prisoners. Current arrangements with the Central Mental Hospital are a good example of collaborative working. In addition to healthcare input, the IPS Psychology Service provides ongoing evidence informed therapeutic approaches to those referred to the service who are suffering from mental health difficulties.

The implementation of Recommendations 15.1.8 and 15.1.9 are being progressed on a joint basis by the health and judicial systems. This involves, for example, the HSE National Forensic Mental Health service, An Garda Síochána and the Irish Prison Service. The NFMHS provides regular training to An Garda Síochána and the Garda training college at Templemore also delivers training as part of the training of all new Garda trainees. The Forensic service provides an advisory service to the Garda negotiation team, and has established links to local gardaí. In 2017 it is planned to develop structured links to Divisional gardaí. Good progress has been made in recent years, arising from the significant additional funding given to mental health, including the modernisation of the NFMHS and by progressing the work of the Interdepartmental Group on those with mental health issues coming into contact with the criminal justice system.

I recently commenced a review of all aspects of *A Vision for Change*, to help inform policy and service development in the future. In this regard, I will bear in mind the issues raised by the Deputy.

Mental Health Services Data

312. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number of counties which have a seven-day support team for mental health; the details of same in each case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38427/16]

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.

Mental Health Services Data

313. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number of counties which have a home care team for supporting persons with mental health; the detail of same in each

case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38428/16]

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.

Accident and Emergency Departments Data

314. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number of hospitals which have a psychiatric nurse employed in emergency departments; the detail of same in each case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38429/16]

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.

Mental Health Services Funding

315. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the list of agencies funded by NOSP, National Office for Suicide Prevention, in 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38430/16]

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.

Health Services Staff

316. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if wages, holiday pay and all other entitlements due to a person (details supplied) will be paid to them immediately; if a reference will be provided for the person; if the pension entitlements can be transferred to their private pension provider; if so, if the HSE will make arrangements with the person; and if he will expedite the matter in view of the fact they resigned in September 2016. [38431/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

Health Products Regulatory Authority

317. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health the channels available to members of the public to raise concerns or make complaints regarding beliefs concerning widespread malpractice and policy failure in the health service, in the area of medical research and the trial use of certain drugs, or similar medical or drug related research undertaken by other areas in the public service such as the education sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38433/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) is the agency responsible for the authorisation of clinical trials with medicinal products (medicines) conducted in Ireland. In addition to an authorisation from the HPRA, clinical trials also require a positive opinion from an ethics committee that is recognised by the Department of Health, prior to being commenced. The types of trials authorised range from first-in-man trials for new medicines to studies with medicines which already have marketing authorisations.

Clinical trials in Ireland are governed by the European Communities (Clinical Trials on Medicinal Products for Human Use) Regulations 2004, S.I. No. 190 of 2004. These Regulations transposed into Irish law the provisions of Council Directive 2001/20/EC and superseded the Control of Clinical Trials Acts 1987–1990 for clinical trials using medicinal products.

The Regulations require that all clinical trials covered by the provisions of the Regulations are designed, conducted and reported in accordance with the principles of Good Clinical Practice (GCP), a set of internationally recognised ethical and scientific quality requirements that must be observed for clinical trials involving human subjects. Compliance with GCP provides assurance that the rights, safety and well-being of trial subjects are protected, and that the results of the clinical trials are accurate and credible.

As the competent authority for the Regulations, the HPRA may carry out GCP inspections of trial sites in order to establish compliance with relevant legislation and guidelines. A trial site can be defined as any location where trial-related activities are conducted. Therefore, an inspection can occur at an investigator site, sponsor company site, laboratory site, manufacturing site or at other establishments deemed appropriate by the regulatory authority. The HPRA also requires that an annual safety report is submitted for any trial which is ongoing in Ireland.

Any member of the public who has concerns over the conduct of a specific clinical trial for a medicinal product should contact the HPRA in the first instance. Members of the public may raise concerns relating to the areas which the HPRA regulates directly with the HPRA by letter, e-mail or phone, or alternatively, by contacting the Office of the Ombudsman.

National Children's Hospital

318. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 180 of 23 November 2016, the cost in legal fees after the HSE acquired the freehold interest in a portion of the site at St. James's at a cost of €110,000; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38441/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to this issue I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Health Services Funding

319. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Health if he will increase the funding for counsellor and neuro-physiotherapist services for persons that who have suffered aneurysms or strokes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38447/16]

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

Mental Health Services Data

320. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number of children waiting on services from CAMHS for less than 12 months, less than 24 months and less than 36 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38459/16]

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.

Mental Health Services Data

321. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number of CAMHS teams that offer an out-of-hours service by county in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38460/16]

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.

Invalidity Pension Eligibility

322. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) who is in receipt of an invalidity allowance and has health issues will be allowed to retire on health grounds from their employment in the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38461/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

General Practitioner Services

323. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons in County Laois who have been refused access to a general practitioner service under the medical card system in view of the fact the general practitioner lists are full; his plans to deal with persons that need to be taken on by a local general practitioner; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38462/16]

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 with the HSE to provide services to eligible patients under the General Medical Services (GMS) scheme.

Where a GMS patient experiences difficulty in finding a GP to accept him/her as a patient, the HSE has the power to assign an eligible person to a GP's GMS patient list where the person has been removed from another GP's list or refused entry onto a GP's list, and the person has unsuccessfully applied to at least three GPs in the area, who are contracted to provide services under the GMS.

In relation to the information requested specific to Co. Laois, as this is a service matter, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the HSE for direct reply to you.

Mental Health Services Staff

324. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the status of the allocation of the posts from the 2015 €35 million funding for mental health; the number of posts this allocation supports; the number that have been filled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38465/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): The Mental Health Budget has been increased by around €115 million since 2012 to present. 1500 posts were approved for recruitment up to the end of 2015 from this funding. Approximately, 1,150 of these new development posts have been filled since 2012. The allocation of posts funded by the €35 million development funding in 2015 has been completed, with 390 posts recruited in that year, now in place.

Disability Services Provision

325. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 228 of 6 October 2016, if he will ensure that a response is provided by either him or the HSE to a proposal from a project (details supplied) without any further delay. [38474/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I understand that the Health Service Executive replied to the Deputy's earlier Parliamentary Question on 28th November, 2016. From my earlier reply to the Deputy, she will be aware that the Minister for Health, along with Department and Health Service Executive (HSE) officials, recently met with representatives of An Saol Project, at which they outlined their ideas for the project.

The Programme for Partnership Government includes a commitment to publish "a plan for advancing neuro-rehabilitation services in the community." A National Steering Group, chaired by the Head of the HSE's Disability Reform Team, has completed an implementation framework in respect of the recommendations from the *National Policy and Strategy for the Provision of Neuro-rehabilitation Services in Ireland 2011 - 2015*. The Group is currently considering feedback on the framework, which was circulated to wider stakeholder interest groups. The HSE intends to finalise and progress implementation of the framework for the Neuro-rehabilitation Strategy in 2017. I understand that the HSE will consider proposals for specialised services for people with severe acquired brain injury in the broader context of the finalisation of the implementation framework and available resources.

As the Deputy's question relates to a service matter, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the HSE for an updated reply to be issued directly to the Deputy.

Drug Treatment Programmes

326. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 993 of 16 September 2016, the number of convicted persons under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1977 that are in receipt of custodial medical treatment or care in the Central Mental Hospital in Dundrum in each of the years 2011 to 2016 to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38497/16]

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.

Health Services

327. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38527/16]

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

service matter it has been referred to the HSE for reply.

Hospital Staff

328. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health his plans regarding the severe staff shortages in the maternity unit at Mayo University Hospital, particularly in view of the strike action being taken by INMO midwives at the hospital due to what they describe as a severe shortage of midwives and ongoing clinical risks to mothers and babies at the hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38529/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Further to the recent threat of industrial action taken by INMO midwifery staff regarding staffing shortages in the maternity unit in Mayo University Hospital (MUH), local management and Saolta Group HR have been in regular contact with the INMO on this matter and management are endeavouring to address it. Both parties have agreed to refer the matter to the Workforce Relations Commission for their assistance in seeking a resolution, and any industrial action by the INMO has been suspended pending those discussions taking place.

There are currently no permanent vacant posts in the maternity department/labour ward. There were four midwives appointed in 2016 to vacant posts and two WTE maternity leaves are replaced by new graduates of September 2016.

In terms of additional posts, MUH is currently in the process of recruiting a Bereavement Clinical Nurse Specialist and has established a training position for obstetric sonography. It has sought approval for a number of new posts for the Maternity Department including a Clinical Midwife Manager 3, Clinical Midwife Specialist Lactation Consultant, Clinical Midwife Manager 2 shift leaders, which will amount to four whole time equivalents; obstetric emergency staffing for the out of hours theatre service and a clinical audit nurse. MUH is working with the Saolta Group and the HSE nationally in relation to these posts. Interviews for a new post of Director of Midwifery will take place this month and if a suitable candidate can be identified it is expected the post will be filled early next year. Significant work has been and is being undertaken in relation to supporting the maternity services at Mayo University Hospital.

Mental Health Policy

329. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health if there is a system in place whereby persons in mental health institutions who do not have any family members to advocate for them have an advocate assigned to them; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38531/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): I agree with the Deputy that it is important that persons who suffer from a mental illness, particularly when they are receiving treatment in a psychiatric hospital, should have access to supports where they wish to raise personal matters and perhaps do not have family members or others available to them for that purpose.

The Irish Advocacy Network is an independent, mental health organisation led by people with personal experience of mental health difficulties who provide a Peer Advocacy Service across the island of Ireland. Because their advocates have self-experience, the Network seeks to build a strong affinity with, and empathy towards clients. The services they provide promote recovery by offering advocacy, information and support to their clients. Their ultimate aim is

to enable people with mental health difficulties to self-advocate, to support them in having their voice heard and to allow them grow in confidence and claim their rights. The service is confidential and free. Contact details for the Irish Advocacy Network are available on their website at www.irishadvocacynetwork.com.

Mental Health Services Funding

330. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the need for more funding for mental health for community based and accessible safe harbours in the County Waterford area; his plans to increase funding to the recommended levels in the near future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38533/16]

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.

Health Services Staff

331. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) did not have their social worker replaced after their social worker went on maternity leave; if he will arrange for a replacement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38534/16]

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.

Hospital Staff Data

332. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the amount spent across departments on agency staff by the Cavan and Monaghan hospital group in 2016 to date in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38535/16]

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.

Medicinal Products Prices

333. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the cost of dispensing one treatment of methadone to a person with an opioid dependence; the number of trained medical practitioners that can dispense methadone; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38541/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Alcohol Treatment Programmes

334. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Health the roll-out stages and funding allocation for the extension of the CARE project (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38544/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): The provision of services to prevent and treat addiction to alcohol is the responsibility of the Health Service Executive and as such, I have referred this question to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply.

Question No. 335 answered with Question No. 289.

Disease Management

336. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health if he will consider developing a national strategy for those suffering from colitis and Crohn's disease, with particular focus on equitable access to inflammatory bowel disease nurses, self care and patient empowerment and sustainable funding models; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38549/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): Crohn's Disease is an Inflammatory Bowel Disease that can affect any part of the gastrointestinal system. The diagnosis of Crohn's Disease often requires a range of tests including endoscopy, radiology and blood tests relating to anaemia and inflammation. Management of the condition may require antibiotics and medication to reduce inflammation.

The diagnosis and management of Crohn's Disease takes place in an acute hospital setting with follow up in primary care as appropriate. These services are available in hospitals and primary care settings.

While the development of plans for a specific programme for Crohn's Diseases is not envisaged, the Health Service Executive is leading a large scale work-programme to develop a system of integrated care within Ireland's health and social care services. The Integrated Care Programmes, which includes a programme for the Prevention and Management of Chronic Disease, place clinical leadership at the centre of these reform measures in order to improve patient experiences and outcomes and to overcome the current fragmentation in the way health and social care is currently delivered.

Services for People with Disabilities

337. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 218 of 17 November 2016, when he will make a decision regarding a new acquired brain injury unit in County Longford (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38551/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Programme for Partnership Government includes a commitment to publish "a plan for advancing neuro-rehabilitation services in the community". A National Steering Group, chaired by the Head of the Health Service Executive's (HSE's) Disability Reform Team, has completed an implementation framework in respect of the recommendations from the National Policy and Strategy for the Provision of Neuro-rehabilitation Services in Ireland 2011 - 2015. The Group is currently considering feedback on the framework, which was circulated to wider stakeholder interest groups. The HSE intends to finalise and progress implementation of the framework for

the Neuro-rehabilitation Strategy in 2017.

Under the Health Act 2004, the HSE is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. I understand that the HSE will consider proposals for specialised residential services for people with acquired brain injury, such as that referred to by the Deputy, in the broader context of the finalisation of the implementation framework and available resources.

Primary Care Centres

338. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if a site has been chosen for the primary care centre in Carrickmacross; if so, the timeline for works commencing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38553/16]

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.

Hospital Services

339. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 432 of 18 October 2016, if he will provide a further update as to when the national steering group established by him to develop policy on a major trauma system for Ireland will publish its first report; the status of the group's recommendations in respect of St. Luke's Hospital, County Kilkenny; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38556/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As I have previously informed the Deputy, the development of the trauma policy is a joint initiative from the Department of Health and the HSE, in recognition that we do not have a coordinated trauma network structure in Ireland. The focus for the development of a policy direction in relation to the strategic organisation of Ireland's trauma service is to ensure that patients have access to the specific safe, high quality trauma services they need. The primary aim will be to improve patient outcomes and lead to a reduction in preventable death and disability.

The development of the policy is still work in progress and the group has not yet made any recommendations. It is expected the Group's report will be completed in early 2017.

Vaccination Programme

340. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Health if there is significant under reporting of HPV vaccine adverse reactions to the Health Products Regulatory Authority, HPRA; his plans to provide an advertising campaign to draw the attention of families that may be suffering in silence to contact the HPRA (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38558/16]

341. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Health if there is significant under reporting of HPV vaccine adverse reactions to the Health Products Regulatory Authority, HPRA, by doctors and consultants failing to report suspicions of side effects even when parents had pointed out the connection; his plans to investigate the stage at which the medical profession consider reporting the conditions of the girls as listed on the HPRA website; and if he will

make a statement on the matter. [38559/16]

342. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Health his views on the safety of the Gardasil HPV vaccine (details supplied); his plans to follow the Danish model or if the HSE will deal with the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38560/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 340 to 342, inclusive, together.

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

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

Gardasil is the HPV vaccine used in Ireland in the context of the HSE schools immunisation programme. By January 2016, over 200 million doses of Gardasil had been distributed worldwide. In Ireland over 620,000 doses of Gardasil have been administered and over 220,000 girls have been fully vaccinated against HPV since it was introduced in 2010.

The European Medicines Agency (EMA) is a decentralised agency of the European Union responsible for the scientific evaluation, supervision and safety monitoring of medicines developed by pharmaceutical companies for use in the EU. It would not be appropriate to comment on data submitted by manufacturers of a medicinal product to the EMA as part of their market authorisation processes or monitoring of its safety following authorisation for use.

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

As part of its monitoring of the safety of medicines, the HPRA operates an adverse reaction reporting system, with healthcare professionals and patients encouraged to report adverse reactions they consider may be associated with their treatment, through the range of options in place for reporting. All reports received are evaluated and considered in the context of the safety profile of the product concerned, with reports followed up as necessary for further information, that may assist in the assessment of the case.

In addition, pharmaceutical companies are obliged, as a condition of the authorisation to market a medicine, to submit reports of adverse reactions received directly, to the HPRA. At EU level, regulators continuously monitor this cumulative reporting experience as part of the ongoing assessment of the safety of HPV vaccines. In accordance with its reporting obligations, the HPRA provides anonymised details of reports received to the EMA, the WHO and to the relevant pharmaceutical companies.

The fact that a suspected adverse reaction has been reported does not necessarily mean that the vaccine has caused the observed effect, this may also be caused by a new disease the patient developed. Further data are usually needed to complete the picture. In the context of monitoring the safety of vaccines, new information on a possible risk is called a signal. Signals may arise from various data sources, including spontaneous reports, clinical trials and epidemiological studies. Once a signal has been identified, investigations are undertaken to consider the likelihood that a medicine may have caused or contributed to the effect, try to identify risk factors and estimate the frequency of occurrence. Following the assessment, a decision on the most appropriate regulatory action is taken by the competent authorities. The regulatory action is communicated to healthcare professionals, patients and the general public through established channels, and timelines reflect the degree of urgency.

The EMA completed its detailed scientific review in November 2015 of the evidence surrounding reports of two conditions. In line with its initial recommendations, the EMA confirms that the evidence does not support a causal link between the HPV vaccine and development of the two conditions studied. Therefore there is no reason to change the way the vaccines are used or to amend the current product information. The Agency's Committee for Medicinal Products for Human Use concurred that the available evidence did not recommend any changes to the terms of licensing or the product information for these medicines. On 12 January 2016 the European Commission endorsed the conclusions of the EMA, that there is no change to the way HPV vaccines are used, or to amend the current product information. This final outcome by the Commission is now binding in all member states.

The review recognised that, at that time, more than 80 million girls and women worldwide have now received these vaccines, and in some European countries they have been given to 90% of the age group recommended for vaccination. Use of these vaccines is expected to prevent many cases of cervical cancer (cancer of the neck of the womb, which is responsible for over 20,000 deaths in Europe each year) and various other cancers and conditions caused by HPV.

I am aware of claims of an association between HPV vaccination and a number of conditions experienced by a group of young women. An illness that occurs around the time a vaccine is given and is already known to be common in adolescence does not imply the vaccine caused the problem. As there is no scientific evidence that the vaccine causes long term illnesses, the HPV vaccine cannot be held responsible for these illnesses. It appears that some girls first suffered symptoms around the time they received the HPV vaccine, and understandably some parents have connected the vaccine to their daughter's condition. It is important to reassure people that anyone who is suffering ill health is eligible to seek medical attention, and to access appropriate health and social care services, irrespective of the cause of their symptoms. The individual nature of the needs of some children may require access to specialist services. The HSE are currently working to put in place a clinical care pathway appropriate to the medical needs of this group.

I am aware of media reports that the authorities in Denmark and Japan have taken some measures concerning HPV immunisation in their countries. However, it would be inappropriate for me to comment on the arrangements put in place by the health authorities in these countries.

The benefits of HPV vaccines outweigh the known side effects. The safety of these vaccines, as with all medicines, will continue to be carefully monitored and will take into account any future new evidence of side effects that becomes available. I encourage the parents of all eligible girls to ensure that their daughters receive this important cancer preventing vaccine.

343. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 614 of 15 November 2016 and 536 of 29 November 2016, if the capital programme for nursing home facilities 2016 to 2021 is an issue of responsibility for the Government and him rather than a service matter for the HSE; if that is the case, if the funding for a new community hospital in Letterkenny is to provide additional bed capacity or to replace existing bed capacity in the county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38577/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): The Government's "Building on Recovery: Infrastructure and Capital Investment Plan 2016-2021" which was published on 30 September 2015 included an investment programme in health infrastructure. Based on this, the HSE prepared its Capital Plan and on 26 January 2016 details of the programme of investment in public nursing home facilities were announced.

