Written Answers.

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

Questions Nos. 1 to 6, inclusive, answered orally.

Questions Nos. 7 to 44, inclusive, resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 45 to 57, inclusive, answered orally.

Equality Issues

58. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Social Protection his views on the increasing numbers of low paid or part-time workers and the impact of this on wage inequality here, which according to research carried out by UNITE is the second highest in the EU-15, and in view of the recent decrease in the number of persons on the live register; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2777/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): My colleague the Minister for Jobs Enterprise and Innovation has responsibility for legislation and regulation in relation to statutory minimum wage levels and to conditions of employment.

However, I can say that it is not accurate to suggest that part-time work has been an important element in recent employment growth. In the four years ending in the third quarter of 2016, employment increased by 199,000. Within this total, full-time employment increased by 184,000 while part-time employment grew by only 15,000. Indeed the number of part-time workers who describe themselves as "under-employed" – in other words, working part-time because they could not find full-time work – actually fell by 47,000 during this period. The fall in unemployment (and in the Live Register) in recent years is therefore primarily due to growth in full-time, not in part-time employment.

In relation to wages, wage inequality in Ireland is above the average for the EU member states. Eurostat data for 2014 indicate that 21% of workers here earn an hourly wage which is less than two-thirds of the median wage – defined in the data as "low-paid". On this particular measure of inequality, Ireland ranks seventh highest in the EU, and second-highest in the EU-15.

However, under this Eurostat definition, the threshold for low pay is set relative to the level of earnings in an individual country, rather than to the absolute value of the wage itself. Because median wages in Ireland are among the highest in the EU, the "low-pay threshold" is also relatively high – at €13.44 per hour, as compared with €8.80 per hour for the EU overall, and, for example, €9.96 in France or €9.87 in the UK. The low-pay threshold in Ireland is in fact close to the median wage in either of the two countries mentioned.

Finally, it should also be noted that, while inequality in market incomes in Ireland is relatively high, the Irish tax and welfare system does more to offset this inequality than is the case elsewhere in the EU.

Labour Activation Measures

59. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the specific measures his Department plans to introduce to tackle unemployment for those persons aged 50 years of age and over; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2726/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Government policy to reduce unemployment is twofold. First, through policies set out in the Action Plan for Jobs, to create an environment in which business can succeed and create jobs and second, through Pathways to Work to ensure that as many of these new jobs and other vacancies that arise in our economy are filled by people taken from the Live Register, including people over 50 years of age. These policies have seen a significant reduction in unemployment over the last few years.

People of all ages have benefited from this reduction none more so than people over 50 years of age. The unemployment rate for persons aged 50 and over has fallen by almost half, from 11.7% at its peak in the third quarter of 2012 to 6.1% in the third quarter of 2016. The unemployment rate for older members of the labour force is also lower than for those in younger age groups. Quarterly National Household Survey Data data show that in the third quarter of 2016, the most recent period for which disaggregated data is available, the unemployment rate for those aged 50-64 was 6.1%, as compared with 7.5% for those aged 25-49 and 17.7% for those aged under 25.

This pattern – of lower relative unemployment among those in the older age-groups – has been a consistent one over time and current trends suggest that older unemployed people will continue to benefit from the improving labour market conditions.

With regard to the question of targeting the over 50 age group through specific measures, the Department already prioritises two groups for activation support. People aged under 25 are prioritised given the higher rate of unemployment among young people, and people who are long-term unemployed are prioritised given their relatively low progression to employment rates. With the exception of these two groups the prioritisation of resources for employment and activation purposes within the Department is based on a range of factors using a jobseeker profiling and assessment method developed in conjunction with the ESRI. Age is one of the factors taken into account in this model, as are gender, nationality, level of educational attainment, family circumstances and prior employment experience. This holistic approach is in line with best international practice and ensures that resources are targeted in a more precise way than using broadly based indicators such as age alone.

Given that the underlying unemployment data do not indicate a requirement for specific measures targeted at the over 50s it is not proposed to introduce new measures aimed specifically at the older unemployed at this time.

Social Welfare Fraud

60. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Social Protection the action he is taking to combat welfare fraud; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2737/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The majority of people in receipt of a payment from the Department of Social Protection receive what they are entitled to be paid. Nevertheless, my Department recognises that abuse of the welfare system is an ongoing reality and must be tackled. Anti-fraud measures are set out in the Department's Compliance and Anti-Fraud Strategy 2014 – 2018 and are designed to prevent and detect fraud, to ensure effective oversight of schemes, to pursue prosecution of offenders and the recovery of any overpaid entitlements identified. I will be publishing the report on the implementation of the Strategy for the year 2016 before the end of March.

All Departmental staff exercise a control and compliance function in processing new applications and reviewing existing entitlements. The systems used to support schemes are designed to detect wrongful claiming and to highlight anomalies. In addition, the Department's inspectorate undertakes detailed examination of claims on a risk assessed and random basis. This is supplemented by at least three fraud and error surveys of Departmental schemes annually and by the use of data matching and data analytics techniques.

In addition, my Department's Special Investigation Unit, which comprises trained inspectors and Garda officers, is tasked with undertaking targeted and systematic examination of claims to tackle fraud and to work with other enforcement agencies to identify more serious breaches of the law.

Cross-functional and targeted actions are undertaken - both internally and in joint operations with other national and international agencies - to ensure a strategic response to high risk sectors or where fraud is considered to be most prevalent. In particular, actions are focused on sectors of the economy where there is a risk of concurrent working and claiming social welfare payments. New forms of fraud continue to be identified and the approach of the Department needs to be sufficiently flexible to combat all threats.

Overall, my Department conducts around one million claim reviews annually comprising customer entitlement enquiries, inspections and special investigations. Early indications for 2016 are that these activities have prevented incorrect expenditure of over half a billion euro, in what my Department refers to as control savings.

The continued roll-out of the Public Services Card has considerably reduced the potential for identity fraud and my Department has deployed identity and analytics software and other intelligence systems to reinforce its fraud prevention work. Members of the public also play an important role in supporting these anti-fraud activities and some 19,000 reports from concerned citizens have been received during 2016. To this end, I plan to launch a fraud awareness campaign over the coming months in recognition of the important role the public plays in this regard.

The value of overpayments recovered has increased steadily in recent years and indications are that approx. €82m was recovered in 2016. This figure is subject to verification.

I am looking at a number of additional anti-fraud measures that I hope to introduce in 2017. These include publishing the names of persons who are convicted of social welfare fraud and applying surcharges on overpayments resulting from fraud.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Supplementary Welfare Allowance Payments

61. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason for the drop in

supplementary welfare allowance scheme payments being issued from community welfare offices in recent years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2766/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) scheme can consist of a basic weekly payment and/or a weekly/monthly supplement in respect of certain expenses, including rent, as well as single exceptional needs payments (ENPs) and urgent needs payments (UNPs). Some €378 million has been provided for the SWA scheme in 2017 including €31.5 million for ENPs & UNPs. The SWA schemes are subject to a means test and are demand led. The reductions in numbers receiving support under SWA can be attributed to the overall improvement in the economy, improvements in administration and policy changes in recent years. The numbers on the Live Register have dropped significantly from a peak of almost 450,000 in 2011 to a current figure of some 280,000 - a drop of almost 38%. For example, to focus on ENPs, expenditure has been stabilising in recent years at between €30 million and €32 million with some 100,000 ENPs made in 2016.

The ENP guidelines issued to staff in 2012 and 2013 have contributed to more streamlined and consistent approaches being taken to applications across the country. The guidelines do not affect the statutory discretion available to officers administering the scheme in issuing an ENP to assist an individual or household in any particular hardship situation which may arise. Separately, my Department is leading on the provision of extra supports for vulnerable people in the development of the Personal Micro Credit (PMS) scheme which aims to move people to legitimate, low cost, locally available alternative access to credit. To date, 95 Credit Unions, representing 180 credit union locations, have signed up as participants of the scheme.

I can assure the Deputy that the SWA scheme is kept under review to ensure that the CWS continues to support those most in need of assistance.

Question No. 62 answered with Question No. 55.

Free Travel Scheme

63. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will consider the introduction of travel vouchers for persons living in rural Ireland with no access to public transport and relying on private transport providers for essential weekly journeys; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2752/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The free travel scheme provides free travel for those with eligibility on the main public and private transport services which includes road, rail and ferry services provided by companies such as Bus Átha Cliath, Bus Éireann, Iarnród Éireann, Luas and services provided by over 80 private transport operators who operate mainly in rural areas. There are currently approximately 873,000 customers with direct eligibility with an annual allocation of €80 million. My Department also provides annual funding of €1.5 million towards the Rural Transport Programme which provides services to people whose travel needs are not met by existing bus or train services.

I have no plans at this time to introduce travel vouchers for persons living in rural Ireland with no access to public transport. Any decision to do so would significantly change the nature of the free travel scheme and would have budgetary consequences.

Various alternatives to the existing system, including the use of vouchers, have been examined previously by my Department which concluded that a voucher type system, which would be open to a wide range of transport providers including taxis, would be extremely difficult to administer, open to misuse and unlikely to be sufficient to provide for an acceptable amount of

travel.

Under the supplementary welfare allowance scheme my Department may award a travel supplement in any case where the circumstances of the case so warrant. The supplement is intended to assist with ongoing or recurring travel costs that cannot be met from the client's own resources and are deemed to be necessary. Every decision is based on consideration of the circumstances of the case, taking account of the nature and extent of the need and of the resources of the person concerned.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Labour Activation Measures

64. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Social Protection his plans to reform and recalibrate local activation programmes such as community employment, Tús and Gateway as announced in his statement of 2017 priorities. [2755/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): My Department provides a range of activation supports and programmes catering for long-term unemployed jobseekers and those most distant from the labour market. These include programmes such as Community Employment (CE), Tús and Gateway. These schemes help to break the cycle of unemployment and improve a person's chances of returning to the labour market. My Department is also very conscious of the valuable contribution the schemes are making in the provision of services to individuals and communities across Ireland.

As the Deputy will be aware, these employment schemes provide part-time temporary work in local communities, including opportunities for training and development as a stepping-stone back to employment, for people in receipt of a range of social welfare payments, including those on a long-term jobseeker's payment.

With the ongoing welcome reductions in the Live Register, issues such as the appropriate level of expenditure, the number of places and the criteria for participation on employment schemes are all being considered. I hope to bring a Memorandum to Government on these matters in the coming weeks. If there are any changes to be made, consultations with stakeholders will be facilitated.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility

65. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Social Protection the measures that his Department will take in the future to further support self-employed persons following the changes announced in budget 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2769/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Government is committed to encouraging self-employment and entrepreneurship. This includes enhancing the position of the self-employed through a supportive tax regime, improving the level of PRSI based benefits available to self-employed workers and providing a better safety net for low income self-employed farmers.

As part of the Government's commitment to rural Ireland, I am announce the total reversal of cuts to the means test for the Farm Assist scheme, a programme which helps over 7,800 self-

employed farm families. At a time of falling farm incomes, it's essential that we strengthen the safety net for farmers who are on the margin. The introduction of additional income disregards for farmers with children further ensures that farm families with children will benefit.

Also, in recognition of the crucial work undertaken in rural communities by the Rural Social Scheme, an additional 500 places will be made available to low-income farmers on the scheme this year. This will bring the total number of places on the scheme up from 2,600 to 3,100 in 2017.

Improving the PRSI system has been one of my key priorities since becoming Minister in this Department. On Budget Day, I was pleased to announce important measures which will directly benefit the self-employed.

From March 2017, the self-employed will have access to the treatment benefit scheme which includes free eye and dental examinations, and contributions towards the cost of hearings aids. Treatment benefit entitlements will also be extended from October 2017 so as to provide further dental and optical benefits. This improvement will benefit both the self-employed and employees.

Even more significantly, self-employed contributors will be eligible for the Invalidity Pension from December 2017. For the first time, this will give the self-employed access to the safety-net of State income supports if they become permanently incapable of work as a result of an illness or disability without having to go through a means test. This is a real advance in the level of cover available to the self-employed.

I plan to continue extending cover for the self-employed to other benefits on a phased basis in future Budgets. In 2017, my Department will examine the extension of social insurance to cover new risks and contingencies, including developing proposals on a form of jobseeker's benefit where a person's business fails or they can no longer continue working in their profession or trade.

I look forward to making further improvements for the self-employed in future Budgets.

Fuel Poverty

66. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the action his Department is taking to tackle fuel poverty; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2764/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The risk of fuel poverty is influenced by a combination of fuel prices, weather, income and the heat efficiency of housing. My Department will continue to ensure that those on low incomes and those who are more vulnerable to energy poverty are supported through the fuel allowance and the household benefits package. The fuel allowance is a payment of €22.50 per week for 26 weeks from October to April, to over 379,000 low income households, at an estimated cost of €229 million in 2017. This payment assists these households with the higher energy costs that arise in that period. It is a contribution towards the energy costs of a household. It is not intended to meet those costs in full. Only one allowance is paid per household.

My Department also pays an electricity or gas allowance as part of the household benefits package to over 424,000 customers, at an estimated cost of €232 million in 2017.

Under the supplementary welfare allowance scheme, a special heating supplement may be paid to assist people in certain circumstances who have special heating needs due to ill health

or infirmity. Exceptional needs payments may also be made to help meet an essential, once-off cost which a person is unable to meet from his/her own resources.

The Government's affordable energy strategy indicated that the best measure to address energy poverty is to improve the thermal efficiency of homes. The Better Energy Warmer Homes scheme, administered by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, funds energy efficiency improvements in the homes of the elderly and vulnerable, making the homes more comfortable, healthier and more cost effective to heat.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Departmental Contracts

67. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Social Protection the measures his Department has in place to ensure that the contracting out of public employment services to private companies, Turas Nua and Seetec, will not push claimants into low paid, low quality and temporary employment; if he has read the report The Impact of Sanctions (details supplied); his views on the reported negative impact of financial sanctions on unemployed persons if they do not enter into employment or take up an internship quickly; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2776/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Department was careful in designing the JobPath service to ensure that payments to contractors are conditional on people not just finding a job but staying in the job and that the job is a full-time job. Contractors are paid quarterly in arrears for each 13 week period of sustained employment of at least 30 hours per week and will only get full payments if the jobseeker stays in employment for 12 months. Suitability of employment is a key factor in ensuring that jobs are sustainable. If people are placed into unsuitable jobs they are less likely to remain in employment and as a consequence the providers fees will be reduced.

The JobPath providers work closely with employers to provide them with the best possible candidates for available jobs. It is not in the interests of the JobPath companies to place unsuitable candidates into inappropriate jobs as this will have adverse effects on the companies' ability to secure jobs for its other clients.

The report which the Deputy has referred to is limited to very small sample (55 interviews over a three year period). The findings are at variance with findings from a recently completed large-scale survey of Intreo centre clients carried out by an independent external agency in 2016. In summary, this survey which will be published shortly, found that jobseekers rated the service highly and on the key aspects of premises, staff, services and processes, the view of jobseekers was almost uniformly positive. These results echo the results of a similar survey completed in 2015.

With regard to the issue of penalty rates of payment, jobseeker payments are conditional on jobseekers being genuinely available for work. The activation and employment support services provided by the Department, at significant expense, are designed to help jobseekers secure employment. In line with the principle of rights and responsibilities jobseekers are entitled to be provided with these services but are also required to engage with the services when they are made available. This obligation applies irrespective of whether the service is provided by my Department's own case officers, those employed by the Local Employment Service or by JobPath. Failure, without good cause, to engage with the services can result in a reduction in the payment to the jobseeker. However reductions are only applied after the jobseeker has

been given due notice on two occasions and an opportunity to provide an explanation for their non-engagement and to re-engage with the services. All decisions on the application of a reduced rate of payment are made by staff of the Department. This process is very different to the process in the UK which seemed to inform much of the commentary in the report referenced in the question.

Currently across the country less than 1% of jobseekers are on a reduced rate of payment relating to their non-engagement with the Department's activation services. Again this contrasts with the UK rate of 16% rate quoted in the report referenced in the question.

With regard to the quality of service delivered by the JobPath providers, an independent survey of a representative sample of over 2,000 participants shows that the majority of jobseekers feel that:

- They are receiving a good service under JobPath (76 – 81% satisfaction vs 5 – 8% dissatisfaction).

- JobPath staff make them feel valued (90%+) and they have a good relationship with their JobPath advisor (90%+).

- The JobPath service has improved their chances of getting a job (68% - 77%).

- The service is as good as or better than the service provided in Intreo centres (80%+).

A separate analysis of employment outcomes for JobPath participants show that they have a higher chance of securing and remaining in a job than participants of a similar duration of unemployment. Given that only a small number of people have completed their full engagement with the JobPath service these results can only be treated as indicative, nevertheless they are encouraging. The results together with a copy of the survey findings together are available at http://www.welfare.ie/en/pressoffice/pdf/pr170117.pdf

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits

68. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will revise the rules to ensure that all recipients of social protection payments receive the Christmas bonus; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2773/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Christmas bonus was introduced in 1980 for certain welfare schemes and was extended to long-term jobseekers in 1985. Payment of the bonus was abolished in 2009. It was re-instated at a rate of 25% by the previous Government in 2014 and was increased to 75% in 2015. I was pleased to be able to increase the rate of Bonus payable to 85% last December. This payment recognises the needs of people who are long-term financially dependent on their social welfare payment for all or most of their income, such as pensioners, people with disabilities and carers. It was paid to over 1.2 million beneficiaries in December last at a cost of circa €220 million.

The bonus paid over the last 3 years applied to all of the schemes to which it previously applied as well as the new back to work family dividend in 2015. The bonus was never paid to short-term welfare recipients including jobseekers with a duration of less than 15 months and illness benefit recipients generally. These arrangements have been continued.

Payment of a Christmas Bonus in December 2017 will be considered later this year. It

should be noted that payment to those weekly welfare recipients who have not historically received a Bonus would cost in the region of €33 million (based on 2016 data).

Defined Benefit Pension Schemes

69. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Social Protection his views regarding the future viability of defined benefit schemes here in view of the planned closure of a defined benefit pension scheme (details supplied); his plans to address the crisis in this sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2600/17]

76. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Social Protection the steps he plans to take to prevent solvent and profitable companies from closing their defined benefit pension schemes and moving pension risk to employees which is a growing issue in pension schemes across different employments here. [2601/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 69 and 76 together.

While it is not appropriate for me to comment on matters relating to an individual pension scheme, the Deputy will be aware that the number of defined benefit (DB) pension schemes in Ireland has dropped significantly in the last two decades. During the financial crisis the decline of defined benefit pension schemes accelerated. Occupational pension schemes are generally set up under trust and are contributed to by the employer on a voluntary basis. Almost all Irish defined benefit schemes have a rule that allows the employer to cease contributions, usually after a notice period. Neither the Minister for Social Protection nor the Pensions Authority has the power under legislation to intervene to freeze the winding up of a scheme or to compel the employer to make contributions to a scheme. Neither is there an obligation on the employer to give notice to members or to consult in advance of ceasing contributions. However, in the case where a restructuring of benefits is proposed, pensioners, deferred scheme members and unions must be kept informed by trustees. Furthermore, changes made in 2015 require trustees to notify groups representing the interests of pensioners and deferred scheme members in a scheme in such a situation.

While there are strong arguments for the introduction of greater employer obligations, it is also the case that certain less desirable side effects may result. Any changes to the Pensions Act that legislatively alters the relationship between a pension scheme and its sponsoring employer could have far-reaching implications for pensioners and the pension sector as a whole, as well as the employers. These could include prompting well-funded schemes to wind up to avoid new obligations; threatening a company's financial stability; rendering some employers insolvent; and/or giving a competitive advantage to employers who either never provided a pension and/or put defined contribution schemes in place.

My Department and the Pensions Authority are currently working on proposals for the reform and simplification of pensions, the purpose of which is to impose higher standards on all occupational schemes.

I would like to assure the Deputy that my Department and the Pensions Authority are closely monitoring developments in the DB sector and keep the need for legislative change under continuous review.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pensions

70. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Social Protection the progress that has been made on achieving equality in pension entitlements for those persons who have taken time out of their paid career to care for family members; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2573/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): There are a number of ways to qualify for a State pension the rate of payment under the State pension (contributory) scheme is related to contributions paid over the years into the Social Insurance Fund, and credited contributions where applicable. As such, those with a stronger attachment to the workforce, who have paid more into that fund, are more likely to be paid at a higher rate under that scheme, than those with more intermittent contributions made during their working life. Since the contributory pension was introduced in 1961, the 'yearly average' contributions test has been used in calculating the level of pension entitlement, where the total contributions paid or credited are divided by the number of years of the working life (from their entry into insurable employment up to the year prior to their reaching State pension age). There are a number of criteria which must be satisfied in order to qualify for a State pension (contributory), whether at full or reduced level. These include that the person must be aged 66 or over, and that they have at least 520 paid contributions. Payment rates are banded. For example, someone with a yearly average of 48 contributions will qualify for a full pension, whereas someone with a lower yearly average of 40 will qualify for a pension at the 98% rate.

The home-makers scheme makes qualification for a higher rate of State pension (contributory) easier for those who take time out of the workforce for caring duties. The scheme, which was introduced in and took effect from 1994, allows up to 20 years after that date spent caring for children under 12 years of age (or caring for incapacitated people over that age) to be disregarded when a person's social insurance record is being averaged for pension purposes, subject to the standard qualifying conditions for State pension contributory also being satisfied. This has the effect of increasing the yearly average of the pensioner, which is used to set the rate of their pension, amounting up to 95% of the maximum contributory pension rate.

The Department is currently working on the development of a "Total Contributions Approach" (TCA) to replace the yearly average approach. The aim of this approach is to make the rate of contributory pension more closely match contributions made by a person with a view to making proposals for consideration later in the year. It is worth noting that this is a very significant reform with considerable legal, administrative, and technical elements in its implementation. An important element in the final design of the scheme will be the position of people who have gaps in their contribution records for various reasons, and this factor is being considered very carefully in developing this reform.

The Deputy should note that, on an actuarial basis, it is a fact that women generally get more back from their PRSI contributions than men. This is particularly true for women with lower earnings and shorter contribution years. The Actuarial Review of the Fund in 2012 confirmed that the Fund provides better value to female rather than male contributors. This is due to the redistributive nature of the Fund. The forthcoming Actuarial Review of the Social Insurance Fund will provide data that will allow officials to accurately cost and project various options available under the TCA reform.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits

71. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Social Protection when he will consult on options for the introduction of a working family payment; and if the family income supplement will be replaced in his reforms. [2753/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Programme for Government contains a number of commitments to improve the take-home pay of families on low incomes. One such commitment is the proposed "Working Family Payment" targeted at low-income families. My Department's approach to developing the Working Family Payment will be guided by two principles. First, that it should ensure that work pays and that no family is better off on welfare than at work, and second, though equally important, that it have a positive effect on child poverty. An open call for submissions on the Working Family Payment will issue shortly on the Department's website. An Interdepartmental Working Group is in place to assist the work of my officials in developing proposals. This work will also be informed by the consultation process.

Considerable work and analysis needs to be completed along with the consultation. It is intended that developed proposals will be prepared and will be considered in the context of discussions for Budget 2018.

There are no plans that the proposals will replace the Family Income Supplement.

Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility

72. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Social Protection the amount of unclaimed social protection entitlements that persons are entitled to claim but for whatever reason do not claim. [2774/17]

83. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Social Protection his plans to publicise or launch campaigns to ensure persons are fully aware of their entitlements to social protection payments in various circumstances; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2775/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 72 and 83 together.

The Department's Customer Charter and Action Plan 2016-2018 sets out the level of service customers can expect when dealing with the Department, including a commitment to providing clear, accurate and comprehensive information.

Whilst the Department does not gather information on the amount of unclaimed social welfare entitlements, it makes every effort to ensure that anyone who has an entitlement, and wishes to submit an application form, may do so.

The Department's website, www.welfare.ie, is the central repository of information on all of the Department's schemes and services, and is complemented by telephone contact centres and enquiry facilities should a person wish to enquire about their potential entitlement.

The national network of Citizen Information Services also provides key advice, information and assistance to customers seeking such on my Department's schemes.

In addition, the Department holds regular meetings with customer representative groups, which are used as a mean of communicating new information of schemes, as well as providing an opportunity to consult and receive feedback on proposed communication strategies, in order to maximise the effectiveness of those strategies for my Department's customers. For example,

in 2016, I launched a public awareness campaign to highlight the availability of the Paternity Benefit scheme in order that members of the public, who may not have previously been customers of the Department, were made aware of the availability of the scheme.

The Department is currently reviewing its communications strategy with a view to ensuring that customers are aware of the types of assistance available to them depending on their circumstances.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

JobPath Implementation

73. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he has satisfied himself with the operation of JobPath; and if he plans to wind down this scheme with unemployment continuing to fall. [2757/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Ireland's Public Employment Service (PES) is managed by the Department of Social Protection (DSP) and delivered directly by its own Intreo service as well as by contracted private companies, such as JobPath, Local Employment Service (LES) and Job Club providers. With JobPath the department has procured additional resources to enable it to provide a high quality case managed employment support service to people who are long term unemployed and those most at risk of becoming long-term unemployed.

The JobPath service was designed to augment and complement the Department's existing employment service capacity, including that provide by LES. The additional capacity provided through the JobPath service has allowed the department to provide the type and intensity of services required by Jobseekers, particularly those most distant from the labour market.

Prior to the introduction of Intreo and JobPath the Department had a case officer to live register ratio of approximately 1,500:1 compared to international benchmarks of less than 200:1. Today with the reduction in the unemployment rate and the increase in capacity, both internally through Intreo and externally through JobPath, the ratio is circa 230:1 and is trending downwards. Nevertheless with a ratio of 230:1 as compared with international norms of less than 200:1 JobPath continues to play a key role in the delivery of the services required by Jobseekers and is likely to do so for the next few years.

The initial data on the impact of the service is encouraging, showing high satisfaction levels among clients of the service, and that people who engage with the service are more likely to secure employment than those who do not. The results of an independent customer satisfaction survey recently undertaken (which forms part of the report) indicates that jobseekers feel that they are receiving a good service, and that JobPath has improved their chances of securing employment.

The department continues to monitor the delivery of the service and will publish performance data on a quarterly basis this year.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Free Travel Scheme

74. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will confirm the future

of the free travel scheme operated under his department; the proposed changes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2750/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The free travel scheme provides free travel for those with eligibility on the main public and private transport services which includes road, rail and ferry services provided by companies such as Bus Átha Cliath, Bus Éireann, Iarnród Éireann, Luas and services provided by over 80 private transport operators. There are currently approximately 873,000 customers with direct eligibility with an annual allocation of €80 million.

I am aware that the free travel pass is a valuable support for older people and people with disabilities, and that it has a significant role in promoting social inclusion and preventing their isolation. In order to maintain service at existing levels funding to the free travel scheme was increased by €3 million in budget 2016. I have no plans to make any changes to the free travel scheme at this time and I am committed to its full retention.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Employment Support Services

75. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Social Protection the specific measures he plans to introduce to address the issue of high levels of unemployment being experienced by persons with disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2730/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): In Ireland, as in many other countries, the employment rate for people with disabilities is considerably lower than those without disabilities. The reasons for this are diverse and demand a wide-ranging response. The Comprehensive Employment Strategy (CES) for People with Disabilities sets the overall direction of the government's response to this problem and seeks to reduce barriers to employment and improve pathways to work. My Department actively participated in the development of the strategy and takes a full part in its implementation. For instance, among the commitments contained in the CES was the setting up of an interdepartmental group, under an independent chair, to review and make recommendations to "Make Work Pay" (MWP) for people with disabilities through the examination of the complex interactions between the benefit system, the additional costs associated with work for people with disabilities and net income earnings from employment. I understand that the group is concluding its work and the report will be published soon. Of course, along with its comprehensive range of income supports, my Department provides for a range of supports to allow people with disabilities to improve their employability, to seek and take up employment. I stress that take-up of the employment supports are of a voluntary nature and are tailored to individual circumstances and a person's capacity to engage with education, training or job-search programmes. For instance, my Department has progressively extended its Intreo service to persons with disabilities and over 60 officers have received training to enable them to interact effectively with people with disabilities. The Department of Social Protection provides a wide range of work related supports for people with disabilities.

One of the principal supports is access to the EmployAbility service, which provides job-coach support to people with disabilities in accessing jobs in the open labour market. Other supports include the provision of employment subsidies through the Wage Subsidy Scheme, workplace adaptation grants and specialist training courses that are specially designed for people with disabilities. Funding is also provided to AHEAD (Association for Higher Education Access and Disability) for the Willing Able Mentoring (WAM) programme, an employment

placement programme for graduates with disabilities.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Question No. 76 answered with Question No. 69.

Carer's Allowance Data

77. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the most up to date figures on the refusal rates for those persons applying for a carer's allowance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2768/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Carer's Allowance (CA) is a social assistance payment made to carers who are providing full-time care and attention to someone who has a disability such that they require that level of care. As well as providing full-time care and attention, applicants must satisfy a means test and be habitually resident in the State.

In November 2016, the latest month for which figures are available, 3,362 applications for CA were decided on. Of these, 1,255 were disallowed by a deciding officer as the qualifying criteria were not satisfied.

An application for CA can be disallowed because one or more of the qualifying conditions are not satisfied or because insufficient evidence is provided at application stage to establish the need for full-time care and attention or the means of the applicant.

Applicants are advised of their right to review or appeal when a decision is made on their entitlement and in many cases further evidence is subsequently submitted, leading to a revised decision to award CA.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the deputy.

Pensions Reform

78. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the steps he is taking with regard to pension reform, including closing the gender pension gap; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2767/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): My Department will develop, publish and commence the implementation of an Action Plan for the reform of pensions this year. This Action Plan will include a road map for the reform of the State pension, rationalisation and reform of the Defined Benefit pension landscape, transposition of the IORP2 directive and the introduction of auto-enrolment Defined Contribution pensions for all working people.

All reforms we will propose to the pension system will be based on the idea of fairness and equality. The current gap between State pension payments made to men and women over the age of 66 averages out to a difference of 2%. Although this 2% gap between genders is not ideal, it does compare favourably to our EU counterparts.

The National Pensions Framework (2010) proposed that a "Total Contributions Approach" (TCA) should replace the yearly average approach for new pensioners from 2020. The aim of this approach is to make the rate of contributory pension more closely match contributions made by a person. Officials of my Department are currently working on the detailed develop-

ment of the TCA. It is planned that, following receipt and analysis of data from the forthcoming independent Actuarial Review of the Social Insurance Fund, a consultation process will be conducted in the middle of this year, and following this, proposals on the final details of the scheme will be made by the Government to the Oireachtas before the end of the year.

It's worth noting that this is a very significant reform with considerable legal, administrative, and technical elements in its implementation. An important element in the final design of the scheme will be the position of people who have gaps in their contribution records for various reasons, and this factor is being considered very carefully in developing this reform.

The Pensions Authority is the independent body responsible for regulating occupational pension schemes and ensuring compliance with the Pensions Act. My Department and the Pensions Authority are working on proposals for the reform and simplification of pensions, the purpose of which is to impose higher standards on all occupational schemes. The reform proposals are intended to apply equally to defined benefit (DB) provision to ensure that those charged with running DB schemes do so in a manner which provides greater security for their members. Standards in respect of pension schemes will be further enhanced by the transposition of the new IORPS 2 Directive within the next two years.