The programme includes the replacement of 33 existing facilities and refurbishment/extension of 57 others. This programme of investment will deliver 215 additional beds in centres being built or refurbished in locations identified as having particular capacity issues. Under the Programme it is proposed to deliver a 130 bed replacement CNU at Letterkenny by end 2021 through a PPP or alternative funding mechanism. Operational responsibility for delivering the programme is a matter for the HSE.

General Practitioner Data

344. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 1386 of 16 September 2016, the reason no reply has issued. [38600/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I understand that the HSE has recently issued a reply to the Deputy.

National Treatment Purchase Fund Data

345. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the private hospitals and health providers that are under contract with the National Treatment Purchase Fund, his Department and the HSE with respect to the provision of services and surgeries that are not being met publicly or where there are extensive waiting lists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38601/16]

348. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the type of contracts that exist between his Department, the HSE, the National Treatment Purchase Fund and private hospitals in relation to treatments commissioned by the private sector; if contracts are awarded en bloc either in terms of funding allocated, speciality and so on or on a case by case basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38605/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 345 and 348 together.

The NTPF was established on a statutory basis in 2004 and previously arranged for the provision of hospital treatment to classes of persons determined by the Minister. Since 2011 this function has been suspended.

Budget 2017 provides for the treatment of our longest waiting patients. €20m is being allocated to the NTPF, rising to €55m in 2018.

On foot of this allocation the NTPF recently issued a Prior Information Notice stating that commissioning will recommence and they will be engaging with suppliers through competitive dialogue on the required optimum approach for future outsourcing of public patients. Controls to ensure quality patient treatment, value for money and efficient processes will be determined by this process. No formal contracts have been signed to date.

The NTPF launched the 2016 Endoscopy Initiative in June which includes outsourcing from a list of approved private providers. These are Clane General Hospital, Galway Clinic, Aut Even Hospital, Bon Secours Hospital, Beacon Hospital, Hermitage Medical Clinic, Whitfield Clinic, St. Vincent's Private Clinic, Blackrock Clinic and St. Francis Private Hospital.

In relation to contracts entered into by the HSE, as this is a service matter I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

National Treatment Purchase Fund Data

346. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of treatments commissioned from the private sector by the National Treatment Purchase Fund in each year since its inception in tabular form; the number of treatments commissioned from the private sector by his Department or the HSE in each of the past ten years if applicable; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38603/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Treatments have been commissioned from the private sector by both the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) and the HSE in targeted initiatives to reduce waiting list numbers.

The NTPF was established on a statutory basis in 2004 and previously arranged for the provision of hospital treatment to classes of persons determined by the Minister. Since 2011 this function has been suspended.

I include with the official report a tabular statement setting out details of the annual budget of the NTPF and the number of patients treated per annum since its inception.

Budget 2017 provides for the treatment of our longest-waiting patients. €20m is being allocated to the NTPF, rising to €55m in 2018. Planning for these initiatives is currently being finalised with the NTPF. As part of this process, I have requested that the NTPF put in place a robust monitoring and evaluation process of the outputs and outcomes to ensure that the learning gleaned informs future initiatives.

In relation to treatments commissioned from the private sector by the HSE, as this is a service matter I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Year	Total Patient Numbers	NTPF Care Expenditure(€m)	Revenue Grant from Department of Health (€m)
2016 (Forecast)	3,000	2.0	5.1
2015	1,092	1.0	5.1
2014	1,002	0.5	5.1
2013	1,950	4.8	17.4
2012	2,012	41.9	40.6
2011	19,217	57	85.6

Year	Total Patient Numbers	NTPF Care Expenditure(€m)	Revenue Grant from Department of Health (€m)
2010	33,639	84	90.1
2009	28,758	90	90.4
2008	36,269	94	104.6
2007	32,638	95	91.7
2006	24,411	75	78.6
2005	18,994	60	64.0
2004	13,627	42	44.0

Medicinal Products Prices

347. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of drugs where, following the NCPE, National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics, assessment of the manufacturer's economic dossier on the cost effectiveness of a drug (details supplied), the NCPE found a drug not to be cost effective; if this information will be provided for each of the past five years with a breakdown of whether additional price reductions were successfully negotiated and agreed upon; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38604/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply.

Question No. 348 answered with Question No. 345.

Rare Diseases Strategy

349. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of the implementation of the 48 recommendations of the national steering group on rare diseases; the specific actions being taken on access to medication and technology; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38606/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The National Rare Disease Plan for Ireland (2014 - 2018) recommended that an Oversight Implementation Group of relevant stakeholders, including patients' groups, be established to oversee and monitor implementation of the plan's recommendations. This group was established by my Department in 2015 and it has met on a number of occasions.

One of the principal recommendations in the Plan was the establishment of a National Clinical Programme for Rare Diseases. This programme was to be responsible, over time and among other functions, for assisting with mapping and developing care pathways for rare diseases; facilitating timely access to centres of expertise – nationally and internationally; and developing care pathways with European Reference Centres for those ultra-rare disorders where there may not be sufficient expertise in Ireland.

In line with this recommendation, a National Clinical Programme for Rare Diseases was established in 2013 under the National Clinical Strategy and Programmes Division of the HSE. The programme is a joint initiative between the HSE and the Royal College of Physicians of

Ireland. This clinical programme is a channel for assisting with the advancement of a number of other recommendations in the plan, such as those on National Centres of Expertise for rare diseases; and in this vein, the programme designed a framework for the designation of Irish Centres of Expertise in cooperation with HSE Acute Hospitals Division in line with the recommendations stipulated in the national plan.

The Rare Diseases National Plan also recommended that ‘the National Clinical Programme for Rare Diseases through a National Office for Rare Diseases develop the clinical and organisational governance framework that would underpin care pathways and access to treatment for rare disease patients, particularly in the context of transition from paediatric to adult care’.

As such the National Clinical Programme has developed a draft transition model of care which will be entering a consultation stage very shortly.

The National Clinical Programme for Rare Diseases and the Department of Health encouraged designated Centres of Expertise to participate in European Reference Networks (ERNs) for Rare Diseases in line with the national plan. ERNs are European networks connecting health care providers and centres of expertise so that international expertise on specific rare diseases may be pooled together for the benefit of patients. Any centre applying for membership of an ERN must have strategies in place to ensure that care is patient-centred; that patients’ rights and preferences are respected; and must show a research component to their work.

Hence, the recommendations in the national plan that related to empowering and protecting patients and carers, and research on rare diseases will be fulfilled in part through this process. It is expected that ERNs will have a major structuring effect by linking thematic expert centres across the EU.

With the encouragement of the National Clinical Programme for Rare Diseases, Acute Hospital Divisions in the HSE and the Department of Health, five centres of expertise were designated in June this year during the first round of calls from the European Commission for participation in European Reference Networks. Three of these designated centres applied for membership of ERNs.

In 2014, the Minister for Health announced €850,000 for investment into charity-led research priorities, which particularly benefits rare disease research. Five charities were to provide matching funding bringing the total investment to €1.9 million. They were to share €850,000 in State funding to take part in international research into rare medical conditions. In 2016, the next cohort of projects was funded by the State with €1.686 million, matched by charity funding of €1.224 million. The total funding of €2.91 million is shared between 14 charities. The next round of this joint funding initiative will open in 2017. The EU commission now intends to explore the possibility to further strengthen the collaboration between Member States and the Commission in the area of research on rare diseases.

The establishment of a National Rare Disease Office (NRDO) featured prominently in the recommendations of the Rare Disease plan. The national office was established by the HSE in June 2015. Its work is currently led by the NCPRD Clinical Lead, supported by an Information Scientist, part-time Administrative Officer, part-time Genetic Counsellor and by a 0.2FTE Consultant Geneticist. It is, among other functions, providing up-to-date information regarding new treatment and management options, including clinical trials. In addition, the post of Information Scientist for the office is being funded jointly by the HSE and the EU Commission.

The NRDO has already performed a preliminary situation analysis of the existing rare disease registries and is in the process of assigning these known registries on our national Orphanet site, which is the international rare disease reference and information portal funded by the EU.

The EU Commission has started the development of a European Platform on Rare Diseases Registration. Its principal goal is to enable sharing and use of rare diseases' patient data across Europe, among the multitude of existing patient registries, within and across rare diseases.

A number of recommendations about access to appropriate drugs and technologies were contained in the plan. One chief recommendation in this regard refers to the HSE developing a Working Group to bring forward appropriate decision criteria for the reimbursement of orphan medicines and technologies; and that the approach should include an assessment system similar to that for cancer therapies established under the National Cancer Control Programme. The HSE has advised my Department that its Acute Hospitals Division is developing the terms of reference, required membership and reporting relationship for this committee which will parallel the National Cancer Control Programme Technology Review Committee.

This Committee will also be supported by the National Clinical Programme for Rare Diseases Clinical Advisory Group.

The national plan for Rare Diseases recommended that the Health Identifiers Bill and the Health & Patient Safety Bill be published. The former was published in 2013 and enacted in 2014. It is now being implemented by the HSE. A revised and much expanded General Scheme of a Health Information and Patient Safety Bill was approved by the government in November 2015 and published on the Department's website.

Two recommendations referred to training in rare diseases for healthcare professionals. The Department of Health has contacted formally the various healthcare representative and professional bodies about implementing these recommendations.

Finally, rare diseases have already been tabled on the agenda for North-South meetings. Therefore, future work to deepen cooperation between both jurisdictions on rare diseases is anticipated.

National Treatment Purchase Fund

350. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health further to the budget 2017 announcement of additional funding being made to the NTPF, the evaluation mechanisms that are in place to ensure value for money in terms of the spend; the evaluation mechanisms in place to ensure satisfactory outcomes and number of treatments in accordance with the funding allocation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38607/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Budget 2017 provides for the treatment of our longest waiting patients. €20m is being allocated to the NTPF, rising to €55m in 2018.

On foot of this allocation the NTPF recently issued a Prior Information Notice stating that commissioning will recommence and they will be engaging with suppliers through competitive dialogue on the required optimum approach for future outsourcing of public patients. Controls to ensure quality patient treatment, value for money and efficient processes will be determined by this process.

Hospital Beds Data

351. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the reason the number of available inpatient beds has reduced from 12,051 in 2006 to 10,473 in 2015 and 10,629 in 2016 to date; the number of psychiatry and long term care beds that have been excluded since 2006 to

show only acute beds in the 2015 and 2016 figures; the factors that determine the reason an inpatient bed in 2006 is no longer available in 2015 and 2016; if the physical infrastructure still exists for these beds and if not the details of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38608/16]

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.

National Treatment Purchase Fund Data

352. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if data is being collected in relation to the type of treatment, the cost of treatment and the patient outcome for services commissioned from the private sector by the NTPF; the details of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38610/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The NTPF was established on a statutory basis in 2004 and previously arranged for the provision of hospital treatment to classes of persons determined by the Minister. Since 2011 this function has been suspended.

I include with the official report a tabular statement setting out details of the annual budget of the NTPF and the number of patients treated per annum since its inception.

Budget 2017 provides for the treatment of our longest-waiting patients. €20m is being allocated to the NTPF, rising to €55m in 2018. Planning for these initiatives is currently being finalised with the NTPF. As part of this process, I have requested that the NTPF put in place a robust monitoring and evaluation process of the outputs and outcomes to ensure that the learning gleaned informs future initiatives.

Finally, the NTPF launched the 2016 Endoscopy Initiative in June and I receive monthly reports on the overall progress of this initiative, which is on track to achieve its target of no patients waiting more than 12 months for a routine scope by the end of the year. The NTPF will be submitting a final report to me by the end of January 2017 which will set out the overall performance of the initiative including; number of patients referred number of patients who received a procedure, a total cost of procedures and a breakdown of where these procedures were provided.

Year	Total Patient Numbers	NTPF Care Expenditure (€m)	Revenue Grant from Department of Health (€m)
2016 (Forecast)	3,000	2.0	5.1
2015	1,092	1.0	5.1
2014	1,002	0.5	5.1
2013	1,950	4.8	17.4
2012	2,012	41.9	40.6
2011	19,217	57	85.6
2010	33,639	84	90.1
2009	28,758	90	90.4
2008	36,269	94	104.6
2007	32,638	95	91.7
2006	24,411	75	78.6

Year	Total Patient Numbers	NTPF Care Expenditure (€m)	Revenue Grant from Department of Health (€m)
2005	18,994	60	64.0
2004	13,627	42	44.0

Hospital Appointments Delays

353. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite an appointment for hip surgery for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38613/16]

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.

Protected Disclosures

354. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health if allegations are being independently investigated regarding reports from a whistleblower concerning patients' deaths in the Mid Western Regional Hospital in Limerick (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38644/16]

355. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health if he and his Department are assured that protections for whistleblowers are in place to prevent isolation and harassment of them after they make allegations in the workplace; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38645/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 354 and 355 together.

Under Section 21 of the Protected Disclosures Act 2014, all public bodies must establish and maintain procedures for the making of protected disclosures by workers who are or were employed by the public body and for dealing with such disclosures. I can confirm that my Department and the HSE have procedures in place to deal with protected disclosures in line with that Act. Reports in the media on 22 November referred to a protected disclosure alleging links between deaths in University Hospital Limerick and multi-resistant infection in the hospital. Regarding the specific protected disclosure, I have written to the person concerned and my Department is in contact with the HSE and the disclosure is being managed in accordance with the Protected Disclosures Act 2014 and it would not be appropriate for me to comment on such matters.

Primary Care Centres

356. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health when the proposed new primary care centre in Bettystown, County Meath, will open; the range of services to be provided at the centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38647/16]

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.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme

357. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if it is compulsory or lawful for a nursing home to charge families a €20 recreational fee; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38678/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): The Nursing Homes Support Scheme (NHSS) is a system of financial support for people who require long-term nursing home care. Participants contribute to the cost of their care according to their means while the State pays the balance of the cost.

The NHSS covers the cost of the standard components of long-term residential care which are:

- Nursing and personal care appropriate to the level of care needs of the person;
 - Bed and board;
 - Basic aids and appliances necessary to assist a person with the activities of daily living;
- and
- Laundry service.

A person's eligibility for other schemes, such as the medical card scheme or the drugs payment scheme, is unaffected by participation in the NHSS or residence in a nursing home.

Although the NHSS covers core living expenses, residents can still incur some costs in a nursing home, e.g. social programmes, newspapers or hairdressing. In recognition of this, anyone in receipt of financial support under the NHSS retains at least 20% of their income. The minimum amount that is retained is the equivalent of 20% of the State Pension (Non-Contributory). An operator should not seek payment from residents for items which are covered by the NHSS, the medical card or any other existing scheme.

Part 7 of the Health Act 2007 (Care and Welfare of Residents in Designated Centres for Older People) Regulations 2013 stipulates that the registered provider of the nursing home must agree a contract in writing with each resident on their admission to the nursing home. This contract must include details of the services to be provided to that resident and the fees to be charged. Residents should never be charged fees which are not set out in the contract. The Department of Health and the HSE are not a party to such contracts which are concluded between each resident and their nursing home.

Registered providers of nursing home care are obliged to provide an accessible and effective complaints procedure. Concerns about additional charges should in the first instance be taken up with the nursing home provider. The Office of the Ombudsman can examine complaints

about the actions of a range of public bodies and, from 24 August 2015, complaints relating to the administrative actions of private nursing homes. The Office of the Ombudsman normally only deals with a complaint once the individual has already gone through the complaints procedure of the private nursing home concerned.

Home Help Service

358. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the status of extra home help hours in respect of persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38679/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Home Help Service

359. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if he will ensure that a person (details supplied) receives the home help hours which were allocated to the person from both the HSE and a company (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38689/16]

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 Prices

360. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Health if he proposes to include a device (details supplied) for testing blood glucose levels for a diabetic on the long-term illness scheme as it is a cheaper method of testing than blood strips and blood machines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38690/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicinal products under the community drug schemes in accordance with the provisions of the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for reply to the Deputy.

Services for People with Disabilities

361. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health if a gym for persons with disabilities (details supplied) in County Longford is being closed; the reason this would occur despite the need for such a facility; the research that has been conducted by his Department or the HSE on the facility; the ongoing staffing issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38701/16]

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

which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

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

Services for People with Disabilities

362. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the replacement services that will be in situ for the service users of a centre (details supplied) when it closes in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38703/16]

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

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

Home Help Service

363. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be facilitated with home help; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38714/16]

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 Services

364. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the number of times the full capacity protocol in South Tipperary General Hospital was implemented in each of the years 2011 to 2015 and 2016 to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38718/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Following the formation of Government an additional €40 million was provided to assist in the management of winter pressures. Utilising this additional funding the HSE developed the Winter Initiative Plan 2016 – 2017 which was published in September. Key aspects of this plan are being implemented at hospital and community services level across the country.

South Tipperary General Hospital is one of nine hospitals which have been targeted in this year's Winter Initiative. In order to alleviate ED overcrowding at the hospital, a range of specific measures have been put in place. These include the expansion of access to Community Intervention Teams services to support the hospital by facilitating hospital avoidance and timely discharge. Additional home care packages are also being provided; from 3 October to the 5 February, an additional 3 home care packages per week will be provided in the South Tipperary area. Additional access to aids and appliances to support timely discharge will also be

provided. A tender process to establish a National Framework Agreement for Temporary Accommodation is currently being evaluated. Based on the outcome of this process, the HSE will consider options, to provide additional capacity at the hospital.

Last week the HSE convened a Winter Initiative Health Summit and I met with Hospital Group CEOs, as well as hospital and Community Health Organisation managers, to reinforce the importance of driving key performance improvements across primary, acute and social care to reduce ED overcrowding and to plan for expected surges in demand in our EDs in the New Year.

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

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Review

365. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health his plans to review the terms of the financial assessment in the nursing home support scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38719/16]

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

When the NHSS commenced in 2009, a commitment was made that it would be reviewed after three years. The Report of the Review was published in July 2015. Arising out of the Review, a number of key issues have been identified for more detailed consideration across Departments and Agencies. These issues include examining the treatment of business and farm assets for the purposes of the financial assessment element of the Scheme. This work is currently underway and the IFA has made a submission in this context to the Interdepartmental Group which is overseeing the Review. Changes arising from this Review may require legislative implementation. There are no plans at present to review the terms of the NHSS financial assessment more generally.

Supported Residential Accommodation Provision

366. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of the case of a person (details supplied) who is waiting for long-term residential care; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38720/16]

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

367. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding an application to the HSE in respect of a person (details supplied). [38725/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Respite Care Grant Expenditure

368. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health the amounts spent by HSE Wexford disability services on full-time adult residential placements, both locally delivered residential services and external agencies, in each of the years from 2008 to 2015 and to date in 2016; and the amount by which each annual spend by HSE Wexford disability services on full-time adult residential placements was above or below the allocated central HSE budget for each year. [38739/16]

369. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health the amounts spent by HSE Wexford disability services across all areas of respite care for adults in each of the years from 2008 to 2015 and to date in 2016; and the amount by which each annual spend by HSE Wexford disability services on respite care was above or below the allocated central HSE budget for each year. [38740/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I propose to take Questions Nos. 368 and 369 together.

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

The Programme for Partnership Government states that the Government wishes to provide more accessible respite care to facilitate full support for people with a disability.

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

Hospital Appointments Status

370. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health when a cataract appointment will be provided for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38756/16]

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 the Deputy directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

371. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health when a cataract appointment will be provided for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38757/16]

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 the Deputy directly.