In relation to supplementary private pensions and the gender gap, the rate of coverage in Ireland is almost equal at approximately 47% of those in employment for both men and women. However, it would be true to say that there are gender gaps in terms of the value of private pensions savings. Given that private pensions are largely a function of the amount contributed by employees, this gap reflects gender differences in employment patterns, notably in pay, working hours and career duration.

In relation to the supplementary coverage of 47% more generally, despite the considerable efforts by Governments and the pensions industry to promote and incentivise voluntary participation in supplementary pensions, the marginal changes in coverage over the last 20 years indicates that the voluntary approach to pensions participation is not achieving the desired goal in terms of increasing coverage to an appropriate level. Therefore, it is my intention to bring forward proposals for an auto-enrolment system for those workers without retirement savings. This is to address a situation where future retirees will suffer unwanted reduction in living standards at retirement.

Detailed analysis and consultation will be required in order to ensure that any system proposed adequately addresses the needs of the target membership and the gender issue will be closely considered as part of this process.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Back to Education Allowance

79. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the supports in place for persons on jobseeker's payments who wish to take up a higher degree to improve their employment potential. [2578/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Back to Education Allowance Scheme (BTEA) is designed to support second chance education. It enables eligible persons to pursue approved education courses and to continue to receive income support for the duration of a course of study, subject to meeting certain conditions. The objective of BTEA is to assist those who are distant from the labour market to acquire the necessary education to improve their chances of becoming independent of the social welfare system. The BTEA should

not be viewed, however, as an alternative to the student grant system.

The focus of the BTEA scheme is on providing assistance to the highest possible number of those in greatest need in terms of meeting the requirements of a modern labour market. People in possession of a third-level qualification have already achieved a high level of academic attainment which should impact positively on their employment prospects.

Other than the Professional Masters in Education, which is a pre-requisite to taking up a teaching post, the BTEA does not provide income support to jobseekers seeking to pursue a higher degree qualification at Masters Level. Having a Masters degree is not regarded as a prerequisite to re-entering the workforce and, at present, I have no plans to extend the scheme to cover courses leading to a Masters degree.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Community Employment Schemes Administration

80. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will report on the operation of the community employment scheme; if he will report on his earlier commitment to assist community employment sponsors in ensuring maximum utilisation of community employment places in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2729/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As the Deputy will be aware, CE schemes provide part-time temporary work in local communities, including opportunities for training and development as a stepping-stone back to employment, for people in receipt of a range of social welfare payments, including those on a long-term jobseeker's payment.

These schemes help to break the cycle of unemployment and improve a person's chances of returning to the labour market. My Department is also conscious of the valuable contribution the schemes are making in the provision of services to individuals and communities across Ireland. At the end of December 2016, there were 22,356 participants employed on CE schemes nationally.

The CE Sponsors advertise their vacancies free-of-charge on the Department's JobsIreland website - www.jobsireland.ie. Posting vacancies is a relatively simple process and a dedicated video tutorial is available on the site to assist sponsors. Anyone requiring further assistance can contact my Department's National Contact Centre by phone at Lo Call 1890 800 024 or (01) 248 1398, or by email at jobsireland@welfare.ie. Further enhancements will be made to the way in which CE vacancies are displayed on the site in the coming months.

Jobseekers can also view CE vacancies online. Eligible candidates are referred to sponsors by case officers in the local Intreo Centres. My Department continues to refer candidates so I would advise sponsors, who have any recruitment concerns, to contact their local DSP office.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Unemployment Levels

81. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Social Protection his plans to reduce long-term unemployment. [2754/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Government's primary strat-

egy to tackle unemployment – including long-term unemployment – is twofold. The Action Plan for Jobs support continuing strong economic recovery and employment growth. Policies and actions to ensure that unemployed people benefit from the increase in employment are set out in the strategy paper Pathways to Work 2016-2020.

To date, these policies have been effective in reducing both overall and long-term unemployment. The most recent data show that unemployment has fallen from a peak of 15% in 2012 to 7.2% in December 2016. The long-term unemployment rate peaked at 9.5% in Q1 2012 before falling to 4.2% in Q3 2016. At the latter date, the long-term unemployed accounted for 52% of all those unemployed, down from almost 65% in early 2012. The number of long term unemployed in Q3 2016 was 92,300; this compares to 204,300 in early 2012.

Long-term unemployment can be expected to fall further this year in line with the forecast fall in overall unemployment.

The Government recognises the importance of a continued focus on measures to facilitate long-term unemployed people find and sustain employment. This is the rationale behind the Government's Pathways to Work 2016-2020 strategy (published January 2016).

A range of measures were introduced under previous Pathways to Work strategies for long-term unemployed people. This included a structured process of engagement with long-term unemployed people being referred to the activation process (Group Engagement followed by regular one-to-one case officer contact); wage subsidies in JobsPlus; the roll-out of a payment-by-results contracted employment services in JobPath, to provide additional capacity in order to engage more systematically with long-term unemployed jobseekers; and reserved places for long-term unemployed jobseekers on a range of Further Education and Training (FET) and public employment programmes.

A core focus of Pathways to Work 2016-2020 is on consolidating and improving the quality and consistency of reforms undertaken in previous strategies, with continued prioritisation of those long-term unemployed.

I am confident these measures, and continuing economic recovery, will support further reductions in long term unemployment to add to the substantial improvements that have already been seen over the last few years.

Farm Assist Scheme Administration

82. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Social Protection when the changes announced to farm assist in budget 2017 will take effect; the date on which the 15% income disregard announced in budget 2017 will apply to all current farm assist recipients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2581/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The farm assist scheme provides support for farmers on low incomes and recipients retain the advantages of the jobseeker's allowance scheme such as the retention of secondary benefits and access to activation programmes. The 2017 Revised Estimates for my Department provide for expenditure of almost €83 million on the farm assist scheme.

I am very pleased that, with the agreement of my colleagues in Government, Budget 2017 introduced new measures in relation to the assessment of means for farm assist. These include that 70% of farm income will now be assessed as means, down from 100% being assessed as means (which is a 30% income disregard) and an additional annual means disregard of €254 for

each of the first two children and €381 for the third and subsequent children. These measures fully reverse the cuts to the farm assist means test that were introduced in Budgets 2012 and 2013.

All existing farm assist recipients currently assessed with means will have their payments adjusted so that the new measures contained in Budget 2017 will come into effect from the 8th March implementation date with relevant payments changing on the 15th March. (Farm Assist is paid weekly in arrears). It is estimated that the measure will cost €8.5 million in 2017.

Farm Assist recipients also benefitted from the following measures announced in Budget 2017 - the €5 per week increase in the weekly rates of payment; the 85% Christmas Bonus and Farm Assist recipients are eligible to avail of the 500 additional places on the Rural Social Scheme.

Question No. 83 answered with Question No. 72.

Community Employment Schemes Operation

84. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Social Protection if his attention has been drawn to specific difficulties being experienced by supervisors and sponsors in managing special community employment schemes for drugs-related projects; if he will examine a more streamlined approach for these projects; the number of persons currently on drugs-related project community employment schemes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2770/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): A new Programme Framework for Community Employment (CE) drug rehabilitation schemes was introduced in January 2016. Before finalising the Framework, there was an important consultation process both within my Department and with the community and voluntary sector and the HSE.

One of the main issues discussed in detail during this consultation was that addiction is a complex, bio-psycho-social phenomenon. Accordingly, a range of factors will affect participant's progression towards recovery and an integrated response is required to ensure effective outcomes for participants, supervisors and sponsors. I believe that the Framework provides the necessary flexibility and support both to participants entering the CE drug rehabilitation programme and to supervisors and sponsors.

At the end of December 2016, there were 987 referred clients on drug rehabilitation places (697 male and 290 female) and 138 support workers (50 male and 88 female). In total, at the end of December 2016 therefore, there were 1,125 places taken up on CE drugs schemes.

As the Deputy is aware, under the National Drugs Strategy, it is also recognised that the response to substance misuse is a cross-cutting issue. No single agency has the range of competencies or expertise to provide all the supports needed to assist recovering drug users to complete their rehabilitation. While CE has an important role to play, it needs to be supplemented by support from other bodies such as the HSE, the Department of Education and Science and relevant agencies that play a key role in the overall integrated response to this client group in terms of rehabilitation.

If the Deputy is aware of particular issues affecting CE drugs schemes, he should bring them to my attention and I will ask my officials to examine them.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

One-Parent Family Payment

85. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Social Protection the nature and the scope of the review he and his Department are carrying out on lone parents; the timeframe for this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2771/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): We are still at an early stage of the implementation of the reforms to the one parent family payment (OFP) and it will take several years before the full impact can be assessed. This is because many lone parents, on foot of the reforms, are taking up education, training or employment support programmes, which will take time for them to complete.

However, given the issues raised during the debate on the Social Welfare (SW) Bill 2016, I agreed that my Department would commission an independent report on the OFP reforms to examine the financial and social effects of the amendments to the scheme made since 1 January 2012, taking into account the poverty rates and welfare dependency of those impacted by the reforms. I am committed to producing the report as quickly as possible, and no later than August 2017 so that it can inform Budget 2018 discussions.

Under procurement rules it is not yet possible to provide further information on the nature of the report. However, I can say that my Department has already liaised with the Office of Government Procurement (OGP) on the most efficient way forward. On their advice an outline of the Request For Tender (RFT) was issued in December to potential providers seeking expressions of interest by 11th January 2017. The responses received confirm that the RFT can issue under an existing OGP framework. The drafting of the RFT has commenced and officials are working with the OGP to complete the procurement process. The timeframe for this report is ambitious but my Department is making every effort to progress this quickly taking account of the procurement rules.

Rural Social Scheme

86. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection if his attention has been drawn to the fact that rural social scheme supervisors are on notably different pay scales to community employment supervisors; the reason for such a discrepancy in view of the fact they carry out similar duties and responsibilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2727/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Rural Social Scheme (RSS) was introduced in 2004. It is managed by 35 Local Development Companies (LDCs) and by Údarás Na Gaeltachta. As the Deputy will be aware, many rural areas benefit from the services provided by the RSS and the positive impact the scheme has on the livelihoods of farming families and rural communities.

I recently announced an additional 500 places on the RSS which is the first increase in participant numbers since 2006. This brings the number of participant places to 3,100.

The setting of terms and conditions of supervisors employed to support RSS participants are matters for each LDC. Each supervisor will have a contract of employment with the partnership company, in line with statutory requirements. Any issues regarding the pay rate of RSS supervisors are a matter for discussion with the LDCs.

I hope this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

Tax and Social Welfare Codes

87. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection his plans to extend PRSI benefits to self-employed persons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2725/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Core to the Programme for Government is improving the position of the self-employed generally, including the commitment to introduce an enhanced PRSI scheme for the self-employed.

Making progress on this commitment has been one of my key priorities since becoming Minister in this Department. On Budget Day, I was pleased to announce a number of important measures which will benefit the self-employed.

From March 2017, the self-employed will have access to the treatment benefit scheme which includes free eye and dental exams, and contributions towards the cost of hearings aids. Treatment benefit entitlements will also be extended from October 2017 so as to provide further dental and optical benefits (these improvements will benefit both the self-employed and employees).

More significantly, self-employed contributors will be eligible for the Invalidity Pension from December 2017. For the first time, this will give the self-employed access to the safety-net of State income supports if they become permanently incapable of work as a result of an illness or disability without having to go through a means test. This is a real advance in the level of cover available to the self-employed.

The self-employed will also benefit in 2017 from the further increase in Earned Income Tax Credit announced by my colleague, the Minister for Finance, as well as the extension of entrepreneurship supports. These measures are all part of the Government's policy of making work pay and encouraging self-employment and entrepreneurship.

I plan to continue extending cover for the self-employed to other benefits on a phased basis in future Budgets. In 2017, my Department will examine the extension of social insurance to cover new risks and contingencies, including developing proposals on a form of jobseeker's benefit where a person's business fails or they can no longer continue working in their profession or trade.

Social Welfare Benefits

88. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection his plans to introduce a new working family payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2724/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Programme for Government contains a number of commitments to improve the take-home pay of families on low incomes. One such commitment is the proposed "Working Family Payment" targeted at low-income families.

My Department's approach to developing the Working Family Payment will be guided by two principles. First, that it should ensure that work pays and that no family is better off on welfare than at work, and second, though equally important, that it have a positive effect on child poverty.

An open call for submissions on the Working Family Payment will issue shortly on the Department's website. An Interdepartmental Working Group is in place to assist the work of my

officials in developing proposals. This work will also be informed by the consultation process.

Considerable work and analysis needs to be completed along with the consultation. It is intended that developed proposals will be prepared and will be considered in the context of discussions for Budget 2018.

Data Protection

89. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if personal information collated by Seetec working on behalf of his Department is stored on databases outside Ireland, which are soon to be outside EU jurisdiction; and his views on whether this infringes on the privacy of persons by allowing their personal information to be stored on databases over which the State has no control. [2577/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): No personally identifiable client information is stored outside Ireland by either company.

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 service is delivered by two companies, Seetec and Turas Nua.

Information is shared with these companies to enable them to provide employment services on behalf of the Department. 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. Under the contracts for the provision of these services, there are strict obligations placed on these providers by the Department with regard to data protection. The companies are also contractually required to register with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner and are subject to the same provisions of data protection legislation as Departmental staff. Data protection legislation requires that personal data shall be kept only for one or more specified and lawful purposes and that personal data shall be used and disclosed only in ways compatible with these purposes. Any breaches or suspected breach of the data protection legislation may, in addition to being investigated by the Department, also be referred to the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner.

It should also be noted that the contracts in place are governed by and construed in accordance with the laws of Ireland and the courts of Ireland have exclusive jurisdiction over these contracts.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Free Travel Scheme

90. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection if his attention has been drawn to a report which proposes a €50 annual charge on the free travel pass; if he will give a commitment that no such charge will be introduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2723/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The free travel scheme provides free travel for those with eligibility on the main public and private transport services which includes road, rail and ferry services provided by companies such as Bus Átha Cliath, Bus Éireann, Iarnród Éireann, Luas and services provided by over 80 private transport operators. There

are currently approximately 873,000 customers with direct eligibility with an annual allocation of €80 million.

I am aware of the report to which the Deputy refers. In 2012, my Department along with the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, set up an interdepartmental working group to review the free travel scheme. The purpose of the review was to examine and report on the current operation and future development of the free travel scheme.

The review was carried out at a time of fiscal constraint, to examine and report on the operation and future development of the Free Travel scheme. The review analysed the Free Travel scheme in terms of sustainability, fairness and effectiveness. The options and recommendations outlined in the review were therefore to be considered as providing a range of choices in the context of the sustainability of the scheme in the medium to long term. Economic circumstances have changed significantly since those which prevailed when the review was conducted.

I am aware that the free travel pass is a valuable support for older people and people with disabilities, and that it has a significant role in promoting social inclusion and preventing their isolation. I have no plans to make any changes or introduce any surcharge to the free travel scheme at this time and I am committed to its full retention.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Northern Ireland

91. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Taoiseach if he has recently met the UUP, SDLP and other Northern Ireland opposition parties; and his plans to do so. [2784/17]

The Taoiseach: Following Martin McGuinness's resignation, I met with Deputies Adams and MacDonald of Sinn Féin to explore how the difficulties might be addressed. I also spoke by phone with both Martin McGuinness and Arlene Foster.

I spoke with Prime Minister May and we agreed that our two Governments would do what we could to help the parties over the coming period and that we would keep in close contact. Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Charlie Flanagan, and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, James Brokenshire, worked together to see if a way forward could be found.

Minister Charlie Flanagan spoke with SDLP Leader Colum Eastwood and Alliance Party Leader Naomi Long on January 10 and with UUP Leader Mike Nesbitt the following day. In parallel, there have been very close contacts at official and diplomatic level.

Unfortunately, a way forward could not be found and the date for Assembly elections has now been set for 2 March.

Departmental Staff Data

92. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Taoiseach the number of Secretaries General in his Department; the annual pay of each Secretary General in his Department at 1 January 2017; and the expected change in that pay as a consequence of the provisions of the Lansdowne Road agreement. [2915/17]

93. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Taoiseach the number of assistant secretaries general in his Department; the annual pay of each assistant secretary general in his Department at 1

January 2017; and the expected change in that pay as a consequence of the provisions of the Lansdowne Road agreement. [2931/17]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 92 and 93 together.

The Secretary General in my Department is also the Secretary General to the Government and is paid €185,350 per annum.

There is one Second Secretary General and five Assistant Secretaries General in my Department. The Second Secretary General is paid €167,300 per annum. Of the five Assistant Secretaries General, two are paid €136,496 annually, while three receive €130,706 annually.

A range of measures have impacted on the pay position of public servants since 2009. Significant salary reductions have been applied, the most recent of which were under the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2013 (FEMPI Act 2013) which came into effect on 1 July 2013. The effect of these reductions is that the gross annual salary of a Secretary General Level I (PPC) has been reduced by 38%, and that of a Secretary General Level I (non-PPC) by 35% from peak levels.

Pay restoration will be governed by the provisions of Section 3 of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2015 (FEMPI Act 2015). Under the provisions of that Act, for those on salaries in excess of €110,000, the salary reductions imposed under the FEMPI Act 2013 will be restored in three equal phases on 1 April 2017, 1 April 2018 and 1 April 2019. A Circular setting out the revised salary rates applicable from 1 April 2017 to general Civil Service grades, including Secretaries General and Assistant Secretaries General, is currently in preparation and will be issued by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in due course.

Garda Misconduct Allegations

94. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if her attention has been drawn to media reports of allegations of sexual assault by members of An Garda Síochána (details supplied) in Limerick; the course of action she intends to take; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2538/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am aware of the media reports referred to by the Deputy. While I would of course be concerned about the serious allegations therein, I have, as the Deputy is aware, no role in relation to the investigation of criminal complaints. That is a matter for either the Garda Síochána or, in relevant cases, the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission. The Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission is the independent body established by law, with extensive powers, to investigate allegations of Garda wrongdoing.

Furthermore, where issues of discipline in An Garda Síochána arise, these are for the Garda Commissioner to deal with in accordance with the appropriate regulations. Again, I have no role in this process.

The Deputy will appreciate that any member of An Garda Síochána who is the subject of any allegation is entitled to due process, as is any person against whom allegations, serious or otherwise, are made. In these circumstances and in order not to prejudice any investigation which may be ongoing it would not be appropriate for me to comment further.

Garda Vetting Applications

95. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the current waiting time for the processing of Garda vetting applications; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2553/17]

96. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she will consider the use of Pobal when processing Garda vetting applications for those persons seeking work in the early years sector; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2554/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 95 and 96 together.

As the Deputy will be aware, Garda Vetting is conducted by the Garda National Vetting Bureau on behalf of relevant organisations that are registered with the Bureau whose employees, paid or otherwise, are carrying out any work or activity, a necessary and regular part of which consists mainly of the person having access to, or contact with, children or vulnerable persons. It is a service designed to enhance the protection of children and vulnerable persons. The Garda National Vetting Bureau carries out this function in accordance with the provisions of the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Acts 2012 to 2016. The organisation referred to by the Deputy is registered with the Garda National Vetting Bureau for the provision of vetting services to organisations that are in receipt of the relevant funding only and organisations meeting this criterion are referred by the Vetting Bureau to the organisation for processing.

I am informed by the Garda Authorities that at present, 80 percent of vetting applications are processed by the Garda National Vetting Bureau in under five working days. This represents a significant improvement in turnaround times for the processing of vetting applications in recent years, falling from an average of 14 weeks in mid-2013. This improvement has come about as a result of an unprecedented investment by the Government and the Garda Authorities in providing this service, including an increase of over 80 percent in staffing levels and the roll out earlier this year of an e-Vetting system.

In April last year I commenced the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Acts 2012 to 2016 and in tandem with that, An Garda Síochána launched the e-Vetting system. E-Vetting facilitates the on-line processing of applications and this has significantly streamlined the vetting process and contributed to a sustained reduction in processing times for vetting applications. The e-Vetting system is available to all registered organisations and the Garda Authorities are ready to assist those organisations who are not yet using the e-Vetting system to do so.

Processing times for any given application can be longer in individual cases when, for example, additional enquiries may be necessary or where errors have been made in the application. It is important to note that delays can also occur in other aspects of the application process which are outside of the control of the Garda Authorities, for example, in the submission or return of applications by the registered organisations.

Residency Permits

97. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the status of a visa application for a person (details supplied). [2597/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I have been informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned had permission to remain in the State under the Irish Third Level Graduate Scheme. This permission expired on 30 August 2016.

I have also been informed that the person concerned subsequently made a separate application in 2016 for permission to remain in this State. This application does not fall under the Irish Third Level Graduate Scheme. I understand that this distinct application is under consideration and INIS will be in contact in due course.

The Deputy may wish to note that queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to INIS by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been established for this purpose. This service enables up to date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of Parliamentary Question 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.

Family Law Cases

98. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to reform legislation such that persons who are unhappy with the professional conduct of psychologists, psychotherapists or psychiatrists during the compiling of a section 47 report can have their complaints investigated by the relevant accrediting bodies in view of the fact that accrediting bodies currently refuse to investigate such complaints, citing the Judicial Separation and Family Law Reform Act 1989. [2609/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am assuming that the Deputy is referring to section 34 of the Judicial Separation and Family Law Reform Act 1989 which provides that proceedings under that Act shall be heard otherwise than in public. The purpose of the *in camera* rule in family law proceedings is to protect the identity of the parties and any child to whom the proceedings relate. While the general principle as set out in *Bunreacht na hÉireann* is that justice be administered in public, the underlying concern is that family law proceedings relate to matters which are sensitive and private to the parties and there is no public interest in requiring that their identities be published. The *in camera* rule offers protection to children and other family members from the publication or broadcasting of information relating to them which would affect the anonymity of the parties or any child concerned.

Section 40 of the Civil Liability and Courts Act 2004 clarifies the position with regard to the *in camera* rule and the carrying out of hearings, inquiries and investigations by bodies or persons who are doing so in accordance with their statutory functions. Section 40(6) allows documents prepared for or given in evidence in family law proceedings to be produced to bodies or persons carrying out statutory functions involving the conducting of a hearing, inquiry or investigation in relation to, or adjudicating on, any matter. Section 40(7) allows information or evidence given in family law proceedings to be given to bodies or persons carrying out statutory functions involving the conducting of a hearing, inquiry or investigation in relation to, or adjudicating on, any matter. Section 40(9) provides that such a hearing, inquiry or investigation shall be conducted otherwise than in public, in so far as it involves documents, information or evidence provided under section 40(6) or 40(7), and the documents, information and evidence shall not be published.

As section 40 of the Civil Liability and Courts Act 2004 ensures that regulatory bodies car-

rying out their statutory functions can access documents, information or evidence relating to family law proceedings where necessary for the purpose of conducting hearings, inquiries and investigations, I do not believe that further legislation in this area is needed at this time.

With regard to the specific matter raised by the Deputy regarding investigation of complaints into the professional conduct of psychologists, psychotherapists and psychiatrists who prepare reports under section 47 of the Family Law Act 1995, these are policy matters for the Department of Health which has provided me with the following response:

"A complaint can be made to a regulatory body for investigation under Fitness to Practice in the case of a regulated health profession such as a medical practitioner, a nurse, a dentist, pharmacist and a number of designated health and social care professions. In the case of a psychiatrist, the Medical Council is the appropriate regulatory body. Psychologists, one of 14 professions designated for regulation under the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005, are not regulated as of yet. Once regulated, the Health and Social Care Professionals Council (CORU) will be the appropriate body to which a complaint can be made. Consideration is currently being given to a proposal to designate counsellors and psychotherapists for regulation under the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005 but work is at an early stage."

Deportation Orders Re-examination

99. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she will defer the deportation of a person (details supplied); if she will review this case as a matter of urgency; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2640/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person referred to was deported from the State on the 19th of January, 2017.

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

Traveller Community

100. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality when she will introduce legislation to recognise Traveller ethnicity. [2645/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): As I have indicated previously, the question of recognition of Travellers as an ethnic group in Ireland is being considered in the context of the development of the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy. There is no requirement for legislation and no proposals for legislation on this issue.

In September 2015, my predecessor brought a paper to the Cabinet Sub-Committee on Social Policy on the question of recognising Travellers as a distinct ethnic group within Irish society. This followed a process of dialogue with the national level Traveller NGOs during 2015 which culminated in the presentation of an agreed position paper by them and confirmation that

there are no legal or expenditure implications arising from such recognition. The key point is that recognition of the distinct heritage, culture and identity of Travellers and their special place in Irish society would be hugely important to Traveller pride, to Traveller self-esteem and to overcoming the legacy of marginalisation and discrimination that the community has experienced.

I have had a long standing interest in this area, most notably through my chairing of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice, Defence and Equality when it produced its report on the Recognition of Traveller Ethnicity (April 2014). My officials and I have been working to advance this matter and I made a presentation to the Cabinet Committee on Social Policy in December 2016. An an invitation has been extended to Traveller representatives to meet that Cabinet Committee to further these discussions.

Policing Co-operation

101. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if the letter from the PSNI to the British Metropolitan Police requesting that it contact An Garda Síochána regarding undercover policing by the British Metropolitan Police's special demonstration squad on the island of Ireland has been brought to her attention; and if the British Metropolitan Police has been in touch with An Garda Síochána further to this request from the PSNI. [2688/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Deputy will appreciate that, as Minister for Justice and Equality, I have no function in respect of correspondence between the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the London Metropolitan Police Service. The Garda Authorities are in ongoing contact with their counterparts in the London Metropolitan Police Service in the context of co-operation across a full range of policing issues. As the Deputy will also appreciate, An Garda Síochána and the PSNI work closely together on an ongoing basis in tackling crime and promoting community safety for communities on this island.

As I have stated to the House previously, in the light of developments which have taken place outside this jurisdiction since these matters first came to light, including the establishment by the UK Government of an inquiry (the Pitchford Inquiry) into undercover policing, I requested a fresh report from the Garda Commissioner on any issues arising. In seeking that report, I have not sought to circumscribe in any way the information which the Garda Commissioner would provide. I will fully consider this report when it is available.

Refugee Centre Services

102. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the arrangements in place for the provision of essential services at a refugee centre (details supplied) in County Roscommon; the details of the tender process; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2713/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): As the Deputy is aware, a number of persons are to be temporarily accommodated in the Emergency Reception and Orientation Centre (EROC) to be located in Ballaghaderreen, Co Roscommon, under the relocation strand of the Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP). As the name suggests, an EROC is largely about reception and orientation for those who are to be subsequently resettled. The overwhelming majority of persons being relocated to Ireland are

fleeing the war in Syria.

The services being provided will include education, the services of a General Practitioner, HSE medical screening, and access to the services of the Department of Social Protection. A core part of the job of the IRPP is coordination and ensuring appropriate service delivery. Staff of the IRPP hold weekly clinics in the EROC with clients and any service level issues become immediately apparent.

The relevant services will be provided locally or in some cases may be provided at the centre. The mode of service provision is determined on a case by case basis depending on the local situation and the individual circumstances of the asylum seekers. Every effort is made to mainstream services with local populations while not impacting on the delivery of local services. Thus children may attend local schools and adults will be provided with English language classes by the local ETB. Services can in some instances be provided directly to the children and adults although the preference is that they are provided in conjunction with local services as this helps significantly with integration. It should be noted that accommodating persons in EROCs for a period of time is considered to be good practice as it allows for a period of acclimatisation, de-stressing and on-site processing. It is also a process that is supported by the UNHCR as best practice.

By law all children resident in the State must attend school between the ages of 6 and 16. The children of those staying in the Ballaghaderreen EROC will be no different. IRPP officials are liaising with colleagues in the Department of Education and Skills to ensure all children of school-going age resident in the centre are either placed in an appropriate school in the general area or whether facilities in the EROC are the most appropriate mechanism to address educational needs. It is a matter for the Department of Education and Skills to determine whether or not additional resources (e.g. SNAs) will need to be put in place in local schools to meet requirements. If necessary, a bus service will be established should any of the school placements be outside walking distance. The availability of crèche/pre-school facilities is also subject to discussions with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

To ensure that the local service demands generated by the refugees and asylum seekers can be met, an EROC team composed of local service providers is being established. This model works extremely well in the current EROCs located in Clonea Strand and Monasterevin. Persons arriving under relocation will also have had the benefit of direct engagement with my officials while in Greece or Italy, including a vulnerability/needs assessment. Officials of the IRPP will continue to closely engage with those placed in the EROC and will work to ensure that any local service issues that may arise are promptly resolved.

The selection process for EROCs

In recognition that the vulnerable migrants arriving under the IRPP would need some form of emergency accommodation and service provision, an expression of interest prAs the Deputy is aware, a number of persons are to be temporarily accommodated in the Emergency Reception and Orientation Centre (EROC) to be located in Ballaghaderreen, Co Roscommon, under the relocation strand of the Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP). As the name suggests, an EROC is largely about reception and orientation for those who are to be subsequently resettled. The overwhelming majority of persons being relocated to Ireland are fleeing the war in Syria.

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- the accommodation capacity of the EROC

- its potential for on-site services

- the potential availability of school placements for children of a school going age in the general area

- the potential availability of primary care and hospitals within reasonable travelling distance

- the experience of the location in having asylum seekers previously

- availability of other local services including public transport and shopping

- potential for the centre managers to provide additional services to both residents and local population

- potential benefits to local commerce

Approximately 90 properties were offered in response to the call for expressions of interest. After a short-listing exercise based on suitability and state of repair, 14 properties emerged as having potential. The selection process was suspended in early 2016 because the numbers

arriving under the EU relocation programme were lower than anticipated due to operational problems in Greece and Italy. When the numbers arriving increased in late 2016, the short list was re-examined. The property in Ballaghaderreen was identified as the only property on the short list that could be made operational as a suitable EROC within a time frame that would meet demand in early 2017. As there will be a need for further EROCs to receive further persons arriving under the Programme, a new procurement exercise is expected to commence in the coming weeks.

Deportation Orders Data

103. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of undocumented persons deported from Ireland in the past 12 months to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2745/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service of my Department that a deportation order requires a person to remove themselves from the State and it is only where they fail to do so that the State is forced to remove them and enforce the rule of law. The process leading to deportation is extensive with many avenues of appeal, including judicial review in the High Court, open to persons subject to deportation orders.

The safety of returning a person, or refoulement as it is commonly referred to, is fully considered in every case when deciding whether or not to make a deportation order i.e. that a person shall not be expelled from the State or returned in any manner whatsoever to a State where the life or freedom of that person would be threatened on account of his or her race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.

There were 428 persons deported from the State in 2016. Of these, 367 were failed asylum seekers and 61 were illegally present in the State. In addition, provisional figures show that 4,127 persons were refused entry to the State in 2016. Of these, 396 were subsequently admitted to pursue a protection application.

Garda Vetting Applications

104. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the reason for the delay in a Garda vetting application for a person (details supplied); and the reason for the delay in completing such applications. [2800/17]

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 a vetting application was received by the National Vetting Bureau from a registered organisation in respect of the person referred to by the Deputy. The application was processed and returned to the liaison person in the relevant organisation on 20 January 2017. It will be necessary for the applicant to contact the registered organisation concerned to ascertain the current position.

Gambling Legislation

105. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to table the gambling control Bill; when she expects to do so; the status of efforts the Government is making to prevent gambling addiction here; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2813/17]

107. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the status and timeframe for the gambling control Bill; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2817/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 105 and 107 together. The General Scheme of the Gambling Control Bill was published in July 2013 following approval by the Government and is currently in drafting by the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel. The Bill, as proposed, will update all existing laws on the regulation of gambling, including betting and gaming but excluding the National Lottery. It will provide for the licensing of all forms of on-line gambling.

The General Scheme was referred to what was at the time the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Justice, Defence and Equality for consideration and observations. The Joint Committee received 29 submissions and held public hearings following which it issued a report on 6 November 2013 which contained 8 conclusions and was laid before the Houses.

The 2013 General Scheme provides for the conferring of responsibility for all regulatory matters in this area on the Minister for Justice and Equality, including licensing, inspections and prosecutions, and it envisages that these functions would be carried out by a body located within the Department of Justice and Equality. The General Scheme also provides for a dedicated inspectorate to ensure compliance by licence holders with the terms of their licences and with the new legislation generally.The Gambling Control Bill will have consumer protection generally as one of its core principles, and it is envisaged that it will include several measures aimed at the protection of vulnerable persons, including children, from risks to their well-being arising from gambling. The 2013 Scheme includes measures that will require licence holders to act in a socially responsible way. These measures include controls on advertising, promotions and sponsorship.

It is the intention to proceed with this legislation at the earliest opportunity. In support of these efforts the Government has delegated powers of the Minister for Justice and Equality under the gaming and lotteries legislation to me as Minister of State.

At the same time, and pending the bringing forward of the main Bill, which is a major undertaking, I have also asked my Department to examine whether there are any individual pressing areas of concern, intended to be dealt with in the Bill, which could be dealt with early this year by separate legislative measures. A number of such measures are, therefore, under active consideration with a view to their inclusion in the Scheme of the forthcoming Courts and Civil Law Miscellaneous Provisions Bill which is, under the Government Legislation Programme, to be submitted for legislative scrutiny early this year. This initial approach will, as I have indicated, be augmented by the completion of the more complex work on the main Bill for Government approval and publication later this year.

I and officials of my Department are continuing to consult with relevant stake-holders, including those with experience in dealing with persons for whom gambling has become a problem and, as I have outlined, I intend to move forward as quickly as possible with the appropriate legislation.

Gender Recognition

106. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide the protocol for transgender prisoners within State prisons, in terms of health care and accommodating them in prisons of their self-identified gender; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2814/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am informed by the Director General of the Irish Prison Service that a prisoner is committed to prison by the Courts Service as per the Consolidated Committal Order based on their legal identity. The Prison Service accept the prisoner on the basis of the Consolidated Committal Order, which refers to male or female gender.

I am further advised by the Irish Prison Service that on arrival in prison, all prisoners are brought to the reception/committal unit of the prison, where there is an opportunity to provide personal and physical details as part of the committal interview process. The assessment of the prisoner's needs, may require the Prison Governor to consider the biological gender, legal gender, gender identity, transgender, gender expression, sexual orientation or gender recognition legislation. In such cases the Governor may make a recommendation on the appropriate placement within the prison system, taking into consideration good order, security & operational issues, protection issues, available accommodation and the healthcare needs of the prisoner.

The provision of healthcare is a statutory obligation on the Irish Prison Service as defined in the Prison Rules, 2007. The Irish Prison Service is committed to providing general healthcare services for the assessment, treatment and care of all prisoners, including Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) prisoners, which is comparable to those available in the community and which are appropriate to the prison setting.

The Irish Prison Service recognises the need for clear policies and protocols to comply with recently enacted legislation in this area. In their 3 year Strategic Plan 2016-2018, the Irish Prison Service sets out its clear commitment to provide a safe and inclusive environment for all minority groups and develop appropriate placement policies.

The Irish Prisons Service has welcomed the recent publication of research by the Irish Penal Reform Trust, entitled 'Out on the Inside' which highlights issues to be addressed for transgender prisoners. These issues present significant challenges to maintain a balance between safety and security and the overall objective that all persons in custody are treated with dignity and respect.

The Irish Prison Service has indicated that it will shortly establish a working group in order to prepare a new policy for LGBT prisoners.

Question No. 107 answered with Question No. 105.

Property Services Regulatory Authority

108. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of complaints received by the Property Services Regulatory Authority in each of the past six years; the number of preliminary and full investigations carried out to date; the number of draft reports issued; the number of draft reports outstanding that have yet to be concluded; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2831/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Prop-

erty Services Regulatory Authority (PSRA) was formally established in 2012 pursuant to the provisions of the Property Services (Regulation) Act 2011. Section 63 of the 2011 Act provides that a person may make a complaint to the PSRA alleging improper conduct on the part of a licensed property service provider. Subject to a basic assessment under Section 63 of the admissibility of the complaint, the PSRA is obliged to carry out an investigation into the alleged improper conduct. The complaint may also be resolved informally between the complainant and the licensee with the PSRA facilitating such settlements where possible.

The Act does not provide for preliminary investigations so in every instance that a complaint is deemed admissible, an Inspector is appointed and a full and formal investigation is undertaken in accordance with Section 65 of the 2011 Act. Complainants in this type of investigation are kept informed of the progress of the investigation, by the investigating Inspector, as required by Section 65(5) of the Act. At the conclusion of the investigation, the Inspector's penultimate task is to prepare a Draft Investigation Report which is sent to both the complainant and the licensee and on which both can make submissions to the Inspector. The Inspector's final task is to prepare the Final Investigation Report, taking into account any submissions received on the Draft Report, and to submit the Final Report to the Authority. It is then a matter for the Authority to consider the content of the Final Investigation Report and to take any action it considers appropriate in relation to the matter, in accordance with the provisions of the Act.

A table provides details of complaints received by the PSRA for the years 2012 to 2016 inclusive. Of these, 76% have been fully concluded. Additional resources have been provided to the PSRA in recent times, to assist with the reduction of the complaints arrears. I am advised by the PSRA that it is prioritising the finalisation of the older complaints cases.

Year	Concluded Cases	Being Assessed	Investigation Underway or Awaited	Draft Report in Circulation	Final Report Prepared	Total
2012	56	2	1	1	0	60
2013	171	6	19	1	3	200
2014	199	21	35	1	1	257
2015	162	18	23	3	3	209
2016	120	55	33	0	1	209
Total 2012-2016	708	102	111	6	8	935

Court Accommodation Refurbishment

109. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the likely date for the reopening of Mullingar courthouse following its significant refurbishment and renewal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2844/17]

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

However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has informed me that Mullingar Courthouse is being extended and refurbished as part of a major courthouse investment project that will also see new or refurbished courthouses delivered at Drogheda, Cork, Limerick, Wexford, Waterford and Letterkenny during 2017. The

entire project is being delivered by way of Public Private Partnership and will provide significantly enhanced court accommodation and facilities for all court users at these locations.

Construction and refurbishment work in relation to Mullingar Courthouse is due to finish by the end of November 2017 and the Courts Service has advised that it intends that court sittings would resume at the refurbished courthouse shortly thereafter.

Visa Applications

110. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the reason the processing of de facto visas may take up to six months whereas applications for other visas, such as employment visas, can often be processed within three weeks, with appeals for de facto visas taking approximately six months to process; the reason applications for de facto visa cannot be started from abroad before coming here; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2846/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the processing of De Facto Partner Permission applications may take up to six months due to the increase in volume of applications over the past year. Each case must be examined on its merits. I can inform the Deputy that appeals for De Facto Partner Permission applications are generally at present dealt with within three months of receipt.

The De Facto Partner scheme is an administrative scheme whereby an applicant must be resident in the State under another permission before applying for permission to remain on the basis of a De Facto relationship which is akin to marriage. Applications are not accepted from persons who are not legally resident in the State at the time of application.

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

Prisoner Data

111. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of life sentence prisoners committed to prison in 2016; the number of prisoners released from prison; the number recalled to prison; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2861/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am informed by the Irish Prison Service that a total of 16 life sentenced prisoners were committed to prison in 2016. I am also informed that a total of 7 life sentence prisoners were released into the community in 2016 and 4 life sentenced prisoners were recalled to prison in 2016.

Life sentenced prisoners who are released into the community continue to serve their sentences are subject to a number of stringent conditions. While in the community, a life sentenced prisoner will be on reviewable temporary release under the supervision of the Probation Service. Reviewable temporary release is where a prisoner is granted a specific period of tempo-

rary release from prison. This can be at varying intervals, for example, weekly, monthly or annually. The period of release is reviewed when the prisoner returns to prison and a decision is made whether to refuse or grant a further period of reviewable temporary release.

The Probation Service provide progress reports to the Irish Prison Service outlining resettlement and reintegration progress and will report on any risk management concerns a Life Sentenced prisoner may present. Where it is reported to the Irish Prison Service that the prisoner in the community is failing to abide by the conditions of their release, that person may be refused a further period of temporary release and be taken back into custody.

Prisoner Data

112. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the average length of time life sentence prisoners served in prison prior to their release in 2016; the total number of life sentence prisoners in custody; the total number of life sentence prisoners on release in the community at the end of 2016; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2862/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am informed by the Irish Prison Service that a total of 7 life sentenced prisoners were released into the community in 2016. The average length of sentence served in custody by these seven prisoners prior to release was approximately 22 years.

On 31 December 2016 there were 352 prisoners in custody serving life sentences. There were a further 83 prisoners serving life sentences in the community on reviewable temporary release under the supervision of the Probation Service.

Life sentenced prisoners who are released into the community continue to serve their sentences and are subject to a number of stringent conditions. While in the community, a life sentenced prisoner will be on reviewable temporary release under the supervision of the Probation Service.

Garda Districts

113. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality her plans for the reinstatement of Gorey Garda station, County Wexford, to full district status; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2867/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Deputy will appreciate that the Garda Commissioner is primarily responsible for decisions in relation to the distribution of Garda resources and I, as Minister, have no direct role in these matters.

The Deputy will be aware that the Garda District and Station Rationalisation Programme, which was implemented in An Garda Síochána during 2012 and 2013, sought to identify opportunities to introduce strategic reforms to enhance service delivery, increase efficiency and streamline practices within An Garda Síochána. The review concluded that a revised district and station network commensurate with the organisation's resource base would best meet public demand. On foot of the Programme, some 139 Garda stations were closed and some 32 districts were amalgamated to create 16 enlarged districts.

As part of this process, in November 2013, the Gorey District was amalgamated with the Enniscorthy District resulting in an enlarged Enniscorthy District and I am informed that no sta-

tion within the former Gorey District was closed. I have been advised by the Garda authorities that the District Officer at Enniscorthy, in conjunction with the Inspector at Gorey, ensure that the policing arrangements within the Gorey area are effectively managed on an ongoing basis and there is no diminution in the policing service provided within the context of existing available resources in the Gorey area.

Local Garda Management also continues to closely monitor the allocation of resources to ensure that optimum use is made of Garda resources and the best possible policing service continues to be provided to the public and this situation will be kept under review.

The Programme for a Partnership Government recognises that community policing is the embodiment of An Garda Síochána, providing a means of recognising that every community, both urban and rural, has its own concerns and expectations. It commits the Government to ensuring visible, effective and responsive policing in every community, including the most minimal response times possible. In support of this, the Policing Authority has been asked to oversee a review of, among other things, the dispersement of Garda stations in rural areas, and in developing urban and suburban areas, with a view to ensuring both an efficient and optimum geographical distribution of stations and minimal response times, including taking account of station closures since 2012.

While I welcome the beneficial outcomes that have accrued to An Garda Síochána arising from the District and Station Rationalisation Programme, the Programme for Government recognises that there is a need for a review along the lines that I have outlined above.

Leave to Remain

114. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 128 of 17 January 2017, if she will outline the decision reached in the case of persons (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2872/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned was issued a decision letter in relation to their application for De Facto Partner Permission on 20/12/2016. The person concerned was also issued temporary permission to remain in the State on Stamp 4 conditions for twelve months.

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

Garda Deployment

115. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the additional personnel and specialist equipment that will be allocated to the Garda national bureau of criminal investigation, the Garda national technical bureau and the Garda national protective services bureau, respectively, in 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2880/17]

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 the Garda National Bureau of Criminal Investigation, the Garda National Technical Bureau and the Garda National Protective Services Bureau are part of Special Crime Operations. As of 31 November 2016, the latest date for which figures are available, there were 45 members and 4 Civilians attached to the Garda National Bureau of Criminal Investigation; 72 members, 15 civilians and 3 photographers attached to the Garda National Technical Bureau; and 30 members and 7 Civilians attached to the Garda National Protective Services Bureau.

In addition, I am informed that the Commissioner has recently held competitions to fill vacancies for members in Garda Special Crime Operations and the needs of the Garda National Bureau of Criminal Investigation, the Garda National Technical Bureau and the Garda National Protective Services Bureau will be considered when assigning successful candidates from these competitions.

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.

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 by the Garda Commissioner that another 900 trainee Garda are scheduled to attest in 2017 which will bring Garda numbers to around the 13,500 mark by year end.

This focus on investment in personnel is critical. The moratorium on recruitment introduced in 2010 resulted in a significant reduction in the strength of An Garda Síochána. We are now rebuilding the organisation and providing the Commissioner with the resources she needs to allow her to deploy increasing numbers of Gardaí across the organisation including the specialist units.

This investment in personnel is complemented by substantial investment in resources across the board for An Garda Síochána. The Deputy will be aware of the significant resources that have been made available to An Garda Síochána under the Government's Capital Plan 2016 - 2021. In particular, some €205 million in additional funding for Garda ICT and €46 million for new Garda vehicles has been allocated over the lifetime of the plan. This investment will facilitate the provision of more effective policing services and I have no doubt that these new resources now coming on stream will benefit all areas of Garda activity including the Garda National Bureau of Criminal Investigation, the Garda National Technical Bureau and the Garda National Protective Services Bureau.

Citizenship Applications

116. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the status of an application for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2885/17]

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 correspondence issued to the person referred to by the Deputy on two occasions requesting certain information in relation to her application for a certificate of naturalisation. As this information was not received the application was deemed ineligible and the applicant was informed of this in a letter which issued on 21 December 2016.

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

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

Citizenship Applications

117. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in the determination of an application for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2888/17]

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 an application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy was deemed ineligible for reasons provided to the person concerned in a letter issued on 21 April 2016.

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

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

Leave to Remain

118. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the documentation outstanding regarding an application for leave to remain in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2894/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned applied for a right of residency, accompanied by a right to work, based on their parentage of an Irish citizen child. The application was received in the relevant section of the INIS on 30 September, 2015, and the position is still the same as was set out in my reply to Parliamentary Question No. 188 of 17th January, 2017.

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

Departmental Expenditure

119. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the changes that will be required in her Department's 2017 budget to account for the extra €25 million allocated towards pay issues post-budget; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2899/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The additional €25 million in exchequer funding has been allocated directly to the Garda Vote to meet the costs of the Labour Court recommendation. This has led to an overall increase in the Justice Group (consisting of eight Votes) expenditure ceiling for 2017 compared with Budget Day.

The remaining cost of circa €25 million represents less than 1% of the total budget for the Justice sector. In identifying the underspends needed to offset this cost within the Vote Group, I am of course conscious of the need to maintain the resources necessary for the delivery of the front-line services in all areas of the sector. Of its nature, prudent management of budgets always requires careful and ongoing assessment throughout the year and the exact nature of the total adjustments to be made will only become clear over the course of the year but will, naturally, incorporate any underspends in areas such as administrative and legal expenses and any surplus receipts which are generated across the sector.

Departmental Staff Data

120. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Secretaries General in her Department; the annual pay of each Secretary General within her Department at 1 Jan 2017; the expected change in that pay as a consequence of the provisions of the Lansdowne Road agreement; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2912/17]

121. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the

number of assistant secretaries general in her Department; the annual pay of each assistant secretary general within her Department at 1 January 2017; the expected change in that pay as a consequence of the provisions of the Lansdowne Road agreement; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2928/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 120 and 121 together.

The information sought by the Deputy is set out in the table.

Grade	No.	Salary (gross per annum)
Secretary General	1	€176,350
Assistant Secretary and equivalent	16	€115,201 (2)€119,572 (4)€125,761 (1)€129,295 (1)€130,706 (1), €136,496 (3)€141,638 (2)€144,620 (1)€149,499 (1)*

* Transferred into the Department under Senior Public Service Mobility (SPS)

Under the provisions of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2015 (FEMPI), for those on salaries in excess of €110,000, the salary reductions imposed under FEMPI will be restored in three equal phases on 1 April 2017, 1 April, 2018 and 1 April, 2019. I understand that a circular setting out the revised salary rates applicable from 1 April 2017 to general Civil Service grades, including Secretaries General and Assistant Secretaries is currently in preparation and will be issued by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in due course.

Legal Aid Service

122. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to streamline the legal aid process to enable one application to cover the inclusion of a solicitor on the legal aid panel for all counties rather than the current situation whereby each county operates their own system of paperwork and applications; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2958/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Regulation No. 4 of Statutory Instrument No. 12 of 1965, the Criminal Justice (Legal Aid) Regulations 1965 provides that each County Registrar shall compile a list of solicitors willing to act for legally aided persons in their county. In a recent audit of the Criminal Legal Aid Scheme conducted by my Department's Internal Audit Unit a recommendation was made that it would be preferable to put in place a single central panel to be maintained by the Courts Service.

The County Registrars and the Courts Service have been consulted and my Department has commenced work on the drafting of the necessary amending Statutory Instrument to affect this change.

Legal Advice

123. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to reform the legal aid custody advice scheme, particularly with regard to any consideration being given to the fees associated with same. [2959/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Garda Station Legal Advice Scheme commenced on the 14 February 2001 and it has been administered by the Legal Aid Board since 1 October 2011, the Board having taken over this role from my Department.

It provides free legal advice to persons whose means are insufficient to enable them to pay for consultation while detained in Garda Stations under the provisions of –

- Section 30 of the Offences against the State Act 1939 (as amended)
- Section 4 the Criminal Justice Act 1984 (as amended)
- Section 2 of the Criminal Justice (Drug Trafficking) Act 1996 (as amended)
- Section 42 of the Criminal Justice Act 1999
- Section 50 of the Criminal Justice Act 2007 (as amended)
- Sections 16 and 17 of the Criminal Procedure Act 2010
- Certain extension hearings

Following a decision of the Director of Public Prosecutions in May 2014 to facilitate the attendance of solicitors at Garda detainee interviews in Garda Stations the Scheme was revised as recommended to provide for payments to be made to solicitors who attended such interviews. New provisions were created and the Legal Aid Board published a new Scheme Provisions and Guidance Document in August 2014, which incorporated new payment headings and processes to operate the Revised Scheme.

An undertaking was given by my Department that a full review of the Scheme would be conducted when it had been in operation for a reasonable period of time to allow for adequate data and statistics to be gathered. At the last meeting of the Criminal Legal Aid Oversight Committee representatives of the Criminal Law Committee of the Law Society of Ireland attended in order to present their views on how the revised Scheme is operating. A full review of the Scheme is currently underway. On completion of this review the findings will be the subject of further discussions with the Law Society in advance of any proposed reform.

Courts Staff

124. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 128 of 22 November 2016, whereby she stated that 22 of the present District Court judges were presiding in jurisdictions in which they had previously practised as a solicitor, if she will clarify those judges of the 22 that are in a permanent placement in their area of previous practice rather than a temporary assignment. [2960/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I wish to inform the Deputy that the 22 District Court Judges referred to in the answer to parliamentary question number 128 of 22 November 2016 are all permanently assigned to their respective Districts. Permanent and temporary assignments in the District Court are provided for under Schedule 6 of the Courts (Supplemental Provisions) Act 1961, as amended.

Courts Service Data

125. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the total number of drink driving cases that were affected by the issuing of the Garda certificate in Irish, by county; the number of these that were dismissed or struck out; the number that have been adjourned awaiting the outcome of the Supreme Court ruling due in June 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2978/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I have requested the information sought by the Deputy and I will contact him directly when the information is to hand.

Commissioner of Valuation

126. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the reason the Commissioner of Valuation is of the view that the introduction of a regional structure for the Valuation Office is not in line with the current operational requirements and work programmes of the organisation; the reason it is not at present under consideration, in view of the fact that the Valuation Office's work regularly brings staff to all counties and furthermore regional remote working offices were piloted for a nine month period in 2016 (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3023/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Under the provisions of the Valuation Acts, 2001 to 2015, the Commissioner of Valuation is independent in the exercise of his functions, and is responsible for the management and operations of the Valuation Office. As Minister for Justice and Equality, I have no function in relation to operational decisions of the Office. I am informed by the Commissioner of Valuation that the current arrangements in which all of the staff of the Valuation Office are located in one office premises in central Dublin are considered to be suitable and appropriate to the current needs of the organisation. This structure facilitates optimal use of centralised services and effective management and support structures are in place to take advantage of this arrangement in a cost effective manner.

Though staff of the Valuation Office are required, in the course of their duties, to visit other locations from time to time, I am informed that due to the increased use of information and communications technologies and the extensive electronic data sources available to the Office, the requirement to travel is increasingly less prevalent. I am also informed that although informal arrangements are in place to enable a small number of staff to work remotely from other Government buildings, this should not be regarded as a pilot project or a regional structure for the future. There are no proposals to put such a structure in place, nor is it part of the recently published strategic plan for the Office. These informal arrangements are temporary in nature and subject to review in September 2017 in light of changing requirements.

Garda Recruitment

127. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of new entrants recruited to An Garda Síochána in 2016; the number of members that retired from An Garda Síochána in 2016; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3117/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): This Government is committed to ensuring visible, effective and responsive policing throughout the country in order to strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and prevent 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.

I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, 1,200 trainee Gardaí have been recruited and entered the Garda College, of whom 651 entered the Garda College in 2016. Of the 1,200 recruited to date, 679 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide. I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that another 900 trainee Garda are scheduled to attest in 2017 which will bring Garda numbers, taking into account expected departures, to around the 13,500 mark by year end.

This focus on investment in personnel is critical. The moratorium on recruitment introduced in 2010 resulted in a significant reduction in the strength of An Garda Síochána. We are now rebuilding the organisation and providing the Commissioner with the resources she needs to allow her to deploy increasing numbers of Gardaí across every Garda Division, in the coming years.

I am further informed by the Garda Commissioner that there were 263 departures from An Garda Síochána in 2016 which includes those who have departed owing to voluntary retirement, compulsory retirement, cost neutral early retirement, medical discharge, resignation, or dismissal.

I can assure the Deputy that projected departures from An Garda Síochána are kept under continuing review and the level of recruitment adjusted as necessary in order to achieve the desired strength of An Garda Síochána**.**

Garda Data

128. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda currently stationed at Clondalkin, Lucan, Ronanstown and Rathcoole; the comparable figures for each of the years 2012 to 2015, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3118/17]

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 As Minister, I 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.

This Government is committed to ensuring visible, effective and responsive policing throughout the country in order to strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and prevent 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.

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, including 62 to the Dublin Metropolitan Region (DMR) West Division which includes the areas to which the Deputy refers. I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that another 900 trainee Garda are scheduled to attest in 2017 which will bring Garda numbers to around the 13,500 mark by year end.

This focus on investment in personnel is critical. The moratorium on recruitment introduced in 2010 resulted in a significant reduction in the strength of An Garda Síochána. We are now rebuilding the organisation and providing the Commissioner with the resources she needs to allow her to deploy increasing numbers of Gardaí across every Garda Division, including the DMR West Division, in the coming years.

This investment in personnel is complemented by substantial investment in resources across the board for An Garda Síochána. The Deputy will be aware of the significant resources that have been made available to An Garda Síochána under the Government's Capital Plan 2016 - 2021. In particular, some €205 million in additional funding for Garda ICT and €46 million for new Garda vehicles has been allocated over the lifetime of the plan. This investment will facilitate the provision of more effective policing services and I have no doubt that these new resources now coming on stream will see an increase in Garda visibility in our communities.

For the Deputy's information I have set out in the following table the number of Gardaí stationed at Clondalkin, Lucan, Ronanstown and Rathcoole for each of the years from December 2012 to 30 November 2016, the latest date for which figures are readily available from the Garda Commissioner.

Garda Strength 2012-2106

STATION	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016*
CLONDALKIN	95	91	89	87	94
LUCAN	73	72	74	73	74
RONANSTOWN	93	91	91	94	91
RATHCOOLE	26	23	23	21	20
TOTAL	287	277	277	275	279

*as of 30 November 2016

Protected Disclosures

129. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the way in which a member of the public can bring forward information or make a submission to the Garda whistleblowers inquiry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3131/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I assume that the Deputy is referring to the review which I asked Mr Justice Iarfhlaith O'Neill to undertake relating to two protected disclosures which I received from members of An Garda Síochána in early October last year.

Mr Justice O'Neill was asked to review the allegations of wrongdoing contained in the disclosures, to make any inquiries with persons or bodies that he considered appropriate in relation to the review and to report to me on the conclusion of the review, including any rec-

ommendations which he may consider necessary in relation to any further action which may be appropriate and warranted to address the allegations. General submissions from the public were therefore not relevant to this particular review.

Mr. Justice O'Neill's review is now complete and I received his Report on 7 December 2016. The Report sets out in detail the allegations contained in the protected disclosures. In view of the nature of those allegations, and the fact that third parties are mentioned, the Report was referred to the Attorney General for her advice on how to proceed, including the question of what material might properly be put in the public domain, having regard to the rights of all concerned. Advices were received from the Attorney General's Office which raised further issues and which necessitated further consultation between my Department and the Office.

I expect that I will be in a position to bring proposals to Government on this matter in the very near future.

Departmental Staff Data

130. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the total number of persons employed at her Department's office at Davis Street, Tipperary town, County Tipperary; the way in which this compares each year since it opened; if there is physical capacity in these offices for further decentralisation of jobs; her plans in this regard; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3151/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Further to the question posed by the Deputy I assume that the reference to Davis Street, Tipperary Town relates to the Private Security Authority, an independent regulatory body under the remit of my Department, with responsibility for regulating and licensing the private security industry in the State.

The Private Security Authority decentralised to Tipperary town in October 2004 when a temporary office was first established. The table sets out the information on the number of persons employed from 2005 to date.

Year ending	Number of persons employed
2005	8
2006	27
2007	38
2008	38
2009	38
2010	37
2011	37
2012	36
2013	36
2014	39
2015	39
2016	40

As the Deputy will be aware the Citizenship Division of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service of my Department is also a decentralised office located in Tipperary Town and there are 56 officers employed in that office.

There are currently no further plans to decentralise any more of my Department's functions to Tipperary Town.

National Women's Strategy

131. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the national women's strategy; the groups and organisations that contributed to the formation of the strategy; the measures the strategy will utilise to support stay-at-home parents; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3162/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): The National Women's Strategy 2007 to 2016 has concluded. A public consultation on a new National Women's Strategy for the period from 2017 to 2020 is under way and will close on 31 January. Three public consultation meetings have been held in Cork, Athlone and Dublin and applications are still being accepted to attend a further meeting on the morning of 31 January in the Sligo Park Hotel. Written submissions are also sought. Further information on the consultation is given on www.genderequality.ie.

A list of persons and organisations that make written submissions will be published on this website when the consultation has concluded. A composite written report of the consultation meetings will also be available. The results of the consultation will be evaluated by a Strategy Committee being established to assist the Department of Justice and Equality with preparing the Strategy.

The issue raised by the Deputy will be among the matters to be considered.

UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

132. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding incorporating the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities into law; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3163/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy Finian McGrath): Ireland signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2007 and since then, successive Governments have emphasised Ireland's strong commitment to proceed to ratification as quickly as possible, taking into account the need to ensure all necessary legislative and administrative requirements under the Convention are met. This Government remains committed to ratification of the Convention. It is essential that the State is in a position to meet the obligations it assumes under the terms of an international agreement from the moment of its entry into force for Ireland. Before the State can ratify the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, enactment of new legislation and amendment of existing legislation is required to ensure obligations will be met upon entry into force for Ireland. Ratification of a Convention before we have amended domestic legislation that contradicts it makes no sense and does nothing to ensure compliance or to actually protect the people for whose benefit the Convention exists. The previous Government published a Roadmap in October 2015, which sets out the legislative measures needed to meet those requirements, along with declarations and reservations to be entered by Ireland on ratification. 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 completed Committee Stage in the Dáil on 7 December 2016. 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.

The Disability (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2016 was published immediately prior to Christmas. The primary purpose of the Bill is to address the remaining legislative barriers to Ireland's ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). Work is ongoing on all the other issues set out in the previous Government's Roadmap for Ratification published in October 2015 and these will be progressed as Committee Stage amendments. The Bill will be progressed to enactment at an early date to facilitate ratification of the UN Convention as soon as possible. The precise timing of ratification now depends on how long it takes for the Bill to progress through the enactment process and on issues in relation to commencement of the Deprivation of Liberty provisions, which will be included in the Committee Stage amendments, and of the the Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act 2015.

Garda Deployment

133. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she has reviewed the possibility of providing additional Garda to DMR north to address drugs issues in the area. [3204/17]

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 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. It is the responsibility of the Divisional Officer to allocate personnel within his/her Division.

I am informed that the number of Gardaí assigned to the Dublin Metropolitan Region (DMR) North Garda Division on the 30 November 2016, the latest date for which figures are readily available was 671 of which 22 were assigned to the Divisional Drugs 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. The Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau leads out the policing strategy for tackling drugs supply. This approach allows for the co-ordinated use of Garda resources in tackling all forms of organised crime, including illicit drug activity nationwide. When appropriate, the work of the Division is supported by a number of Garda national units such as the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation, the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau, and the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau.

At the request of the Garda Commissioner in 2016, the Government moved decisively to strengthen Garda resources to deal with gang-related crime in the Dublin area. In particular funding was approved for the establishment of a dedicated Armed Support Unit for the DMR in order to enhance armed support capability in Dublin and to free up the resources of the ERU. Following a selection and training process, the Armed Support Unit for the DMR is now fully operational and providing armed cover on a 24 hour basis. All the necessary resources have been provided to equip the new ASU and I have also taken steps to upgrade the equipment available to the Emergency Response Unit and the Special Detective Unit.

As part of the range of measures which have been put in place, a new Garda Special Crime Task Force has been in operation in the DMR since July 2016 and is focussing relentlessly on persons involved in gangland activities. It operates in cooperation with other agencies including the Revenue Commissioners and Department of Social Protection and has the benefit of the expertise of members of the Criminal Assets Bureau, Garda Divisional Asset Profilers, and the Garda Síochána Analysis Service.

I am also informed that Operation Hybrid has been established to coordinate the response to violent crime in Dublin and address public concerns about community safety. As of 9 January 2017, there have been 51 arrests and 5 charges brought in connection with the recent shootings and 3 charges brought for related offences. In addition, 26 firearms have been seized and over 11,000 lines of enquiry conducted. In excess of 20,000 high visibility checkpoints have been implemented with significant support from Armed Support Units and a significant amount of CCTV footage, mobile phone traffic, and forensic evidence is also being examined. I understand Operation Hybrid is reviewed on a weekly basis to maintain optimal impact.

Underpinning all of these measures is the Government's commitment to ensuring visible, effective and responsive policing throughout the country in order to strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and prevent 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.

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, including 52 to the DMR North Division. I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that another 900 trainee Garda are scheduled to attest in 2017 which will bring Garda numbers to around the 13,500 mark by year end.