Hospital Waiting Lists

372. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health the average waiting time for cataract patients in County Galway from time of referral to treatment; the reason for the delays; his plans to address the waiting list and related issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38758/16]

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

Hospital Appointments Delays

373. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite an appointment in respect of a person (details supplied); if a timeframe will be arranged as soon as possible; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38759/16]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Mental Health Services Provision

374. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Health when the child and adolescent mental health service for Dublin 15, currently located in Cherry Orchard in Ballyfermot, will be transferred to the local health centre in Corduff, Dublin 15, as the service was successfully previously located in Dublin 15 for a number of years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38760/16]

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.

Disease Awareness

375. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health the steps he will take to ensure awareness in the community with regard to the causes and symptoms of Lyme disease and to ensure that the medical profession and health service are equipped to deal with the illness and its presentation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38769/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Lyme disease (also known as Lyme bor-

reliosis or LB) is an infection caused by a spiral-shaped bacterium called *Borrelia burgdorferi* that is transmitted to humans by bites from ticks infected with the bacteria. The infection is generally mild affecting only the skin, but can occasionally be more severe. Lyme disease is the commonest cause of tick-borne infection in Europe.

The Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) of the HSE collects and collates surveillance data on notifiable infectious diseases. Lyme borreliosis is notifiable in Ireland since 2012; the notifiable entity being the more severe neurological form of LB: Lyme neuroborreliosis.

The number of annual neuroborreliosis notifications over the last few years is as follows:

This gives an average annual incidence rate of neuroborreliosis in Ireland of about 2.7 neuroborreliosis cases per million population.

Since 2013, the HPSC has held an annual ‘Lyme Awareness Week’ at the beginning of the tick biting season, the purpose of which is to draw attention - particularly in the media - to Lyme disease and the ticks that can spread this disease. The week beginning May 2nd was designated as Lyme Awareness Week this year.

The literature on the HPSC website points out that campers, walkers and certain occupational groups such as forestry workers, conservation workers, deer cullers and farmers are at particular risk of exposure to ticks (and therefore LB). That said, anyone walking or hiking in the countryside is at risk of biting ticks. The ticks responsible for LB are generally hard-bodied ticks (Ixodidae). Ixodes ticks are hosted by a wide range of mammals including deer, sheep and cows, and occasionally birds; their tiny size (less than 2mm unfed) means they can remain undetected for long periods.

Ixodes ticks are most likely to be found in:

They are present in both urban and rural environments and are active from spring to autumn. Lyme cases tend to appear in Ireland with greater frequency after April, hence the choice of this time of year for Lyme Awareness Week.

Both the Health Protection Surveillance Centre and Tick Talk Ireland provide guidance on protection against contracting Lyme borelliosis. The best protection is to prevent tick bites, when walking in grassy, bushy or woodland areas, particularly between May and October:

Further advice can be obtained from the HPSC website (www.hpsc.ie) and the HPSC produced a leaflet on “Protecting Yourself Against Tick Bites and Lyme Disease ” which is available for the public to download.

In addition, a Lyme Borreliosis Subcommittee has been established to look at methods of raising awareness especially in those areas (including recreation areas) where Lyme carrying ticks can be most expected to be found.

Hospital Appointments Delays

376. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite a procedure for a person (details supplied). [38770/16]

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.

Long-Term Illness Scheme Coverage

377. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Health when it is proposed to add new PKU-suitable foods to the various reimbursement schemes in view of the acute difficulties being experienced currently by those in need of them. [38784/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply.

Symphysiotomy Payment Scheme

378. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Health if he will waive the costs for women pursuing legal challenges through the courts, including, where appropriate, in appeals to the Supreme Court regarding survivors of symphysiotomy. [38788/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Judge Maureen Harding Clark submitted her report on the Surgical Symphysiotomy Scheme on the 19 October last. Minister Harris examined the report and submitted it to Government last week prior to its publication on the Department's website on 22 November last. Awards of between €50,000 and €150,000 were made to 399 women and the Scheme cost approximately €34 million.

The Scheme was set up to give women who had undergone symphysiotomy an alternative non-adversarial option rather than having to bring their cases through the courts, with an uncertain outcome in each case. The Scheme was voluntary and women did not waive their rights to take their cases to court as a precondition to participating in the Scheme. Women could opt out of the Scheme at any stage in the process, up to the time of accepting their award. It was only on accepting the offer of an award that a woman had to agree to discontinue legal proceedings.

For women who chose to continue their cases through the courts rather than applying for a payment under the Scheme the issue of legal costs arising will be dealt with on a case by case basis by the courts.

Nursing Home Accommodation Provision

379. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health the status of the progress report on the new building works announced following the allocation of funds for a home (details supplied); when building works will commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38789/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): The Capital

Programme announced earlier this year provides for the replacement and refurbishment of 90 public nursing homes across the country over the next five years. Significant work was undertaken by the HSE in determining the most appropriate scheduling of projects over the 5 year period from 2016 to 2021, within the phased provision of funding, to achieve compliance and registration with HIQA.

Under this Capital Programme it is proposed to deliver a replacement CNU at the Sacred Heart Hospital Roscommon by 2021. Currently the project is at appraisal stage.

Hospital Appointments Delays

380. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the delay in a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38790/16]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

381. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive an appointment date for Tallaght general hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38792/16]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

382. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive an appointment with an otolaryngology specialist in the ENT consultant group; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38797/16]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Health Services Staff Recruitment

383. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 1,219 of 16 September 2016, subsequently referred to the HSE for direct reply, if the post referred to has now been successfully filled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38808/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

HSE Staff

384. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Health his views on the status of a person (details supplied) who is a HSE employee; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38819/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

Hospital Waiting Lists

385. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 574 of 29 November 2016, his views on whether it is satisfactory that a child in County Tipperary should be told that the waiting time for an ENT appointment is over four years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38821/16]

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.

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. As this query relates to service matters, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Question No. 386 answered with Question No. 289.

Audiology Services Provision

387. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health how long it takes for persons in counties Limerick and Clare to be fitted with a hearing aid after having audiology examinations and having ascertained the need for the hearing aid. [38887/16]

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

Audiology Services Provision

388. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health the reason County Limerick was recently without an audiologist for almost a year. [38881/16]

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

Afforestation Programme

389. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which he can generate an increase in forestry development through the use of marginal lands with the objective of increased carbon sequestration and good environmental practice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38861/16]

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

All applications are considered under the afforestation scheme where approvals are subject to minimum productivity thresholds, a public consultation process and adherence to environmental guidelines. However, marginal land is best suited for forestry as it is generally less productive for agriculture. Where farmers are under utilising their land the Department encourages planting on the more marginal fields while maintaining the herd size which is left to graze on the remaining fields. In this way agricultural output is maintained and a valuable asset with environmental benefits is established.

The development of marginal land for forestry has been positively impacted by two recent initiatives. The first of these is the introduction of a new approach to land classification system from a forest productivity perspective and the second is a full review and consolidation of environmental requirements for afforestation. Both of these developments should help increase planting on marginal sites in line with good environmental practices.

Climate Change Policy

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

his plans to co-ordinate meeting carbon methane reduction targets without detrimental effects on the agri food sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38863/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): As part of the Whole of Government approach to climate policy, officials from my Department are working closely with other Departments and in particular, with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment as the lead in this area.

The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015 provides a statutory basis for Government policy on climate change. One of the key objectives of this Act is to set out an approach to carbon neutrality that does not compromise our capacity for food production. As required by the Act, the National Mitigation Plan (NMP) is currently being prepared and I understand that this will be released shortly for a period of public consultation by my colleague, the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment. Agricultural sectorial mitigation measures have been prepared for input to the NMP.

A range of actions are currently being undertaken to make Irish farming more environmentally sustainable, including measures under the Rural Development Programme (RDP) which is worth almost €4 billion over seven years. The Programme is strongly targeted towards environmental benefits, including Knowledge Transfer (KT) programmes, which will bring the latest innovative sustainability research and practices direct to farmers.

The RDP also includes the Green, Low-Carbon, Agri-Environment Scheme (GLAS), which offers opportunities to support emission reductions and carbon sequestration through various actions such as hedgerow and tree planting, minimum tillage and encouraging the sustainable management of upland peatlands, while at the same time addressing other environmental threats such as biodiversity and water quality.

In addition, the Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP) is directly targeted at the climate emissions of 30,000 beef farmers. Its objective is to lower the intensity of greenhouse gas emissions by improving the quality and efficiency of the national beef herd.

Furthermore, the establishment and maintenance of landscape features (for example, Ecological Focus Areas and maintenance of permanent pasture under CAP Pillar I) can assist with achieving other environmental objectives which are expected of land, such as water and biodiversity management, in addition to carbon sequestration benefits.

All of these efforts are being implemented alongside an extensive afforestation scheme. Afforestation is the main cost effective land based climate mitigation tool available to Ireland, followed by the above mentioned mitigation technologies in agriculture itself. Climate change mitigation by forests, forest fuels and wood products is one of the principal drivers of the policy to expand forest cover out to mid century.

Transfer of Entitlements Application

391. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will review a matter (details supplied) regarding entitlements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38283/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department received five 2014 Transfer of Entitlement application forms in respect of a Transferor seeking the transfer of entitlements by sale to five separate Transferees. These transfer applications were not successful as there were outstanding issues pertaining to the Transferor.

The Transferor and Transferees under all five transfer applications were notified in writing in November 2014 that the transfer applications were unsuccessful. There is no record of further correspondence from the Transferor or the Transferees following these notifications.

There is no record in my Department of advice offered to an auctioneer in connection with the sale of the entitlements in this case. As the Auctioneer was not a Transferee under any of the transfer applications submitted no associated payment could be made or would be due to the Auctioneer.

Inland Fisheries Stocks

392. **Deputy Michael Collins** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his attention has been drawn to the damage to vulnerable stocks in inshore waters by the practice of pair trawling; his plans to ban the practice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38311/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I am advised that the practice of pair trawling in inshore waters around Ireland is confined to fishing for sprat (*Sprattus sprattus*) and consequently I am presuming that this is the stock that the Deputy is referring to when he speaks of “vulnerable stocks”.

Sprat in Irish waters is not a species for which fishing quotas or Total Allowable Catches have been established under EU regulation. The International Council of the Exploration of the Seas (ICES) considers sprat to be a data limited stock. In order to try and address that paucity of accurate information in respect of sprat stocks in the waters around Ireland, a three year research project, partially funded by industry, began in October 2014 under the auspices of the Marine Institute in cooperation with Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology.

This project aims to develop an accurate and detailed understanding of the stock structure of sprat around Ireland. It will determine whether the sprat in Irish coastal waters is one stock or several separate stocks and it aims to increase our understanding of their role in the broader marine ecosystem. This data will in turn contribute to the ICES assessment of the vulnerability or otherwise of sprat in the waters around Ireland.

The central objective of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) is to ensure that fishing and aquaculture activities are environmentally sustainable in the long term through the conservation and sustainable exploitation of marine biological resources and the management of fisheries and fleets exploiting such resources.

Available scientific information is that sprat in Ireland spawn from January to June with a fishery normally taking place from October to Christmas. This is a fortuitous situation, allowing some degree of reproductive output as the fishery takes place after the fish have been able to spawn. The Marine Institute advise that there is no evidence that spawning sprat are or ever have been targeted in Irish fisheries nor is there evidence that sprat actually spawn inshore. That of course is not to deny that they are easily targeted inshore when they occur there.

I have also been informed that the Marine Institute is actively pursuing the addition of sprat to the species covered under the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund Marine Biodiversity Scheme, in 2017. This would allow for more intensive data collection to enhance scientific knowledge and underpin any future efforts at management.

Animal Identification Schemes

393. **Deputy Michael Collins** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason horse breeders and other stakeholders were not made aware of a statutory instrument (details supplied) which came into being on 17 February 2015, until March 2016; and if the passports of horses that were registered within that period were excluded from the food chain. [38312/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): While Commission Implementing Regulation 262/2016 was published by the EU Commission on 17 February 2015, it only came into effect on 1 January 2016 and was transposed into national legislation via S.I. No 62 of 2016 (as amended) in February 2016.

My Department consulted with a range of stakeholders, including approved horse breeding organisations, during the negotiating process on the EU Regulation No 262/2015 and subsequently when drafting the national implementing regulations. In addition, following the publication S.I. No 62 of 2016 in February 2016, my Department's Press Office liaised with various farming and equine publications in highlighting changes to the legislation.

With regard to horses registered between 17 February 2015 and March 2015, the position is that horses registered before 31 December 2015 are subject to the rules set out in Commission Regulation 504/2008. Horses registered after that date are subject to the rules of Regulation No 262/2015. Accordingly, the food chain status of equines identified between 17 February 2015 and March 2016 is determined by provisions of these regulations.

Food Safety Standards

394. **Deputy Michael Collins** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the report carried out by a person (details supplied) proves that it is safe for horses to enter the food chain, providing the 28-day blood test prior to slaughter has been carried out with positive results; and if this blood test is adequate in this regard. [38313/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The slaughter of horses for food for human consumption is subject to strict EU regulatory requirements, including requirements in relation to horse identification and use of medicinal products.

Exposure in 2013 of the problem of adulteration of beef products with horse meat, which was due in large measure to the vigilance of testing and control systems applied in Ireland, has resulted in greater emphasis being placed on detection of food fraud and improved consumer protection across the EU. Controls have been enhanced at both EU and national level to mitigate the chance of any recurrence. This is a major reputational issue for the food sector generally and the meat trade in particular. In the light of this recent history, there are no current legislative proposals within the EU to allow horses be slaughtered for entry into the food chain beyond those which are allowed currently, whether on foot of blood tests or other means.

In relation specifically to the use of medicinal products in animals destined to enter the food chain it should be noted that this is strictly governed by both EU and national legislation with a requirement to test for these substances as part of our National Residues Control Plan. Some medications have no maximum permitted residue limits set and thus there is no scientific basis on which meat from animals in which these have been used can be considered safe. Additionally, where there has been treatment with certain specific equine medications the passport must be endorsed by the veterinarian administering the medication and there is a minimum six month period before the animal can be slaughtered for human consumption. My Department, based on current scientific knowledge, ensures that EU legislation in this regard is implemented in

full and in doing so ensures that there is full consumer confidence in what is permitted to enter the food chain.

Coillte Teoranta Activities

395. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the proposed future plans of Coillte Teoranta for a forest park (details supplied); if there have been any offers made in the past five years to buy the park; the details of those proposals; if Coillte Teoranta is planning any major investment at this site; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38337/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Coillte Teoranta was established as a private commercial company under the Forestry Act, 1988 and day-to-day operational matters, such as the management of the estate and property transactions (including any offers), are the responsibility of the company.

Coillte has, however, advised that the company has no investment plans for Killykeen Forest Park but are currently working with Cavan County Council to examine how public recreation facilities at the park may be improved.

Felling Licences

396. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the grounds on which the forestry service can refuse a felling licence to a private forestry owner; if the age of the forestry is grounds for refusing a felling license; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38338/16]

397. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a private forestry owner that wishes to clear fell mature forest can be refused a felling licence on the grounds of the age of the forestry despite raising concerns regarding wind blow and stipulating that they would immediately replant the area in question; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38339/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 396 and 397 together.

A Felling Licence granted by the Minister for Agriculture, Food & the Marine provides authority under the Forestry Act 1946 to fell or otherwise remove a tree or trees. This Act prescribes the functions of the Minister and details the requirements, rights and obligations in relation to Felling Licences.

The Department promotes Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) as a central principle of Irish forest policy, whereby forests are managed to provide economic, social and environmental benefits on a sustainable basis for both current and future generations. All proposed forestry operations that are licensed must be carried out to ensure the implementation of SFM in Ireland. There are many factors taken into consideration in the process to determine whether or not a licence will be granted, including compliance with environmental legislation and good forest practice.

Until recently the majority of clear felling and replanting has been concentrated in the public estate. A significant portion of the private forest estate, particularly conifers, that were afforested in the 1980s and the early 1990s are now approaching a stage where forest owners are

considering the best time to fell. In some cases forests will be thinned and other case clearfelled depending on a variety of different reasons such as site and market conditions.

The age at which it is best to harvest a forest depends on many things, including volume production, the risk of windblow, sawmill requirements regarding log sizes and current market prices. Forest owners may wish to fell early, delay felling or in some cases not fell at all for their own reasons. In some cases the landowner may apply for a licence to fell early if it is felt that the stand of trees is susceptible to windblow. Felling licences would normally be granted in such cases. What is of utmost importance for the Department is to ensure through the felling licence system that the felling and replanting is carried out in a manner that accords with sustainable forest management principles. A licence application that does not accord with sustainable forest management principles may be refused or have conditions added to the licence to ensure that it would accord with sustainable forest management principles.

Fish Quotas

398. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide a breakdown of the new Irish fishing quotas; the details of the medium-term strategy of the Government for this industry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38340/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): At this time, it is not possible to provide a full breakdown of the 2017 Irish fishing quotas. This is because the levels of Total Allowable Catch (TAC) and the quotas for Ireland will, as usual, be determined at the Council meeting, due to be held on 12 and 13 December. This will involve intensive negotiations with Member States and the EU Commission. The final quotas for all EU member states will not be known until these negotiations are concluded.

The information we have to hand regarding the 2017 quotas are based on the EU Commission's proposal, which was published on 27 October, as well as a number of updates that issued throughout November. While a full sustainability impact assessment is underway on these proposals, it is fair to say that a number of the Commission's proposals are very concerning for Ireland. These include a proposed cut of 68% for Celtic Sea Cod and a 9% cut for our vital prawn fishery.

There's no doubt the December Council will be challenging and I will be doing my utmost to ensure a positive and balanced package for our fishing sector.

In relation to the medium-term strategy for the Irish fishing industry, Food Wise 2025, the Report of the 2025 Agri Food Strategy Committee, sets out a cohesive, strategic plan for the development of agri-food and fisheries sector over the next decade. The Committee has identified that opportunities will arise as a result of significant population growth and greater access to international markets. It identifies over 400 recommendations to achieve sustainable growth and these will require a concerted and coordinated approach by all stakeholders. In light of the UK decision to leave the EU, Brexit is now a standard item on the agenda of the Food Wise High Level Implementation Committee.

Fisheries Protection

399. **Deputy Michael Collins** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he is taking to ban super trawlers from Irish waters; and if he will put an emergency measure in place such as putting permanent observers on board super trawlers while in Irish

waters. [38348/16]

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

All foreign fishing vessels, on the north-west coast, are precluded from Ireland's 12 mile fishing zone, other than for transit purposes and all foreign pelagic fishing vessels, including pelagic factory vessels, are also precluded from Ireland's 12 mile fishing zone on the west coast. In addition, Irish fishing vessels equal to or greater than 36.58 m (120 ft) in length, are precluded from Ireland's 12 mile zone. Under the Voisinage arrangement Northern Ireland vessels were given access in respect of the six mile fishing zone. However, in light of the recent Supreme Court judgement on this matter, access for Northern Ireland vessels is not currently provided for in domestic law.

Under the Common Fisheries Policy, Council Regulation (EC) No 812/2004 of 26/4/2004 sets down measures concerning incidental catches of cetaceans in fisheries. The Regulation requires that, *inter alia*, member states design and implement monitoring schemes for incidental catches of cetaceans using observers on board the vessels flying their flag and with an overall length of 15 m or more, for defined fisheries. The fisheries subject to this requirement includes pelagic fisheries.