This focus on investment in personnel is critical. The moratorium on recruitment introduced in 2010 resulted in a significant reduction in the strength of An Garda Síochána. We are now rebuilding the organisation and providing the Commissioner with the resources she needs to allow her to deploy increasing numbers of Gardaí across every Garda Division, including the DMR North Division, in the coming years.

Mortgage Interest Relief Expenditure

134. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Finance the cost over the next five years of increasing mortgage interest relief for landlords to 100%; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2544/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): A landlord in receipt of rental income is assessed to income tax on their net profit after deduction of allowable expenses incurred in earning those rents. In computing the profit amount of the rents received, only those deductions that are specified in section 97(2) of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 are allowable.

Interest on money borrowed to purchase, repair or improve the premises is specified as an allowable deduction, but subject to certain restrictions. A landlord is entitled to claim a deduction for 100% of qualifying interest in respect of a rented commercial premises but, between 2009 and 2016, in general only 75% of qualifying interest was allowable in respect of rented

residential property. I provided in Budget 2017 for the restoration of 100% interest deductibility on a phased basis over 5 years, commencing from 1 January 2017. The deduction available in respect of interest accrued in 2017 on a loan relating to a residential rental property is 80% of qualifying interest.

Interest paid on monies borrowed to purchase, repair or improve a rental premises is generally accepted as being a legitimate rental expense. The restriction to 75% deductibility in respect of residential rental property was introduced as part of the revenue-raising package in Finance Act 2009 required to stabilise the public finances. However in view of the current rental accommodation shortages, it was my view that it was appropriate to revisit this measure in Budget 2017. Restoration of full interest relief on borrowings for residential landlords was also recommended in the DKM Consultants 2014 report "Rent Stability in the Private Rented Sector" prepared for the Housing Agency on behalf of the Private Residential Tenancies Board. The report noted that the restriction could create market distortions in favour of cash buyers and investment in commercial property where unrestricted deduction for qualifying interest is still available.

I am advised by Revenue that, based on personal Income Tax returns filed for the year 2014, the latest year for which complete information is available, and making certain assumptions about the data, it is estimated that the cost of increasing the level at which landlords can claim interest repayments against tax for residential rental properties from the current 2017 level of 80% to 100% is in the order of €56 million per annum on a full-year basis.

It should be noted that this estimate does not include the cost associated with the increase in the level of qualifying rental interest payments from 75% to 80%, which amounted to €14 million on a full year basis.

Help-To-Buy Scheme Eligibility

135. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding the help-to-buy scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2681/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The process to register as a 'qualifying contractor' for the Help to Buy incentive requires documentation be submitted which shows:

- that the contractor has valid tax clearance and is considered compliant for Relevant Contracts Tax (RCT) purposes

- details of the proposed or actual qualifying residences. Such details include a copy of the planning permission, the residences already constructed (if already built) and details of the ownership of the land on which the qualifying residences are, or will be, constructed.

In addition, a short one-page registration form, HTB1, seeks the applicant's consent to have his, her or its name and tax registration number published on the Revenue website as a 'qualifying contractor'. The publication details are necessary in order that potential purchasers can check that the contractor qualifies under the incentive.

The Help to Buy scheme is a generous incentive that facilitates the purchase of a new home by a First Time Buyer. For new builds, the rebate is payable on signing the contract to purchase the property rather than upon completion of the sale. This means that it is necessary that details of the planning permission and ownership of the land are provided to Revenue. This information is completely within the control of the builder/developer. The other key condition is that of

tax clearance/tax compliance. If a contractor is not tax compliant, in order to participate in the scheme, he or she should engage with Revenue to bring his or her tax affairs up to date.

These administrative requirements on contractors to be registered as 'qualifying contractors' are necessary in order to safeguard public monies being paid under the incentive. I do not regard such requirements as particularly onerous and the information sought is generally seen as the minimum necessary to satisfy Revenue that the purpose of the incentive, the increased provision of houses for First Time Buyers, will be delivered, and by tax compliant contractors.

The Deputy should also be aware that Help to Buy claimants who purchase their home on or after 1 January 2017 are effectively instructing the Revenue to pay their Help to Buy rebate directly to their approved qualifying contractor's bank account. Consequently, it is crucial that the bona fides of the contractor in question is fully established at the point the rebate is made.

As regards the level of interest on the part of contractors, I am advised by Revenue that in the period up to and including 20 January 2017, there have been 53 applications for registration. Thirteen of these applications have been registered as 'qualifying contractors' and their details published on the Revenue website. The remaining applications are being processed and any unsuccessful applicants have been advised about how to address any issues arising in their application.

I am further advised by Revenue that they have seen a steady increase in the number of applications. There were nine applications received in 2016, and in the first three weeks of January the number of weekly applications have been 8, 14 and 22, respectively. I believe that these statistics show that contractors do indeed believe that it is worth their while registering for the incentive.

Help-To-Buy Scheme Eligibility

136. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Finance the rights and recourse a first time buyer has in the event of a builder or developer refusing to complete the required forms to enable the buyer to avail of the new first time buyers scheme; if there is an alternative route for the buyer to follow in such circumstances to avail of the grant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2572/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The legislation setting out the payment provisions for the Help to Buy incentive is contained in Section 477C (16) of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997. Claimants are required to complete a two-stage online process; an application and then a claim.

First-Time Buyers under the Help to Buy incentive fall into 3 categories as follows:-

1. Claimants who have contracted to purchase, or drawn down the first tranche of their qualifying loan to self-build, their home in the period between 19 July 2016 and 31 December 2016, inclusive. This category is known as Retrospective Claimants.

2. Claimants who contract to purchase their home, in the period between 1 January 2017 and 31 December 2019.

3. Claimants who draw down the first tranche of their qualifying loan to self-build their home in the period between 1 January 2017 and 31 December 2019.

Regarding retrospective claimants, I am advised by Revenue that the claim process does

not require the developer to pass information to Revenue. Instead, retrospective claimants are required to submit supporting documentation including a signed copy of the contract, evidence of their mortgage or mortgage drawdown, and details of the property directly to Revenue.

Regarding claimants who contract to purchase their home in the period between 1 January 2017 and 31 December 2019, I am advised that the information supplied by the claimant will require verification by the Revenue-approved qualifying contractor before any refund is paid. The appropriate refund will be made directly to the qualifying contractor. Therefore I am advised that Revenue do not envisage any delays on the part of the contractor in completing the process.

Regarding claimants who draw down the first tranche of their qualifying loan to self-build their home in the period between 1 January 2017 and 31 December 2019, I am advised that the information supplied by the claimant will require verification by the claimant's solicitor before any refund is paid. The appropriate refund will be made to the claimant's qualifying loan bank account. Such claims do not require the developer to pass information to Revenue.

I am advised by Revenue that once complete information is received, all refunds are being processed in full without delay.

All claimants are advised to provide the necessary information to Revenue via MyEnquiries, which is an online service that allows customers to securely send correspondence to Revenue. MyEnquiries can be accessed from the Revenue website www.revenue.ie either through myAccount or through ROS (Revenue's Online Service), depending on whether the claimant is a PAYE taxpayer or a self-employed taxpayer.

If the Deputy knows of a contractor who is not co-operating with a First Time Buyer to allow them claim any payments under the Help To Buy incentive, he should provide these details to my officials and I will arrange to have this information passed to Revenue.

Revenue Commissioners Powers

137. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Finance if the auditor that failed to detect the wrongdoing at an organisation (details supplied) and was subsequently reported to the Revenue Commissioners by a whistleblower, was then subsequently reported by the Revenue Commissioners to the Chartered Accountants Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2613/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by Revenue that they are legally prevented from making any comments in relation to specific cases on the grounds of taxpayer confidentiality.

Section 851A of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (inserted by the Finance Act 2011) placed on a formal statutory basis the long-standing and accepted obligation on Revenue to treat all taxpayer information confidentially. The general position is that all taxpayer information is confidential, and may only be disclosed in accordance with the terms of that provision or under any other statutory provision that allows the disclosure of such information.

Private Rented Accommodation

138. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Finance the status of action 9 of the strategy for the private rental market which sets out that his Department will establish a work-

ing group on tax and fiscal treatment of rental accommodation providers in the first quarter of 2017; the terms of reference for the working group; if the working group has met; the membership of the working group; if the group will provide opportunities for outside engagement and submissions; the timeline for the group to produce a final report; if the work of this group will encompass the consideration of tax relief for renters recently referred to by the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government or if that matter will be considered by a separate group; if so, if he will provide the same details requested in relation to the working group on tax and fiscal treatment of rental accommodation providers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2622/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Rebuilding Ireland Strategy for the Rental Sector, published by the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government in December 2016, committed to the establishment of a working group in early 2017 to examine and report on the tax treatment of landlords (or rental accommodation providers), and to put forward options, where appropriate, for amendments to such treatment.

The first meeting of the Working Group took place on the nineteenth of January and proposed terms of reference will be put to me for consideration and approval soon. The group is chaired by the Department of Finance and its membership at present consists of officials from the Tax and Economics Divisions of the Department of Finance; the Revenue Commissioners; the Housing Division of the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government; and the Residential Tenancies Board. It is anticipated that the group will also receive input from sectoral representatives in due course.

A public consultation was conducted during the development of the Rebuilding Ireland action plan to which almost 500 written submissions were received. Aspects of these submissions relating to the tax and fiscal treatment of rental accommodation providers will be considered by the Working Group, and the Group will facilitate the making of submissions by others, including political parties, either as part of a more focused additional public consultation or by other means.

The report of the Working Group is scheduled to be completed in advance of Budget 2018, to allow for consideration of proposed options, if any, in consultation with Minister Coveney, as part of my deliberations for that Budget. The tax treatment of tenants or renters is not within the scope of the commitment given in the strategy for the rental sector publication and therefore is not currently being considered by a specific working group within my Department. However, all tax reliefs are regularly reviewed as part of the annual Budget and Finance Bill process.

Bus Éireann

139. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the effect on fiscal space if Bus Éireann were to be placed on balance sheet for the purposes of the budget; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2642/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The classification of Bus Éireann as a public corporation was recently reviewed as part of the work the Central Statistics Office (CSO) carried out to complete the Public Corporations Questionnaire for Eurostat. This questionnaire considered data from annual financial statements up to 2015. One of the purposes of this questionnaire is to conduct the Market / Non-Market test over a three year period on publicly controlled corporations in order to determine their institutional sector classification. For Bus Éireann it was determined that, based on their accounts for the years 2013-2015, they covered more than 50% of their costs through sales, or, in their case, operating turnover. On

the basis that this does not include any government subventions or grants, the CSO have made the determination that Bus Éireann is classified in the Non-Financial Corporations sector for the period under consideration. The sector classification of Bus Éireann and all other public bodies will continue to be reviewed annually however a sector reclassification would only be considered when a trend of non-market activity is observed over a number of years.

In the circumstances that Bus Éireann or any other entity was reclassified by the CSO and included in the General Government sector the expenditure base used in the expenditure benchmark calculation of fiscal space would be adjusted to reflect the level shift in expenditure. As a result, providing their annual expenditure remained constant, there would be no impact on fiscal space.

Banking Sector Remuneration

140. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if he will report on recent meetings he held with a bank (details supplied) regarding remuneration at that bank or any other meetings with other banks at which this issue was discussed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2643/17]

141. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the maintenance of a salary cap at the State-backed banks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2644/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 140 and 141 together.

I can confirm that as part of ongoing engagement with the banks in which the State has a shareholding, I met with the chairman of the bank referred to by the Deputy. At that meeting, a broad range of topics was discussed one of which was the current remuneration restrictions which apply to the banks which the State had to rescue and the potential impact of these restrictions on recruitment and retention. I should highlight for the Deputy that there are no plans to deviate from current Government policy.

I can also confirm that I recently met with senior representatives of the other banks in which the State has a shareholding as part of the same round of meetings at which again a broad range of topics was discussed. Remuneration was not on the agenda for these meetings.

Tax Agreements

142. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Finance the contact that took place between his Department and the Federal Republic of Brazil regarding Ireland's inclusion on Brazil's taxation blacklist, in view of the fact that there is no record of any correspondence between his Department and Brazil between 1 August 2016 and 8 January 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2652/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Ireland's interaction with Brazil on this important issue is being led by the Irish Ambassador to Brazil. All correspondence with the Brazilian Federal Revenue Service on this issue has to date been through the Ambassador and the Department of Foreign Affairs. My officials and officials from the Revenue Commissioners continue to be actively engaged in supporting the Ambassador in our efforts to seek Ireland's removal from the Brazilian list. This includes arranging a delegation of officials meeting with

their Brazilian counterparts to attempt to address any concerns the Brazilian side have.

Fiscal Policy

143. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the potential impact of items (details supplied) on the fiscal space for 2018, 2019 and 2020; if he will be issuing revised Exchequer targets for 2017 in line with the 2016 Exchequer out-turn; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2812/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy will appreciate, it is a long standing practise of the Department of Finance not to revise the Budget day fiscal forecasts, based on the end year outturn. However, the Exchequer tax revenue performance will continue to be monitored closely in the coming months, along with all other components of the Exchequer. These performances will be reviewed as part of the next official fiscal forecasts, which will be set out in the Stability Programme Update (SPU) 2017, due to be published in April 2017.

The fiscal space is calculated in line with the trend potential growth rate of GDP less a convergence margin that applies as Ireland is not yet at its medium term budgetary objective (MTO) under the balanced budget rule. It should be noted that changes in revenue levels are not relevant to the calculation of fiscal space unless it arises from a discretionary policy decision. Additional revenue arising from discretionary measures increases the overall fiscal space while the converse in relation to revenue reductions also applies. As such the 2016 tax revenue is not expected to have any material impact on the fiscal space available for 2018 and subsequent years.

As the Deputy will be aware, the medium term fiscal space projections set out in Budget 2017 are not final as they are based on projections for the GDP deflators, reference rates, convergence margins and general government expenditure outturns for each of the relevant years. The actual GDP deflators, reference rates and convergence margins values used to assess compliance with the rules each year will be set by the European Commission using their estimates compiled in their Spring and Autumn forecasts. The general government expenditure values used to evaluate adherence to the rules will be the final Central Statistics Office (CSO) estimates from the National Income and Expenditure (NIE) and Government Finance Statistics (GFS). Revised projections of fiscal space for the medium-term will be published by my Department in the SPU and / or the Spring Economic Statement.

Tax Code

144. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Finance the changes to be made to capital acquisitions tax in respect of children in single child families (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2882/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I note the amendment to the question asked, but the answer I provided to Parliamentary Question 41804/16 on the 17th of this month remains valid. There is no special Capital Acquisitions Tax (CAT) provision for single child families and the same general rules apply for single or multiple child families. Every child can avail of the Group A threshold, so, currently where there is only one child or many children, each child can be gifted and/or inherit up to €310,000 from his or her parents in the course of his/her lifetime without incurring CAT. As I stated in my reply to Parliamentary Question 41804/16, CAT is the overall title for both Gift and Inheritance Tax. The tax is charged on

the amount gifted to, or inherited by, the beneficiary of the gift or inheritance.

For the purposes of CAT, the relationship between the person who provides the gift or inheritance (i.e. the disponer) and the person who receives the gift or inheritance (i.e. the beneficiary), determines the life-time tax-free threshold known as the "Group threshold" below which gift or inheritance tax does not arise. Where a person receives gifts or inheritances in excess of their relevant tax free threshold, CAT at a rate of 33% applies on the excess over the tax free threshold.

There are, in all, three separate Group thresholds based on the relationship of the beneficiary to the disponer. Each of these was raised in the recent budget, Budget 2017.

Group A: tax free threshold €310,000 (formerly €280,000) applies where the beneficiary is a child (including adopted child, stepchild and certain foster children) or minor child of a deceased child of the disponer. Parents also fall within this threshold where they take an inheritance of an absolute interest from a child.

Group B: tax free threshold €32,500 (formerly €30,150) applies where the beneficiary is a brother, sister, a nephew, a niece or lineal ancestor or lineal descendant of the disponer.

Group C: tax free threshold €16,250 (formerly €15,075) applies in all other cases.

In 2015 the Group A CAT threshold, applying to transfers from parents to their children, was €225,000. I raised it to €280,000 in Budget 2016 and further increased it to €310,000 in budget 2017. This represents an increase of about 38% in two years. Options for future changes to CAT will be considered in the context of upcoming budget processes.

Departmental Staff Data

145. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Finance the number of Secretaries General in his Department; the annual pay of each Secretary General within his Department at 1 Jan 2017; the expected change in that pay as a consequence of the provisions of the Lansdowne Road agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2908/17]

146. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Finance the number of assistant secretaries general in his Department; the annual pay of each assistant secretary general within his Department at 1 January 2017; the expected change in that pay as a consequence of the provisions of the Lansdowne Road agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2924/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 145 and 146 together.

I have 1 Secretary General, 1 Second Secretary General and 5 Assistant Secretaries General in my Department at present. The annual pay for each at 1 Jan 2017 is contained in the following table.

Post	Annual Pay
Secretary General x 1	€185,350.00
Second Secretary General x 1	€175,126.00
Assistant Secretary x 1	€136,496.00
Assistant Secretary x 1	€131,385.00

Assistant Secretary x 1	€130,706.00
Assistant Secretary X 2	€119,572.00

Under the provisions of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2015 (FEMPI Act 2015), for those on salaries in excess of €110,000 the salary reductions imposed under the FEMPI Act 2013 will be restored in three equal phases on 1 April 2017, 1 April 2018 and 1 April 2019. A circular setting out the revised salary rates applicable from 1 April 2017 to general Civil Service grades, including Secretaries General and Assistant Secretaries General, is currently in preparation and will be issued by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in due course.

Credit Availability

147. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance the steps he is taking to reduce financing costs for the construction industry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2956/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy is aware, small and medium sized businesses, including those in the construction sector, play a central role in the sustainable recovery of the Irish economy. Government policy is focused on ensuring that all viable SMEs have access to an appropriate supply of credit from a diverse range of bank and non-bank sources.

The Deputy will also be aware that in my role as Minister for Finance I have no direct function in the relationship between the banks and their customers. I have no statutory function in relation to the banking decisions made by individual lending institutions at any particular time and these are taken by the board and management of the relevant institution. This includes decisions in relation to products as determined by the banks.

All viable businesses operating in Ireland should have the opportunity to access sufficient finance to meet their enterprise needs in a manner that supports growth and employment in the economy. As the Deputy will be aware, Chapter 7 (Finance for Growth) of the Action Plan for Jobs 2016 (APJ) set out a range of commitments to ensure viable SME's can access appropriate finance at a reasonable cost from both bank and non-bank sources. Finance for Growth will again feature in the Action Plan for Jobs 2017 and a number of actions have been proposed by my Department for inclusion in relation to this.

In line with Action 144 of the APJ 2016, officials from my Department collated and examined data from AIB and Bank of Ireland on a monthly basis, including data pertaining to the various sectors. Furthermore, my officials meet the banks on a quarterly basis to ensure an informed understanding of the wider SME bank lending environment which assists the development and implementation of policies aimed at ensuring SME access to finance and increased competition in the SME lending sector.

It should be noted that the results of the most recent Department of Finance SME Credit Demand Survey, covering the period April to September 2016, show that when pending applications are excluded, 84% of credit applications to banks were approved or partially approved. Demand for credit remains subdued and the latest survey shows only 39% of SMEs in the construction sector requested bank finance in the previous six months a decrease of 9% from September 2015. Furthermore, the main reason for not applying for bank finance is that SMEs do not need it (86%). Only 1% of respondents stated the reason for not applying for

bank finance was because it was too expensive to borrow. Further results from the survey can be found at *www.finance.gov.ie.*

The Government remains committed to the SME sector, as reflected in the Programme for a Partnership Government, and sees it as a key engine of ongoing economic growth. Consequently, my Department and the Credit Review Office, working with the other relevant Departments and Agencies, will continue to monitor the availability of both bank and non-bank credit on both a macro and sectoral basis in order to ensure that sufficient access to finance is available to facilitate indigenous viable SMEs, including those in the construction sector, to reach their full potential in terms of growth and employment generation.

Separately, the Deputy may also wish to note that the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund ISIF) has been actively involved in a number of important initiatives which enhance the availability of finance to the construction sector in line with the terms of the Fund's mandate. This includes its investments in:

- Activate Capital - which is an innovative non-bank financing platform that has the potential to provide funding for substantial numbers of new homes in Dublin and the other major urban centres in which demand is most pronounced;

- Ardstone Residential Partnership - which is a residential equity investment fund that is focused on delivering residential units to the market over the short-to medium-term; and

- Wilbur Ross Cardinal Commercial Real Estate Mezzanine Debt Fund - which has funded a number of residential developments in recent months.

Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland

148. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Finance the reason the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland will not accept an animal herd as collateral from a farmer for a business loan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2968/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) began lending in March 2015 and its purpose is to increase the availability of low cost, flexible funding to SMEs. The SBCI does not lend directly to SMEs; rather it makes funding available to SMEs through both bank and specialist, non-bank finance providers, known as on-lenders. At present, the SBCI has eight on-lending partners.

SBCI Business loans are made available to farmers through its bank on-lenders under the Agricultural Investment Loan Scheme (AILS). All loan applications are subject to the relevant on-lender's normal lending criteria and credit decisions are solely the responsibility of the individual on-lender and not the SBCI. It is a matter for the on-lender to determine what represents sufficient collateral for a loan in the case of each loan application.

Tax Code

149. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance if the home carers tax credit applies to couples or persons that care for a loved one and do not qualify for the carer's allowance or are not in receipt of any other State benefit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3109/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Home Carer Tax Credit may be

claimed by married couples and couples in a civil partnership who are jointly assessed for tax purposes and where one spouse or civil partner provides care for a dependent person. A dependent person for the purposes of the Home Carer Tax Credit includes a child in respect of whom the claimant is in receipt of child benefit, a person aged 65 or over, or a person who is permanently incapacitated by reason of physical or mental disability, but does not include the spouse or civil partner of the claimant.

The home carer does not have to be in receipt of the Carer's Allowance payable by the Department of Social Protection in order to qualify for the Home Carer Tax Credit.

The home carer may have income in his or her own right up to €7,200 and still qualify for the full Home Carer Tax Credit. If the income of the home carer is between €7,200 and €9,400 the claimant may still qualify for a portion of the tax credit. The Deputy may wish to note that the Carer's Allowance is not regarded as income for the purposes of qualifying for the Home Carer Tax Credit.

Banking Sector

150. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the levels of competition in the retail banking sector here, the benefits it confers on customers and the creation and sustainment of good careers; his further views on the possible withdrawal of a bank (details supplied) from the market; the engagement his Department has had with this bank regarding its presence in the market here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3152/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am aware that an announcement will be made by the bank concerned next month in relation to its future plans in Ireland and I do appreciate that this is a cause of concern, particularly for customers and employees of the bank in question. However, this is ultimately a commercial decision for the management team and board of the bank, having due regard to their customers. This Government has put the right infrastructure in place to encourage the inflow of financial services firms through its IFS 2020 Strategy and the the fact that all key economic indicators point to continued solid economic growth in Ireland should assist in this regard.

At his recent appearance before the Oireachtas Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform and Taoiseach, the Governor of the Central Bank said they were starting to see some signs of increased competition between banks and a strong desire from the banks to start to grow their loan books. Broadly speaking, I welcome these developments which should benefit consumers of financial products by offering more choices and better pricing.

Disabled Drivers and Passengers Scheme

151. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Finance if the disabled drivers and passengers scheme is only applicable to specially modified vehicles or if certain elements of the scheme, for example, VRT exemption, fuel grant and toll road exemption, may be applied for in circumstances in which the applicant holds a primary medical certificate but does not have a modified vehicle. [3154/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by Revenue that the provisions of the Disabled Driver and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Regulations 1994 (as amended) applies only to vehicles that have been specially constructed or adapted for use by a person with disabilities.

To qualify for the Scheme a person must have a primary medical certificate and the vehicle involved must be specially constructed or adapted to take account of that person's disablement. Once Revenue is satisfied that these criteria are met, the vehicle can then enter the Scheme and qualify for other benefits such as the fuel grant. Toll road exemptions are dealt with by the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport.

Detailed information in respect of the Scheme is at the following link http://www.revenue.ie/en/tax/vrt/reliefs-exemptions.html#section4-10

Primary Medical Certificates

152. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to improve the criteria pertaining to the primary medical certificate; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that a large percentage of applications do not meet with the criteria even though the applicants have serious health ailments and need modified vehicles; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3182/17]

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

To qualify for the Scheme, an applicant must have a permanent and severe physical disability within the terms of the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Regulations (S.I. 353 of 1994) and satisfy one of the six qualifying criteria outlined in the Regulations. The Senior Medical Officer for the relevant local Health Service Executive administrative area makes a professional clinical determination as to whether an individual applicant satisfies the medical criteria. A successful applicant is provided with a Primary Medical Certificate, which is required under the Regulations to claim the reliefs provided for in the Regulations. An unsuccessful applicant can appeal the decision of the Senior Medical Officer to the Disabled Drivers Medical Board of Appeal, which makes a new clinical determination in respect of the individual. The Regulations mandate that the Medical Board of Appeal is independent in the exercise of its functions to ensure the integrity of its clinical determinations. After six months a citizen can reapply if there is a deterioration in their condition.

To qualify for the Scheme an applicant must be in possession of a Primary Medical Certificate. To qualify for a Primary Medical Certificate, an applicant must be permanently and severely disabled within the terms of the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Regulations 1994 and satisfy one of the following conditions:

- be wholly or almost wholly without the use of both legs;

- be wholly without the use of one leg and almost wholly without the use of the other leg such that the applicant is severely restricted as to movement of the lower limbs;

- be without both hands or without both arms;

- be without one or both legs;

- be wholly or almost wholly without the use of both hands or arms and wholly or almost wholly without the use of one leg;

- have the medical condition of dwarfism and have serious difficulties of movement of the

lower limbs.

The Scheme represents a significant tax expenditure. Between the Vehicle Registration Tax and VAT foregone, and the repayment of excise on fuel used by members of the Scheme, the Scheme represented a cost of €50.3 million to the Exchequer in 2015, an increase from €48.6 million in 2014. These figures do not include the revenue foregone to the Local Government Fund in the respect of the relief from Motor Tax provided to members of the Scheme.

I recognise the important role that the Scheme plays in expanding the mobility of citizens with disabilities. I have managed to maintain the relief at current levels throughout the crisis despite the requirement for significant fiscal consolidation. From time to time I receive representations from individuals who feel they would benefit from the Scheme but do not qualify under the six criteria. While I have sympathy for these cases, given the scope and scale of the Scheme, I have no plans to expand the medical criteria beyond the six currently provided for in the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Regulations 1994.

Legislative Programme

153. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the purpose of each item of legislation listed in the legislative programme for his Department. [3188/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The following table sets out the purpose of each piece of legislation under my Department which is listed on the Government Legislation Programme for the Spring/Summer Session 2017.

Title	Purpose
Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman Bill	The purpose of the legislation is to amalgamate the Financial Services Ombudsman and the Pensions Ombudsman. The proposed Bill will amend, update and restate the existing legislation to form one office dealing with pensions and financial services complaints.
Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank Bill	The purpose of the legislation is to allow for Ireland's potential membership of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB).

Title	Purpose
Taxation and Certain Other Matters (International Mutual Assistance) Bill	The purpose of the legislation is to transpose elements of the OECD Mutual Convention on Administrative Assistance and the EU/Switzerland Anti-Fraud Agreement. Both of these international agreements have been signed up by Ireland and related primarily to mutual assistance and exchange of information between countries. Some of the provisions of the agreements have been transposed into Irish law already and this Bill would complete the transposition of both these agreements.

Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank Bill	The purpose of the legislation is to allow for Ireland's potential membership of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB).
Investment Limited Partnership (Amendment) Bill	The purpose of the legislation is to amend certain existing collective investment scheme legislation - the Investment Limited Partnership Act 1994 and the Limited Partnership Act 1907. The proposals are consistent with IFS 2020 and are intended to promote the establishment of new private equity and venture capital funds in Ireland. It is also intended to make certain technical amendments to the Irish Collective Asset-Management Vehicles Act 2015.

Title	Purpose
Insurance (Amendment) Bill 2017	The purpose of the legislation is to implement the Report of the Review of the Framework for Motor Insurance Compensation in Ireland which was published on 22 July. This review was carried out jointly by the Department of Finance and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport. It was approved by both Ministers and noted by Government on 19 July.
Central Bank Consolidation Bill	The purpose of the legislation is to consolidate the corpus of the Central Bank Acts into one statute.
Green Climate Fund Bill	The purpose of the legislation is to give effect to Ireland's membership of the UNFCCC Green Climate Fund, further to a Government Decision.

My Department has two items on the list of Bills which were enacted since the Government came to office on 6th May 2016. These are set out in the following table.

Title	Purpose
Finance Act 2016	The purpose of the legislation is to give statutory effect to Budget day decisions.

Finance (Certain European Union and Intergovernmental Obligations) Act 2016	The purpose of the legislation is to enable the state to enter into an agreement with the Single Resolution Board concerning the lending of sums by the State to the Single Resolution Board in circumstances where, after disposal of the latter's funds in the manner set out in Article 5(1) of the Agreement on the Transfer and Mutualisation of the Agreement on the Transfer and Mutualisation of Contributions to the Single Resolution Fund done at Brussels on 21 May 2014, such disposal is not sufficient to meet the costs of a resolution action referred to in that Article, and to enable, for the foregoing purpose, the making of payments from the Central Fund or the growing produce of that Fund of sums, not exceeding, in the aggregate, a certain amount, to that Board. The legislation also amends Chapter 2 of Part 23 of the Companies Act 2014 for the purpose of implementing certain European Union law on market abuse and, in particular, Directive 2014/57/EU of 16 April 2014.

The Finance Act 2016 also appears on the list of Bills which were published since the Government came to office on 6th May 2016.

Social Insurance

154. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to a parliamentary reply issued in respect of a person (details supplied), if he will review claims dating back to 1996 in view of the fact that the person was on an incorrect rate of PRSI from that time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2599/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Officials in my Department forwarded the relevant documentation regarding the misclassification of PRSI to the Department of Social Protection (DSP) on this case. A letter issued to the person referred to by the Deputy on 15 December 2016 setting out the position and explaining that any refund due will issue to her on receipt of the monies in this Department from the DSP.

Gaeltacht Policy

155. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the resources that will be provided for the new education policy for the Gaeltacht. [2709/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): A dedicated Gaeltacht Education Unit has been established in the Department of Education and Skills in January 2017 to oversee the implementation of the Policy on Gaeltacht Education. This Unit will be assisted

by the Department of Education and Skills' Inspectorate and An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG) to support schools in the Gaeltacht that are committed, over a five-year period, to delivering Irish-medium education and that engage with their communities in the Gaeltacht language-planning process. The Department of Education and Skills will make additional resources and supports available to the schools located in the Gaeltacht that opt for recognition as a Gaeltacht school providing full Irish-medium education. The allocation of resources will be on a staged incremental basis.

Schools, whose application to participate in the Gaeltacht Schools' recognition process is approved, will be granted additional teaching and/or other resources including dedicated continuing professional development (CPD). The Department of Education and Skills will also allocate additional resources to COGG to develop quality learning resources and oversee specific actions within the Policy that will assist in further developing high quality Irish-medium education and Irish-language teaching.

An initial budget of approximately one million euro has been allocated by the Department of Education and Skills to support the initial implementation of the Policy on Gaeltacht Education in 2017.

Schools Building Projects Status

156. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the redevelopment of a school (details supplied) in County Mayo; when a technical team will visit the school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2534/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy will be aware, a building project for the school referred to by the Deputy was included in my Department's 6 Year Capital Programme.

In the context of progressing the proposed project, my Department recently obtained additional documentation from the school in question. This documentation is currently under review and my Department will be in further contact with the school to arrange a technical site visit in due course.

Third Level Staff

157. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has discussed with management of Trinity College Dublin proposals to freeze promotions for non-academic staff and to impose a moratorium on offering permanent contracts to non-academic staff; his views regarding increased precarity in the sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2540/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In line with the Universities Act, 1997 third-level institutions, including Trinity College Dublin (TCD), have autonomy in relation to promotion policies and other human resource policies, subject to the requirement to comply with Government policy in respect of core-funded employment numbers. Employers in the higher education sector are also required to operate in accordance with the provisions of national industrial relations agreements. My Department is not aware of any instance in which a third-level institution is not operating in accordance with good practice in relation to promotion and/or recruitment.

My Department also understands that all third-level employers have adhered to the terms of the Haddington Road Agreement and are operating in accordance with the provisions of the Lansdowne Road Agreement. In the event that a union believes that an employer in the higher education sector is not acting in accordance with the terms of the Lansdowne Road Agreement, that union can seek to have the matter addressed using the dispute resolution procedures provided for in the Agreement, and any individuals who have issues of dispute have a variety of dispute resolution options open to them.

From enquiries made by officials of my Department through the HEA, I understand that TCD last updated its promotions procedures in December 2015 when its Board decided to discontinue annual promotion calls among professional (administrative, technical, library and support) staff and the university authorities are now examining a more formalised job evaluation process to be developed for introduction during the 2016/2017 academic year. This will then be considered by university management and union representatives.

As the Deputy will be aware, since the introduction of the moratorium on public sector recruitment, an Employment Control Framework (ECF) has been in place for the higher education sector which provides institutions with considerable flexibility to fill vacancies through recruitment or promotions on the basis of meeting an overall ceiling of posts.

In Budget 2015, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform announced that the existing ECFs and associated moratoriums would be lifted and replaced with a system of delegated sanction for recruiting and promoting up to Principal Officer level, subject to adherence by Departments to binding pay ceilings and ongoing compliance with Workforce Planning requirements. In light of this announcement it is hoped that a new Delegated Sanction Agreement for the higher education sector will be put in place shortly.

Special Educational Needs

158. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the incentives or assistance available to second level schools in County Louth to provide an autistic unit for students who require these services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2562/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Funding for special education provision in 2016 amounted to some €1.5 billion, which was equivalent to over 17% of the gross overall allocation for education and training and an increase of 10% in spending in the previous two years.

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

This range of supports and services furthers this Government's commitment to ensure 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.

The National Council for Special Education is responsible for organising and planning provision for children with Special Educational Needs, including establishing special classes in mainstream primary and post primary schools. Progress in developing the network of Special Classes has been significant.

In 2011 there were 548 special classes, of which 224 were primary ASD classes, 72 were post primary ASD classes and 34 were early intervention classes. The remaining 218 were special classes service children with mild to moderate/severe general learning difficulties and specific learning difficulties including speech and language difficulties.

There are currently 1,153 special classes, which is an increase of over 100% on the number available in 2011. Of these, 127 are ASD early intervention classes, 525 are primary ASD classes and 237 are post-primary ASD classes. The remainder are non ASD special classes.

The NCSE has advised that there are almost 18,000 students with ASD attending schools nationally. Of these 3,484 are attending primary ASD classes and 1,118 are attending post primary ASD classes.

With regard to County Louth, the NCSE has advised that there are 323 students with ASD attending schools in the county. Of these, 165 Students attend mainstream schools and are accessing in-school supports including Resource teaching and SNA support. A further 99 students with ASD are attending 19 Special Classes for children with Autism of which 3 are Early Intervention ASD Classes, 12 are primary ASD classes and 4 are post primary ASD. The remaining 59 students with ASD are placed in special schools.

The NCSE continues to review special class placement requirements nationally and have informed the Department that, in general, they are satisfied that there are sufficient ASD special class placements to meet existing demand.

The continued growth in post primary special class numbers is a natural consequence of the earlier growth in primary special class numbers. However, it should not be assumed that the same levels of growth in post primary class numbers should apply. This is because, for children with Autism, transferring from a special class in a primary school to a special class in a post primary school may not always be the optimal choice. Many children can progress to mainstream post primary with support of SNA and Resource Teaching hours, while more may transfer from primary to a special school depending on their presentation and needs.

It should also be noted that there is a proportionally larger enrolment at Primary level due to the higher number of standard years. Of the total enrolment in schools currently 68% of students are enrolled at Primary Level (which includes all Special Schools) and 32% are enrolled at Post Primary level.

The NCSE has published a guide for Boards of Management and Principals of Primary and Post Primary schools which contains information on setting up and organising special classes, including information on resources which may be provided to schools to establish special classes as requested by the Deputy. The guide is available to download from www.ncse.ie at the following link: http://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Guidelines-SettingUp-Special-Classes-PostPrimary.pdf

Furthermore, it is general practice 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, my 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 by the National Council for Special Education through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers.

Special Educational Needs

159. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding an Autism Spectrum Disorder, ASD, unit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2563/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm to the Deputy that a two-classroom ASD Unit is being provided as part of the accommodation for the new 1,000 pupil-post-primary school to which he refers and which is currently under construction.

State Examinations Exemptions

160. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the fact that while the Irish language exemption on the basis of a learning difficulty is recognised as part of the leaving certificate applied programme year 1, the foreign language exemption on the basis of a learning difficulty is not recognised as part of leaving certificate applied programme year 2; the reason this is the case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2576/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The State Examinations Commission has statutory responsibility for operational matters relating to the certificate examinations.

In view of this I have forwarded your query to the State Examinations Commission for direct reply to you.

Teaching Qualifications

161. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason resource hours teaching is no longer regarded as sufficient to enable primary school teachers to attain the 100 hours teaching necessary to proceed to study for a HDip; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2594/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Teaching Council is the statutory body with responsibility for professional standards at all stages of the teaching career. It has established standards for post-qualification professional practice, as set out in Droichead, the new model of induction and probation for newly qualified primary and post-primary teachers. The Droichead programme was the subject of a three-year pilot before it was approved by the Council in March 2016. The programme is being introduced on a phased basis since last September.

During the growth and development phase of Droichead, teachers employed in a special education or restricted setting must avail of the Droichead programme to achieve full registration with the Council. While a new policy on teacher probation was adopted by the Teaching Council last December, this does not change the requirement for teachers in a special education setting to avail of Droichead.

The INTO issued a directive to its members not to co-operate with or participate in Droichead from 1 July 2016. This directive has prevented newly qualified teachers employed in special education settings from participating in Droichead since September and thereby closed off the registration pathway. I hope the INTO will review its approach.

My Department is also considering the impact of the new policy adopted by the Council.

Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools Scheme

162. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the schools in Cork east that are currently designated under a category (details supplied); and the schools that will be added to this category in 2017. [2673/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that the list of the schools in question is available on my Department's website at the following link: http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools-/

As the Deputy may be aware, a process to review the DEIS Programme which began in 2015 is progressing very well 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.

The review process includes the development of a new assessment framework using centrally held CSO and DES data for the identification of schools for inclusion in a new Programme. The number of schools to receive supports under a new School Support Programme will be determined by this new identification process, which will assess all schools in the country on the same basis, including the schools referenced by the Deputy. 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 our wider Annual Action Plan for Education.

European Fund for Strategic Infrastructure

163. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the potential investment projects his Department put forward to the Department of Finance task force report for the European Fund for Strategic Investment. [2676/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): In November 2014 my Department provided a project list to the Department of Finance for inclusion in the submission to the Task Force established to develop an EU investment project pipeline. A summary of the projects provided at that time is in the table for the information of the Deputy.

Country: Ireland

Projects List

Sector	Subsector	Private/ Public/ PPP	Project name	Implementing agency	Description	Included in national investment plan (yes/ no)	Status	Total investment cost(EUR million)	Investment in 2015 -(EUR million)	Barriers/ solutions
Social Infrastructure	Education and training	Public	Modernisation of educational facilities	Department of Education & Skills	Development of 11 Primary & Post Primary Schools	No	Planning complete. Ready to go to Tender & Construction. Construction can commence in 2015	31m	31m	Barriers include fiscal constraints. Possible solutions include EU grants.
Social Infrastructure	Education and training	Public	Modernisation of educational facilities	Department of Education & Skills	Development of 18 Primary & Post Primary Schools	No	Planning complete. Preparing to go to Tender & Construction. Construction can commence in 2015	72m	72m	Barriers include fiscal constraints. Possible solutions include EU grants.
Social Infrastructure	Education and training	Public	Modernisation of educational facilities	Department of Education & Skills	Development of 18 Primary & Post Primary Schools	No	Planning not yet complete. Construction can commence in 2016	92m	92m	Barriers include fiscal constraints. Possible solutions include EU grants.
Social Infrastructure	Education and training	Public	Modernisation of educational facilities	Department of Education & Skills	Development of 13 Primary & Post Primary Schools	No	Planning not yet complete Construction expected to commence in 2017	63m	63m	Barriers include fiscal constraints. Possible solutions include EU grants.
Social Infrastructure	Education and training	Public	Modernisation of educational facilities	Department of Education & Skills	Peplacement of school temporary accommodation with permanent	No	Planning not yet complete. Can commence in 2015	150m	150m	Barriers include fiscal constraints. Possible solutions include EU grants.
Social Infrastructure	Education and training	Public	Modernisation of educational facilities	Department of Education & Skills	Schools ICT Programme	No	Planning not yet complete. Can commence in 2015	200m	200m	Barriers include fiscal constraints. Possible solutions include EU grants.

Sector	Subsector	Private/ Public/ PPP	Project name	Implementing agency	Description	Included in national investment plan (yes/ no)	Status	Total investment cost(EUR million)	Investment in 2015 -(EUR million)	Barriers/ solutions
Social Infrastructure	Education and training	Public	Modernisation of educational facilities	Department of Education & Skills	Modernisation of Further Education and Training Facilities	No	Planning not yet complete. Can commence in 2015	90m	90m	Barriers include fiscal constraints. Possible solutions include EU grants.
Social Infrastructure	Higher education	Combination of projects that rely solely on public funding but also projects that combine both income streams.	Modernisation of educational higher education facilities	Department of Education & Skills	New and replacement facilities in HEIs, programmes to allow enhancement of IT infrastructure and strategic property acquisitions.	No	Detailed in the spreadsheet "Copy of HE Capital Priority Needs".	€2.4b of which €1.653b is sought from public sources and €756m ccoming from private sources.		Barriers include fiscal constraints. Possible solutions include EU grants.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

164. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will review an application for assisted technology in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2689/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The National Council for Special Education (NCSE), through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), is responsible for processing applications from schools for special educational needs supports, including applications for assistive technology.

Special Needs Organisers (SENOs) make recommendations to my Department where assistive technology is required. The NCSE operates within my Department's criteria in making recommendations for support, as set out in my Department's Circular 0010/2013.

In order to qualify for equipment under the assistive technology scheme, a child must have been diagnosed with a physical or communicative disability and must also have a recommendation in a professional assessment that the equipment is essential in order to allow the child to access the curriculum. It must also be clear that the existing I.T. equipment in the school is insufficient to meet the child's needs.

The NCSE did not make a recommendation to my Department for the provision of assistive technology for the pupil in question, as the application does not meet the terms of Circular 0010/2013. The information provided does not confirm a diagnosed disability or medical condition in line with Circular 0010/2013.

Should additional information become available, which provides further clarification regarding the requirement for assistive technology for the pupil, in accordance with the terms of the scheme, it is open to the school to resubmit an application for consideration.

Parents can contact their local SENO directly to discuss their child's special educational needs, using the contact details available on the NCSE website.

Critical Incidents in Schools

165. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of times the critical incident policy has been implemented in primary and post-primary schools; the funding provided by his Department for the delivery and implementation of the critical incident policy each year from 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2704/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): By way of background I might inform you that this Department's National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) provides guidelines and resource materials for schools to enable them to deal with certain traumatic events which can adversely affect pupils and school staff. The guidelines "Responding to Critical Incidents: Guidelines for Schools and resource Materials for Schools" refer to preventive approaches that schools can adopt in creating a safe and supportive environment. It also outlines how schools can plan for crises.

A Critical Incident is defined as an incident, or series of events, that overwhelms the normal coping mechanism of the school. The kinds of critical incidents experienced by schools includes suicide or suspected suicide, death due to violence, accidental death including road traffic accidents and drowning, and death through illness. The ultimate aim of the process is to return the school to normality.

The Guidelines focus upon alerting schools to planning processes, structures and actions which will better allow them to cope with a traumatic incidents such as suicide or suspected suicide, murder, accidental death including road traffic accidents and drowning, and death through illness of a member or members of the school community. In relation to suicide advice is also given on prevention and positive mental health stratagems and approaches.

They offer a practical step by step guide to schools in how to respond effectively when a critical incident occurs in order to minimise the potential traumatic effect on the school community. It includes templates, advice and information on how to set up a Critical Incident Management Team and develop a Critical Incident Management Plan.

The Guidelines have recently been updated and sent out to schools with new or revised information and advice have been included in the Guidelines, including:

- Revised section on Suicide/suspected suicide including information on suicide prevention and what schools need to do; information on preventing suicide contagion; how to compassionately deal with a suicidal student returning to school after an attempt

- Information on suicide risk and guidance where student expresses suicide ideation

- Teachers helping students in time of crisis listen, protect, connect, model and teach

- Guidance on social media use

- Useful Websites and Helplines for Accessing Resources

- Some additional information, including a comprehensive FAQ guide

During a critical incident NEPS psychologists will also, at the specific invitation of school

authorities, attend at the schools following such incidents to offer direct advice and assistance to school staff and pupils. All such requests are responded to, most usually by the psychologist normally assigned to the affected school but also in some cases, depending on the particular context, by a colleague within the NEPS region and more rarely by colleagues from another NEPS region. The attached sheet gives detail of the number of such requests that were made from 2011/12 to 2015/16.

The critical incident process in schools does not by its nature result from dedicated funding to schools but derives from informing practice of existing staffing in schools and from general non-pay resourcing made available to schools. Direct costs within my Department relate to the development and production of the guidelines and their distribution to schools, general NEPS psychologist time in assisting/advising schools on their implementation and direct NEPS staff time in assisting schools during critical incidents.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Critical Incidents

Academic Year	Number of Incidents in which NEPS Staff involvement was requested by school
2008/09	97
2009/10	93
2010/11	110
2011/12	110
2012/13	152
2013/14	127
2014/15	105
2015/16	105
2016/17	(*)

(*) Data not yet available

School Enrolments

166. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to tackle the issue of over subscribed primary schools; the number of primary schools that are over subscribed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2705/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Under the provisions of the Education Act 1998 the Board of Management of a school is the body charged with the direct governance of that school.

Parents can choose which school to apply to and where the school has places available the pupil should be admitted. However, in schools where there are more applicants than places available a selection process may be necessary. This selection process and the enrolment policy on which it is based must be non-discriminatory and must be applied fairly in respect of all applicants.

The Education (Admission to Schools) Bill was published on 6 July 2016 and passed second stage on 17 November 2016. The introduction of this Bill reflects the Programme for Government commitment to publish new School Admissions legislation taking account of current draft proposals and addressing issues including publication of school enrolment policies, an end to

waiting lists, introduction of annual enrolment structures, and transparency and fairness in admissions for pupils and their parents.

In relation to the provision of additional school accommodation and of new schools, my Department uses a Geographical Information System (GIS) to identify where the pressure for school places across the country will arise. In order to plan for school provision and analyse the relevant demographic data, my Department divides the country into 314 school planning areas. The GIS uses data from a range of sources, including the Central Statistics Office, Ordnance Survey Ireland, the Department of Social Protection and my Department's own databases. With this information, my Department carries out nationwide demographic analyses at primary and post-primary level to determine where additional school accommodation, including new school provision, is required.

In this regard, following completion of such demographic analysis, three new primary schools and eight new post-primary schools opened in September 2016 to cater for areas under increased demographic pressure. Four new primary schools and nine new post-primary schools will also open in 2017 and 2018 to provide additional capacity in areas under demographic pressure.

It is open to any school to submit an application to my Department if they have identified a deficit of classroom accommodation to meet increasing enrolments or to accommodate an additional teacher appointment. Application forms can be accessed on my Department's website www.education.ie.

Education and Training Boards

167. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason for the education and training board selection of a new premises for an organisation (details supplied); the reason another property was deemed unsuitable; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2794/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): City of Dublin Education and Training Board (CDETB) has been managing a Youthreach centre at the premises in question for a number of years. The premise was sold by the former landlord last year and the new landlord informed CDETB that it is must vacate the premises by the end of February 2017. CDETB has been actively seeking new premises since last summer with a number of options under consideration. As yet no decision has been taken in relation to the suitability of any of the premises under consideration.

CDETB has recently succeeded in securing an extension from the landlord on the current premises until the end of April which will provide it with additional time to consider and decide on the most suitable premises for the Youthreach programme for the area.

Summer Works Scheme Applications

168. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application by a school (details supplied) for the summer works programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2822/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department is in receipt of a Category 10 application, external environment project, un-

der the Summer Works Scheme (2016-2017) from the school to which he refers.

Nearly 50% of schools have applied for inclusion under the scheme which reflects a very high demand. Details of successful school applicants in respect of Categories 1 and 2 were announced in April last and are published on my Department's website www.education.ie. Assessment of valid projects in further categories is now being undertaken by my Department, subject to the overall availability of funding, in accordance with the terms and conditions of the scheme as outlined in Circular Letter (0055/2015), which may be accessed on my Department's website. The application from the school in question is available to be considered in this context.

Site Acquisitions

169. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a request (details supplied) has been made to his Department for a discussion on the future potential use of Columb Barracks, Mullingar, as an education centre and with a view to his Department playing a positive role in securing same for this use; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2842/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm that my Department received correspondence in late December 2016 concerning the possible acquisition of Columb Barracks in Mullingar. My Department has previously had informal engagement with an education body in relation to this matter and will be formally responding to this correspondence in due course.

Schools Building Projects Status

170. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of applications for extensions to schools (details supplied). [2855/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy will be aware that building projects for the schools in question are included in my Department's 6 Year Construction Programme.

Preparatory work has been initiated to advance these projects and my Department will continue to liaise directly with the school authorities concerned in the context of progressing the projects through the architectural planning process.

School Curriculum

171. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has satisfied himself that the school curriculum that is set out for the home economics subject is not conflicting with the foods that are served in school canteens; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2858/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department issued a circular to all post primary schools in September 2015 on the Promotion of Healthy Lifestyles in Post Primary Schools (Circular number 0051/2015).

Schools are strongly encouraged to have a formal healthy eating policy that has been devel-

oped in consultation with students (through student councils) and parents.

Guidelines are available to schools on Developing a Healthy Eating Policy in Post-Primary Schools, which have been developed by the Department of Health and HSE.

The healthy eating policy should outline how the school supports healthy eating practices through the promotion of healthy lunches and healthy snacks and other means. The Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) continues to support the SPHE and PE curricula and, through the wider lens of this curriculum support, promotes healthy eating policies.

Many post-primary schools have a number of food outlets, including school shops and vending machines. Some schools also offer school lunches. In addition, some schools offer breakfast and after-school clubs and pre-packed lunches, making the school a key food provider for many students.

While educating on healthy eating is not just the responsibility of schools but also of wider society, schools are well placed to support students to develop an understanding of the nutrient value of common and easily accessible products, as well the skills to make informed decisions about their nutrient intake.

Boards of Management and Principals are being encouraged, however, to ensure that those supplying food and beverage products to their schools are aware of this guidance, especially when contracts are being agreed or renewed.

Home Economics Education provides students with opportunities to develop an understanding of the relationship between food, diet and health. The home economics syllabuses at both Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate levels focus on developing students' food, health and culinary skills. Students study topics such as the nutritional requirements of different groups of the population, the role of diet in relation to health, how to read food labels and to make informed food choices. Students also apply this knowledge as they develop their culinary skills in practical lessons. Therefore, students of Home Economics are enabled to become food literate and act as discerning consumers when faced with a choice and selection of foods for purchase.

In addition, students of Home Economics are often a significant positive voice in their own schools when staff are developing and implementing a healthy eating policy.

School Transport

172. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will review the case of persons (details supplied) who have been deemed ineligible for free school transport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2884/17]

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

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

Under the terms of my Department's Primary School Transport Scheme children are eligible for transport where they reside not less than 3.2 kilometres from and are attending their near-

est national school as determined by the Department/Bus Éireann, having regard to ethos and language.

Children who are eligible for school transport and who hold valid medical cards (GMS Scheme) are exempt from paying the annual charge.

However, Bus Éireann has advised that the children in question are not attending their nearest school and are therefore not eligible for school transport.

Children who are not eligible for school transport may apply to Bus Éireann for transport on a concessionary basis only provided there are spare seats available on the service, and the appropriate annual charge is paid.

Bus Éireann has advised that the children in question are currently availing of transport on a concessionary basis.

In relation to the eldest child the family should liaise with the School Authorities and the Special Education Needs Organiser if they wish to make an application for school transport under the terms of my Department's School Transport Scheme for Children with Special Educational Needs.

Summer Works Scheme Administration

173. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when funding for the 2017 summer works scheme will be announced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2890/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that nearly 50% of schools have applied for inclusion under the scheme which reflects a very high demand. Details of successful school applicants in respect of Categories 1 and 2 were announced in April last and are published on my Department's website www.education.ie. Assessment of valid projects in further categories is now being undertaken by my Department, subject to the overall availability of funding, in accordance with the terms and conditions of the scheme as outlined in Circular Letter (0055/2015), which may be accessed on my Department's website. It is my intention to publish a list of successful applicants in due course.

Summer Works Scheme Applications

174. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a school (details supplied) will receive funding in 2017 under the summer works scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2891/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department is in receipt of a Category 5 application, upgrade of toilet facilities, under the Summer Works Scheme (2016-2017) from the school to which he refers.

Nearly 50% of schools have applied for inclusion under the scheme which reflects a very high demand. Details of successful school applicants in respect of Categories 1 and 2 were announced in April last and are published on my

Department's website www.education.ie. Assessment of valid projects in further categories is now being undertaken by my Department, subject to the overall availability of fund-

ing, in accordance with the terms and conditions of the scheme as outlined in Circular Letter (0055/2015), which may be accessed on my Department's website. The application from the school in question is available to be considered in this context.

Departmental Staff Data

175. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of Secretaries General in his Department; the annual pay of each Secretary General in his Department at 1 January 2017; the expected change in that pay as a consequence of the provisions of the Lansdowne Road agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2906/17]

176. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of assistant secretaries general in his Department; the annual pay of each assistant secretary general in his Department at 1 January 2017; the expected change in that pay as a consequence of the provisions of the Lansdowne Road agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2922/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 175 and 176 together.

At 1 January 2017, as is currently the case, there was one Secretary General in my Department on an annual salary of €176,350.

In addition, there is one Deputy Secretary in my Department on an annual salary of €156,380 and eight Assistant Secretaries General on annual salaries as follows:

- 2 on a salary of €119,572
- 1 on a salary of 125,761
- 5 on a salary of €136,496

Under the provisions of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2015 (FEMPI Act 2015), which underpins the Lansdowne Road Agreement, for those on salaries in excess of €110,000 the salary reductions imposed under the FEMPI Act 2013 will be restored in three equal phases on 1 April 2017, 1 April 2018 and 1 April 2019.

A circular setting out the revised salary rates applicable from 1 April 2017 to general Civil Service grades, including the aforementioned grades, is currently in preparation and will be issued by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in due course.

Third Level Staff

177. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the growing concerns regarding work and contract conditions among support staff in Trinity College; if he has met with SIPTU and Unite representatives on the reason for these concerns; if not, when he plans to do so; the action he will take to ensure that low morale is addressed and fair employment practices are implemented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2974/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Third-level institutions have autonomy in relation to human resource policies, subject to compliance with Government

policy in respect of employment numbers and pay policy. Employers in the higher education sector are also required to operate in accordance with the provisions of national industrial relations agreements. My Department is not aware of any instance in which Trinity College Dublin is not operating in accordance with good practice in relation to work and contract conditions. In the event that a union has concerns regarding work and contract conditions among staff in any university, that union can seek to have the matter addressed using the dispute resolution procedures provided for in the Haddington Road Agreement, and any individuals who have issues of dispute have a variety of dispute resolution options open to them.

Third Level Funding

178. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has read the USI position paper on the funding of higher education regarding the effects a loan scheme would have on students; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2981/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am aware of the USI pre-budget submission and its recommendations for increased funding to the sector. The Report of the Expert Group on the Future Funding for Higher Education, which was established by previous Minister O'Sullivan, sets out a number of funding options for the sector with income contingent loans being just one of those options. Other options include a predominantly State-funded system or a State-funded system supplemented with continuing student fees.

As the Deputy will be aware the Report is currently with the Joint Oireachtas Committee for consideration where each of the funding models will be examined and the process will include input from all stakeholders. I understand the Union of Students in Ireland are one of the groups who have made a submission.

It will be important to obtain political and societal consensus on achieving a sustainable funding model for the higher education sector in the future and my Department and I continue to work with the Committee as it undertakes this important job. However, it is important to recognise, as the Cassells Report has done, that doing nothing is not an option and that other measures to improve equality of access would also be necessary.

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. That is why I am pleased, that I have for the first time in nine years secured additional funding for the sector with €36.5m additional being made available this year and €160m additional overall over the next three years. This includes an increase in the funding available to students from disadvantaged backgrounds and other under-represented groups to assist them in overcoming financial barriers to accessing and completing higher education.

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 and of the most effective funding mechanisms to deliver outcomes in respect of our ambitions in this area. In this context it will identify key elements of the new funding model and of the expected impacts including those on employers. The re-

view will include consultation with stakeholders. It is expected that 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.

State Examinations Reviews

179. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide a progress report on junior certificate syllabus, subject and assessment reforms and his key priorities in this regard for 2017 and 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2982/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The curriculum and assessment arrangements for Junior Cycle are as set out in the Framework for Junior Cycle 2015 and in the related subject specifications and syllabuses developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.

Implementation of the Framework is proceeding and the new subject specifications for Business Studies and Science, along with English, have now been introduced to schools. The teachers involved are benefiting from extensive continuing professional development and are availing of professional time to support implementation. In June 2017, English will be the first subject to be taken by students as part of the reformed Junior Cycle assessment arrangements. Business Studies and Science will be examined under the new arrangements in June 2019.

Phase 3 of the Framework will begin implementation in September 2017, with the introduction of new subject specifications in Irish, Visual Arts and Modern Languages, covering French, German, Spanish and Italian. The new curriculum area of Wellbeing will also be introduced at that time.

Phase 4 will begin implementation in September 2018 with the introduction of Mathematics, Home Economics, History, Music and Geography.

Apprenticeship Programmes

180. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the uptake in the number of apprenticeships by females; if his Department has proposals to address the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2983/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): As the Deputy is aware, in order to be registered as an apprentice by SOLAS, a person must be employed by an approved employer in one of the 27 craft trades. Recruitment to apprenticeship is therefore driven by employers rather than by SOLAS or by education and training providers. The 2014 Review of Apprenticeship in Ireland acknowledged that the number of women employed in craft apprenticeships is low as they operate in sectors that have traditionally low levels of female employment. SOLAS offers a bursary to employers to encourage them to employ female apprentices in these areas. Despite this the number of female apprentices remains low.

Currently the Apprenticeship Council is overseeing the expansion of the apprenticeship system into a range of new areas, following a call for proposals from employers and education and training providers. In recent months, we have seen the first of these new apprenticeships with the new Insurance Practitioner Apprenticeship launching in September 2016 and the Industrial Electrical Engineer Apprenticeship commencing in November 2016. Further new apprentice-

ships will get underway in 2017, many of which are in sectors where there is a different gender balance in the workplace and I am confident that this will lead to a strong increase in female participation when these new apprenticeships are launched.

As set out in the National Skills Strategy 2025, my Department will, in conjunction with SOLAS, review female participation in apprenticeship in 2018 in light of the broadening of the apprenticeship system into new areas and will set appropriate targets thereafter.

Accompanying the renewal and expansion of apprenticeship in Ireland will be a new branding and marketing campaign. SOLAS will examine how this campaign can assist with promoting apprenticeship to women and to their potential employers.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

181. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to reduce class sizes and build on the measures to reduce class sizes in previous budgets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2984/17]

184. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the primary and post-primary average class size figures for Ireland and for other EU member states; his plans to tackle large class size concerns; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2987/17]

202. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will consider further improvements in the pupil-teacher ratio to help reduce the class size towards EU average in budget 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3006/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 181, 184 and 202 together.

Budget 2016 provided for an improvement in the staffing schedule in primary schools by 1 point, from 1 teacher for every 28 pupils to 1 teacher for every 27 pupils for the 2016/17 school year. The Programme for Government has a commitment to reduce class sizes at primary level and it is my intention to make further improvements to class sizes over the life of the Government.

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

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

It should be noted that the current staffing of 27:1 for primary schools has restored the staffing schedule to the position it was at prior to the fiscal crisis.

The Statistics Section of my Department's website contains extensive data relating to schools, including information on class sizes.

Education Policy

182. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the way in which he plans to progress the three areas in the education sector that he has identified as his core priority areas of focus in the sector, including helping children with special needs, supporting schools and building a stronger bridge between education and the workplace; the reason he has prioritised these three areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2985/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Last September, I launched the first ever Action Plan for Education, covering the period 2016- 2019. The central vision of the Plan is that the Irish Education and Training System should become the best in Europe over the next decade. The Plan's high-level goals are based on the five policy areas which I believe will help us to achieve this ambition. The goals are:

1. Improve the learning experience and the success of learners

2. Improve the progress of learners at risk of educational disadvantage or learners with special educational needs

3. Help those delivering education services to continuously improve

4. Build stronger bridges between education and wider community

5. Improve national planning and support services

The basic aim of this Government is to sustain our economic progress and use it to build a fair and compassionate society. Education is the best means of delivering a fairer society, breaking down cycles of disadvantage and ensuring that all our people, in particular those with special educational needs, are able to participate in that progress and fulfil their potential. Excellent and innovative education and training are the pivot around which personal fulfilment, a fair society and a successful nation should revolve. It is central to sustaining economic success and in converting economic success into building a strong community. Having the best education and training service in Europe will allow us to provide better opportunities for more people from disadvantaged groups, as well as ensuring that we create more sustainable well-paying jobs.

Our approach to special education has undergone a huge transformation with a growing proportion of children with special educational needs being educated with their peers in mainstream schools. The participation and progress of learners with special educational needs across the whole education system remains a key focus with an emphasis on improving whole-school and whole system approaches. The Action Plan 2017 sets out a range of measures which will be undertaken during this year. These include allocating teachers to schools under the new allocation model to support children with special educational needs, publishing the outcomes of a comprehensive review of the S scheme, and consult with partners on the implementation of sections of the EPSEN Act and on the provision of services to children with Down Syndrome.