The Regulation does not require that every vessel carries an observer and the Regulation puts the obligation on the Flag Member State (the state in which the vessel is registered) to design and implement the scheme rather than the vessel or the coastal state in whose waters the fishing takes place. It is a matter of competence for the Flag Member State of the vessel concerned to ensure that observers are onboard where required under their national scheme.

Hen Harriers Threat Response Plan

400. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the way in which the package currently on offer to farmers with lands sterilised due to the hen harrier differs from the detail announced in early 2015; if he will address the situation to ensure that landowners can avail of the provisions promised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38355/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): In the first instance, I would like to clarify that neither I nor my Department have any role in the designation of areas preserved for the hen harrier. That function is exercised through the National Parks and Wildlife Service of the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional and Rural Affairs.

However, my Department has been active in developing agri-environment measures under the Rural Development Programme targeted at farmers in these areas which are designed to incentivise farming practices and interventions which will benefit the hen harrier. Farmers with hen-harrier land already have priority access to GLAS and I have also provided that such farm-

ers will be automatically approved for GLAS Plus, should they be farming sufficient area of habitat. In this way, Farmers can earn up to €7,000 per annum through a combination of GLAS and GLAS Plus payments.

My Department is currently in negotiations with the EU Commission regarding a further scheme of assistance by means of a locally led Agri-Environment measure. This will mean that farmers in areas which have been designated for the hen harrier, and particularly those managing large tracts of hen-harrier habitat, will be able to avail of further assistance over and above what is available to them under GLAS. In so far as this differs from what was discussed previously, the main difference is that payments under the new scheme will be calculated on the basis of actions and results, rather than calculated on area. This is a requirement of measures like this brought in under Article 35 of the Rural Development Regulation, which allows much more flexibility on the ground than GLAS. As a result, the new scheme can actually be designed and developed at local level across all hen harrier areas, working closely with farmers and their representatives on the ground.

Basic Payment Scheme Payments

401. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment under the basic farm payment scheme will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Cork. [38356/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named submitted a 2016 Basic Payment Scheme application on 16 May 2016. EU Regulations governing the administration of these schemes require that full and comprehensive administrative checks, including in some cases remote sensing (i.e. satellite) inspections, be completed before any payments issue.

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

Agriculture Schemes

402. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the national reserve scheme; if he will address fears by young farmers wanting to avail of the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38359/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): In 2015 the National Reserve fund was based on a 3% cut to the Basic Payment Scheme financial ceiling and provided some €24 million in funding which was the maximum financing rate available under the relevant EU Regulations. There was no National Reserve in 2016 as all available funding had been utilised under the 2015 scheme. In order to provide for a National Reserve in 2017 funding is required to replenish the Reserve. The two priority categories are Young Farmer and New Entrants. EU Regulations governing the scheme provide that funding for the replenishment of the National Reserve may be obtained by means of surrender of entitlements that remain unused by farmers for two consecutive years and by clawback derived following the sale of entitlements without land. It is envisaged that funding derived from these two sources in 2017 will be very limited. The Regulations also provide for the option of a linear cut to be applied to all farmers entitlements to replenish the Reserve.

Decisions in relation to the National Reserve for 2017 will be considered once the position on potential funding has been established. Consultation between Department officials and the Direct Payments Advisory Committee comprising members of the main farming organisations, agricultural education and farm advisory bodies takes place annually as part of the decision making process for the National Reserve.

Dairy Sector

403. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the move by the European Commission to release 22,500 tonnes of skimmed milk powder onto the market; the way in which this will further impact on farmers in crisis in the dairy sector; if he has contacted the European Commission following its decision to draw its attention to the current crisis being faced by dairy farmers here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38360/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The EU Commission has decided to tender for the release of a limited quantity of SMP currently held in intervention.

The proposal, the object of which is to have a managed release of 22,150 tonnes (6% of total EU intervention SMP stock) of intervention skimmed milk powder to the market, was carefully considered by my Department in consultation with Industry stakeholders.

The purpose of public intervention buying is to put a floor under market prices in periods of downward price volatility. One of the potential disadvantages is that large stocks overhanging the market can have a downward pull on market sentiment which negatively impacts on prices. In addition, there are costs associated with storage of these stocks, borne by the taxpayer, which need to be managed effectively.

It is understood therefore, that product held in intervention must be returned to the market at some point. In this instance the Commission has decided to test the market place at a time when production in the Northern hemisphere is at its lowest, and prices are rising.

My Department will continue to work closely with the EU Commission, other member states and industry stakeholders to ensure that the intervention stocks are released onto the market in an orderly fashion so as to avoid market distortion.

Agriculture Scheme Penalties

404. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of farmers in County Offaly who have been penalised for non-compliance with various schemes over each of the past three years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38385/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The extensive range of data requested by the Deputy is not readily available.

Officials in my Department will compile the data requested and forward it directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Farm Inspections

405. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of farmers in County Offaly who have been inspected over each of the past three years; the number of these that have had penalties imposed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38386/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The extensive range of data requested by the Deputy is not readily available.

Officials in my Department will compile the data requested and forward it directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Farm Inspections

406. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of farmers who have been inspected over each of the past five years for compliance with various schemes, by county; the number of these that have had financial penalties imposed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38387/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The extensive range of data requested by the Deputy is not readily available.

Officials in my Department will compile the data requested and forward it directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Animal Welfare

407. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his attention has been drawn to the use of a live reindeer in a busy Dublin shopping centre (details supplied); the regulations regarding such inappropriate exploitation of an animal in a crowded environment; if the ISPCA have been consulted; the action his department will take to ensure this is not repeated across the country in the run-up to Christmas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38403/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I understand that the reindeer was only present in the shopping centre for a very short period of time and there is no evidence that the welfare of the reindeer was compromised in any way. Nevertheless, while my Department appreciates the desire on the part of some people to enhance the experience of Christmas for children, I would urge anyone intending to use live animals for this purpose to first seek advice from my Department or the local authority veterinarian on the measures needed to ensure that the welfare of the animal is protected.

Section 11 of the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013 provides that a person who has a protected animal, including a reindeer, in his or her possession or under his or her control, is obliged to ensure that the animal is kept and treated in a manner that safeguards the health and welfare of the animal. I would ask anyone who is concerned about the mistreatment of animals to contact my Department or An Gardaí Síochána at animalwelfare@agriculture.gov.ie or on the welfare helpline at 076 1064408.

Grant Aid

408. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if an emergency compensation fund will be made available to grain farmers situated on the western seaboard who have had a poor year in terms of yield due to poor weather and are under severe financial hardship as a result; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38449/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I fully acknowledge and accept that difficulties have been experienced by the farming community, not least by our tillage farmers. This sector is a very important area in the agricultural economy but it has been a challenging year both in terms of market returns and variable weather conditions experienced during the harvest.

I know the Deputy will be aware that I recently chaired a meeting with the main stakeholders in the tillage sector. As I said at the time and I wish to repeat here again this meeting provided a platform for the stakeholders to express their views and concerns on the challenges they are facing but equally to discuss the opportunities that lie ahead for the industry.

At that meeting, I outlined that one of my chief priorities was to provide low-cost more flexible finance and in this regard I was happy to announce on Budget Day, my plans for a €150 million Agri Cash Flow Loan Support Scheme. This has been developed in conjunction with the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI), by leveraging EU and Exchequer funding totalling €25m from my Department, to deliver a total loan fund of €150 million, which will support highly flexible loans for up to six years, for amounts up to €150,000. The interest rate applying is 2.95% and the product will be available to livestock, tillage and horticulture farmers. Loans to tillage and horticulture farmers will be provided in line with the EU's agriculture State Aid de minimis requirements.

This is a cash flow support facility, to improve the working capital position of farmers and other viable primary agriculture SMEs. The loans will be unsecured and are primarily to pay down expensive forms of credit such as merchant credit and other short-term financing facilities such as overdrafts. I recently welcomed the SBCI "Open Call" for financial intermediaries to deliver the Scheme. The SBCI is targeting that the loans will be available in the market in January 2017. I am encouraging farmers to consider their cash flow and borrowings situation now and, if appropriate to their circumstances, to be prepared to apply for these loans when they become available.

The loan scheme is part of a "three pillar strategy" in response to income volatility that I announced in the recent Budget, along with additional tax measures and farm payments. Among the tax measures, I agreed with my colleague the Minister for Finance, for an adjustment to the current 'Income Averaging' system, which will allow for an opt-out in an exceptional year. This will be available immediately, for this year's tax liability, and this will go some way towards addressing current cash flow concerns.

As an additional support to cash flow on farms, including Tillage farms, I also confirmed that advance payments would be made this year in respect of the Basic Payment and Greening Payment schemes. Advance payments commenced on the 17th October last, the earliest possible date by which payments can begin under the governing EU Regulations, with balancing payments from the 1st December.

Furthermore Balancing Payments commenced on 1 December and to date €1,126 billion has been paid out to 120,926 farmers and payments are ongoing. I was also pleased to note that the processing of the Areas of Natural Constraints payment scheme is on schedule and payments have already commenced during the third week in September. It is expected that approx 96,500 will fulfil the scheme eligibility requirements. My Department will also be opening a measure under the TAMS Scheme specifically for the Tillage Sector.

While there is no specific funding available for losses due to poor weather conditions I wish to confirm that at Agriculture Council I have repeatedly called for the situation on agricultural markets to be kept under ongoing review, and have said that we should be ready to deploy support measures if the circumstances require it. At the October Council Minister of State Doyle followed this up with a specific request that market support efforts be extended to the cereals sector.

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

Harbours and Piers Maintenance

409. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his attention has been drawn to the need for a spooling winch at the pier or slipway in Ardmore, County Waterford, to assist local fishermen; if funding will be provided for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38499/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The pier and slipway in Ardmore are owned by Waterford County Council and responsibility for their repair, development and maintenance rests with that Local Authority and its parent Department, the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government. I would refer the Deputy back to these bodies in the first instance regarding the issue referred to.

However my Department has provided limited funding to assist Local Authorities in small scale developments and repair of piers, harbours and slipways under their remit. These monies are made available through the annual Fishery Harbour and Coastal Infrastructure Development programme subject to available Exchequer funding and overall National priorities.

I can confirm that my Department has not received any application in 2016 for funding from Waterford County Council for a spooling winch at the pier/slipway in Ardmore. However any application that might be received in respect of Ardmore Pier under future programmes will be considered in the context of the terms and conditions of the scheme, available funding and overall priorities.

Young Farmer Capital Investment Scheme Applications

410. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment under a scheme will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Cork. [38540/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named has submitted a claim for payment under the Young Farmers Capital Investment Scheme of TAMS II. The claim for payment is being examined at local office level and payment will issue when all checks are completed.

Single Payment Scheme Eligibility

411. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of entitlements a person (details supplied) in County Galway has; and if he will make

a statement on the matter. [38552/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named held 4.21 entitlements with a total value of €558.67 under the Single Payment Scheme. All entitlements under the Single Payment Scheme expired on 31 December 2014.

In order to be eligible for an automatic allocation of entitlements under the Basic Payment Scheme a farmer must have been eligible to receive a direct payment under the 2013 Single Payment Scheme and the 2015 Basic Payment Scheme. The person named did not submit any applications under the 2013 Single Payment Scheme or 2014 Single Payment Scheme. In addition she did not submit an application under the 2015 Basic Payment Scheme to my Department and therefore the person named was not eligible to receive an automatic allocation of entitlements under the 2015 Basic Payment Scheme.

Dairy Hygiene Scheme Applications

412. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a payment in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38580/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named applied for and was approved for grant aid under the Dairy Equipment Scheme Measure under TAMS II. The payment claim submitted by the person named is currently being processed. I would like to clarify that any pre-payment inspections required under the TAMS II suite of measures are carried out by my Department. The checklist referred to has been finalised. Payment will issue to the person named as soon as all the required checks have been successfully concluded.

Single Payment Scheme Applications

413. **Deputy Hildegarde Naughton** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason persons (details supplied) in County Mayo have not received payment under the single farm payment scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38599/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The persons named submitted applications under the 2016 Basic Payment Scheme and applications under the Transfer of Entitlements measure of the Basic Payment Scheme. EU Regulations pertaining to the scheme require that applications are subject to certain administrative and/or on farm checks to determine eligibility under the scheme. All checks have now been completed and applications relating to the person named are now fully processed. Payment under the 2016 Basic Payment Scheme has issued on 6th December, 2016.

Basic Payment Scheme Applications

414. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 196 of 23 November 2016, when payments will issue to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38706/16]

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

form the person named on 10 May 2016.

Processing of the application is currently ongoing with a view to completion and payment issuing to the nominated bank account of the person named at the earliest possible date.

Forestry Grants

415. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 159 of 3 November 2016, the status of an appeal by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38724/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The appeal under the Afforestation Grant and Premium Scheme, was received from the person named in late July. Further to PQ number 159 of 3rd November, the Reviewing Inspector has completed his report and forwarded it to the Appeals Committee for consideration.

The Appeals Committee will consider his report, make their decision and will notify the Appellant accordingly.

GLAS Payments

416. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 398 of 2 November 2016, when payment will issue to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38744/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): An application under Tranche 1 of GLAS (GLAS 1) was received in my Department on the 19 May 2015 and the person named was approved into GLAS 1 with effect from 1 October 2015.

The application has successfully completed the pre payment validation checks in respect of the 2015 scheme year and full payment entitlements issued to the person named on the 28 November 2016.

Applications are currently being processed in respect of the 2016 scheme year with a view to issuing the first instalment on applications that successfully complete the necessary prepayment checks.

Rural Development Programme

417. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will confirm that it is possible via the official rural development programme amendment process to seek the transfer of financial allocations between measures as well as between sub measures under the rural development programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38761/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The financial allocations in the RDP 2014-2020 are based on measures and sub-measures and I can confirm that it is possible to transfer the allocations between measures and sub-measures by means of the official RDP amendment process.

Transferring allocations between measures and sub-measures would only be instituted

where there is a definite and justifiable need, and is more likely to occur towards the end of the 2014 -2020 programming period.

Agriculture Schemes

418. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when the agri finance scheme as announced in budget 2017 will commence; the criteria farmers must meet to be eligible for the fund; the conditions of the scheme; the involvement in the application process; the supports available to farmers to aid with their application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38771/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) is targeting that the loans from the “Agriculture Cash-flow Support Loan Scheme” will be available in the market in January 2017. My Department is contributing €25 million in total, €11.1 million from the EU’s ‘exceptional adjustment aid for milk and other livestock farmers’ and some €14 million in National funding, which leverages a total fund of €150 million. To satisfy the requirements of the EU package, applicants must be engaged in primary agricultural production and must also engage in one of these activities:

- Application of environmental and climate friendly production methods
- Implementation of quality schemes or projects aiming at promoting quality and value added
- Implementation of cooperation projects
- Training in financial instruments and risk management tools.

I announced last month that the SBCI had invited financial institutions to take part in the Scheme. There were a number of applications submitted by the closing date of 25 November and these will now be the subject of a formal approval process.

The normal lending criteria of the participating financial institutions will also apply. This is a cash flow support facility to improve the working capital position of viable businesses. The loans are primarily to pay down expensive forms of credit such as merchant credit and short-term facilities such as overdrafts. The loans may not be used for:

- Refinance of existing term loans
- The refinance of undertakings in financial difficulties (as opposed to cash flow difficulties, as defined in EU guidelines)
- New investments.

However, by improving the cash flow position of their business by using this facility, many will be in a better position to negotiate and restructure existing loan commitments.

More operational details will be available when the Scheme is launched.

Historical Records

419. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he will take to ensure access to the historical records of the Land Commission are facilitat-

ed for researchers (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38806/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): There are no immediate plans to make the 8 million or so records of the former Commission generally available to the public for research purposes or otherwise as they are still working documents and have not been handed over to the National Archives. My officials regularly access these records to service queries from the public relating to current and past transactions and for the full completion of the work of the Land Commission. Wider access will be a matter for consideration when the completion of the work of the former ILC is at a more advanced stage. The records which are available in paper format only are fragile, some dating back as far as the late 1800's and are an irreplaceable resource should they get damaged. In order to maintain them it is essential that they are handled and stored appropriately. Opening up access to these files cannot be considered until appropriate measures are undertaken to minimise potential damage from routine handling. While limited access is granted to persons on application, the office does not provide a research facility as the provision of such a service would require much greater resources than those currently available.

Beef Industry

420. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding culling Friesian bulls; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38817/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I am very aware farmers have faced a number of challenges in 2016 as the year has progressed. The immediate impact of Brexit has been seen in our currency exchange rates and has affected our primary major export market. Beef production is also up here and in the UK in 2016.

Looking at the market outlook for the remainder of the year it is estimated that the total number of cattle available for slaughter at export plants for the year 2016 is expected to be between 70,000 and 80,000 greater than 2015. Figures for the year so far to the week ending 27th November 2016 show that approximately 74,000 extra cattle have been slaughtered so far this year compared to the same period in 2015, an increase of 5.3%.

I am very much aware of the impact that the expansion in the national dairy herd will have on the Irish beef herd and this matter was discussed by all stakeholders at the most recent meeting of the Beef Roundtable. The true impact any increase in the number of cattle in the national herd will have on the beef market will be determined by different factors such as slaughter dates which will vary depending on the system of production on different farms. I have also asked Teagasc to undertake some analysis on the routes to market for the increased number of dairy calves and they have recently completed this work. We will now analyse it with the relevant stakeholders and consider some next steps.

I am also very conscious of the vital role that live exports play in providing an alternative market outlet for Irish farmers especially in an environment where the number of calf births has increased in recent years. The recent opening of the Turkish market for live cattle exports has seen over 12,300 cattle make the trip so far, a number which will increase further by the end of 2016. I also note that exports of live cattle to Libya have recommenced which is a positive and welcome development. My Department is also currently actively examining the possibilities of bilateral health certificates for the export of cattle to Kazakhstan, Montenegro and for breeding cattle to Morocco. I remain actively committed to ensuring that Irish beef producers have the option of exporting to as many markets as possible.

At this moment my Department has no intentions to introduce any scheme to cull Friesian or other dairy breed male cattle.

Aquaculture Licence Applications

421. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a decision will be made in respect of an application for an oyster farm (details supplied) in County Donegal; if a decision is likely before the end of 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38820/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The aquaculture licence application referred to by the Deputy is currently under consideration by my Department under the provisions of the 1997 Fisheries (Amendment) Act, the 1933 Foreshore Act and applicable EU legislation.

The legislation provides for a period of public and statutory consultation. In the case of this application the public consultation period is now over and my Department will continue its examination of this application in accordance with the applicable legislation.

It is not possible at this stage to say when this process will be complete. As the licence application is under active consideration as part of a statutory process it would not be appropriate for me to comment further on the matter at this time.

Radon Control Strategy

422. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the supports available for residents of counties deemed high priority by the EPA with respect to reducing radon gas emissions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38407/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The National Radon Control Strategy Co-ordination Group was established to implement and track the key recommendations of the National Radon Control Strategy (NRCS), published in 2014. This co-ordinated, Government-led, strategy aims to reduce both overall population and individual risk, particularly for people living in areas with high radon levels.

Cost has been identified as a disincentive to householders to both test and remediate their homes for radon. The NRCS contains a number of recommendations, one of which is to explore possible financial incentives to encourage household action on radon. My Department is examining the feasibility of providing such financial incentives. A decision will be taken in the coming months on whether and, if so, how to proceed once the examination of options is complete.

Fisheries Protection

423. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will alleviate the concerns of west Clare anglers who are of the view that County Clare is the only coastal county in which salmon rivers are still closed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38652/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne): Ireland manages salmon stocks on an individual river basis. This management is carried out by Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI), the State Agency with statutory responsibility for inland fisheries.

Management is based on the fact that each of Ireland's 147 salmon rivers, sections of rivers etc., has its own unique stock of salmon which migrates to sea as juveniles and returns to the same river in adulthood to spawn and create the next generation of fish exclusive to that river. Each individual stock is assessed annually and those fisheries meeting their individual conservation limit may be opened to harvest.

IFI is advised by the Standing Scientific Committee for Salmon (SSC) comprising scientists from IFI, the Marine Institute, the Loughs Agency, the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (Northern Ireland) other State bodies and third level institutions.

The underlying primary consideration is the health of the individual stocks, regardless of geographic location of the home river. However, fishing opportunities in the wider Shannon Fisheries District were available in 2016.

The conservation imperative demands that great care must be taken to ensure that the current salmon stocks are not further eroded by mismanagement or inappropriate exploitation, whether that is via angling, commercial fisheries in rivers or through the operation of mixed stock fisheries in estuaries.

The annual Wild Salmon and Sea Trout Tagging Scheme Regulations, made pursuant to Sections 69 of the Inland Fisheries Act 2010, provide for the annual management of Ireland's wild salmon and sea trout fishery by IFI. These Regulations are revised on an annual basis, taking account of advice from IFI, the annual assessment of the SSC and any submissions received from a 30 day public consultation for the following season. I have already commenced the 30 day public consultation for the 2017 Regulations.

A copy of the draft regulations, is available on the Department's website, www.dccae.gov.ie, and is open for public inspection at the offices of the Department in Cavan and also at the offices of Inland Fisheries Ireland. Any person may submit observations on the draft regulations during the consultation period which concludes on 11 December, 2016.

Media Mergers

424. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the stage the proposed determination regarding an acquisition (details supplied) has reached within his Department; if he plans to seek Cabinet approval for any decision he may make on this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38857/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Following approval by the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission, notification of the proposed merger referenced in the question was received by me as Minister on 21 November 2016. I have 30 working days from the notification deadline of 24 November 2016 to conduct an initial, or Phase 1, assessment of the case on media plurality grounds.

This examination is guided by the relevant criteria laid out in the legislation and by the Guidelines on Media Mergers, both of which are available on my Department's website. Following this examination I have three options under the legislation, which are to allow the merger to proceed, to allow the merger to proceed with conditions, or to ask the Broadcasting Authority

of Ireland (BAI) to conduct a more in-depth, or phase 2, examination of the proposed merger.

If the latter is the case, then the BAI will, following its examination of the proposed merger, provide me with a report detailing its recommendations on the matter. It is also possible for me, as Minister, to establish an advisory panel to provide an opinion to the BAI on the application of the relevant criteria to the media merger in question. Following receipt of the BAI's report and recommendations, I must then make a decision either to allow the merger to proceed, to allow it to proceed with conditions or to refuse to grant my consent.

No provision is made in legislation to allow a Minister to seek Cabinet approval for a determination on a media merger nor is there any role for the Oireachtas.

It would not be appropriate for me to provide further comment while this case is currently under consideration.

Broadband Service Provision

425. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the provision he will make to ensure that existing fixed wireless broadband users can continue to have access to broadband providers when the winner of the present competition for the national broadband plan is announced. [38297/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to deliver high speed services to every city, town, village and individual premises in Ireland. The Programme for Government commits to the delivery of the NBP as a matter of priority. This is being achieved through private investment by commercial telecommunications companies and through a State intervention in areas where commercial investment has not been fully demonstrated. The aim of the Plan is to bring competitively priced quality services to rural areas, through a State intervention to build a new high speed broadband network. It is envisaged that this network will offer wholesale services to multiple retailers, who can in turn offer competitive and affordable and high speed broadband to users.

The Department is now in a formal procurement process to select a company or companies who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network in the State Intervention Area comprising over 750,000 premises in Ireland, covering 100,000km of road network and 96% of the land area of Ireland. The procurement process is technology neutral. All three bidders involved in the competitive dialogue process are proposing a predominantly fibre- to- the -home network solution to connect rural Ireland. This is their choice of technology. It is however possible that wireless technology may be part of the solutions proposed and this is a matter for bidders. Furthermore, as the network to be built will offer wholesale services, on an open-access basis, it will be open to existing wireless retailers to offer services on the new network. Wireless operators can also connect their technologies to the network if they can meet the high speed broadband specifications set out in the Plan, which includes a minimum of 30 megabit per second download speed and 6 megabit per second upload speed.

In relation to the separate matter of the management of radio spectrum this is a statutory function of the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg) under the Communications Regulation Act 2002, as amended. ComReg is independent in the exercise of this spectrum management function.

In October, I signed Regulations which will allow ComReg to allocate spectrum in the 3.6GHz band. This will provide an 86% increase in total spectrum available for mobile and

fixed wireless services. The liberalisation of this band is in accordance with EU rules, and will allow the band to be used for a combination of mobile and wireless services, providing better quality voice and data services to customers across Ireland.

I have no role or function in the delivery of the auction process, which is a matter for ComReg. I am aware that ComReg has recently concluded its consultation process on the award process for the 3.6GHz spectrum band, including from parties who may wish to provide fixed broadband services and others who may see this band as an opportunity to provide new services. ComReg has considered the views of all respondents and its decisions on this band must accord with its own statutory functions, objectives powers and duties.

National Broadband Plan

426. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the steps he will take to ensure large companies that are tendering for the national broadband plan do not gain such dominance that they can exclude smaller companies from accessing the necessary spectrum to provide broadband access especially for fixed wireless networks. [38298/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to deliver high speed services to every city, town, village and individual premises in Ireland. The Programme for Government commits to the delivery of the NBP as a matter of priority. This is being achieved through private investment by commercial telecommunications companies and through a State intervention in areas where commercial investment has not been fully demonstrated. The aim of the Plan is to bring competitively priced quality services to rural areas, through a State intervention to build a new high speed broadband network. It is envisaged that this network will offer wholesale services to multiple retailers, who can in turn offer competitive and affordable and high speed broadband to users.

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In October, I signed Regulations which will allow ComReg to allocate spectrum in the 3.6 GHz band. This will provide an 86% increase in total spectrum available for mobile and fixed wireless services. The liberalisation of this band is in accordance with EU rules, and will allow the band to be used for a combination of mobile and wireless services, providing better quality

voice and data services to customers across Ireland.

I have no role or function in the delivery of the allocation process, which is a matter for ComReg. I am aware that ComReg has recently concluded its consultation process on the award process for the 3.6 GHz spectrum band, including from parties who may wish to provide fixed broadband services and others who may see this band as an opportunity to provide new services. ComReg has considered the views of all respondents and its decisions on this band must accord with its own statutory functions, objectives powers and duties.

Company Data

427. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment further to Parliamentary Question No. 220 of 26 November 2015, when EirGrid will provide an answer to this question which has remained unanswered over a year later. [38435/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I understand that EirGrid responded to the Deputy by e-mail on 22 December 2015 and on 3 February 2016. If the Deputy requires additional information, on receipt of such question, I can arrange for this to be forwarded to EirGrid.

Inland Fisheries Data

428. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when the results of the survey of the River Barrow conducted by Inland Fisheries Ireland will be published, in view of the fact that publication of same was expected in July 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38492/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne): Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) carried out a catchment wide fish stock survey in the River Barrow catchment between June 29th and August 13th 2015. The main channel and all major sub-catchments were surveyed to assess fish status. A total of 119 sites in 20 tributary streams (Aughnavaud, Burren, Clashganny, Cushina, Douglas, Duiske, Figile, Greese, Lerr, Mountain, Owenass, Pollmounty, Slate, Stradbally, Triogue, Tully, Fushoge, Gowran, Madlin and Monefelim) were electrofished. A total of 33 sites were surveyed on the main river channel between Rathcoffey near Mountmellick, Co. Laois and St. Mullins, Co. Carlow.

Dace, salmon, roach, minnow, perch, gudgeon, brown trout, pike, eel, stone loach, roach x bream hybrids, 3-spine stickleback and flounder were recorded during the survey. Roach and dace were dominant in many sections of the main channel, while juvenile salmon were common in the upper reaches. In general brown trout and salmon were the most common fish species in the tributary streams.

Following the extensive field work a considerable amount of laboratory work and data analysis to verify and collate results was required in order to prepare and publish a report of the survey works and its outcomes. It is expected that the final report will be available for dissemination at the end of next month.

Energy Infrastructure

429. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if grant aid is available to assist small enterprises to install 3 phase electricity in view of the substantial costs involved in having electricity supply upgraded particularly in rural areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38579/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): My Department does not administer grant aid for such a scheme. The Farm Electrification Grant Scheme (FEGS) was administered and funded through the former Department of Community Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs (DCEGA) and then by the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government from January 2005 to 31 December 2011. The scheme is no longer in operation. In that time, however, some €511,000 was paid to farmers under the scheme, to subsidise the installation of electricity supply to farms located in disadvantaged areas which were without supply or where supply was inadequate to facilitate their development and modernisation. The maximum grant payable was €508 for single-phase supply and €1,016 for 3-phase supply.

Currently, the levying of connection charges is an operational matter for ESB Networks. ESB Networks operates the distribution network on the electricity grid. This is the medium and low voltage electricity network used to deliver electricity to connection points such as houses, offices, shops, business premises, and street lights. ESB Networks is responsible for building, maintaining and operating the distribution level network infrastructure including all overhead electricity lines, poles and underground cables used to bring power to Ireland's customers.

Tariffs and charges levied by ESB Networks are regulated by the Commission for Energy Regulation (CER), a statutorily independent body. In order to ensure that only equitable levels costs are collected through these tariffs, the CER carries out annual reviews of ESB Networks' costs incurred in developing, maintaining and operating the distribution system.

Further information on the levying of charges on electricity customers and complaints in relation to connection the electricity network should be addressed to the CER who may be contacted at 01 4000800, 1890 404 404, energycustomers@cer.ie or Commission for Energy Regulation, The Exchange, Belgard Square North, Tallaght, Dublin 24.

Climate Change Policy

430. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on whether the draft national mitigation plan due to be presented represents Ireland's fair share, based on GNI and carbon emissions per capita, of a global pathway with a reasonable likelihood of remaining well below 2°C, aiming for 1.5°C, in view of current climate impacts causing 17 million persons in southern Africa to be in need of food aid; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38640/16]

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

Work is well underway on the development of the first statutory National Mitigation Plan

(NMP), required under Section 4 of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act, 2015. The primary objective of the first NMP is to track implementation of measures already underway, identify additional measures in the longer term to reduce GHG emissions, and progress the overall national low carbon transition agenda to 2050. The first iteration of the NMP will place particular focus on putting the necessary measures in place to address the challenge to 2020, but also in terms of planning ahead to ensure that appropriate policies and measures can be put in place beyond this date and out to 2030.

The first NMP is being developed having regard to the low carbon transition vision set out in the National Policy Position, Ireland's obligations under the current Effort Sharing Decision No 406/2009/EC, the Paris Agreement, and any likely future EU and international obligations that may arise, including new national targets to be agreed under the 2030 Climate and Energy Package. A key part of developing the NMP has been the preparation of appropriate technical, environmental and economic analysis to inform the decision-making process as to what should be included in the plan. These analyses are still on-going as part of the iterative approach to the development of the plan.

Specifically in relation to Ireland's response to the global challenge of climate change, this is driven by the Paris Agreement which entered into force on 4th November 2016. Ireland signed the Agreement in April of this year and completed the ratification process last month. The Agreement aims to tackle 95% of global emissions through 188 Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). At COP21 in Paris, the Taoiseach announced that Ireland will provide at least €175 million in public funding to climate finance, mainly for adaptation in developing countries by 2020. Ireland is also making a €2m contribution to the Green Climate Fund (GCF) this year with further contributions to follow in 2017 and subsequent years.

Ireland will contribute to the emission-reduction objectives of the Paris Agreement via the NDC tabled by the EU on behalf of its Member States which commits to 40% reduction in EU-wide emissions by 2030 compared to 1990. The specific details of the contribution to this 40% to be made by each Member State in respect of the non-ETS sector was the subject of a European Commission proposal published in July 2016. The full implications of this proposal from a domestic perspective are currently being examined, with Ireland being ambitious to make a contribution that is technically feasible, cost-effective and fair in terms of sharing the low carbon transition effort among Member States.

Alternative Energy Projects

431. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if there is grant aid available for solar farms; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38654/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Programme for Government contains a commitment to facilitate the development of solar energy projects in Ireland. This builds on the Energy White Paper published in December 2015 and recognises that solar also has the potential to provide a community dividend, thereby also enhancing citizen participation in Ireland's energy future. With this in mind, Solar Photovoltaics (PV) is one of the technologies being considered in the context of a new support scheme for renewable electricity generation which is under development. It is widely recognised that solar PV technology is rapidly becoming cost competitive for electricity generation, not only compared with other renewables but also compared with conventional forms of generation. Solar also brings a number of benefits like relatively quick construction and a range of deployment options, including solar roof-mounted PV and utility-scale solar PV.

The first Technology Review public consultation on a new renewable support scheme was published in 2015 and following the completion of detailed economic analysis on the viability and cost effectiveness of supporting a range of renewable technologies - including Solar (PV) - a second public consultation will be published in 2017. Details of the next public consultation will be advertised on the Department's website *www.dccae.gov.ie*.

Before any new scheme is introduced, it will need to secure Government approval and State aid clearance from the European Commission. The new support scheme for renewable electricity is expected to become available in late 2017.

The Deputy might also be interested to know that the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland currently provides supports for the use of solar thermal heating technology to both large industry and SMEs. Households can also avail of grant support for investment in renewable energy installations, including solar thermal, under the Better Energy Homes Scheme.

Broadband Service Speeds

432. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if there are plans to designate the blue areas, commercial providers, identified in the high speed broadband map into the amber areas, State intervention, to ensure that all parts of the country can benefit from similar speeds in view of the fact that fibre to the home has been identified as the preferable technology for the roll-out of the national broadband plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38681/16]

433. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the details of the 170,000 premises which were added to the amber area of the high-speed broadband map in July 2016; the way in which this figure was arrived at; the details regarding the premises including locations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38682/16]

434. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the precise number of premises expected to be covered under the national broadband plan; the criteria used to determine which areas are designated blue or amber in the high-speed broadband map; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38683/16]

436. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he is satisfied that, taking into consideration the revisions of July 2016, there will be no further changes to the designated blue and amber areas in the high-speed broadband map; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38685/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 432 to 434, inclusive, and 436 together.

The National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to deliver high speed broadband services to every city, town, village and individual premises in Ireland. The Programme for Government commits to the delivery of the NBP as a matter of priority. This is being achieved through a combination of commercial investment by the telecommunications sector and a State intervention in those areas where commercial investment has not been fully demonstrated. The State Intervention is being managed in accordance with EU state aid rules.

A key principle of the NBP is to support and stimulate commercial investment through policy and regulatory measures. Commercial investment since the publication of the NBP has considerably exceeded expectations. Over the past 5 years, the commercial telecommunications

sector has invested over €2.5bn in upgrading and modernising networks which support the provision of high speed broadband and mobile telecoms services.

It is estimated that up to 70% of premises in Ireland will have access to commercial high speed broadband services provided by telecommunications operators, while the remaining 30%, consisting of over 750,00 premises, 100,000 km of road network and 96% of the land area of Ireland, will fall within the proposed State led intervention under the National Broadband Plan. Currently, approximately 1.4m premises in Ireland can get high speed broadband from commercial service providers.

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 telecommunications 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.

There are around 1.6 million premises in the BLUE area of which approximately 1.4 million premises in Ireland can now get high speed broadband. My Department is actively monitoring the deployment in the BLUE areas.

On 5 July, I announced that my Department identified that up to an additional 170,000 premises which are currently marked BLUE on the High Speed Broadband Map are unlikely to get access to services. My Department is conducting further analysis with a view to identifying and locking down the Map for the remainder of the procurement process. This work will conclude shortly and will be reflected in a further update to the High Speed Broadband Map.

Direct feedback from consumers continues to be important and if customers cannot access high speed broadband services, I would encourage them to contact my Department directly at broadband@dcca.gov.ie, quoting their address and Eircode and giving details of providers they have contacted with a view to obtaining services.

My 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.

The procurement process for the State Intervention aims to identify an entity or entities to build, roll out, operate and deliver high speed broadband of at least 30 Mbps upload and 6 Mbps download speeds to all premises within the intervention area.

The three bidders in the procurement process have indicated that they are proposing a predominantly fibre-to-the-home solution under the State Intervention meaning that much higher broadband speeds are possible. In cases where fibre is not viable, the bidders might opt for alternative technologies.

In parallel with the procurement, and in accordance with commitments in the Programme for Government, Minister Humphreys is leading on the establishment of two regional action groups to help accelerate the broadband network build in rural Ireland, once a contract(s) has been awarded.

In July, I established a Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce with Minister Humphreys to address immediate issues in relation to the quality of mobile phone and broadband coverage. I expect the Taskforce to report by end 2016.

I recently signed Regulations allowing ComReg to proceed with an early 2017 auction of the 3.6 GHz radio spectrum band, to provide an 86% increase in total spectrum available for mobile and fixed wireless services.

I have also secured €8m for RTE which will allow it to free up the 700MHz spectrum band, to provide enhanced mobile services.

Together, these initiatives should assist in significantly improving the quality of broadband and mobile phone services across Ireland, putting Ireland to the forefront internationally in terms of connectivity.

National Broadband Plan

435. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the estimated costs which will be incurred for utilising the existing infrastructure of national networks to roll out fibre to the home; the source of funding for any costs associated with upgrading this infrastructure to enable fibre to the home; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38684/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The National Broadband Plan (NBP) represents a very significant capital investment project for the State and aims to deliver high speed services to every city, town, village and individual premises in Ireland. The Programme for Government commits to the delivery of the NBP as a matter of priority. On 5 July the Government selected the Commercial Stimulus Model as the optimum ownership model for the network that will be part-funded by the Exchequer. The Department has completed detailed costings, down to every individual premise in the Intervention Area and, on that basis, has modelled the likely cost of various technologies and ownership models. It would not be appropriate to publish the expected cost of building the network or the likely cost to the State while a major public procurement process is underway. I do not intend therefore to indicate the overall estimated Exchequer funding parameters. Ultimately, the costs will depend on the price that bidder(s) quote in the tender process.

On 29 September 2015, the Government's 6 year Capital Plan, Building on Recovery, was published. It includes an allocation of €275m for the National Broadband Plan (NBP). This allocation provides the initial stimulus required to deliver the Government's intervention and it is expected that further funding will be available over the lifetime of any contract(s).

The Department commenced the Invitation to Participate in Dialogue (ITPD) phase of the procurement process in July and is engaged in the formal dialogue process with the three qualifying bidders. Following the conclusion of the Dialogue Phase and an invitation to bidders to submit detailed draft proposals, the Department will issue final tender documentation to bidders. When final tenders have been submitted a winning bidder(s) will be selected for the contract which will comprise one or two lots as set out in the NBP Intervention Strategy.