Quality of provision is the cornerstone to the success of the education and training system. We recognise the fundamental roles that leaders, teachers and support staff play and we want to strengthen the system's capacity to continuously improve and to deliver the highest quality education and training services for learners. The Action Plan 2017 details actions which will ensure that leadership, management, quality frameworks, teaching methods, and initial and continuing training are all operating to the highest standards across the continuum of education and training provision. These actions include expanding the range of supports available through the Centre for School Leadership, providing dedicated professional support to teachers to support the implementation of curricular and policy change, and developing and introducing a new postgraduate qualification for aspiring school leaders.

To become an innovation leader and to build a strong talent base, we as a nation must effectively engage with enterprise. We must work to address identified skills needs in critical areas, and recognise the shifting global economic and political climate in which services are delivered and jobs are created. Successful enterprise engagement is the foundation of much of the planned activity detailed in the Action Plan 2017. This includes driving the growth of traineeships and apprenticeships, ensuring the relevance of work placements and work-based projects, and increasing the diversity of opportunity in learning beyond school.

In order to ensure that progress is made in all of these areas, including helping children with special needs, supporting schools and building a stronger bridge between education and the workplace, updated annual Action Plans will be published each year, detailing the actions that will be implemented during that year. As part of this process, actions will be monitored against published timelines and progress reports will be published on a quarterly basis.

Education Policy

183. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to reform the model of leadership in schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2986/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): It is widely accepted that the quality of school leadership is a key determinant of school effectiveness and the achievement of good learning outcomes. Indeed international research indicates that school leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning.

Budget 2016 provided 250 posts to second level schools to enable Deputy Principals to be more fully available to assist the school principal with the leadership of the school. At primary level Budget 2016 provided for additional release days for teaching principals to range between 15 and 25 days depending on the size of the school.

Budget 2017 has provided for the equivalent of 170 additional posts to second level schools to employ an additional Deputy Principal to assist the school principal with the leadership of the school. With effect from September 2017, schools with pupil enrolment in excess of 700 will be allocated additional Deputy Principal posts.

Budget 2017 also provides for the commencement of the restoration of middle management posts in both the primary and post-primary sector.

The recently established Centre for School Leadership (CSL) is a collaboration between my Department and the representative professional bodies for school principals. It has been created to offer professional and practical support to schools leaders. This support structure for leadership teams in schools will attempt to ensure that school leaders have opportunities to access, share and create knowledge and experience within their leadership roles. The work of the Centre draws on best international practice and research in the professional development of school leaders. Priorities for the Centre include a new post graduate qualification for aspiring school leaders, a mentoring programme for newly appointed school principals, coaching support for serving principals, a review and alignment of leadership programmes with Department standards.

Last year my Department published "Looking at Our School 2016", a quality framework for primary and post primary schools which is designed to support the efforts of teachers and school leaders, as well as the school system more generally, to strive for excellence in our schools.

The current review of the post of responsibility structure in schools will, in the context of restoration of posts, address the further development of a distributed leadership model.

Question No. 184 answered with Question No. 181.

Teaching Council of Ireland

185. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there are remaining sections of the Teaching Council (Amendment) Act 2015 to be commenced; the timeframe for commencing such sections; and the number of fitness to teach complaints received and processed to date since he commenced these provisions in July 2016. [2988/17]

199. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans and the timeframe in respect of complementing the fitness to teach provisions of the Teaching Council (Amendment) Act 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3003/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 185 and 199 together.

The Teaching Council (Amendment) Act 2015 has been commenced in full. I commenced the final sections in July 2016, which provided for the introduction of the fitness to teach process.

The Deputy will appreciate that the fitness to teach process is independent of my Department and she should contact the Council directly for information on the number of complaints received.

The Deputy should note that, under Section 55 of the Teaching Council Act, the Council is obliged to submit an annual report of its activities and proceedings under the Act to me as Minister. Fitness to teach was commenced on 25 July 2016, during the current reporting year. I look forward to the next annual report which will be due after 28 March next.

With regard to complementing the fitness to teach provisions, as the Deputy will be aware the Programme for a Partnership Government provides that the Government will introduce a stronger complaints procedure and charter for parents.

On 5 December 2016, I published the General Scheme of an Education (Parent and Student Charter) Bill 2016. The Government have approved the draft outline of a new law, which will require every school to consult with parents and students, and publish and operate a Parent and Student Charter.

The publication of this draft legislation will fulfil a key commitment in the Action Plan for Education to improve information and complaint procedures for parents and students relating schools. The draft legislation defines the principles that will guide how schools will engage with students and parents.

Following consultation with our education partners, including the National Parents Council (Primary), National Parents Council (Post Primary) and the Irish Second-level Students Union, I will finalise national guidelines on a Parent and Student Charter.

The draft Bill will now go to the Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skills for pre-legislative scrutiny.

The provisions of both sections 24 and 28 of the Education Act are relevant to the new in-

vestigatory powers of the Teaching Council. Section 24, is particularly significant as it provides to schools as employers the procedures to deal with teacher conduct or underperformance. It would be expected that schools, as employers, would deal with issues of teacher conduct or underperformance under Section 24 procedures. In addition, it would be expected that parental complaints in relation to teacher conduct or underperformance may also be dealt with under Section 24 procedures by the school, as employer.

Education Policy

186. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when he proposes to publish a draft of the education (parent and student charter) Bill; the details of the proposed pre-legislative scrutiny process; and the timeframe for this. [2989/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): On 5 December 2016, I published the General Scheme of an Education (Parent and Student Charter) Bill 2016. The Government have approved the draft outline of a new law, which will require every school to consult with parents and students, and publish and operate a Parent and Student Charter.

The publication of this draft legislation will fulfil a key commitment in the Action Plan for Education to improve information and complaint procedures for parents and students relating schools.

The draft legislation defines the principles that will guide how schools will engage with students and parents.

Following consultation with our education partners, including the National Parents Council (Primary), National Parents Council (Post Primary) and the Irish Second-level Students Union, I will finalise national guidelines on a Parent and Student Charter.

The draft Bill has now gone to the Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skills for pre-legislative scrutiny. On 12 December 2016, I wrote to the Chairperson of the Committee requesting that the Committee might consider carrying out pre-legislative scrutiny on the General Scheme of an Education (Parent and Student Charter) Bill simultaneously with Deputy Jim Daly's Private Members Bill regarding the establishment of an Ombudsman for Education.

Teaching Council of Ireland

187. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the way in which he will address concerns that the Teaching Council, in the absence of a statutory complaints procedure for use at school level, will be expected to address complaints which are better resolved at local level and thus have less resources to deal with very serious complaints which may arise. [2990/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy will be aware the Programme for a Partnership Government provides that the Government will introduce a stronger complaints procedure and charter for parents.

On 5 December 2016, I published the General Scheme of an Education (Parent and Student Charter) Bill 2016. The Government have approved the draft outline of a new law, which will require every school to consult with parents and students, and publish and operate a Parent and Student Charter.

The publication of this draft legislation will fulfil a key commitment in the Action Plan for Education to improve information and complaint procedures for parents and students relating schools. The draft legislation defines the principles that will guide how schools will engage with students and parents.

Following consultation with our education partners, including the National Parents Council (Primary), National Parents Council (Post Primary) and the Irish Second-level Students Union, I will finalise national guidelines on a Parent and Student Charter.

The draft Bill will now go to the Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skills for pre-legislative scrutiny.

In relation to Part 5 (Fitness to Teach) of the Teaching Council Act, the provisions of both sections 24 and 28 are relevant to the new investigatory powers of the Teaching Council. Section 24, is particularly significant as it provides to schools as employers the procedures to deal with teacher conduct or underperformance. It would be expected that schools, as employers, would deal with issues of teacher conduct or underperformance under Section 24 procedures. In addition, it would be expected that parental complaints in relation to teacher conduct or underperformance may also be dealt with under Section 24 procedures by the school, as employer.

Third Level Admissions Assistance

188. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the specific measures he plans in order to deal with concerns regarding third level student support and funding challenges for third level institutions. [2991/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department is investing in a significant programme of student supports in the 2017/18 academic year in order to assist students from under-represented groups to participate in and complete higher education.

In total, my Department will provide almost €418million on student supports in 2017.

This encompasses the student grant scheme which is expected to assist circa 80,000 students in 2017/18. The grant scheme is complemented by the Student Assistance Fund and the Fund for Students with Disabilities, as well as a programme of scholarships and bursaries.

The Report of the Expert Group on Future Funding for Higher Education, published in July 2016, clearly outlines the funding challenges facing the higher education sector. The report also makes a number of recommendations for consideration for the future. As committed to in the Programme for Government, I have referred the report of the expert group to the relevant Oireachtas Committee for its consideration, in order to build political consensus on the most appropriate future funding model for the higher education sector.

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

In addition, in Budget 2017, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform and I an-

nounced 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 and of the most effective funding mechanisms to deliver outcomes in respect of our ambitions in this area. In this context, it will identify key elements of the new funding model and of the expected impacts, including those on employers. It will also include consultation with stakeholders. It is expected that the review will be published by the end of April 2017 and will complement the ongoing work by the Oireachtas Committee in regard to the Cassells report.

Teachers' Remuneration

189. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his view on whether there is a clear pay disparity between teachers recruited before 1 January 2011 and those recruited thereafter with regard to pay equality for teachers; his further views on whether it is unacceptable to maintain such pay disparities; his plans to address pay equality issues beyond the steps already agreed in relation to restoration of a qualification allowance payment; the cost of restoring teachers recruited since 1 January 2011 to the previous pay scale; the elements which make up this cost; and the number of teachers affected. [2992/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As a consequence of the financial crisis, there was a need to enact a number of measures to reduce public expenditure so as to stabilise the country's public finances. These included pay reductions and also reductions to the pay of new entrant public servants, including teachers, since 2011. Collective agreements reached between the Government and the public service unions provided vital industrial peace during this very difficult period for the State.

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

In education, there is a well-established increment system. Teachers are not paid equally. For example, the pay scale for teachers appointed prior to 2011 ranges from €32,009 to €60,155 depending on the date that the individual began teaching. Part of the negotiation to date has secured a convergence of the scales of recruits at different periods. Any further negotiation on new entrant pay cannot focus on just one sector. A broader assessment of pay and new entrant pay will be informed by the analysis of the Public Service Pay Commission.

ASTI members are currently balloting on a set of proposals published by the Teachers Conciliation Council in November. The proposals provide ASTI members with an opportunity to benefit from the programme of pay restoration described above, including the agreement reached with TUI and INTO, which will see pay rises of between 15-22% (between €4600 and €6700) for new entrant teachers. There are also other immediate undoubted benefits for individual ASTI members in accepting the proposals.

The ASTI Central Executive Committee took a decision to put the outcome of the talks process to a ballot of members with a recommendation to reject. The ASTI's leadership have taken a view on the proposals. It is now over to the members to form their view.

ASTI members will have to weigh the benefits up for themselves. These benefits are only available to ASTI members if they vote to accept. ASTI's membership now have a decision to make as to whether to accept the TCC proposals and the immediate benefits on offer or to engage again in industrial action. It is for the ASTI leadership to explain its strategy in respect of the latter approach.

School Admissions

190. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has reviewed the recently published Labour Party Equal Status (Admission to School) Bill; his views on the aims and objectives of the bill; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2993/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I have made my position clear on the issue of the role of religion in school admissions. I have stated that I believe that it is unfair that preference is given by publicly-funded religious schools to children of their own religion who might live some distance away, ahead of children of a different religion or of no religion who live close to the school. In that respect I agree with the aims of the Labour Party's Bill. I have also stated that I believe that it is unfair that parents, who might otherwise not do so, feel pressure to baptise their children in order to gain admission to the local school and I intend to reform the school admissions system in relation to the role that religion can play in that process.

I have set out four possible approaches for dealing with the issue, in primary schools in the first instance, including:

- A catchment area approach, prohibiting religious schools from giving preference to children of their own religion who live outside the catchment area ahead of non-religious children who live inside the catchment

- A 'nearest school rule', allowing religious schools to give preference to a religious child only where it is that child's nearest school of that particular religion

- A quota system, which would allow a religious school give preference to children of its own religion in respect of only a certain proportion of places, meaning that the remaining places would be allocated based on other admissions criteria – proximity to the school, lottery etc.

- An outright prohibition on religious schools using religion as a factor in admissions, meaning that all places would be allocated based on other factors. Within this approach, there is capacity to allow religious schools to require parents or students to indicate some support or respect for the ethos of the school.

I am also mindful of the need to avoid possible pitfalls and unintended consequences with each of these approaches, including most importantly possible impacts on minority religions and on the wishes of Protestant, Jewish, Islamic and other communities to be able to run schools in accordance with their ethos and admit children from their communities to attend those schools.

Other possible consequences to be avoided include possible breaches of the constitution, technical and administrative difficulties impacting on the capacity to effectively run the system of over 4000 schools and the possibility of creating 'postcode lotteries', such as other countries have experienced, resulting in pronounced divergence in the quality of schools in more advantaged compared to less advantaged areas.

I will be commencing a short process of consultation on this issue and I am interested in

hearing the views of the groups who stand to be impacted by changes as well as any members of the public with views on the issue. After that I will progress to develop and implement measures to deal with this issue.

Teachers' Remuneration

191. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to issue a directive on implementing pay deductions for members of teachers' unions that rejected working additional hours under the Croke Park agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2994/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): ASTI's withdrawal from the Croke Park hours means that the union has repudiated the Lansdowne Road Agreement. The financial and other consequences for ASTI members of failure to co-operate with the terms of the agreement were formally notified to ASTI in June 2016. It was indicated at that time that in the event of continuing failure to co-operate in the medium term, further additional measures may also ensue.

Circular Letter 0045/2016 sets out the implications for ASTI members of failure to co-operate with the terms of the agreement. As detailed in the circular, ASTI members have opted to forego a series of benefits and protections including:

- Avoiding an increment freeze until

- Inclusion of the S&S allowance of €1,592 into the pay scale

- Continued alleviation of the FEMPI Act pay reductions

- The Ward Report measures and a revised sequence for filling posts which enable fixed-term and part-time teachers to gain permanent, full-time jobs more easily and quickly than before

- An increase in the quantum of the Croke Park hours that can be worked on other than a whole-school basis

- A review of the usage of the Croke Park hours

- Protection against compulsory redundancy

In addition to the above, as ASTI members are not covered by the LRA, they do not benefit from the recent agreement which my Department reached with INTO and TUI under the LRA, which substantially addresses the current difference in pay between those recruited since 2011 and those recruited since 2012. The agreement reached with TUI and INTO will see pay rises of between 15-22% (between €4600 and €6700) for new entrant teachers.

Also, the Government recently moved to address an anomaly issue arising in the context of the recent Labour Court Recommendations in respect of the Garda Associations through an increase in annualised salaries of €1,000 for the period 1 April 2017 to August 2017 inclusive for public servants on annualised salaries up to €65,000 who are parties to the Lansdowne Road Agreement and who do not stand to benefit from those Labour Court Recommendations.

Following discussions, the Teachers Conciliation Council published a set of proposals in November for consideration by ASTI members aimed at finding a resolution to their dispute. The ASTI Central Executive Committee took a decision to put the outcome of the talks process

to a ballot of members with a recommendation to reject. That ballot is now underway. The ASTI's leadership have taken a view on the proposals. It is now over to the members to form their view.

The proposals provide ASTI members with an opportunity to benefit from the programme of pay restoration under public service agreements, including the agreement reached with TUI and INTO for new entrant teachers.

ASTI members will have to weigh these benefits up for themselves. These benefits are only available to ASTI members if they vote to accept. ASTI's membership now have a decision to make as to whether to accept the TCC proposals and the immediate benefits on offer or to engage again in industrial action. It is for the ASTI leadership to explain its strategy in respect of the latter approach.

While the union's ballot process is ongoing it would not be helpful for me to comment further.

School Curriculum

192. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the roll-out of the junior cycle reform process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2995/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The curriculum and assessment arrangements for Junior Cycle are as set out in the Framework for Junior Cycle 2015 and in the related subject specifications and syllabuses developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.

Implementation of the Framework is proceeding and the new subject specifications for Business Studies and Science, along with English, have now been introduced to schools. The teachers involved are benefiting from extensive continuing professional development and are availing of professional time to support implementation. In June 2017, English will be the first subject to be taken by students as part of the reformed Junior Cycle assessment arrangements. Business Studies and Science will be examined under the new arrangements in June 2019.

Phase 3 of the Framework will begin implementation in September 2017, with the introduction of new subject specifications in Irish, Visual Arts and Modern Languages, covering French, German, Spanish and Italian. The new curriculum area of Wellbeing will also be introduced at that time.

Phase 4 will begin implementation in September 2018 with the introduction of Mathematics, Home Economics, History, Music and Geography, with the final phase 5 being implemented from September 2019. Phase 5 subjects will include Technology subjects, Religious Education, Jewish Studies and Classics.

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

marks.

My Department requested the ASTI to provide an immediate derogation from their directive regarding the CBAs for current teachers of English in order that some current third year English students are no longer unfairly and unjustifiably disadvantaged.

Following talks with the teacher unions in late 2016, facilitated by the Chair of the Teachers Conciliation Council, it has been provided that, on a once-off basis, the NCCA and SEC will communicate arrangements in respect of a second calendar window in the 2016/17 school year to allow for the completion and submission of the Junior Cycle English Assessment Task by students who are prevented from meeting the current deadline. This was notified to schools in the week beginning 19th December 2016.

This was agreed as a result of an acknowledgement by the parties that a significant number of students were not in a position to meet the timing requirement of completion between 5th and 9th December 2016, as a result of industrial action taken by the ASTI.

The Department welcomes the decision of the ASTI to give its members a say on the overall offer now available following the recently concluded talks under the Chair of the Teachers Conciliation Council. While the ASTI's Central Executive Committee has recommended rejection, a decision on whether to accept or reject will now be taken by the wider membership at ballot. The ASTI has indicated that it will conduct its ballot of members this month.

Skills Shortages

193. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the areas that have been highlighted as having skills shortages by the skills and labour market research unit, such as business administration and management, the green economy, financial services, information technology, manufacturing, engineering, sales, marketing and transport; his plans to tackle these skills shortages; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2996/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Action Plan for Education 2016 – 2019 provides a key statement on the reform agenda across the education and training system. The Plan contains a range of actions to be implemented with particular focus on disadvantage, skills needs, and continuous improvement within the education service.

A key objective of this Plan is to address the identified skills needs across key priority sectors of the economy identified by the SLMRU. These sectors include Financial Services, Manufacturing and ICT, Biopharma, Medtech and others.

Launched in 2016 the National Skills Strategy has over 120 Actions involving over 50 stakeholders, the purpose of the National Skills Strategy 2025 is to provide a framework for skills development that will help drive Ireland's growth both economically and societally over the next decade. Included in the actions in the Strategy is the creation of a new National Skills Council. The Council, when established shortly, will oversee research and advise on prioritisation and delivery of identified skills needs. Skills information from the EGFSN, the SLMRU and the recently established Regional Skills Fora will feed into the work of the Council.

Within the Further Education and Training (FET) sector, significant improvements have been made in the planning and funding of provision since the publication of the FET Strategy in 2014. Education and Training Boards engage in a service planning process annually against a range of detailed parameters set by SOLAS. This process has been refined and improved each year and includes the use of strengthened labour market data provided by the SLMRU to ensure

that the skill needs of learners and enterprise are met.

Schools Review

194. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the suggestions by the Irish National Teachers' Organisation that related capital investment will be necessary if the programme for Government commitment on having schools available for child care services can be successfully implemented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2997/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In accordance with key commitments in the Programme for a Partnership Government (May 2016) in relation to establishing a quality system of school age childcare, my Department is working closely with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs in considering how to facilitate schools who wish to make their facilities available as part of the range of options available to parents where there is demand. A cross-departmental group is now finalising an Action Plan for School Age Childcare which has been considered by me and my colleague, Minister Zappone, T.D.

In general, school authorities have a considerable degree of autonomy in relation to how their premises are managed and utilised at local level. The use of school facilities must be approved by the school authority. In 2005, my Department issued a circular to Trustees, Boards of Management and Principals of Primary and Voluntary Secondary Schools (Circular Letter Prim 16/05) to encourage Trustees and Boards of Management to make their facilities available where possible for community, education and recreation purposes. This circular recognises that the decision ultimately lies with the relevant Board or Trustees and that the first priority at all times should be the interest of the school, its teachers and pupils.

In facilitating such extra provision there are a number of complex issues that need to be considered in respect of such arrangements. I engaged with education partners specifically in relation to this matter in a very positive roundtable discussion in the Summer. These issues - including property, governance, insurance and liability - are being considered as part of a review within my Department of the requirements to be established around the use of school premises/property for pre-school and after school services and the preparation of guidelines in consultation with patrons/trustees in relation to same.

While there is no provision in this year's budget for additional capital investment specifically in relation to pre-school and afterschool services, capital funding in excess of €400m will be expended on the delivery of school accommodation projects (large scale projects and the Additional Accommodation Scheme) in 2017.

Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools Scheme

195. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the stage at which the review of the school support programme through the DEIS initiative is at; when this review will be completed and published; if he envisages any changes to the funding or delivery model of the DEIS programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2999/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware, a process to review the DEIS Programme which began in 2015 is progressing very well 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.

The review process includes the development of a new assessment framework using centrally held CSO and DES data for the identification of schools for inclusion in a new Programme. The number of schools to receive supports under a new School Support Programme will be determined by this new identification process, which will assess all schools in the country. 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.

A series of pilot schemes aimed at introducing measures shown to work well in improving results for disadvantaged students will be introduced. Targeted measures to be included are, School Leadership, School networking/clustering, teaching methodologies, integration of all supports within communities, greater use of HSCL services.

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

School Curriculum

196. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to provide new courses in the leaving certificate, such as coding, physical education and politics; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3000/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department has committed to enriching teaching and learning with new curricula, in the Action Plan for Education 2016-2019. The central vision of the Plan is that the Irish Education and Training System should become the best in Europe over the next decade. This will contribute to delivering a "Step-Change" in the development of critical skills, knowledge and competences and providing the foundations for participation in work and society.

There are important developments in relation to coding across the primary and post-primary sector. The Action Plan for Education includes a commitment to develop a new subject specification for Leaving Certificate Computer Science which will help to harness and develop student interest in this strategically important discipline.

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) has, in this regard, recently commenced the curriculum development process, with a view to the subject being introduced to schools from September 2019, following a period of professional development for teachers of the subject.

The formulation of curriculum and assessment arrangements is a complex and intensive process. It can involve research, analysis, action-research or piloting in schools and extensive consultation with stakeholders including students, parents, teacher unions and others. This is then followed by a period of professional development for teachers. I am exploring whether the projected timescale for Leaving Certificate Computer Science can be adjusted so that implementation in schools can commence sooner.

At Junior Cycle level a short course on Coding developed by the NCCA is available to schools on an optional basis. The course looks to build on the coding skills that primary stu-

dents may have experienced while offering insight into possible future studies in computer science and software engineering.

At primary level, the NCCA, at my request, is considering coding as part of a wider review of the curriculum, including the introduction of computational thinking and flexible and creative thinking skills into the Mathematics curriculum. A new Primary School curriculum for Junior Infants to second class is planned for implementation from September 2018. As part of this I am exploring the introduction of an initiative in the area of Coding at Primary Level.

There is also a Transition Year module relating to 'Having Fun with Computer Programming and Games'.

In addition to these initiatives, a large number of schools are running voluntary coding programmes through initiatives such as Coder Dojo, which I believe we should learn from to improve the outcomes of the education system for our children.

The roll-out of the new Leaving Certificate subject of Politics and Society commenced in 41 schools from September 2016, following an open invitation to introduce this as an optional Leaving Certificate subject. Politics and Society aims to develop the student's ability to be a reflective and active citizen, in a way that is informed by the insights and skills of social and political science. The introduction of the specification is part of my Department's commemoration of 1916 and its commitment to education for sustainable development. The subject will be available to all schools from 2018.

Physical Education is being developed by the NCCA as a full subject that can be assessed for the Leaving Certificate in a manner similar to other subjects. A specification for Leaving Certificate Physical Education was finalised by the NCCA in late 2016. In addition, a Senior Cycle Physical Education Framework specification has recently been completed by the NCCA. The Framework will assist schools to design a P.E. programme for those students who may not choose to take P.E. as part of their Leaving Certificate examination. These developments are in keeping with the strong emphasis from my Department on promoting and encouraging Healthy Lifestyles for all students and commitments in the Programme for Partnership Government.

The Action Plan for Education also includes commitments to finalise and implement additional subject specifications at Leaving Certificate level as resources permit.

School Staff

197. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the moratorium on filling certain promoted posts in schools will be lifted, in view of the fact it was introduced as an emergency measure in 2009; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3001/17]

208. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to end the current ban on promotions at the primary school level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3012/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 197 and 208 together.

Budget 2017 provided for an additional €7.75m to strengthen school leadership. This will provide 170 additional posts to second level schools to employ additional Deputy Principals to assist the school principal with the leadership of the school. With effect from September 2017, schools with pupil enrolment in excess of 700 will be allocated additional Deputy Principal

posts.

Budget 2017 also provides for the commencement of the restoration of middle management posts to lift the rigidity of the longstanding moratorium on these posts in both the primary and post-primary sector. Measures to commence the restoration of middle management posts will be introduced in the primary and post-primary sectors in September 2017. The aim is to contribute to the further development of a distributed leadership model in schools, involving the establishment and facilitation of leadership teams with appropriately defined and shared responsibilities for areas such as curriculum and learning, student support and wellbeing, school improvement and leadership and development of staff teams.

A Department circular will issue in the coming weeks in relation to these new arrangements which will come into effect from the 2017/18 school year. Strengthening leadership is schools is a serious issue and these new arrangements will provide additional resources to focus on leadership and management in our schools.

Teachers' Professional Development

198. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the way in which, including the total investment involved, his Department supports teacher continuous professional development at primary and post-primary levels; the figure of the total investment as a percentage of education spending overall; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3002/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): A key objective in the Action Plan for Education 2016 – 2019 is to develop the continuum of teacher education to equip teachers with the right skills for 21st century teaching and learning and improve school leadership. The quality of our teaching profession is the single most critical factor in sustaining and enhancing the quality of education outcomes in our system. We know that providing the best possible professional development and ongoing practical support to these key people in the education sector is vital if we are to realise the ambitious objectives that we have for Irish education. Specific targets for 2017 will be outlined in the Action Plan for Education.

My Department spent approximately €46.5m on teacher continuing professional development (CPD) in 2016 across the primary and post primary sectors. The teacher CPD budget represents 0.56% of my Departments overall net expenditure.

The spend of €46.5m includes all costs associated with the provision of CPD at primary and post primary level funded by my Department.

The professional development needs of serving teachers in recent years have been addressed through the provision of an induction programme for newly qualified teachers, national in-service for new and revised curriculum areas including junior cycle, the new primary language curriculum and ongoing support for the curriculum generally with a particular focus on priority areas - literacy and numeracy, well-being, support for school leaders and for teachers to meet the needs of children with special educational needs.

The responsibilities of the recently established Centre for School Leadership, a partnership between my Department, IPPN and PD, cover the range of leadership development from pre-appointment training and induction of newly appointed principals, to CPD throughout leaders' careers.

Other areas of expenditure include training for child protection, Board of Management training, a Teacher Fee Refund Scheme, Teacher Professional Networks and a number of post-

graduate programmes to meet particular identified needs such as the teaching of mathematics and special educational needs.

The Teaching Council is the professional body and regulator for teachers. It has published its policy, Cosán, on teacher learning and will continue to engage with stakeholders, including teachers, in preparation for the commencement of section 39 of the Teaching Council Acts 2001-2015 which will enable the Teaching Council to review and accredit programmes of CPD.

Question No. 199 answered with Question No. 185.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

200. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the estimated timeframe for and cost of the Government programme commitment to reducing the pupil-teacher ratio in junior and senior infants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3004/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Budget 2016 introduced a 1 point improvement (from 28:1 to 27:1) to the primary staffing schedule which has been implemented for the current school year and it should be noted that the current staffing schedule of 27:1 for primary schools has restored it to the position it was at prior to the fiscal crisis.

The staffing schedule operates on a general average of 27 pupils to every 1 teacher for the current school year. The ratio of 27:1 is an overall classroom teacher allocation ratio for the school and is not a reference to class size. The configuration of classes and the deployment of classroom teachers are done at local school level. Depending on the circumstances of the school, e.g. fluctuating enrolment, accommodation available, there may be a variation in the size of the classes in the school. School authorities are requested to ensure that the number of pupils in any one class is kept as low as possible, taking into account all of the above factors. The Department requests school authorities to use their autonomy under the staffing schedule to implement smaller class sizes for junior classes.

Each 1 point adjustment to the staffing schedule is estimated to cost in the region of €15m - €18m per annum.

Budget 2017 sets out the resources available for schools for the 2017/18 school year. This Budget represents the start of a major reinvestment in education, and the first phase of implementation of the Action Plan for Education, aimed at becoming the best education system in Europe within a decade.

The budget provides for over 2,400 additional teaching posts for our primary and post-primary schools in the next school year. This includes additional teaching posts to meet demographic need, curriculum reform, additional resource teaching posts and the strengthening of school leadership.

The Programme for Government has a commitment to reduce class sizes at primary level and it is my intention to make further improvements to class sizes over the life of the Government.

School Patronage

201. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the location of all schools under religious patronage which he expects to be divested in 2017; and if he will make

a statement on the matter. [3005/17]

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

In addition to the phased transfer of Catholic schools to new patrons already under way, this requires considering new ideas and new approaches to substantially accelerate the changes in school provision in order to achieve greater diversity. By developing new approaches which enable engagement with the landowner, I am convinced that we can significantly increase the number of non-denominational and multi-denominational schools. I am progressing these matters as a priority and have already held a round of consultations with patron bodies in this regard.

My Department is continuing to work with patron bodies and Church Authorities with a view to progressing the divestments under the existing process arising from surveys carried out in 2012/13. However, I envisage that the new approaches that I hope to be in a position to announce shortly will have the potential to accelerate progress

In addition to progressing the reconfiguration of existing school provision to provide greater choice to parents in areas of stable population, the Government is committed to ensuring that parental preferences will continue to be key to patronage decisions on new schools established in areas of demographic growth.

Question No. 202 answered with Question No. 181.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

203. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the restoration of postgraduate grants and their necessity to open up access to postgraduate studies and to ensure that a steady stream of persons achieve a postgraduate qualification for societal good and to ensure attractiveness to foreign investors. [3007/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy will be aware of the Programme for Government commitment to increase financial supports for post graduate students with a particular focus on those from low income households.

In response to this commitment, I secured additional funding of €4million in Budget 2017 to facilitate the reinstatement of full maintenance grants, from September 2017, for the most disadvantaged post graduate students.

This will benefit approximately 1,100 of the most disadvantaged post graduate students who meet the eligibility criteria for the special rate of maintenance grant, from September 2017, and it reverses the budgetary cut that was imposed on this cohort of students in 2012.

In addition to this specific measure targeted at postgraduate students, I also secured an additional €4.5million for other new access measures that will benefit target groups such as lone parents, travellers, mature students, and students with disabilities.

The new measures being introduced as a result of Budget 2017 will complement the existing student supports that are already in place for the 2016/17 academic year. This will involve expenditure by my Department at further and higher level, of almost €418 million on supports for approximately 80,000 disadvantaged students in 2017.

Teachers' Remuneration

204. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans for equating newly qualified teachers since 2011 and those that entered the workforce prior to this date; if he will report on the discussions with the Association of Secondary Teachers in Ireland on the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3008/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As a consequence of the financial crisis, there was a need to enact a number of measures to reduce public expenditure so as to stabilise the country's public finances. These included pay reductions and also reductions to the pay of new entrant public servants, including teachers, since 2011. Collective agreements reached between the Government and the public service unions provided vital industrial peace during this very difficult period for the State.

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

I accept that ASTI members have outstanding pay demands and that this deal does not travel the full distance that they set out to achieve. However, it does represent significant progress, and the door is not closed to the trade union movement seeking to advance the issue further in the context of future public service pay talks.

In education, there is a well-established increment system. Teachers are not paid equally. For example, the pay scale for teachers appointed prior to 2011 ranges from €32,009 to €60,155 depending on the date that the individual began teaching. Part of the negotiation to date has secured a convergence of the scales of recruits at different periods. Any further negotiation on new entrant pay cannot focus on just one sector. A broader assessment of pay and new entrant pay will be informed by the analysis of the Public Service Pay Commission.

Following discussions, the Teachers Conciliation Council published a set of proposals in November for consideration by ASTI members aimed at finding a resolution to their dispute. The ASTI Central Executive Committee took a decision to put the outcome of the talks process to a ballot of members with a recommendation to reject. This ballot is now underway. The ASTI's leadership have taken a view on the proposals. It is now over to the members to form their view.

The proposals provide ASTI members with an opportunity to benefit from the programme of pay restoration I mentioned above, including the agreement reached with TUI and INTO, which will see pay rises of between 15-22% (between €4600 and €6700) for new entrant teachers.

In addition, there are other immediate undoubted benefits for individual ASTI members in accepting the proposals including:

- Avoiding an increment freeze

- Inclusion of the S&S allowance of €1,592 into the pay scale

- Continued alleviation of the FEMPI Act pay reductions

- The Ward Report measures and a revised sequence for filling posts which enable fixed-term and part-time teachers to gain permanent, full-time jobs more easily and quickly than before

- An increase in the quantum of the Croke Park hours that can be worked on other than a whole-school basis

- A review of the usage of the Croke Park hours

- Protection against compulsory redundancy

Also, the Government recently moved to address an anomaly issue arising in the context of the recent Labour Court Recommendations in respect of the Garda Associations through an increase in annualised salaries of €1,000 for the period 1 April 2017 to August 2017 inclusive for public servants on annualised salaries up to €65,000 who are parties to the Lansdowne Road Agreement and who do not stand to benefit from those Labour Court Recommendations.

ASTI members will have to weigh these benefits up for themselves. These benefits are only available to ASTI members if they vote to accept. ASTI's membership now have a decision to make as to whether to accept the TCC proposals and the immediate benefits on offer or to engage again in industrial action. It is for the ASTI leadership to explain its strategy in respect of the latter approach.

ASTI's ballot will take place shortly. While that process is ongoing it would not be helpful for me to comment further.

Special Educational Needs

205. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to improve access to special educational supports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3009/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Funding for special education provision in 2016 amounted to some €1.5 billion, which was equivalent to over 17% of the gross overall allocation for education and training and an increase of 10% in spending in the previous two years. This funding provides for a range of supports and services including additional learning and resource teaching support, access to support, special transport arrangements, building adaptations, enhanced capitation in special schools and special classes, specialised equipment, additional teacher training and the services of the National Educational Psychological Service.

12,900 Special Needs Assistants (Ss) were available for allocation to schools to the end of 2016, which represents an increase of 23% over the numbers allocated in 2011. There are also over 12,500 Learning Support and Resource Teacher posts in mainstream primary and post primary schools for the 2016/2017 school year.

The NCSE has allocated 7430 resource teacher posts to schools for the 2016/17 school year; this represents an increase of 41% in the number of resource teachers which have been allocated since the 2011/12 school year, at which point 5265 posts were allocated. In addition, over 5000 learning support posts are allocated to schools under the General Allocation Model for primary schools and Learning Support allocations for post primary schools.

On the 18th January, I announced that a new model for allocating Special Education Teaching Resources to mainstream primary and post primary schools will be introduced from September 2017. The new model will allocate teachers to schools on the basis of the profiled educational needs of each school. This will end the unfairness which exists in the current system, whereby many parents are unable to access the assessments needed to qualify for educational resources. This had a particularly negative impact on children from more disadvantaged areas.

In order to build upon the very significant development of supports for children with Special Educational Needs, additional provisions were made in Budget 2017. €18m was provided to fund an additional 900 teaching posts to support the introduction of this new allocation model. This substantial additional provision will ensure that:

- Up to 1,000 schools will receive additional allocations, where the new model indicates additional need.

- No school will receive an allocation of resources less than the allocation they received in the 2016/17 school year.

Also, a further €3.8m was provided to fund an additional 115 Ss in 2017 to meet expected demands for such supports.

There are over 1,150 Special Classes in place in comparison to 548 in 2011, with approximately 150 new classes having been made available for the current school year, 2016/17. 125 special schools also provide specialist education for those pupils who need it, from infants to eighteen years of age.

In recent years, the NCSE has provided my Department with a number of policy advice papers on the provision of supports for children with special needs, all of which are available on the NCSE's website.

At my request, the NCSE are currently undertaking a comprehensive assessment of the Special Needs Assistant Scheme and I have specifically asked the NCSE to identify the most appropriate form of support options to provide better outcomes for students with Special Educational Needs, having regard to the significant amount of State investment in this area.

It is intended to bring into effect many improvements to the provision of special educational needs support, through policy developments across a range of areas, in conjunction with NCSE policy advice.

As committed to in the Programme for a Partnership Government, I plan to examine the adequacy of the present policies and provision, and their scope for improvement. In doing so, I will take into account the recommendations contained in the NCSE policy advice papers. The Programme commits that we will invest additional resources in the National Educational Psychological Service to ensure earlier intervention and access for young children and teenagers and to offer immediate support to schools in cases of critical incidents. The Programme commits to bring the total number of NEPS psychologists to 238 from the current sanctioned limit of 173. A recruitment process is currently underway to bring the numbers of NEPS Psychologists to currently approved numbers.

I can confirm that this Government will continue to ensure that the supports required to ensure that all children with special educational needs can continue to participate in education will be provided.

Special Educational Needs

206. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to improve access to Irish sign language courses for students with hearing disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3010/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): There are a number of specific supports in place for students who learn through Irish Sign Language (ISL) and a number of initiatives which seek to promote, develop and implement ISL in order that it will achieve greater recognition and use in the education system. These include:

- special schools for the deaf have been encouraged in relation to the use of sign language in class.

- funding for an ISL weekly home tuition service through which deaf tutors visit the homes of deaf pre-school children and deaf school-going pupils to provide training in ISL for the deaf children, pupils, their siblings and parents.

- funding is also made available through the Special Education Support Service (SESS) to enable individual teachers and whole school staff to undertake courses in Irish Sign Language which are available throughout the country through a variety of providers.

Sign language is an option in the Leaving Certificate Applied. There is also an opportunity for students to learn sign language in the course of Transition Year.

The Post-Primary Languages Initiative has developed a specification for a short course in Irish Sign Language (ISL) which is available as part of the new Junior Cycle. The emphasis is on developing communication skills in ISL at level A1 (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages). This course develops students' ability to understand ISL in live, and in recorded situations, to produce the language and to interact with other signers in a simple way and on familiar topics. A link to the course is available at: http://languagesinitiative.ie/images/ISL/MFL_Gen_Spec_ISL_28_May__Short_Course.pdf

My Department, through the Higher Education Authority (HEA), has established and funds a Centre for Deaf Studies in Trinity College, Dublin which provides diploma courses for ISL/English interpreters, deaf tutors and in deaf studies. The course modules deal with issues such as sign linguistics, bi-lingualism and socio-linguistics of sign language. The course is delivered in seminar sessions/group work and the award of the diploma is based on continued assessment and a project and course design. The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) published its Policy Advice on the Education of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children in Ireland which makes a number of recommendations for the improvement of educational provision for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children, including recommendations relating to ISL provision. This policy advice is available on the NCSE's website www.ncse.ie. A number of the recommendations contained in the policy advice on the Education of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children have been, or are currently in the process of being implemented. My Department will continue to implement the recommendations in conjunction with other Departments and agencies where necessary, subject to the availability of resources.

The National Council for Special Education has also published a parental information leaflet for parents of children who are Deaf of Hard of Hearing, which provides details of the supports which are available for such children.

Assessment, rehabilitation and information services for children with hearing impairment and their families are funded by the Health Service Executive (HSE), either directly or indirectly. Services provided include communication therapy and lip reading classes as well as sign language classes.

School Funding

207. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the criteria used by his Department for deciding on applications for capital funding junior, senior and post-primary schools. [3011/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The delivery of school projects so that all schools in an area can between them cater for all students seeking a school place is the main focus of my Department capital budget. To this end, my Department uses a Geographical Information System to identify the areas under increased demographic pressure nationwide. The system uses a range of data sources in carrying out nationwide demographic exercises to determine where additional school accommodation is needed at primary and post-primary level. The outcome of the latest demographic exercises was that in November 2015, 13 new schools were announced to open nationwide in 2017 and 2018.

The November 2015 announcement also detailed the new building projects and major extensions, including special schools, that will be progressed in areas where significant demographic need has been established. In addition, the 6 Year Programme (2016-21) prioritises projects that in addition to meeting increases in enrolments, have a major deficit of mainstream accommodation capacity for current enrolments, require major refurbishment and replacement of poor accommodation. School projects that were announced under my Department's 5 Year Plan (2012-16) will also be advanced in the Capital Programme.

While all projects included in the Programme are based on the educational and demographic needs of the particular school and area, the decision of when exactly each individual school building project can proceed to tender and construction is based on a number of factors including the stage reached by the project in architectural planning, the level of overall funding available and the other contractual commitments and profiled expenditures extant under the Programme at that time.

The Capital Programme also provides for devolved funding for smaller scale projects for schools, where an immediate accommodation requirement has been identified, such as the appointment of an additional teacher. In that regard, it is open to schools to apply for funding for additional classroom accommodation, where required.

Question No. 208 answered with Question No. 197.

Technological Universities

209. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the Technological Universities Bill; when it is to return to Dáil Éireann; the necessary changes he proposes to make to the draft legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3013/17]

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.

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.

In relation to the legislation, the third Government Legislative Programme of this new Partnership Government was published on 17 January 2017, 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. 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.

State Examinations

210. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the reported failure rate at leaving certificate maths; the measures his Department proposes to remedy this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3014/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am taking it that the Deputy is referring to the combined numbers of Leaving Certificate Mathematics candidates at all three levels (Higher, Ordinary, and Foundation) who were awarded E grades, F grades or no grade in the 2016 examination. The designation of any performance in the certificate examinations as a 'fail' ceased in 1968.

The nature of curricular examinations such as the Leaving Certificate and the procedures currently in place for awarding grades are such that a certain amount of fluctuation in the grade distribution from year to year is to be expected. Grade distributions are also affected significantly by the proportion of candidates who opt to take the examination at each level. In particular, if the proportion of candidates opting for Higher level increases, the candidates making this move will tend to be those who were towards the higher-achieving end of the Ordinary level distribution and will tend to fall at the lower-achieving end of the Higher level distribution. This will obviously affect the grade distribution at both levels. Influenced by the combined effect of syllabus change in mathematics, known as Project Maths, and the introduction by the Higher Education Institutions of 'bonus points' for Higher level mathematics, the number of students in recent years presenting for Higher level in Leaving Certificate Mathematics examinations has increased significantly, from 15.8% in 2011 to 28% in 2016.

During the standard-setting process that happens as part of the marking process each year, the State Examinations Commission (SEC) takes account of these and any other relevant factors in the course of satisfying itself that the distribution of grades awarded is appropriate and that it accurately reflects the performance of the candidates in comparison to the achievement standards envisaged when the syllabus was designed.

In the context of a significant migration of mathematics candidates from Ordinary to Higher level, it may be noted that a similar absolute number of candidates awarded E, F or no grade at Ordinary level will inevitably be manifested as a higher percentage, since the total number of candidates at this level has reduced.

The number of candidates who failed to achieve at least a D3 grade at any level of the mathematics examination in 2016, while marginally higher than in the last three or four years, is very similar to the number in the years before that (2009 to 2011, for example). In the context of the factors mentioned above, there is nothing especially unusual about the grade distribution in mathematics for 2016.

In the case of the current syllabus change in mathematics, there has been a deliberate attempt to increase the emphasis on higher-order thinking skills, including interpretation, problem solving, and dealing with the unfamiliar. These are skills that students find difficult to master and teachers find difficult to instil in students.The syllabus expectations are ambitious at all levels.

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) will be undertaking a review of the Project Maths initiative, now that the full implementation of all phases of the curricular change is complete. By this time students will have been through the new maths cycle a few times and the NCCA will have good information on which to base the assessment of its impact, especially on the learning of under-achievers. I have asked the State Examinations Commission to ensure that any lessons that can be learned from candidate performance in recent examinations, and the 2016 examination in particular, be fed into that review process. The Project Maths Implementation Support Group, an industry-education partnership set up by my Department, including third level bodies, Engineers Ireland, Science Foundation Ireland, will also be able to provide their considered opinions to this process.

Third Level Data

211. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the drop-out rate in third level institute of technology courses; the measures his Department proposes to remedy the situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3015/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In line with the overall mission of higher education in Ireland there has been a steady increase in student enrolments over recent years. The most recent report by the HEA on retention and progression, entitled 'A Study of Progression in Higher Education 2012/13 TO 2013/14', is available on the HEA website, www.hea.ie. This is the fourth in a series of progression analysis released by the HEA and examines those 1st year undergraduate new entrants enrolled in the academic year 2012/13 and traces them to the following academic year 2013/14. The report gives an in-depth analysis of the non-progression rates by NFQ level, sector, discipline, gender, age, nationality and socio-economic group. There are many factors identified as influencing the likelihood of progression such as Gender, Age at commencement, Prior Educational attainment, nationality and socio-economic grouping.

The report shows that 84% of full-time undergraduate new entrants in 2012/13 progressed to their second year of study in 2013/14. The rates of non-progression in 2012/13 varied within and between sectors ranging from 26% and 28% at levels 6 and 7 to 17%, 11% and 6% at level 8 in universities, institutes of technology and colleges respectively.

The report demonstrates that the overall new entrant non-progression rate was 15% in 2007/08 and has remained constant at 16% from 2010/11 to 2012/13. However, rates of progression do vary across the sector and between disciplines and further work will be done to see how students can best be supported to continue on their course or transfer to another programme.

The HEA through the System Performance and Strategic Dialogue process also monitor

progression rates within the institutions on an annual basis. Institutes report on retention measures in place within their institutes to combat high non-progression rates. The HEA funds retention initiatives in Computer Science disciplines in higher education institutions through the Information Technology Investment Fund. In 2015 these initiatives included additional classes, attendance mentoring, teaching and learning initiatives, student support sessions, buddy practicals and maths enabling courses. In 2016 the National Forum for Teaching and Learning established an ICT Retention Scoping Group to examine ways in which students could be enabled to complete ICT courses. The group working with practitioners and industry are examining areas such as career guidance, pathways, provision and pedagogy.

One of the key objectives of the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education2015-2019 (National Access Plan) is to address the issue of non-completion within higher education institutions, for those in under-represented target groups. The Plan also commits to the further development of mechanisms to track the progression, retention and student experience of target groups. The target student groups include entrants from socio-economic groups that have low participation in higher education; first time mature student entrants and students with disabilities.

To support the implementation of these objectives, a Working Group has been established to consider the issues contributing to the non-completion of target groups in the National Access Plan and to produce recommendations for policy and practice. The group is chaired by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and includes representatives of relevant stakeholders. The HEA, with assistance from the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning, is currently undertaking a scoping exercise to inform the work of the group.

Apprenticeship Programmes

212. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the lack of apprenticeships suitable for a number of employment vacancies, such as chefs and in the hospitality sector generally, to upskill young unemployed persons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3016/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): As the Deputy will be aware, the Apprenticeship Council was established in early 2014 to oversee the expansion of the apprenticeship system into a range of new areas. Its first task was to formally invite proposals for new apprenticeship programmes from consortia of enterprise, professional bodies and education and training providers. Over 80 separate proposals were received all of which were evaluated by the Council. Following the evaluation process, the Council prioritised 25 proposals for development. Included in these proposals are a number of proposals in the hospitality sector, particularly in the culinary area.

Work is progressing on the development of a new Commis Chef Apprenticeship led by the Irish Hotels Federation and the Restaurants Association of Ireland working with Kerry Education and Training Board. It is planned that this programme will commence in 2017. The Apprenticeship Council recently approved development funding for a separate proposal to develop a Chef de Partie Apprenticeship. The Council will continue to work closely with these consortia to develop their proposals into sustainable apprenticeships that can be delivered on a nationwide basis.

Equality Issues

213. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the new national action plan for educational inclusion will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3017/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy may be aware, a process to review the DEIS Programme which began in 2015 is progressing very well 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.

The review process includes the development of a new assessment framework using centrally held CSO and DES data for the identification of schools for inclusion in a new Programme. The number of schools to receive supports under a new School Support Programme will be determined by this new identification process, which will assess all schools in the country on the same basis. 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 our wider Annual Action Plan for Education.

English Language Training Organisations

214. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of ACELS-MEI schools that were inspected by staff from the Department of Justice and Equality and his Department during the ILEP application process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3018/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Interim List of Eligible Programmes (ILEP) is a list of education programmes considered to justify the granting of permission to students to live and work in Ireland. The ILEP is operated and maintained by the Department of Justice and Equality. The first full iteration of the ILEP was published by that Department on 20th January 2016 and the ILEP continues to be updated at regular intervals.

As part of the ILEP process, 16 English language providers were inspected in 2015. Of these, 9 providers held recognition from ACELS (Accreditation and Coordination of English Language Services) and MEI (Marketing English in Ireland).

In 2016 10 providers were inspected, 6 of which were ACELS/MEI recognised schools.

Providers continue to be subject to unannounced inspections, spot checks and other monitoring of compliance as part of the ILEP process.

English Language Training Organisations

215. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of inspections ACELS-QQI carry out annually on members; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3019/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): ACELS (the Accreditation and Coordination of English Language Services) is a voluntary national scheme responsible for the recognition and inspection of English language schools. It is administered by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI). ACELS has been closed for new applications since January 2014, and it continues to operate on a voluntary, contractual basis for existing members.

Under the terms of the current regulations governing the operation of this scheme inspections of ACELS recognised English language schools take place when:

1. There is a change of ownership of the English language school
2. A new general or academic manager(s) is appointed
3. There is a change of premises, or an additional premises is added to the school
4. There is a complaint against the school

Therefore the number of inspections per annum is contingent on the number of incidents of the above. 11 inspections were conducted by ACELS in 2014; 35 inspections were conducted in 2015 and 28 inspections were conducted in 2016.

Education Standards

216. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the international education mark will be introduced as per the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3020/17]

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.

School Closures

217. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the recent closure of a school (details supplied) and the difficulties students have in recovering their fees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3021/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department was informed of the closure of this school by Quality and Qualifications Ireland on 2nd September 2016. This was a private English language school which was a member of Marketing English in Ireland (MEI) – an association of private English language schools inIreland. MEI has protection for enrolled learner arrangements in place for its members and I understand that MEI has been accommodating students affected by the closure of this school.

Any affected students who are experiencing difficulties are advised to contact MEI directly.

Child Care Services

218. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the proposals he is currently reviewing in conjunction with the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs to carry out the programme for Government commitment to have schools available for child care services outside school hours; if community groups and private providers will be allowed tender for access to those facilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3022/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In accordance with key commitments in the Programme for a Partnership Government (May 2016) in relation to establishing a quality system of school age childcare, my Department is working closely with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs in considering how to facilitate schools who wish to make their facilities available as part of the range of options available to parents where there is demand. A cross-departmental group is now finalising an Action Plan for School Age Childcare which has been considered by me and my colleague, Minister Zappone, T.D.

In general, school authorities have a considerable degree of autonomy in relation to how their premises are managed and utilised at local level. The use of school facilities must be approved by the school authority. In 2005, my Department issued a circular to Trustees, Boards of Management and Principals of Primary and Voluntary Secondary Schools (Circular Letter Prim 16/05) to encourage Trustees and Boards of Management to make their facilities available where possible for community, education and recreation purposes. This circular recognises that the decision ultimately lies with the relevant Board or Trustees and that the first priority at all times should be the interest of the school, its teachers and pupils.

In facilitating such extra provision there are a number of complex issues that need to be considered in respect of such arrangements. I engaged with education partners specifically in relation to this matter in a very positive roundtable discussion in the Summer. These issues - including property, governance, insurance and liability - are being considered as part of a review within my Department of the requirements to be established around the use of school premises/property for pre-school and after school services and the preparation of guidelines in consultation with patrons/trustees in relation to same.

Earcaíocht agus Soláthar Foirne Tríú Leibhéal

219. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Catherine Connolly** den Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna an n-iarrfaidh sé ar Údarás Ollscoil na hÉireann, Gaillimh athbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar an gcinneadh gan líofacht sa Ghaeilge a bheith riachtanach don phost mar Uachtarán na hOllscoile as seo amach; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [3024/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Mar is eol don Teachta, is comhlachtaí neamhspleácha iad institiúidí Tríú Leibhéal agus is ar Bhoird Rialaithe agus ar fhoireann bhainistíochta na n-institiúidí bainteacha atá freagracht as cúrsaí oibríochta laethúla, lena n-áirítear ceisteanna a bhaineann le gnásanna earcaíochta agus roghnúcháin.

Maidir leis an gceist áirithe atá idir lámha, tá curtha in iúl ag an Ollscoil dom go mbeidh folúntas ann i leith Uachtaránacht OÉ Gaillimh i mí Eanáir 2018. Le déanaí, chuir an Ollscoil tús le hullmhúchán chun comórtas a eagrú le hUachtarán nua a cheapadh. Sa chomhthéacs sin, tionóladh cruinniú d'Údarás na hOllscoile Dé hAoine 2ú Nollaig 2016 agus rinneadh cinneadh comhthola gan leanúint de riachtanas cumas sa Ghaeilge a bheith ag sealbhóir an phoist.

Is den tábhacht a shonrú nach n-éilítear in Acht na nOllscoileanna, 1997 ná in Acht an Choláiste Ollscoile, Gaillimh (Leasú), 2006 cumas Gaeilge a bheith ag Uachtarán OÉ Gaillimh. Is ceanglas de chuid an reachta Ollscoile infheidhme reatha é an riachtanas cumas Gaeilge a

bhaineann leis an Uachtarán reatha. Tá Údarás na hOllscoile i dteideal, faoi alt 33 d'Acht na nOllscoileanna, 1997, reachtanna nua a dhréachtú agus reachtanna reatha a leasú de réir mar a mheasann sé bheith riachtanach.

Is í an réasúnaíocht atá taobh thiar den chinneadh seo chun an reacht reatha Uachtaránachta faoi mar a bhaineann sé leis an nGaeilge a leasú, riar ar an léiriú spéise is iomláine in Éirinn agus thar lear sa chomórtas Uachtaránachta atá le teacht. Tá ceanglas ar an Ollscoil faoi alt 18 (2) d'Acht na nOllscoileanna, 1997, rannpháirtíocht a chinntiú i bpróiseas roghnúcháin na hUachtaránachta ag iarrthóirí ardcháilíochta ón taobh istigh agus ón taobh amuigh den Ollscoil araon. Tá an ollscoil rangaithe faoi láthair i measc an 250 ollscoil is fearr ar domhan ag Ranguithe Ollscoileanna an Domhain 2016/2017 an TIMES HIGHER EDUCATION agus ag Ranguithe Ollscoileanna an Domhain 2016/2017 an QS. Ar an mbonn sin, tá an Ollscoil ag dúil go gcuirfidh réimse suntasach d'iarrthóirí, idir inmheánach agus sheachtrach, iarrthóirí idirnáisiúnta san áireamh, suim san fholúntas le haghaidh Uachtarán nua.

Ní mór a chuimhneamh freisin go bhfuil freagrachtaí reachtúla ar leithligh ar OÉ Gaillimh maidir le cur chun cinn agus saothrú na Gaeilge ar an gcampas agus i bpobail Ghaeltachta. Feidhmítear é seo go príomha trí obair thábhachtach Acadamh na hOllscolaíochta. Feidhmíonn sé go hiomlán trí mheán na Gaeilge agus tá sé freagrach as forbairt agus soláthar cláir acadúla, taighde agus seirbhísí eile trí mheán na Gaeilge. Is in Acht an Choláiste Ollscoile, Gaillimh, 1929 a leagadh amach den chéad uair tiomantas na hOllscoile i leith na Gaeilge agus athdhearbhaíodh é seo in Acht an Choláiste Ollscoile, Gaillimh (Leasú), 2006. Maítear sa dara hAcht gur bunaidhm i gcomhair oibríocht agus fhorbairt an Choláiste soláthar oideachais sa Choláiste trí mheán na Gaeilge agus go léireofar an dualgas reachtúil seo san uile phlean straitéiseach a fhorbróidh an Ollscoil. Faoin Acht is ar 'Údarás Rialaithe agus Uachtarán an Choláiste' a thiteann sé, trína bhfeidhmeanna féin faoi seach agus trí chur i bhfeidhm a gcumhachtaí féin faoi seach, a chinntiú go ngnóthaítear an bhunaidhm faoi mar atá leagtha amach san Acht.

Ar an mbonn sin, beag beann ar cé acu atá nó nach bhfuil cumas sa teanga ag Uachtarán na hOllscoile, tá ceanglas air/uirthi bheith i gceannas ar phobal na hOllscoile agus é ag feidhmiú pholasaí Gaeilge an Stáit agus na hOllscoile go cuimsitheach.

Summer Works Scheme Applications

220. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application by a school (details supplied) for the summer works scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3076/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department is in receipt of a Category 3 application, mechanical works, under the Summer Works Scheme (2016-2017) from the school to which he refers.

Nearly 50% of schools have applied for inclusion under the scheme which reflects a very high demand. Details of successful school applicants in respect of Categories 1 and 2 were announced in April last and are published on my Department's website *www.education.ie*. Assessment of valid projects in further categories is now being undertaken by my Department, subject to the overall availability of funding, in accordance with the terms and conditions of the scheme as outlined in Circular Letter (0055/2015), which may be accessed on my Department's website. The application from the school in question is available to be considered in this context.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

221. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will assist in having a child (details supplied) in County Cork allocated a place at a specific special needs school. [3077/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department has no role in relation to processing applications for enrolment to schools. The enrolment of a child to a school is a matter, in the first instance, for the parents/guardians of the child and the Board of Management of a school.

Parents of children with special educational needs who may need advice or are experiencing difficulties in locating a school placement or are having difficulties with enrolment should contact their local Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO) as soon as possible for information on available places. The local SENO contact details are available on *www.ncse.ie.*

Parents can choose which school to apply to and, where the school has places available, the pupil should be admitted. However, in schools where there are more applicants than places available a selection process may be necessary. This selection process and the enrolment policy on which it is based must be non-discriminatory and must be applied fairly in respect of all applicants. However, this may result in some pupils not obtaining a place in the school of their first choice.

Section 29 of the Education Act, 1998 provides for an appeal by a parent or guardian to the Secretary General of my Department, where a Board of Management of a school, or a person acting on behalf of the Board, refuses to enrol a student in a school. My Department has no authority to compel a school to admit a pupil, except in the case of an appeal under section 29 of the Education Act, 1998 being upheld.

Application forms for taking a section 29 appeal are available on my Department's website at the following:

link: *http://www.education.ie/en/Parents/Services/Appeal-against-Permanent-Exclusion-Suspension-or-Refusal-to-Enrol/Section-29-Appeals-Application-Form.doc*, or by contacting Section 29 Administration Unit, Friars Mill Road, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath, phone 0761 108588. Appeals should be taken within 42 days from receipt of written notification from the school's Board of Management.

Gaelscoil Issues

222. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of Gaelscoileanna at the primary level that did not have the capacity to cater for all applicants to attend them in September 2016; the steps being taken to ensure that all those seeking primary education through the medium of Irish can access same; the criteria used in approving the recognition of new Gaelscoileana; the policy of his Department to ensure that all children here have reasonable access to an Irish-medium primary school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3080/17]

223. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if any national assessment was carried out on the demand for Irish-medium primary school education and the adequacy of the present Irish-medium education schools to meet this demand; if no such assessment has been carried out, his plans to carry out such an assessment; and if he will make a

statement on the matter. [3081/17]

224. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to devise a system of catchment areas for Gaelscoileanna to ensure that there is State-wide cover by catchment area for Irish language-medium primary schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3083/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 222 to 224, inclusive, together.

For school planning purposes, my Department plans school provision across a framework of 314 school planning areas in order to assess and meet changing demographic needs throughout the country. My Department uses a Geographical Information System (GIS) to identify the areas under increased demographic pressure nationwide. The GIS uses data from the Central Statistics Office, Ordnance Survey Ireland, the Department of Social Protection and my Department's own databases. With this information, my Department carries out nationwide demographic analyses to determine where additional school accommodation is needed at primary and post-primary level.

When it is decided that a new school is required to meet demographic needs in an area, my Department runs a separate patronage process to decide who will operate the school. This patronage process incorporates consideration of, and the potential for, Irish-medium provision. It is open to all patron bodies and prospective patrons, including patrons involved in Irish-medium provision and indeed any prospective patron which wishes to provide Irish-medium education, to apply for patronage of a new school under the patronage process. Parental preferences for each patron, together with the extent of diversity currently available in the area, are key to decisions in relation to the outcome of this process.

Following consideration of feedback from patrons, for the 2016 patronage process concerning the patronage of the nine new post-primary schools to open in 2017 and 2018 and the ongoing patronage process concerning the patronage of the four primary schools opening in 2017 and 2018, my Department has moved to incorporate the medium of instruction of a proposed new school as an integral part of the patronage assessment and recommendation process. In this regard, as part of the application process, prospective patrons must submit completed parental preferences and indicate their preference for their child(ren) to be educated through that patron's school model and also their preference with regard to education through the medium of English or Irish. The assessment process includes an analysis of Irish medium provision in the area and the adjacent school planning areas.

My Department will continue to make provision for Irish-medium education where it is feasible to do so.

Home Tuition Scheme Eligibility

225. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the procedure through which a company or a person providing early intervention services in a preschool setting to children with autism and-or ASD can avail of the home tuition grant; the most appropriate person for them to contact in his Department in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3132/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Purpose of the Home Tuition Grant Scheme is to provide a compensatory educational service for children who, for a number of reasons such as chronic illness, are unable to attend school. The scheme also pro-

vides a compensatory educational service for children with special educational needs seeking an educational placement for whom such a placement is not available. Provision is also made for early educational intervention for children aged from 2.5 years to 3 years with autism.

Home Tuition is provided as an interim measure only for children for whom a placement in a recognised school is sought but not available and should not be regarded as an optional alternative to a school placement.

Where parents of children, who are eligible for Home Tuition under the terms of the scheme, and for whom home tuition has been approved, have sought alternative arrangements to be put in place for the tuition, my Department has responded by putting arrangements in place with 12 private pre-school providers which provide group tuition to children in a class type setting. Each of these providers was selected by the parents.

My Department will consider similar arrangements with other private providers should parents of eligible children request this.