The timing of each stage of the procurement is dependent on a number of factors including the number of qualified bidders and the complexities that may be encountered during the procurement process. It must be noted that bidders will need adequate time to prepare detailed proposals and their final formal bids and get the relevant shareholder and funding approvals at these stages of the process.

In preparation for the procurement stage of the process my Department investigated how different technical solutions could be used to deliver high speed broadband. In line with EU State Aid rules, the process must be "technology neutral" and it is not therefore possible to

specify what technology should be used to build the network. Notwithstanding, the three bidders in the procurement process have indicated that they are proposing a predominantly fibre-to-the-home solution under the State Intervention. In cases where fibre is not viable, the bidders might opt for alternative technologies.

In the meantime, my Department continues to liaise closely with industry and relevant other Departments and agencies to remove barriers to assist in the commercial deployment of telecommunications networks. The commercial telecommunications sector has invested over €2.5bn to support the provision of high speed broadband and mobile telecoms services.

I have also secured €8m for RTE which will allow it free up the 700MHz spectrum band, to provide enhanced mobile services.

These initiatives should assist in significantly improving the quality of broadband and mobile phone services across Ireland, putting Ireland to the forefront internationally in terms of connectivity.

Question No. 436 answered with Question No. 432.

National Broadband Plan

437. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the reason his Department did not issue a policy directive under sections 12 and 13 of the Broadcasting Act 2009; his views on whether the failure by his Department to issue a directive since 2003 has impeded investment and the roll-out of competitive alternative high speed next generation access, NGA, services in the past three years; his further views on whether this lack of direction by his Department could be considered a breach of the State's obligation to promote competition in the provision of NGA services under the State aid guidelines governing the national broadband plan, NBP, intervention and the impact of this on the NBP; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38686/16]

438. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on whether ComReg, which is obliged to implement Government policy directives issued to them by him in regulating the market, are doing so in the absence of a current directive on the national broadband plan, NBP, and are relying on an expired 2003 directive; his further views on whether the current award process is in line with the NBP and the State's obligations to protect and promote competition in the market for next generation access services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38687/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 437 and 438 together.

The provision of telecommunications services, including Next Generation Access Services, is undertaken by telecommunications service providers operating in a fully liberalised market under licences provided by the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg). The regulation of telecommunications operators is the statutory responsibility of the ComReg, which is independent in its functions.

Both policy and regulation have contributed substantially to the roll out of high speed broadband networks in the last number of years. ComReg's NGA decisions in 2013 created the framework to drive accelerated investment in high speed broadband, which is now available to approximately 1.4m premises in Ireland. ComReg's multiband spectrum auction in 2012, has also allowed the extensive roll-out of 4G networks with at least one operator now having in

excess of 90% population coverage. From a policy perspective the National Broadband Plan is also driving investment, and legislation passed by the Houses of the Oireachtas to allow ESB to use its network to deliver high speed broadband services, has resulted in fibre-to-the-home services being rolled out currently in 17 regional towns.

In October, I signed Regulations which will allow ComReg to auction spectrum in the 3.6GHz band (Wireless telegraphy (3.6GHz Band Licences) Regulations, 2016 (S.I. 532 of 2016)). The liberalisation of this band is an EU requirement and the adoption of the 3.6 GHz EC Decision is mandatory for all EU Member States, including Ireland. This Decision is service-neutral, technology-neutral and expressly obliges Member States to allow the use of the entire 3.6GHz band fixed and mobile services. The release of spectrum in this band will provide an 86% increase in total spectrum available for mobile and/or fixed wireless services, leading to better quality voice and data services to customers across Ireland.

ComReg is independent in its functions and I have no role in the process for allocating the spectrum which is now underway. Having regard to the independence of ComReg in the matter and the fact that a process is underway, it would not be appropriate for me to comment further on the matter at this time. I would note however that the allocation process followed extensive public consultation by ComReg over almost a two year period. I have no reason to believe that the process being currently undertaken by ComReg will not result in the fair allocation of any future spectrum assignment and I expect the outcome of the process to provide a level of certainty and transparency for all stakeholders. A policy direction is neither necessary nor appropriate in the circumstances.

Investment decisions by the commercial telecommunications networks providers in the electronic communications market, including investment decisions on the roll-out of Next Generation Access (NGA) are taken purely on commercial grounds by each network operator, having regard to the predicted investment cost and the anticipated revenue returns from any such investment. The State can only intervene in this market in cases of clear market failure. In this regard the National Broadband Plan aims to bring competitively priced quality services to rural areas, through a State intervention to build a new high speed broadband network. It is envisaged that this network will offer wholesale services to multiple retailers, who can in turn offer competitive, affordable and high speed broadband to users.

The Plan aims to deliver high speed services to every city, town, village and individual premises in Ireland. The Programme for Government commits to the delivery of the NBP as a matter of priority. This is being achieved through private investment by commercial telecommunications companies and through a State intervention in areas where commercial investment has not been fully demonstrated.

The Department is now in a formal procurement process to select a company or companies who will roll out a new high speed broadband network in the State Intervention Area comprising over 750,000 premises in Ireland, covering 100,000 km of road network and 96% of the land area of Ireland. The procurement process is technology neutral. All three bidders involved in the competitive dialogue process are proposing a predominantly fibre-to-the-home network solution to connect rural Ireland. Wireless technology may also play a role in part of the overall solution. It is a matter for the bidders in the process to put forward the technologies they believe are most appropriate to meet the NBP objectives.

Accordingly, I do not propose, nor do I see any necessity, to issue any policy direction to ComReg in this regard.

Broadband Service Provision

439. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on whether the upcoming 3.6 Ghz spectrum award could result in the reduction of competition in the next generation access, NGA, market while increasing the scale and cost to the State of the proposed national broadband plan intervention; if he plans to ensure effective competition in the NGA market post the spectrum award process, ensuring continuation and investment in competitive NGA fixed wireless services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38688/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The management of the radio spectrum is a statutory function of the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg) under the Communications Regulation Act 2002, as amended. This role includes the allocation of radio spectrum, the award of spectrum licences and the associated application of terms and conditions and obligations. ComReg is independent in the exercise of this spectrum management function. In October, I signed Regulations which will allow ComReg to allocate spectrum in the 3.6GHz band. The allocation will provide an 86% increase in total spectrum available for mobile and fixed wireless services. The liberalisation of this band is in accordance with EU rules, and will allow the band to be used for a combination of mobile and wireless services, providing better quality voice and data services to customers across Ireland.

I have no role or function in the delivery of the allocation process, which is a matter for ComReg. I am aware that ComReg has recently concluded its consultation process on the award process for the 3.6GHz spectrum band, including from parties who may wish to provide fixed broadband services and others who may see this band as an opportunity to provide new services. ComReg has considered the views of all respondents and its decisions on this band must accord with its own statutory functions, objectives powers and duties.

The aim of the National Broadband Plan is to bring competitively priced quality services to rural areas, through a State intervention to build a new high speed broadband network. It is envisaged that this network will offer wholesale services to multiple retailers, who can in turn offer competitive and affordable and high speed broadband to users.

The Plan aims to deliver high speed services to every city, town, village and individual premises in Ireland. The Programme for Government commits to the delivery of the NBP as a matter of priority. This is being achieved through private investment by commercial telecommunications companies and through a State intervention in areas where commercial investment has not been fully demonstrated.

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

The procurement process is technology neutral. All three bidders involved in the competitive dialogue process are proposing a predominantly fibre-to-the-home network solution to connect rural Ireland. This is their choice of technology. It is however possible that wireless technology may be part of the solutions proposed and this is a matter for bidders. Furthermore, as the network to be built will offer wholesale services, on an open-access basis, it will be open to existing wireless retailers to offer services on the new network. Wireless operators can also connect their technologies to the network if they can meet the high speed broadband specifications set out in the Plan, which includes a minimum of 30 Mbps download speed and 6 Mbps

upload speed.

Renewable Energy Generation Targets

440. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the way in which he will ensure that his energy and climate change plan will deliver 16% binding renewable targets by 2020; his views on fines from failing to meet these targets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38709/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Energy White Paper ‘Ireland’s Transition to a Low Carbon Energy Future 2015-2030’, published in December 2015, sets out a high-level framework for Ireland’s energy transition to a low carbon economy and society and identifies a range of measures and actions to support this aim. The 2009 EU Renewable Energy Directive sets Ireland a legally binding target of meeting 16% of our energy requirements from renewable sources by 2020. Ireland is committed to achieving this target through meeting 40% of electricity demand, 12% of heat and 10% of transport from renewable sources of energy, with the latter transport target also being legally binding. The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) has calculated that 25.3% of electricity, 6.5% of heat and 5.7% of transport energy requirements were met from renewable sources at end 2015. The SEAI analysis also shows that 9.1% of Ireland’s overall energy requirements in 2015 were met from renewable sources and that this avoided €286 million of fossil fuel imports.

The Government has a range of policy measures and schemes to incentivise the use of renewable energy and although good progress towards the target has been made to date, meeting the 16% target remains challenging. My Department is currently developing a proposed new Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) and a new Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) Scheme, designed to assist us meeting our RES-E and RES-H targets. The introduction of any new scheme - including the overall costs and technologies to be supported - will be subject to Government approval and State aid clearance from the European Commission.

In the transport sector, Ireland aims to meet its renewable target mainly through the increased use of sustainable biofuels, with electric vehicles also making a small contribution. Further increases to the obligation rate in the Biofuels Obligation Scheme will take effect from 1 January 2017 when the rate will increase to 8% by volume.

Renewable Energy Feed in Tariff Scheme

441. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will progress the extension to the renewable energy feed in tariff 2 support scheme for those in the development of renewable energy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38779/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I have received a number of representations from the renewable energy industry and individual project developers seeking an extension to the project development milestones set out in the REFIT terms and conditions. Under the terms and conditions of the REFIT 2 scheme, projects must be connected by end 2017. The industry has highlighted the challenges that developers face in terms of securing finance for projects under development, in addition to the time it can take to construct and connect a renewable energy project. I am currently considering an extension to the development milestones in the REFIT 2 scheme and will conclude

this process in the near future.

Climate Change Policy

442. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the extent to which he expects to meet carbon reduction targets in the time given; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38862/16]

445. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his priorities in respect of climate action; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38878/16]

446. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his proposals for reducing our carbon footprint; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38879/16]

451. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the measures his Department has taken to reduce the carbon footprint in the past year and any discussion he has had with his European colleagues in reducing same on a European level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38875/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 442, 445, 446 and 451 together.

Climate-action related work is progressing in the context of:

- the high-level National Policy Position (2014) to pursue the transition to a low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by 2050;
- the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015, which provides for the development and submission to Government of national mitigation plans and national adaptation frameworks in order to pursue the national transition objective; and
- our international and EU obligations.

In relation to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reduction, Ireland has a target for each year between 2013 and 2020 under the 2009 EU Effort Sharing Decision (ESD). For the year 2020, the target set is that emissions should be 20% below their value in 2005. This is the most demanding 2020 target allocated under the ESD, and one shared only by Denmark and Luxembourg. The target for each of the years 2014 through 2019 is on a straight-line trajectory between the targets for 2013 and 2020, and surpluses in one year can be used to cover deficits in any subsequent year. The average incidence of these targets is a 12% reduction relative to 2005.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has reported that emissions for 2015 are estimated at 59.84 million tonnes carbon dioxide equivalent, which is 3.7% higher than emissions in 2014. According to the EPA, these figures indicate that Ireland will be in compliance with its 2015 annual limit set under the ESD. However, the Agency has cautioned that the 2015 emissions data suggests that achievement of our long-term mitigation goals will be difficult. Moreover, the most recent EPA projections (March 2016) indicate that emissions for 2020 could be in the range of 6% to 11% below 2005 levels depending on whether or not additional policies and measures, beyond those already in place by the end of 2014, are implemented.

At international level, Ireland will contribute to the 2015 Paris Agreement via the Nationally Determined Contribution tabled by the EU in March 2015 on behalf of Member States, which

commits to at least a 40% reduction in EU-wide emissions by 2030 (compared to 1990 levels). This is based on reductions in the ETS and non-ETS sectors of 43% and 30% respectively. The specific details of Ireland's contribution to this overall EU 30% reduction in the non-ETS sector, as well as the contributions to be made by other Member States, are the subject of negotiations between the EU and Member States in the context of the European Commission Effort Sharing Regulation Proposal, which was published on the 20 July 2016. The outcome of these deliberations will determine Ireland's contribution, which needs to reflect a level of ambition that is technically feasible, cost-effective and fair, to the overall EU 2030 effort.

In terms of putting in place the first of a series of plans to manage our transition to a low carbon economy and to meet our international and EU targets, a national mitigation plan will be submitted to Government for approval by June 2017 in accordance with the 2015 Act. The preparation of the plan is designed to be a *'whole-of-government'* approach to tackle emissions and each Minister with responsibility for the largest emitting sectors has been requested by Government to develop sectorial mitigation measures. The primary objective of the mitigation plan, when finalised, will be to track implementation of measures already underway and identify additional actions in the longer term to reduce emissions and progress the overall transition agenda to 2050. In advance of the statutory consultation on a draft mitigation plan, which will take place in Spring 2017, I intend to publish a document shortly for an initial non-statutory public consultation. The outcomes of the consultations will inform the preparation of the final National Mitigation Plan.

Mirroring the mitigation effort, the 2015 Act also provides for the making and submission to Government of iterative national adaptation frameworks which will specify the national strategy for the application of adaptation measures in different sectors, and by local authorities, in order to reduce the vulnerability of the State to the negative effects of climate change and to exploit any beneficial opportunities that may arise. Work is progressing in relation to the first national framework, which must be submitted to Government for approval no later than 10 December 2017.

While the extent of the challenge presented by climate change, and the scale of the transformation required if Ireland is to move to a low carbon and climate resilient economy, are evident, there is a clear and long-term global and national climate change policy direction in place, supported by a well-defined national statutory framework. Work is progressing to convert this policy ambition into actions to bring about the transformation required if we are to decarbonise our economy and build resilience to the inevitable impacts of global warming.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

443. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the progress to date in meeting his Departments targets in respect of quality and access to broadband; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38876/16]

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

My Department is now in the formal procurement process to select a company or companies who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network throughout the State Intervention Area.

The procurement process for the State Intervention aims to identify an entity or entities to build, roll out, operate and deliver high speed broadband of at least 30 Megabits per second upload and 6 Megabits per second download speeds to all premises within the intervention area. The procurement process also requires that the solution be future proofed. This is important if we are to find a solution which works for the 25 years of the contract.

The three bidders in the procurement process have indicated that they are proposing a predominantly fibre-to-the-home solution for rural Ireland under the National Broadband plan intervention meaning that much higher broadband speeds of up to 1,000 Mbps may be achievable.

Earlier this year, before I came into office, the Department announced that it would be June 2017 before contract(s) were awarded. 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. In addition, bidders need adequate time to 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 on timelines at this juncture, given that discussions are on-going 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 a 3-5 year timeline to roll out a network of the scale envisaged under the State Intervention. As part of the competitive process, the Department will engage with winning bidder(s) on the best roll-out strategy, in order to target areas of particularly poor service, business needs and/or high demand. This will need to be balanced with the most efficient network roll-out plan. A prioritisation programme will be put in place in this regard, in consultation with the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. A detailed roll-out plan for the network will be published once contract(s) are in place.

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

In a further positive initiative, last July, I established a Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce with Minister Humphreys to address immediate issues in relation to the quality of mobile phone and broadband coverage. I expect to publish the report of the Taskforce in the coming

weeks.

I recently signed Regulations allowing ComReg to proceed in early 2017 to allocate spectrum in the 3.6GHz radio spectrum band. This will provide an 86% increase in total spectrum available for mobile and fixed wireless services. I have also secured €8m for RTE which will allow it to free up the 700MHz spectrum band, to provide enhanced mobile services.

In the meantime, my Department continues to liaise closely with industry and relevant other Departments and agencies to assist in the removal of barriers to assist in commercial deployment of telecommunications networks.

These initiatives should assist in significantly improving the quality of broadband and mobile phone services across Ireland, putting Ireland to the forefront internationally in terms of connectivity.

Mobile Telephony Services

444. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the extent of his discussions with the communications regulator in the matter of the upgrading of the mobile telephone service throughout the country with particular reference to the availability in all areas urban and rural; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38877/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The management of radio spectrum is a statutory function of the independent regulator of the telecommunications sector, the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg). Licences issued by ComReg impose terms and conditions on mobile network operators – including minimum population coverage obligations. ComReg monitors compliance in this regard by means of biannual drive tests. However, given ComReg's independence, I have no statutory function in the matter of auditing mobile coverage.

I am critically aware of the frustration currently being experienced across Ireland, where mobile networks are not always delivering the services people expect. Mobile operators have invested significantly in rolling out improved services, following ComReg's multi-band spectrum auction. At least one operator now has in excess of 90% 4G population coverage. The rate of demand for data services has however increased by 500% in the last four years and this presents a continuing challenge for mobile operators, regulators and policy makers both in Ireland and internationally.

Recognising this challenge, I specifically included in the Programme for Government, a commitment to a Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce. In July, I established the task force, together with Minister Humphreys, which aims to unlock barriers to investment in mobile and broadband services. The Terms of Reference of the task force state that it will identify and recommend practical actions that can be taken to improve mobile reception and broadband access. The task force and its various subgroups has already met approximately 20 times, with a number of helpful initiatives emerging in the areas of planning, local authority engagement, and consumer information and engagement.

The task force involves Government Departments and agencies, as well as engagement with ComReg and telecoms operators. I anticipate that we will bring a report later this month, on foot of its work. This report will set out specific timelines for the delivery of the recommendations and actions.

Under the Programme for Government, Minister Humphreys has also established two regional action groups to work with Local Authorities, Local Enterprise Offices, LEADER Groups and other relevant agencies in helping accelerate the roll-out of broadband and mobile services at local level.

In addition, I recently signed Regulations allowing ComReg to proceed with an early 2017 allocation of spectrum in the 3.6GHz radio spectrum band. This will provide an 86% increase in total spectrum available for mobile and fixed wireless services.

Furthermore, in my Department's estimates for 2017 I have secured an €8m provision for RTÉ to allow it to free up the 700MHz spectrum band. ComReg in turn will make plans to allocate this spectrum, to provide for significantly enhanced mobile coverage. The 700 MHz band is particularly suited to rural environments where the signal can travel long distances.

These initiatives should assist in enhancing the quality of mobile phone and data services across Ireland, and particularly in rural Ireland.

In parallel, the National Broadband Plan aims to deliver high speed services to every city, town, village and individual premises in Ireland, through private investment and a State intervention in areas where commercial investment have not been fully demonstrated. The procurement process is underway and the three bidders in the process have indicated that they are proposing a predominantly fibre-to-the-home solution for rural Ireland. Intensive dialogue with bidders is ongoing, with a view to putting in place contract(s) that will deliver the NBP network and put Ireland to the forefront internationally in terms of connectivity.

Questions Nos. 445 and 446 answered with Question No. 442.

Electric Vehicles

447. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his expectations and proposals to encourage the use of electric cars as a means of carbon reduction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38880/16]

450. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he is satisfied with the roll-out of charge points for electric cars across the country and his plans for 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38874/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 447 and 450 together.

Since 2011, the Electric Vehicle Grant Scheme has been supporting and incentivising, through grants of up to €5,000, the deployment of Electric Vehicles (EVs) in Ireland. These grants are in addition to tax incentives such as the Vehicle Registration Tax (VRT) reliefs of up to €5,000, which apply to EVs and Accelerated Capital Allowances (ACA), which allows companies to offset the cost of investment in qualifying technologies including EVs. Budget 2017 extended the relief from VRT on EVs for a further 5 year period and on Hybrid vehicles for 2 years. The purchase of 1,702 new EVs has been supported since the Grant Scheme commenced. Of these, 615 have been grant aided to date this year which is an increase from 2015 when 555 were grant aided over the full year.

The roll-out of the charging infrastructure is an operational matter for the ESB and I do not have any function in this regard. I am aware, however, that the ESB, through its ecars programme, has been rolling out both publicly accessible charging infrastructure and domestic

charge points for electric vehicles. I am advised that almost 900 public charge-points have now been installed nationally including 79 DC fast chargers, most of which have been installed mainly on the inter-urban roads. The location of these charge-points is available on the 'ecars' section of the ESB's website at www.esb.ie. In addition, I understand that ESB ecars has installed over 1900 charge-points in domestic and commercial premises.

In accordance with the commitment in the Programme for Government, my Department and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport are establishing and will co-Chair a Low Emissions Vehicles Task Force involving relevant Government Departments and agencies. The first meeting is scheduled for later this month. A key task will be to examine as a matter of priority what further actions are necessary to further stimulate EV sales and other low emission vehicles to 2020 and beyond. In addition, the Task Force will look at actions to ensure sufficient and effective charging infrastructure exists as the EV fleet develops.

Broadband Service Provision

448. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the progress on the roll-out of fibre broadband on a county basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38872/16]

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

The 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 telecommunications 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 breakdown per townland of areas covered by both State Intervention and commercial providers are available on the Department's website. For the Deputy's convenience, I have included a County-by-County breakdown in the following table. This breakdown covers current and anticipated roll-out by commercial telecoms providers (BLUE) and premises in the proposed intervention area (AMBER). The commercial roll-out includes a mix of technologies including fibre-to-the-home, fibre-to-the-cabinet and cable:

-	Total Addresses	Operator - Blue	NBP - Amber
Connacht	319,309	149,151	170,158
Galway	133,815	71,275	62,540
Leitrim	22,316	8,990	13,326

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-	Total Addresses	Operator - Blue	NBP - Amber
Mayo	84,167	33,336	50,831
Roscommon	39,125	14,269	24,856
Sligo	39,886	21,281	18,605
Leinster	1,171,323	944,464	226,859
Carlow	27,406	16,851	10,555
Dublin	580,348	572,053	8,295
Kildare	88,327	67,791	20,536
Kilkenny	47,772	25,317	22,455
Laois	38,761	22,560	16,201
Longford	22,582	10,891	11,691
Louth	60,144	45,015	15,129
Meath	82,555	51,384	31,171
Offaly	36,717	19,587	17,130
Westmeath	44,377	26,563	17,814
Wexford	79,510	40,202	39,308
Wicklow	62,824	46,250	16,574
Munster	669,147	404,427	264,720
Clare	68,158	33,657	34,501
Cork	267,754	181,782	85,972
Kerry	90,004	38,824	51,180
Limerick	97,661	63,698	33,963
Tipperary	84,575	43,368	41,207
Waterford	60,995	43,098	17,897

-	Total Addresses	Operator - Blue	NBP - Amber
Ulster	176,355	80,603	95,752
Cavan	42,372	18,175	24,197
Donegal	100,518	48,514	52,004
Monaghan	33,465	13,914	19,551
Total	2,336,134	1,578,645	757,489

My Department is now in the formal procurement process to select a company or companies who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network throughout the State Intervention Area.

The procurement process for the State Intervention aims to identify an entity or entities to build, roll-out, operate and deliver high speed broadband of at least 30 Megabits per second upload and 6 Megabits per second download speeds to all premises within the intervention area. The procurement process also requires that the solution be future proofed, this is important if we are to find a solution which works for the 25 years of the contract.

The three bidders in the procurement process have indicated that they are proposing a predominantly fibre-to-the-home solution for rural Ireland under the National Broadband plan intervention meaning that much higher broadband speeds of up to 1000 Megabits per second may be achievable.

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

In a further positive initiative, last July, I established a Mobile Phone and Broadband task force with Minister Humphreys to address immediate issues in relation to the quality of mobile phone and broadband coverage. I expect the task force to report by end 2016.

I recently signed Regulations allowing ComReg to proceed with an early 2017 auction of the 3.6GHz radio spectrum band, to provide an 86% increase in total spectrum available for mobile and fixed wireless services. I have also secured €8m for RTE which will allow it to free up the 700MHz spectrum band, to provide enhanced mobile services.

In the meantime, my Department continues to liaise closely with industry and relevant other Departments and agencies to assist in the removal of barriers to assist in commercial deployment of telecommunications networks.

These initiatives should assist in significantly improving the quality of broadband and mobile phone services across Ireland, putting Ireland to the forefront internationally in terms of connectivity.

Departmental Expenditure

449. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action

and Environment the total budget for all environmentally friendly schemes his Department administers in the coming year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38873/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I secured €29.4m in Exchequer funding in Budget 2017 for the environment and waste management areas of my Department, an increase of some €9m on the comparative 2016 allocation.

I am also responsible for making allocations from the Environment Fund, which generates revenue through the landfill and plastic bag levies that is ring-fenced for environmental purposes. In 2016, a total of €40.5 million was allocated from the Fund, and allocations for 2017 will be decided shortly, based on projected revenues for the year. Allocations from the Environment Fund in 2016 supported, *inter alia*, waste schemes, environmental research and development, the Local Agenda 21 Scheme, and Environmental NGOs. Details of expenditure from the Environment Fund is available in the published annual accounts of the Fund which are available at the following website address <http://www.housing.gov.ie/search/sub-topic/environment-fund>.

Expenditure on “environmentally friendly” schemes is not strictly confined to the environment or waste areas of my Department. For example, in 2017 an increased allocation of €100m will expand the Better Energy Scheme and will introduce new measures such as the Renewable Energy Scheme. Within this, a record €25m will be ring-fenced to support the Better Energy Communities Scheme.

Question No. 450 answered with Question No. 447.

Question No. 451 answered with Question No. 442.

National Postcode System Implementation

452. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he requested the public broadcasting of advertisements on both TV and radio promoting the use of Eircode postcodes during emergency situations; if so, the reason the public advertisements do not carry any endorsement by his Department; and if he did not consider it more appropriate to use public funds to run public awareness campaign advising persons to assure if their Eircode postcode is correct. [38883/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Eircode ran an advertising campaign on television and radio to raise public awareness of using Eircodes during emergency situations. Using Eircodes helps the National Ambulance Service (NAS) provide speedier access to care. The NAS integrated Eircodes into their Computer Aided Dispatch system (CAD) in February 2016. This means that callers to the ambulance service can give the patient’s Eircode, which is validated in the CAD system. The call taker can then locate the patient’s property and direct the nearest available ambulance to the correct location.

Ambulance emergency requests often come from isolated rural locations. NAS considers the Eircode information to be very important in the rapid identification of these rural addresses – in particular, responding to calls from any of the 35% non-unique addresses in the state which caused significant operational challenges in the past. On foot of the campaign, call takers in the National Ambulance Service noticed a big improvement in the elderly population knowing and keeping their Eircode close to the phone.

While there is no requirement to reference the Department in a public service announce-

ment, my Department did approve the public awareness campaign.

As stated in the reply to Question No [38884/16] Eircode employ rigorous quality assurance and validation check processes on the assignment of all Eircodes to each postal address and its corresponding geo-location.

National Postcode System Implementation

453. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if Eircode has carried out an assessment of the accuracy of the Eircodes assigned to households. [38884/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Eircode employ rigorous quality assurance and validation check processes on the assignment of Eircodes to each postal address and its corresponding geo-location. The postal addresses and the geo-locations are provided to Eircode from authoritative sources, namely An Post and Ordnance Survey Ireland through their subsidiary company An Post GeoDirectory.

Eircode undertake detailed quality checking process of all new address data provided by An Post GeoDirectory. Once this process has been completed, Eircodes are then allocated to each postal address through rigorous rules based assignment with built-in quality checks that verify each Eircode is unique and is accurately assigned to the postal address as well as its geo-location.

National Postcode System Expenditure

454. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if the public broadcaster covered the cost of the production and transmission of the Eircode postcode public service advertisement; and if so, if it was requested by him. [38886/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The decision to run the public broadcast is an operational matter for RTE and not one in which I have a function.

Legislative Measures

455. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the implementation of a new Coast Guard Bill; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38795/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I refer the Deputy to my response to PQ Ref: 34648/16 on 15 November 2016, in which I outlined the legislative provisions that underpin the activities of the Coast Guard (IRCG). I am satisfied that the current operations of the IRCG; search and rescue, pollution response, and voluntary activity generally, are well supported by the State and there is no requirement to put the Coast Guard on any additional statutory footing.

Football Players Transfer System

456. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of British soccer scouts operating here in recruiting underage footballers for British-based football clubs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38289/16]

457. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the protocols and criteria used in respect of recruiting underage footballers by British football clubs here; the protocols and criteria used to select persons of suitable character to operate as a football scout for a British based football club here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38290/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 456 and 457 together.

Neither I nor Sport Ireland have any role in relation to the practice of British soccer scouts recruiting underage players in Ireland. The Deputy may wish to enquire with the Football Association of Ireland as the National Governing Body for soccer in Ireland.

Road Projects Status

458. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the N5 road for the Castlebar to Westport section; the amount this will cost; the money that had been ring-fenced for the project; when it will commence; and the estimated date for completion. [38300/16]

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

Noting the above, I have referred your question regarding the N5 to TII for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

Cycling Policy

459. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the actions being taken by his Department to provide safety training for students for cycling at primary school level; the details of his Department's arrangements with Cycling Ireland to facilitate this; if a new course standard is being implemented on behalf of his Department; the funding available to schools for students to avail of cycling training; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38318/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The development of a standardised road safety cycling training proficiency programme for children is one of the key actions identified in the Action Plan in the Road Safety Strategy 2013-2020. In response, Cycle Right, a new national standard for cycle safety training, has been developed by my Department in association with the Road Safety Authority (RSA), Cycling Ireland and other relevant stakeholders and will be rolled-out early next year.

Cycle Right is a modular cycling road safety training course which is delivered over three stages, with participants gaining skills and knowledge on a phased basis to prepare for cycling

in increasingly complex road scenarios. Prior to the development of Cycle Right there was no designated standard for the delivery of cycle training in Ireland resulting in a variance of course content, duration and quality of delivery from area to area. In general, no on-road training was provided

Funding for the new standard has been made available by my Department with some support from the RSA to meet the additional costs of providing the high level of training (including road based training) and teacher/pupil ratio that Cycle Right requires. This additional funding will be administered by Cycling Ireland. It is expected that all local authorities that have provided funding for cycle training in recent years will continue to do so at the same level and that those authorities that have not provided funding to date will see the launch of Cycle Right as an opportunity to support cycle training to school children in their area.

The cost of student participation in this new training will be covered by a combination of funding from my Department, the RSA, local authorities and a small parental contribution.

Electric Vehicles

460. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a person (details supplied) with a current full clean driving licence from Nova Scotia, but also with a previous lapsed full clean licence from Newfoundland, will be able to avail of bilateral agreements with Canada that would allow them to renew their licence here without having to go through the licence application process as if the person was a learner driver, in view of their 20 plus years experience; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38344/16]

461. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if bilateral agreements with Canada on the issue of driving licences that are in place in respect of Newfoundland, Manitoba and Ontario will be extended to cover Nova Scotia, British Columbia and the remaining parts of Canada; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38346/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 460 and 461 together.

The operation of the National Driver Licensing service is the statutory responsibility of the Road Safety Authority (RSA), and I cannot comment on individual cases.

I can however explain the legal position. Irish driver licensing law operates within a framework of EU law. On this basis, we have driver licence exchange relationships with all other EU member states. In the case of non-EU countries, we may reach bilateral agreements on mutual exchange of driving licences. These are not a straightforward matter, and it is not enough for it to be convenient or desirable to both sides. The relevant authorities on each side must make detailed comparisons of the two licensing regimes, so that each may be satisfied that the two regimes are compatible. On the Irish side, this task is undertaken by the RSA.

Driver licensing in Canada operates at provincial rather than national level. This means reaching agreements with each individual province. The RSA has been working on this for some time, and agreements are now in place with Ontario, Manitoba, and Newfoundland and Labrador.

In the circumstances described by the Deputy, as we do not have a licence exchange arrangement with Nova Scotia, the person would not be able to exchange their licence here. If they were to renew their Newfoundland & Labrador licence, however, it would be exchangeable in Ireland.

Public Service Vehicles

462. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding to the coach passenger industry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38373/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy has referred to, my predecessor approved proposals to reform the current licensing regime for Large Public Service Vehicles (LPSVs), which is presently administered by An Garda Síochána.

A key aim of the reform is to streamline the process for industry so as to eliminate the overlap and duplication that currently exists with regard to the various elements of the current LPSV licensing regime. As part of the overall reform package, my Department has been liaising with other stakeholders, including the Coach Tourism and Transport of Ireland, with a view to agreeing the most appropriate mechanism and institutional arrangements to effect this change, as well as other related reforms to the bus regulatory regime. A number of options are under consideration in this regard.

Regardless of which options is deemed to be the most appropriate, primary legislation will be required to underpin the new arrangements. Work is also underway to define the precise dimensions of the legislative changes required to provide both for the new regulatory regime for LPSVs and to revoke the existing legislative provisions governing such vehicles.

Rail Network

463. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his Department has conducted a cost-benefit analysis of the commercial value of the Limerick to Ballybrophy railway line and its contribution to the local economy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38394/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I presume the Deputy's question is in the context of the Rail Review 2016.

The National Transport Authority (NTA) is currently running a public consultation on rail in Ireland. It was launched over two weeks ago with the publication of the Rail Review 2016 - which the NTA undertook in conjunction with Iarnród Éireann - together with an NTA consultation document "The Role of Rail in Ireland and Funding its Delivery". Both documents are available on the NTA's website.

The public consultation process will give the public and all interested parties the opportunity to give their views and contribute to the debate on the future of heavy rail in Ireland. The public consultation process will run until 18th January 2017 and the NTA will then prepare a report based on the findings; thereafter I intend to bring this report to Government.

No decisions will be made about the heavy rail network, or individual rail lines, before the public consultation process has concluded and been evaluated.

Ferry Services Provision

464. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of a new ferry for Valentia Island (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38413/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): My Department's role in relation to tourism lies primarily 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. While the Department provides funding to Fáilte Ireland to invest in tourism offerings, it does not administer those capital programmes. Similarly, it does not have discretionary funds at its disposal to assist with tourism proposals.

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.

Road Projects Status

465. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if work has commenced in the early activities in the construction of the M20 Cork to Limerick motorway, as set out in decision one of his update of the project; and if this stage of the process has not commenced, when it will commence. [38446/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual national road projects is a matter for the Transport Infrastructure Ireland (formerly known as the NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects is a matter in the first instance for TII in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act.

As I have indicated previously, I have agreed that TII can proceed with some early activities related to restarting planning for the proposed M20 scheme. Additional funding will need to be made available to my Department if the project is to be progressed beyond those early activities. As this preparatory (early activity) work is being undertaken by TII, I have referred the Deputy's question to TII for direct reply. Please contact my office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Roads Maintenance Funding

466. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide emergency funding to Kerry County Council to carry out works on the Dale Road, Abbeydorney Cross to Ballinclogher Cross, R551, at which urgent upgrades are necessary due to an extremely dangerous road layout resulting in seven vehicles crashing over ditches in 2016 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38490/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads such as the R551 is the statutory responsibility of each local authority, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from local authorities' own resources supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is also a matter for

the local authority.

The economic reality of recent years has meant significant reductions in roads budgets across the board and this has resulted in some grant programmes being curtailed, including the Specific and Strategic Grant Programmes, in order to protect funding for road maintenance and repair.

It is important to reiterate that the role of Exchequer grants for regional and local roads is to supplement local authorities in their spending in this area and it is open to Kerry County Council to fund this work from its own resources.

Trans European Transport Network Programme

467. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if meetings have previously been scheduled between him and the European co-ordinator for the North Sea-Mediterranean TEN-T corridor; if he has met with the European co-ordinator; if not, the reason the meetings did not take place; and his views on whether the TEN-T corridor is vital for the further development of infrastructure within the State. [38495/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The European Co-ordinator for the North Sea Mediterranean Core Corridor, Professor Balazs, was due to visit both Northern Ireland and Ireland in late June but due to scheduling issues and uncertainty after the outcome of the UK Referendum, this visit was postponed.

I have asked for this meeting to be arranged again and my officials have been in contact with the office of the European Co-ordinator. It is hoped that this visit will now occur in Spring 2017.

As a small peripheral open trading economy it is vital that European transport infrastructure is efficient and effective and enhances Ireland's transport connectivity to the transport networks of our European partners. The NSMED Core Corridor Work Plan will contribute to this objective in a joined up manner and my officials will continue to work with NSMED Corridor Forum stakeholders, officials from the European Commission, the European Co-ordinator and other Member States in implementing this plan and seeking European co-funding for the implementation of projects in Ireland along this corridor. In this context, I look forward to meeting Prof Balazs when he visits Ireland.

Public Service Vehicles

468. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of wheelchair accessible taxis by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38542/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The regulation of the small public service vehicle industry, including the licensing of wheelchair accessible taxis and hackneys, is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the provisions of the Taxi Regulation Act 2013.

I have therefore referred your question to the NTA for direct reply to you. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

Public Transport

469. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will investigate with the National Transport Authority chief executive officer (details supplied) when the agency which she heads will be in a position to identify the company that has been successful for its open tender for the provision of bus shelters across the country; when this new advertising company will be in the position to begin the planning application process with Sligo County Council for the delivery of the already identified new bus shelter at John Street, Sligo, which has been approved for development and which has had its funding announced by the NTA on 10 August 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38546/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the development of public transport infrastructure including bus stops, bus shelters, bus stations, bus stands and bus fleets in the State. Moreover, I have no role in any tendering or contractual arrangements between the NTA and third party contractors.

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

Tourism Industry

470. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the progress being made to develop the Ireland Lakelands brand as a separate proposition to sit alongside the Wild Atlantic Way and Ireland's Ancient East, with specific reference to the Ballina-Killaloe area and Lough Derg to Portumna Bridge taking in villages and Nenagh along the way; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38562/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): My Department's role in relation to tourism lies primarily 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.

Free Travel Scheme Review

471. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to extend the free travel initiative for children during the summer to all areas of the State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38563/16]

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.

Rural Transport Services

472. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his

plans to address the real danger that rural bus services will disappear over the coming months leaving large swathes of rural Ireland without vital bus services if Bus Éireann moves ahead with plans to alter the terms and conditions of its Expressway staff; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38649/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I have been consistently clear since assuming office that issues relating to pay and conditions in any particular State owned company under my Department's aegis are a matter for discussion and agreement between the employer and the employees.

I am aware that Bus Éireann is considering options designed to address its significant financial losses which result from its commercial Expressway service. The formulation and progression of those plans are a matter for Bus Éireann. Bus Éireann has engaged consultants to independently review the options available to it as it seeks to address these losses.

In addition the Deputy is also aware that the Company has indicated its desire to discuss the Expressway issue with trade unions. I am firmly of the belief that difficult issues such as this can only be resolved through open, constructive and realistic engagement between the company and its employees and I do not propose to comment on the detail of any proposals that might be put to Trade Unions to address the serious challenges facing Bus Eireann. As shareholder, however, I do have a view that Bus Eireann's serious financial challenges should be tackled decisively and effectively so that the company can be viable and serve its customer base on a sustainable basis.

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

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

Rail Network Expansion

473. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the DART expansion programme and the electrification of the Sligo line from Connolly to Maynooth, together with removal of level crossings and resignalling; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38715/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The National Transport Authority's 'Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area 2016 - 2035', which was approved and published earlier this year, proposes implementation of the DART Expansion Programme involving electrification of the Northern line as far as Drogheda, the Kildare Line to Hazelhatch, the Sligo line to Maynooth in the west and to the M3 Parkway and construction of the DART Underground tunnel. The extension of the DART to Maynooth and to the M3 Parkway would provide an enhancement to existing services for commuters from the wider catchment areas in Counties Kildare and Meath, including Kilcock and Enfield.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Government decided in September 2015 that the original proposal for the tunnel should be redesigned and work is underway on that at present. Due to constraints on funding, not all of the elements of the DART Expansion Programme can be progressed during the lifetime of the Capital Plan. Funding has been allocated for the extension of the DART to Balbriggan and for work on the redesign of the tunnel. Other elements of the Programme will be considered in the planned review of the Capital Plan.

Driver Licences Applications

474. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if persons over 70 years of age can apply to have their driving licence renewed to the NDLS by post, rather than having to attend in person; if not, the reason; and if he will consider issuing a directive to the NDLS to allow persons over 70 years of age to apply for their driving licence renewal by post in order to improve access for elderly citizens. [38733/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The operation of the National Driver Licensing Service is the statutory responsibility of the Road Safety Authority, and I have no role in procedural matters. I have therefore referred the Question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response has not been received within ten days.

Sports Facilities Provision

475. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when he expects construction to begin on the national velodrome; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38737/16]

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

Rail Network

476. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will seek assurances from the chief executive officer of Iarnród Éireann that extra security will be provided to the Howth Junction-Donaghmede DART station over the Christmas and New Year period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38750/16]

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

Rail Network

477. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if

Iarnród Éireann will be removing the staff from the Sandycove and Glasthule DART station to make it an unmanned station; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38752/16]

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

Roads Maintenance Funding

478. **Deputy Regina Doherty** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the value of road block funding grants allocated to each county for each of the years 2014, 2015 and to date in 2016 in tabular form. [38798/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of each local authority, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from local authorities' own resources supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is also a matter for the local authority.

Following the re-structuring of the local authorities in 2014 and the abolition of the former Urban District Councils there are no longer separate block grants for urban councils. The regional and local road grant allocations and payments made to local authorities in the period 2014 to 2015 are included in the allocation and payment booklets available in the Dáil library. The regional and local road grant allocation booklet for 2016 is also available in the Dáil library.

Tourism Promotion

479. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the steps he will take to ensure that Tourism Ireland, Fáilte Ireland and such other tourism organisations will provide information regarding the facilities that are in County Westmeath pertaining to developed greenways along the entire length of the Royal Canal in County Westmeath and between Mullingar and Athlone along the old rail trail, which are important tourist facilities but which are not referred to on the Discover Ireland website; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38828/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): My Department's role in relation to tourism lies primarily in the area of national tourism policy. It is not directly involved in the implementation of that policy, including the provision of tourism information and marketing. That is an operational matter for the Boards and Management of the tourism agencies, Tourism Ireland and Fáilte Ireland.

Accordingly, I have referred the Deputy's question to Tourism Ireland and Fáilte Ireland for direct reply to the Deputy. Please contact my private office if you have not received a reply within ten working days.

Transport Infrastructure Ireland Projects

480. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his Department approved design work (details supplied); when works will commence; and if he will

make a statement on the matter. [38831/16]

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

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

Transport Infrastructure Ireland Projects

481. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his Department approved design work (details supplied); when work will commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38858/16]

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

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

Aviation Issues

482. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of permits that were issued to carry munitions of war through Ireland or Irish airspace in 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [33832/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The number of permits issued by my Department in 2015 for civilian aircraft to carry munitions of war through Irish airspace was 818.

Military Aircraft Landings

483. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the payment to the Irish Aviation Authority by his Department to cover the costs of US military planes landing in Shannon Airport and air traffic control costs. [33824/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The payments by my Department to the Irish Aviation Authority (IAA) represents a reimbursement of costs incurred by the IAA in the provision of aeronautical communication services and en-route air navigation services provided by the Authority to certain specified classes of airspace users (e.g. military aircraft, State aircraft, Search and Rescue).

The practice derives from the exclusion of State aircraft from the scope of the Chicago Convention establishing the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO). While the ap-

plication of the exemption from charges is at the discretion of the State concerned, the policy and general practice at international level is to exempt such flights from charges. Ireland, in common with the vast majority of Eurocontrol's 41 member states, subscribes to this practice. The exemption does not cover terminal charges such as landing fees consequently no reimbursement occurs for these charges.

The total amount paid to the IAA in 2015 in respect of exempt services was €2.5 million. This amount includes the cost of US military and State flights and exempt flights from other States. This payment is in respect of the amounts invoiced to IAA, in the first instance, by Eurocontrol. That body sets the charges under its Route Charges System based on a number of factors including distances and aircraft size and weight. For further details on the route charges system, I refer the Deputy to the latest Eurocontrol Report on the Operation of its Route Charges System in 2015. It is available at

<https://www.eurocontrol.int/sites/default/files/content/documents/route-charges/operation-reports/2015-report-on-the-operation-of-the-route-charges-system.pdf>

Child Abuse

484. **Deputy Colm Brophy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the status of the work of the Ferns 5 national steering committee and the implementation of the recommendation of the Ferns 5 report. [38329/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Ferns 5 National Steering Committee for Sexual Abuse Services was established to facilitate and promote integration and coordination of the key stakeholder agencies in the development of sexual abuse services for children in Ireland. The final report of the Steering Committee, which was published in 2014, included a Children's Service Framework to include policies and procedures and standards for the following:

Tusla, the Child and Family Agency is currently leading a national, multi-agency process to implement a national service model for sexual abuse services for children and their families which includes; An Garda Síochána, the Health Service Executive, the Children's Hospital Group, the Probation Service and Children at Risk in Ireland (CARI) - a non-Governmental organisation.

The establishment of multi-agency service provision for children and young people who exhibit sexually harmful behaviour was set out in Tusla's 2016 Business Plan. A principal psychologist and a principal social worker have been recruited and the recruitment of a senior psychologist and a senior social worker is underway. Implementation teams are currently being established in the four regions. Further development of the service will be planned for in the context of the 2017 Business Plan.

Youth Cafés Provision

485. **Deputy Colm Brophy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans for capital funding in 2017 for development of new youth service facilities and youth cafés. [38330/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department administers a range of funding schemes and programmes to support the provision of youth

services by the voluntary youth sector, to young people throughout the country. The funding schemes support national and local youth work provision to some 380,000 young people. The voluntary youth sector involves approximately 1,400 paid staff, including youth workers and 40,000 volunteers working in youth work services and communities throughout the country. Budget 2017 has provided €2.6m to my Department for a capital funding scheme for youth projects and services.

Work on the development of a new capital funding scheme for 2017 is underway. My Department is engaging with each Education and Training Board Youth Officer to identify the capital needs of the youth sector. I hope to announce details of this new capital scheme in the coming months.

Children in Care

486. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of non-Irish nationals by nationality currently within the care system in tabular form; the number of instances in these cases in which the young persons' consulate has been informed of this action being taken; the steps she and Tusla have taken to ensure that Ireland is fully in compliance with its duty under the Vienna Convention and Brussels II Regulation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38410/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I have requested information from Tusla, the Child and Family Agency and I am anxious to report to you in an accurate and helpful manner and I will respond directly to the Deputy upon receipt of this information.

Psychological Services

487. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if dedicated psychiatric services will be provided in respect of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38424/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The issue raised by the Deputy is a matter for the Minister for Health.

Homeless Persons Data

488. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her Department does not provide the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government with the number of homeless adults and children in Tusla-funded accommodation services; and if she will engage with her counterparts in the Departments of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government and Social Protection and supply these figures from January 2017 to ensure that they are included in the Department of Housing, Planning, Community, and Local Government's official monthly homeless figures. [38442/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Policy responsibility for children who present as 'out of home' without their parent(s) or guardian(s) relates to children under 18 and any child welfare and protection concern that may arise in the context of the Child Care Act 1991. Children under 16 who present as out of home to emergency services are taken into care. Children aged 16 and 17 may be taken into care, or provided with a service

under section 5 of the Child Care Act 1991 (accommodation for homeless children).

Figures available from Tusla indicate that, at the 31st of December 2015, there were 9 children aged 16 and 17 years old who were being accommodated under section 5.

Children accommodated under section 5 of the Act are provided with the same supports and safeguards as children in care. In some instances, they may not wish to be taken into care and will take up services only on the basis of receiving support under section 5. Social work departments work with these children to ensure the minimum time spent in homeless accommodation. The majority of children accommodated at the end of 2015 were the subject of a section 5 for six months or less.

Tusla has worked and will continue to work with relevant services in order to maximise the supports available to children and families and to ensure that all professionals are aware of their obligation to be vigilant in relation to child protection. The national dataset collated by Tusla, currently on a quarterly basis, is not compiled by local authority area. However, this can be made available on a formal basis to the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if required.

Children in Care

489. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 714 and 715 of 15 November 2016, if the numbers provided for children under one year of age taken into care represent individual new cases for each year provided; the reason Tusla does not employ a metric that collates the number of newborn children taken into care directly or soon after birth; if there are plans to introduce such a metric; the number of such removals of children under one that have taken place, by county or location, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38473/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, collates data in relation to the numbers of admissions to care. Each admission to care represents a new admission and hence the same child could be admitted into care more than once during the year. The data records each admission and not individual cases.

Data in relation to each admission is collected for the individual child and recorded on the child's file. Care files contain information about admission, care plans, including reunification plans, placement details, actions of each professional in the child's life, health and development needs, educational needs and discharge details. This information is not analysed or collated nationally.

Tusla does not specifically identify pregnant mothers as a cohort for specific enumeration through metrics because each case is assessed individually both before and after birth. The newborn baby's environment, familial supports and the parents' capacity are unique to each child; therefore each assessment is informed by these factors.

Data regarding the number of admissions into care of children who were under 1 year old for the years 2011 to 2015 is set out in the following tables.

Year	Number of Admissions for children aged under 1 year
2011	230
2012	255
2013	224

Year	Number of Admissions for children aged under 1 year
2014	231
2015	205

Please note data relate to admissions and not children and there may be multiple admissions for the one child or children

Year	Number of Admissions for children aged under 1 year
2011	230 (10%)
2012	255 (12%)
2013	224 (12%)
2014	231(14%)
2015	205 (13%)

Please note data relates to admissions and not children and there may be multiple admissions for one child or children.

The percentage figures above reflect the percentage of those under 1 year as a percentage of the overall number of admissions (all age categories).

Child and Family Agency Staff

490. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 581 of 29 November 2011 and 569 of 22 November 2016, the number of staff allocated to the HSE and health board's separated children team for unaccompanied refugee minors in each of the years 2000 to 2014; and if all records relating to staffing numbers for the separated children team transferred ownership from the HSE to Tusla on establishment in 2014. [38585/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Prior to the establishment of Tusla in January 2014, child welfare and protection services, including separated children teams for unaccompanied refugee minors, were provided under the auspices of the Health Service Executive. Tusla again has informed me that the information requested did not transfer on its establishment.

I have asked my officials to contact Tusla directly in order to find out where these records are held and in order that a reply to the Deputy setting out the information requested can be supplied directly to her.

Child Care Qualifications

491. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will ensure that all members of staff in child care which count towards ratios are trained up to FETAC level 5 with regard to child-care regulations taking effect at the end of November; if this requirement will be met if a member of staff is undertaking that training at that moment in time; and if there is flexibility regarding members of staff who are in training for such qualifications. [38646/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The majority of the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016 came into effect 30th June 2016.

The Regulations provide that each employee working directly with children attending the service must hold at least a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at Level 5 on the National Qualifications Framework or a qualification deemed by the Minister to be equivalent. The Regulations clearly state that the service provider must ensure that their staff meet this standard.

This section of the regulations took effect on 30th June 2016 for services registering after that date and for all other services it will take effect on 31st December 2016.

My Department introduced this regulatory change following many years consultation with the sector. Mindful of the challenge that it would present to the sector, my Department introduced the following supportive measures:

- Learner Funds to provide sector workers with an opportunity to upskill to a Level 5 qualification.

- The Regulations provide an exemption for certain existing childcare staff who intend to retire from the sector in the near future, do not hold the minimum qualification and who do not wish to undertake a course of training at this stage. The option to apply for an exemption, which was first publicised through the City/County Childcare Committees in 2014 applies up to September 2021. The Regulations stipulate that persons seeking to avail of this exemption must, by 30th June 2016, have signed the necessary declaration and be in possession of a letter from the Minister confirming that the exemption had been granted.

- A qualifications assessment procedure, put in place by DCYA in the latter half of 2015, allows for applications to be made for individual qualifications assessment. This is conducted by DCYA in consultation with the Early Years Policy Unit of the Department of Education and Skills, and is available to anyone who applies. Each application is dealt with on a case by case basis.

Staff who have completed a relevant award at NFQ Level 5 or above by the 31st of December, or who were granted an exemption before the 30th June 2016, will meet the regulatory standard. Staff who are currently undergoing education to achieve a Level 5 award will not meet the regulatory standard until that award has been achieved.

Child Care Services

492. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the grants available for disability ramps for a child-care facility; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38651/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): In June 2016, I introduced the new Access and Inclusion Model (AIM), which enables children with disabilities to access and fully participate in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme.

The model delivers seven levels of progressive support, moving from the universal to the targeted, to enable the full inclusion and meaningful participation of children with disabilities in the ECCE Programme. The degree of support provided will depend on the needs of the child in the context of the pre-school service delivering the ECCE programme.

Level 5 of the model provides for specialised equipment, appliances and grants for minor building alterations (to include disability ramps) which are necessary to support a child's par-

ticipation in the ECCE programme. The maximum grant available under this stream for minor building alterations is €7,000.

An application to Pobal, who are the administrators of the scheme, can be made by the pre-school service provider in conjunction with the parent for a minor building alterations grant.

Further information is available in the AIM Policy on the dedicated website, *www.aim.gov.ie*.

Inter-Country Adoptions

493. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans for opening the adoption programme between Ireland and Haiti; and if she will prioritise that programme in view of the fact that there are more than 30,000 children in institutions in that country, that many Irish families are approved for inter-country adoption and there are many links between Ireland and Haiti. [38755/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Haiti ratified the Hague Convention on 1 April 2014. In May 2014 the Adoption Authority of Ireland accredited Helping Hands Adoption Mediation Agency to facilitate inter country adoption between Ireland and Haiti. Helping Hands applied for accreditation by Institut du Bien-Être Social et de Recherches (IBESR), the central authority of inter country adoption in Haiti. The Authority has recently advised the Department that Helping Hands has been formally approved by IBESR to mediate adoptions from Haiti.

A preliminary meeting is scheduled between the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the Department of Foreign Affairs to examine the feasibility of progressing this matter further.

European Defence Capabilities

494. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he will clarify the Government's position on the European military headquarters; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38722/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): As I previously advised the House on 27th September 2016, there have been proposals around for some time, that the EU should establish a joint operational headquarters to support the planning and conduct of its civil and military operations. A permanent joint civil-military operational headquarters, appropriately configured, could potentially deliver more effective and responsive CSDP operations in support of the UN and international peace and security, a position which Ireland supports.

However, this is a matter which EU Member States, including Ireland, will consider in the context of the Council Conclusions of 14 November on implementing the EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy. Ireland will participate fully in that process and in the ongoing development of the EU Common Security and Defence Policy in support of the UN and international peacekeeping and crisis management.

Easter Rising Commemorations

495. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the reason Louth Civil Defence did not take part in the 1916 commemoration parade on 27 March 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38783/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Civil Defence was invited to provide up to 100 volunteers to represent the organisation as part of the contingent of State emergency services in the Easter Sunday Commemoration Ceremony and Parade in Dublin on 27th March 2016. Nominations to participate in the parade were requested from the local Civil Defence Units throughout the country. Twenty-two of the thirty-one Units submitted written nominations. The number of nominees submitted exceeded the permitted limit. However, no nominations were received from Louth Civil Defence Unit.

The volunteers selected from the units that submitted written nominations to represent Civil Defence then undertook an extensive training programme in foot-drill in preparation for participation in the parade.

While twenty-two of the thirty-one units were represented in the parade, members from other units, including members of Louth Civil Defence assisted their colleagues in other duties on the day. I would like to thank all members of Civil Defence for their contribution to events commemorating the centenary of the Easter Rising, at both national and local level throughout the year.

Ferry Services Provision

496. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if any contingency plans have been put in place involving the Naval Service to provide a replacement ferry service for the persons of Inis Mór on a temporary basis until a more permanent solution is found. [38826/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Defence Forces do not have contingency plans in place for the provision of such a service. While the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs was in contact with my Department and I undertook to consider any request that is received, it has been confirmed to me that ferry services to Inis Mór have now resumed. With regard to the provision of ferry services generally, the military authorities have advised me that Naval Service ships are not suitable for this type of work.

Civil Defence

497. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the steps he will take to provide alternative, suitable and appropriate accommodation for Westmeath Civil Defence, as the current accommodation is totally inadequate, given that there is alternative accommodation available in Columb Barracks, Mullingar; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38829/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Civil Defence is a volunteer based organisation which supports the front-line emergency services. It operates in partnership between the Department of Defence and local authorities through-out Ireland. The Civil Defence Branch of the Department of Defence is charged with the management and development of Civil Defence at national level. The Civil Defence Branch provides policy direction, centralised training, administrative support and guidance and centralised procurement

of major items of uniform and equipment in support of local authority Civil Defence efforts.

At local level, Civil Defence is based in each local authority area under the operational control of the relevant local authority. On a day to day basis these Units operate under the control of a Civil Defence Officer, who is an employee of the local authority.

The provision of accommodation for local Civil Defence Units is the responsibility of the relevant local authority. This is a longstanding position which was reaffirmed in the White Paper on Defence (2015).

Senior officials from the Department of Defence met with the Chief Executive, Westmeath County Council earlier this year. This has been in keeping with efforts by the Department, since the closure of Columb Barracks in 2012, to explore a number of avenues to try and secure the long term future of the former barracks for the benefit of the local community. To date, Westmeath County Council has declined the option of availing of Columb Barracks for use, including for use by Civil Defence.

Recently I met with a number of Westmeath Civil Defence volunteers to discuss the provision of accommodation. I advised the volunteers that although accommodation for local Civil Defence Units is a matter for each local authority, the Department of Defence will continue to work pro-actively with Westmeath County Council, to encourage them to provide appropriate accommodation for its local Civil Defence Unit.