In recognition of the demand for group arrangements by parents of children, who are eligible for Home Tuition under the scheme, my Department now advises all such parents of the option to enter into a group arrangement with other parents of children for whom home tuition has been sanctioned. My Department has no contract with the pre-school providers. The contract is essentially between the parents and the relevant provider.

Parents wishing to enter into such an arrangement must notify my Department in advance for approval. The arrangements must conform to the general terms of the scheme.

Schools Building Projects

226. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to support the provision of additional land and facilities at a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3136/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The delivery of school projects so that all schools in an area can between them cater for all students seeking a school place is the main focus of my Department's capital budget.

To this end my Department uses a Geographical Information System (GIS) to identify the areas under increased demographic pressure nationwide. The system uses a range of data sources in carrying out nationwide demographic exercises to determine where additional school accommodation is needed. The outcome of the latest demographic exercises was that in November 2015, 13 new schools were announced to open nationwide in 2017 and 2018. This is in addition to a new primary school to cater for demographic growth which opened in September 2016 to serve the Drumcondra/Marino/Dublin 1 school planning area. This area is adjacent to the school planning area in which the school in question is located. My Department is also aware that there is existing capacity in primary schools in the Coolock/Darndale/Artane/Edenmore areas.

I wish to advise the Deputy that I have made arrangements to meet with the school, in question, to clarify the position and to discuss any other issues they may have.

Special Educational Needs

227. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if children with SNAs in a school (details supplied) are given their allocated time; the reason some children are not receiving the time with SNAs that they are allocated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3157/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), for allocating Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) to schools to support children with special educational needs. The NCSE operates within my Department's criteria in allocating such support, as set out in my Department's Circular 0030/2014.

The Special Needs Assistant (SNA) scheme is designed to provide schools with additional adult support staff who can assist children with special educational needs who also have additional and significant care needs. Such support is provided in order to facilitate the attendance of those pupils at school and also to minimise disruption to class or teaching time for the pupils concerned, or for their peers, and with a view to developing their independent living skills. SNA support is allocated to schools to support pupils based on their assessed care needs, as opposed to being allocated on the basis of a particular disability diagnosis.

SNA allocations are accordingly not made to individual children, but are made to schools to support the care needs of children with assessed special educational needs in the school.

The consideration of professional reports is an integral part of determining the extent of supports to be provided for pupils with special educational needs. In making allocations to schools, the NCSE takes into account the assessed individual needs of all children with identified needs in the school.

A school's allocation of SNA support can change from year to year and may be increased or decreased as students who qualify for SNA support enrol or leave a school. New students with care needs may, or may not, enrol to replace students who have left, for example, or SNA allocations may be decreased where a child's care needs have diminished over time.

The deployment of SNAs within schools is then a matter for the individual Principal/Board of Management. Department Circular 0030/2014 provides substantial guidance on the deployment and utilisation of SNAs within schools. SNAs should be deployed by the school in a manner which best meets the care support requirements of the children enrolled in the school for whom SNA support has been allocated. It is a matter for schools to allocate support as required, and on the basis of individual need, which allows schools flexibility in how the SNA support is utilised.

The NCSE has published details of SNA allocations to schools for 2016 on its website: *http://ncse.ie/statistics.*

Schools Site Acquisitions

228. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a site assessment at a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3158/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy will be aware that a building project for the school in question is included in my Department's 6 Year Construction Programme (2019-2021). My Department is aware of the school's accommodation needs and will be liaising with the school in due course in the context of initiating the architec-

tural planning process for the project.

Water Services Infrastructure

229. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the position regarding the recommendations from the steering group of the project undertaken to identify the extent of problems arising from developer-provided water services infrastructure; the plan, including funding options, in place to address the problems arising from developer-provided water services infrastructure in order to remove impediments to the taking in charge of associated housing estates; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2748/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The National Taking in Charge Initiative (NTICI) for residential estates with a pilot scheme funding of €10 million was announced in April 2016. The aim of the NTICI was to accelerate the taking-in-charge process of housing estates, including estates with developer-provided water services infrastructure. Survey data gathered from each of the 31 local authorities were collated in December 2015 and, subsequently, funding was allocated by my Department for a number of developments on the basis of proposals submitted by the local authorities.

The information provided by this survey indicated that, of the 5,566 developments yet to be taken in charge, there are approximately 914 estates with developer-provided water services infrastructure (DPI).

Under the terms of the NTICI, only those developments subject to valid taking-in-charge applications were eligible for inclusion in the call for funding proposals, outlined in Circular FPS3 of April 2016. It was also stipulated that funding for estates with DPI would only apply to developments that could demonstrate sustainable solutions that will also be acceptable to Irish Water and EPA. The valuable knowledge and experience gained under this Initiative will help to inform and direct future taking-in-charge processes.

Seven local authorities were selected from the list with DPI; Clare, Cork, Donegal, Galway, Kerry, Tipperary and Wexford, as they contained a significant number of housing estates with DPI. In total, 68 developments with DPI were submitted by the seven local authorities for funding and 44 were initially approved.

After assessing the submissions in detail, a final allocation of €1.9 million was distributed across the 7 local authorities to progress works on 31 housing estates with developer provided water services infrastructure to taking in charge standard. Work is still progressing on a number of these pilot projects and upon the completion of these works my Department will prepare a report by the Summer of 2017 on key lessons learned with recommendations, based on the experience gained, to inform and progress future taking-in-charge plans.

Social and Affordable Housing

230. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he has had discussions with the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs regarding the extent to which local authorities are obliged to take into consideration in their allocations policies a number of factors (details supplied). [3119/17]

231. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Com-

munity and Local Government if he has had any discussions with the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs regarding whether an applicant for social housing is entitled to be considered an adult plus children, for the purposes of allocation, in the circumstances in which the children stay with the parent several days a week. [3120/17]

232. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his views on the fact that many parents in circumstances in which they are separated from their former partner, find it difficult to accommodate their children for the number of days that they have access to them, due to being considered a single applicant for the purposes of social housing and consequently, are only entitled to enough rent supplement or HAP to house themselves; his further views on whether this makes contact with that parent difficult for the child; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3121/17]

260. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the extent to which local authorities are obliged to take into consideration in their allocations policies a number of factors (details supplied). [3106/17]

261. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if a person is entitled to be considered as an adult plus children for the purposes of allocation of social housing in circumstances in which the children stay with the parent several days a week. [3107/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 230 to 232, inclusive, and 260 and 261 together.

The allocation of social housing support to qualified households is a matter for the local authority concerned, in accordance with its allocation scheme made in accordance with section 22 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 and associated Regulations. This legislation requires all local authorities, as a reserved function, to make an allocation scheme determining the order of priority to be accorded in the allocation of dwellings to households qualified for social housing support, the allocation of which would, in the opinion of the authority, meet the accommodation needs and requirements of the households. Under the 2009 Act, a household is defined as a person living alone, or two or more persons, who in the opinion of the local authority concerned, have a reasonable requirement to live together.

As such, it is a matter for each housing authority to decide on the type of support to be allocated to individual households. As Minister, I am precluded by the 2009 Act from intervening in relation to the procedures followed, or decisions made, by housing authorities in the allocation of particular dwellings.

I have not had discussions with the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs in relation to the allocation of accommodation to households of the type referred to.

Vacant Sites Levy

233. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will bring forward the date for full implementation of the vacant site levy; if he will consider reducing the number of exemptions that apply to the Act; if he will consider raising the levy applied to exceed annual land price inflation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2542/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015 introduced a new measure, the va-

cant site levy, with a view to incentivising the development of vacant or under-utilised sites in urban areas. Under the Act, planning authorities are required to establish a register of vacant sites in their areas, beginning on 1 January 2017, and to issue annual notices to owners of vacant sites by 1 June 2018 in respect of vacant sites on the register on 1 January 2018. The levy will be applied by planning authorities, commencing on 1 January 2019, in respect of sites which were vacant and on the vacant site register during the preceding year (i.e. 2018) and will subsequently be applied on an annual basis thereafter, as long as a site remains on the vacant site register in the preceding year.

The timeframes set out in the legislation in relation to the commencement of the application of the levy are based on legal advice in relation to the constitutional rights of property owners and are intended to allow site owners sufficient time and opportunity to initiate development on their sites, or alternatively to sell their sites, in order to avoid becoming liable for the levy.

Planning authorities are empowered to apply an annual vacant site levy of 3% of the market value of vacant sites exceeding 0.05 hectares (or 500 square metres) in area which, in the planning authority's opinion, were vacant or idle in the preceding year, in areas identified by the planning authority in its development plan or local area plan for residential or regeneration development. The 3% rate of vacant site levy is consistent with the rate applied to derelict sites under the Derelict Sites Act 1990 and is considered reasonable, without being over-punitive, for the purposes of incentivising the activation of such sites for residential or regeneration purposes.

In addition, the legislation provides that reduced or zero rates of levy may apply in specific circumstances in order to help alleviate the financial burden faced by owners of vacant sites which are subject to a site loan and where the loan is greater than the market value of the site (i.e. a negative equity situation), and also where the site loan is greater than 50% of the market value of the site. This is to ensure that the levy provisions are fair, reasonable and proportionate taking account of the difficult circumstances faced by owners who are in this position.

In this context, I have no proposals to amend the existing legislative provisions relating to the vacant site levy in relation to the timeframes for its implementation or the rate of the levy to be applied, as proposed.

My Department issued general guidance in July 2016 on the implementation of the vacant site levy to planning authorities by way of Circular Letter PL 7/2016, entitled Implementation of the Vacant Site Levy, as provided for in the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015, which is available on my Department's website at the following link:

http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/pl_07-2016_guidance_on_implementation_of_the_vacant_site_levy.pdf.

Planning authorities are presently engaging in the necessary preparatory work prior to the application of the levy with effect from January 2019, including the revision of development plans to specify the areas in which the levy is to be applied as well as the identification of specific vacant sites for entry on the register. My Department will monitor the implementation of the levy to ensure that it is being fully used in line with its intended purpose.

Housing Data

234. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his views on the accuracy of housing completion statistics relied on by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2543/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department receives detailed monthly data from the ESB on the number of connections to the electricity grid; these data have for many years been used as a proxy for house completions as units are normally connected at the point at which the unit is ready for occupation. My Department maintains regular contact with the ESB to ensure that this data set remains relevant and consistent over time. The ESB recently confirmed to the Department that the connections figure includes a small, but not easily quantified, number of reconnections to the grid where the unit was disconnected, and therefore vacant, for at least two years. Furthermore, they also confirmed that service alterations are not included in the connections figures.

My Department also produces annual estimates of the housing stock using census figures, when available, completions data and an evolving estimate for obsolescence of the housing stock. I will shortly publish the final monthly housing output report for 2016 and that report will show that, after a sustained period of very low levels of activity, there are now clear positive signs of increasing supply.

My Department will continue to monitor and review a range of available sources of housing data and statistics on an ongoing basis to ensure that the best possible information is available to inform policy development and implementation.

Private Rented Accommodation

235. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the evidence he has for the claim that landlords are exiting the market; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2545/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The 2015 Annual Report of the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) reported 319,609 registered tenancies with 170,282 landlords and 693,314 occupants.

There are no definitive figures on the overall size of the rented sector in Ireland. However, a study by DKM economic consultants commissioned by the RTB and published in 2014 examined both Central Statistics Office data and RTB annual reports to examine the size of the sector.

They reported on the size of the Rented Sector as follows:

	Census 2011	RTB 2011	RTB 2012	RTB 2013	RTB 2014
Landlords		182,800	212,306	179,026	160,160
Tenants	770,375	554,567	593,382	457,208*	643,330
Tenancies	305,377	260,144	264,434	282,918	303,574

*May not include all tenants i.e. minor.

There is evidence of a drop in the total number of landlords over recent years, followed by a recovery.

The results of Census 2016 will assist in providing an updated overview of housing tenure in Ireland, including the rented sector.

Private Rented Accommodation

236. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and

Local Government the current rate of return for landlords on private residential property with a buy to let mortgage and with no mortgage in view of his previous statements that the rationale for allowing rent increases of up to 4% in rent pressure zones was to ensure a rate of return for landlords of 4%. [2546/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The widely varying market conditions in the residential rental sector across the country mean that estimating rental income against landlords' costs in providing rental properties in any meaningful aggregate manner is extremely difficult. Not only do rents vary significantly across the country but so do levels of indebtedness among landlords with buy to let mortgages and hence the costs they face in servicing their borrowings. Whether a rental property is financed through debt or equity, the issue of a return on investment still arises.

Neither my Department, nor the Residential Tenancies Board, collects information on the cost and value of landlords' investment or on their operating costs.

Social and Affordable Housing

237. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will provide information on the planned reduction in social housing provision at publicly owned sites earmarked for redevelopment under land initiative style proposals, relative to the amount of council housing historically provided on those sites when estates were originally built. [2547/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I believe there is a broad consensus that housing output needs to at least double, across all tenures, to provide the 25,000 new homes a year needed to meet demand. There is also consensus on the need for a significant portion of the increased output to be at more affordable prices and rents. Achieving these aims is the fundamental objective underpinning the Government's Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness.

During the extensive stakeholder consultation that preceded publication of Rebuilding Ireland, the issue of large tracts of land, suitable for housing, but with little or no construction underway, was raised frequently. In the case of local authority owned lands, I was determined that under Rebuilding Ireland, we would see accelerated delivery of homes from these and other State lands. In progressing housing activity on these sites, there is no question of reducing social housing output. Overall, some 47,000 additional social housing units are to be provided under Rebuilding Ireland and in the case of large publicly owned sites, social housing is to be delivered as part of vibrant, integrated, mixed tenure developments.

O'Devaney Gardens in Dublin City is a good example of one such large site where the City Council has brought forward a significant proposal for accelerated housing development. In order to optimise delivery of housing from this site, my Department has agreed a mixed tenure approach with the City Council. This approach delivers accelerated output across all tenures and also has wider benefits in terms of the achievement of more sustainable integrated communities. Such developments are considered on a case by case and site-specific basis between my Department and the local authority concerned.

The approach to delivery of housing from such sites is in accordance with State land supply and management objectives contained in Rebuilding Ireland. More broadly, my Department is engaging with local authorities and other State bodies, to identify and map sites in local authority and public ownership for the purposes of delivering housing more quickly. This approach

to active land management of State land can also enhance land supply more broadly, providing alternatives for a wide variety of housing providers, including the public and voluntary housing sectors, and ensuring that the State extracts the most beneficial use of under-utilised assets for much needed housing in the shortest possible timeframe.

As part of the broader land management strategy, I recently announced details of 23 Major Urban Housing Development Sites, some in State ownership and some owned privately, with the potential to deliver up to 30,000 additional homes over the next 3 to 4 years on existing zoned lands and close to the key areas of demand. These sites are being progressed as exemplars for the co-ordination and delivery of plan-led housing development and active land management.

Water Services Funding

238. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he has received a request from Clare County Council's rural water monitoring committee to clarify the definition of multi-annual programming in the rural water sector and to ensure that the full RWP allocations for 2017 and subsequent years are made as early as possible in the year and preferably in the first quarter in order that moneys can be fully drawn down; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2556/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I can confirm that Clare County Council's Rural Water Monitoring Committee has sought a clarification in relation to my Department's new Multi-Annual Rural Water Programme 2016-2018 and a reply will issue shortly.

In 2016 an Expert Panel, convened for the purpose, considered bids from local authorities for schemes for the period 2016-2018 under Measures 3, 4 and 5 of the multi-annual programme. The subsequent approval of schemes in the programme under these three measures brought certainty to their inclusion in the programme, allows their preliminary preparation to commence and will enable my Department to make an early allocation of funding for them in 2017. My Department will soon seek bids from local authorities for Measures 1 and 2 of the programme for 2017.

A copy of the Expert Panel's report and consideration of all proposals under Measures 3, 4 and 5 of the Programme is available on my Department's website at the following link –

http://www.housing.gov.ie/water/water-services/rural-water-programme/group-water-schemes-and-rural-water-issues.

Local Authority Housing Standards

239. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to amend the minimum size that apartments can be built in order to become wheelchair accessible (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2557/17]

240. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to make all new and or proposed local authority housing and apartment schemes and or units fully wheelchair accessible (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2560/17]

248. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the claims outlined in a newspaper (details supplied) that Dublin City Council cannot design apartments to be wheelchair accessible and also at the Department's minimum building size standards; if so, the minimum size building standard for a wheelchair accessible apartment; his plans for this wheelchair accessible standard as the minimum building size standard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2806/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): I propose to take Questions Nos. 239, 240 and 248 together.

All new buildings, including social housing units, must comply with the legally enforceable minimum performance standards set out in the Building Regulations 1997-2014. In this context, the Building Regulations (Part M Amendment) Regulations 2010, and the accompanying Technical Guidance Document M - Access and Use (2010), which came into effect on 1 January 2012, set out the minimum statutory requirements applicable to new buildings, and to existing buildings where new works, a material alteration or a material change of use is proposed.

The requirements of Part M aim to ensure that regardless of age, size or disability:

(a) new buildings other than dwellings (including multi-unit developments) are accessible and usable;

(b) extensions to existing buildings other than dwellings are, where practicable, accessible and useable;

(c) material alterations to existing buildings other than dwellings increase the accessibility and usability of existing buildings, where practicable;

(d) certain changes of use to existing buildings other than dwellings increase the accessibility and usability of existing buildings, where practicable; and

(e) new dwellings are visitable.

Part M of the Building Regulations aims to foster an inclusive approach to the design and construction of the built environment. While the Part M requirements may be regarded as a statutory minimum level of provision, the accompanying technical guidance encourages building owners and designers to have regard to the design philosophy of universal design and to consider making additional provisions where practicable and appropriate.

Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments Guidelines for Planning Authorities, published by my Department in December 2015, set nationally consistent minimum standards from a planning policy perspective, and do not preclude compliance with the requirements of Part M.

Where apartments are designed as living accommodation for people with specific needs e.g. a wheelchair user, specialist design and floor areas greater than minimum standards will be required.

While the latest iteration of Part M of the Building Regulations initially coincided with the general downturn in economic and construction activity, its positive effects on access and use in the built environment will now be seen more widely as economic recovery takes hold and construction activity continues to gather momentum and moves onto a sustainable footing. While I have no proposals to amend Part M at this point in time, the Building Regulations, including

Part M requirements, are subject to ongoing review in the interests of safety and the well-being of persons in the built environment and to ensure that due regard is taken of changes in construction techniques, technological progress and innovation.

County Development Plans

241. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if there has been recent changes at European Parliament level that would affect the county developments plan of local authorities and in particular affect local need requirements for planning permission. [2588/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department is presently engaged in consultations with planning authorities regarding potential modifications required to the 2005 Planning Guidelines on Sustainable Rural Housing with a view to ensuring that rural housing policies and objectives contained in development plans comply with Article 43 (Freedom of Movement of People) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

On conclusion of these consultations, my Department will be engaging with the European Commission on proposed changes to the Guidelines, with a view to issuing updated Guidelines to planning authorities on the matter in due course.

Planning Issues

242. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government when a decision will be made on an application submitted to his Department by Mayo County Council to develop a strategic development zone at Ireland West Airport, Knock; the reason for the delay in the decision making; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2623/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I can confirm that my Department has received a proposal from Mayo County Council, seeking Government approval to designate Ireland Airport West, Knock County Mayo as a Strategic Development Zone under Section 166 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended).

My Department has engaged with the Department of Tourism, Transport and Sport in relation to this matter, including in relation to related issues concerning wider aviation and land use policy and landside development at airports in general. I anticipate that this engagement will be finalised shortly, with a view to the consideration of the proposal being concluded later this Spring.

Social and Affordable Housing Data

243. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will provide a breakdown of the 5,280 social housing units provided in 2016 (details supplied); if he will provide a further breakdown of the leased units in terms of whether the units will be owned by councils or AHBs at the end of the lease term or if they will be owned by the private sector; if all 5,280 social housing units are now tenanted; and if not, the number that have not been tenanted. [2635/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Government has set out ambitious targets for the delivery of social housing supports over the lifetime of Rebuilding Ireland. Last year, over 18,300 social housing supports were provided across a range of delivery programmes. Within this, preliminary data show that around 5,280 new social houses were either purchased, leased, remediated or built by local authorities and approved housing bodies across the country using a range of funding mechanisms and delivery programmes.

My Department publishes a wide range of statistical information on housing delivery and these are available on the Department's website at the following link:

http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordble/overall-social-housing-provision.

The information on the website is up to date as of the end of quarter 3 2016; information for the full year of 2016 is currently being finalised and will be published shortly.

On completion of units through whatever delivery means, their final tenanting is then a matter for the local authorities directly. In all cases there should be no undue delay between the completion of units and completion of the tenanting process.

Departmental Projects

244. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the potential investment projects his Department put forward to the Department of Finance task force report for the European Fund for Strategic Investment. [2677/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The following table sets out the potential projects submitted by my Department to the Department of Finance in November 2014 in respect of the task force report for the European Fund for Strategic Investment.

Project	Implementing Agency	Description	Total Investment (€m)
Social Housing	Local Authorities	Social Housing- 1 ,500 units over three years	250.00
Retrofit Local Authority Housing Stock	Local Authorities	Energy Efficiency Measure Reduce Carbon Footprint, retrofit 2,000 apartments	100.00

Water and Sewerage Schemes Grants

245. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if his Department will provide funding for a group water scheme (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2700/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Rusheen No. 3 Group Water Scheme was included by Kerry County Council in its bid under Measure 3 of the Rural Water Multi-Annual Programme 2016-2018 for funding those group water schemes in areas where a public scheme and private wells are not a viable option. However, following examination of all local authorities' proposals under this measure by the Expert Panel convened for this purpose, the Rusheen Group Water Scheme was not recom-

mended for funding under the programme. A copy of the Expert Panel's report and consideration of all proposals under the Programme is available on my Department's website at: http://www.housing.gov.ie/water/water-services/rural-water-programme/group-water-schemes-and-rural-water-issues.

Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund

246. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to create a link road between a sports centre (details supplied) and the Garrycastle area which would open up a massive land bank for the purpose of housing; and if there are no plans, if he will investigate this matter. [2749/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I presume the Deputy is referring to proposals submitted by local authorities under the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund. The aim of this Fund is to relieve critical infrastructural blockages to enable the accelerated delivery of housing on key development sites and to improve the economic viability of new housing projects in Dublin and in urban areas with high demand for housing. The €200m Fund will be composed of an Exchequer allocation of €150 million, matched by a €50 million contribution from participating local authorities.

A Call for Proposals under the Fund was issued to local authorities on 26 August 2016, with a closing date for receipt of proposals of 14 October. It was open to all local authorities to apply, with funding to be allocated on the basis of a competitive bid process. Twenty-one local authorities have submitted a total of 74 project applications relating to specific sites or development land areas. Westmeath County Council submitted a proposal in relation to Brawny, Athlone which includes the link road between the sports centre and the Garrycastle area.

The overall total cost of the 74 funding bid applications is approximately €800m, with funding of some €600 million being sought from the Exchequer and local authorities agreeing to fund approximately €200 million as part of their matching fund requirements. It will not be possible to approve all applications, given the scale and value of applications received.

The viability of the applications is currently being examined in detail against the assessment criteria set out in the Call for Proposals, with a focus on the level of funding required and what it might leverage, the number of housing units that could be delivered, their strategic location and speed of delivery, and affordability levels of a proportion of the homes. Following completion of this analysis, I intend to announce successful applications during the first quarter of this year.

Social and Affordable Housing

247. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans in respect of a new affordable housing scheme; when plans will be made public in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2793/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Action 4.6 of Rebuilding Ireland provides for the introduction of an affordable rental scheme to enhance the capacity of the private rented sector to provide quality and affordable accommodation for households currently paying a disproportionate amount of disposable income on rent.

As set out in the recently published Strategy for the Rental Sector, this commitment is to be

progressed through kick-starting supply in rent pressure zones. Lands held by local authorities in rent pressure zones are to be brought to market on a competitive tendering basis, with a view to leveraging the value of the land to deliver the optimum number of units for rent, targeting middle income households, in mixed tenure developments. The cost of providing rental units is to be permanently reduced by lowering the initial investment and development costs for providers - AHB or private - allowing the rental units to be made available at below market prices without the need for ongoing rental subsidies.

The local authorities concerned will identify a number of sites with the potential for up to 1,000 units of accommodation and will move forward, as soon as possible, to issue calls for proposals from parties interested in developing projects. As speed of delivery will be critically important, appropriate licence arrangements, incorporating clear timescales for delivery, will be a key feature of the process.

This programme is being co-ordinated with the dedicated measures in *Rebuilding Ireland* to accelerate housing output from the Major Urban Housing Delivery Sites, including support from the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF) where necessary. Possible project locations include O Devaney Gardens and Oscar Traynor Road in Dublin. In tandem, new-build rental accommodation is also to be provided in the major build-to-rent projects planned for strategic development zones and other large sites in Dublin and other locations, such as Cherrywood in the Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council area.

Question No. 248 answered with Question No. 239.

Pyrite Remediation Programme

249. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his views regarding the range of flexibility afforded within the operation of the pyrite remediation scheme in relation to adding on properties to be remediated as part of particular phases, in the interests of co-ordinated development and securing economies of scale (details supplied). [2810/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The Pyrite Resolution Board, with the support of the Housing Agency, is responsible for the implementation of the pyrite remediation scheme. In accordance with the provisions of the Act, the Board is independent in the performance of its functions, and as Minister, I have no role in the operational matters pertaining to the implementation of the scheme. The Board may be contacted by phone at Lo call 1890 252842 or by email to info@pyriteboard.ie.

However, it is important to note that section 14(5) of the Pyrite Resolution Act 2013 provides that the Board, having regard to the need to secure the most beneficial, effective and efficient use of the funds available to the pyrite remediation scheme, may arrange dwellings into groups for the purpose of a programme of pyrite remediation.

Social and Affordable Housing Funding

250. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if an application for funding in respect of the phase 2 Clúid housing project for Letterfrack has been approved; if not, when it is likely this application will be considered and a decision made on same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2859/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The assessment of a proposal for the provision of 11 new social units by Cluid Housing Association, as a second phase development at Letterfrack, County Galway, will be finalised shortly. I therefore expect to be in a position to convey a decision to Galway County Council within the next two weeks.

Water and Sewerage Schemes

251. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if there will be any change in national policy to support more sewerage schemes in 2017 (details supplied); and if he will provide support to an application by Westmeath County Council for the Marlinstown sewerage scheme in view of the fact that this application meets all the criteria and is shovel ready. [2860/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department's new Rural Water Multi-annual Programme 2016-2018 was developed through a working group of key stakeholders involving local authorities, the Water Services Transition Office, Irish Water, the National Federation of Group Water Schemes as well as my Department. The programme provides for the funding of demonstration Group Sewerage Schemes, through Measure 4(d), where clustering of households on individual septic tanks is not a viable option, particularly from an environmental perspective.

Local authorities were invited in January 2016 to submit bids under the programme. The invitation envisaged no more than two demonstration sewerage projects being brought forward under the measure in any one year of the three year programme. The demonstrations will allow, over the course of the programme, my Department to determine the appropriate enduring funding levels and relationship with the current grant scheme.

Marlinstown Group Sewerage Scheme was included by Westmeath County Council in its bid under Measure 4(d) of the Programme. However, following examination of all local authorities' proposals under this measure by the Expert Panel convened for this purpose, the scheme was not recommended for funding under the Programme. A copy of the Expert Panel's report and consideration of all proposals under the Programme is available on my Department's website at the following link –

http://www.housing.gov.ie/water/water-services/rural-water-programme/group-water-schemes-and-rural-water-issues.

Departmental Reports

252. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government when he expects the Mulcahy report into allegations made concerning certain planning matters in County Donegal to be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2892/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department appointed Senior Counsel on a non-statutory basis in September 2015 to prepare a review report in relation to planning matters in Donegal. Senior Counsel was originally due to submit a review report to my predecessor by end-October 2015; however, further interactions and clarifications sought with regard to the scope and nature of the review resulted in delays to its conclusion.

These clarifications have now been provided and I expect Senior Counsel to complete his independent review as soon as possible over the coming months. While I intend to publish the report after having considered its contents, I will only be in a position to confirm this after I have received the report and fully considered it.

Judicial Reviews

253. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the cost to his Department in defending judicial review proceedings taken in relation to his use of section 31 of the Planning and Development Acts from 2010 to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2893/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): In relation to judicial review proceedings concerning decisions by me as Minister to direct planning authorities on the content of their development plans, one case was settled but legal costs arising have not yet been determined. A further two cases have not yet been heard by the High Court, and so costs are not yet known.

Departmental Staff Data

254. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of Secretaries General in his Department; the annual pay of each Secretary General within his Department at 1 Jan 2017; the expected change in that pay as a consequence of the provisions of the Lansdowne Road agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2907/17]

255. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of assistant secretaries general in his Department; the annual pay of each assistant secretary general within his Department at 1 January 2017; the expected change in that pay as a consequence of the provisions of the Lansdowne Road agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2923/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 254 and 255 together.

There are one Secretary General and 6 Assistant Secretaries General in my Department, along with 2 further Assistant Secretary General equivalent posts. The current pay scales for both grades are available on the website of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform at *https://civilservicepayscales.per.gov.ie/*.

Under the provisions of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2015 (FEMPI), for those on salaries in excess of €110,000 the salary reductions imposed under the FEMPI Act 2013 will be restored in three equal phases on 1 April 2017, 1 April 2018 and 1 April 2019. A circular setting out the revised salary rates applicable from 1 April 2017 to general Civil Service grades, including Secretaries General and Assistant Secretaries General, is currently in preparation and will be issued by my colleague the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform in due course.

Construction Sector Strategy

256. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the steps he is taking to help reduce financing costs for the construction industry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2955/17]

257. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the steps he is taking to help reduce input costs for the construction industry; the way in which such costs are tracked by his Department; the targets his Department is working to in this area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2957/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): I propose to take Questions Nos. 256 and 257 together.

Under Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, the Government is committed to a broad range of measures to tackle, among other things, some of the costs associated with the provision of housing in the interests of reducing construction overheads. This includes undertaking a detailed analysis, in conjunction with the construction sector, to benchmark housing delivery input costs in Ireland, in order to facilitate an increased level of housing output into the future. A working group, chaired by my Department, with a broad range of industry representatives has been established. The first meeting took place in December and there is another meeting scheduled to take place this week. While it is intended that the working group will concentrate on the domestic market, the Housing Agency is currently advancing an independent review and analysis of delivery costs and international comparisons. Both studies are expected to be complete in the first half of 2017.

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

Further measures taken by my Department to bring down the cost of providing housing and reduce the amount of finance required include the €200 million Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF), which will provide much-needed enabling infrastructure on key sites to open up lands for development from early 2017 onwards.

In addition, the NTMA, through the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF), is developing proposals to offer competitive financing on a commercial basis, and in line with ISIF's statutory mandate, to meet other infrastructure requirements on large development sites.

Strategy for the Rental Sector

258. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the supports he will introduce for landlords in 2017. [2970/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): On 13 December 2016, Government approved the publication of a Strategy for the Rental Sector, which delivers on a commitment made under Pillar 4 of Rebuilding Ireland. The strategy is structured around 4 key areas: security, standards, supply and services. The overarching objective of the strategy is to increase security and supply and support the development of a stable, strong and viable rental sector offering choice for households, investment opportunities for providers and reflecting the rights and responsibilities of both tenants and landlords.

The measures under these four headings will be implemented through the 29 act ions con-

tained in the Strategy. Action 9 commits to the establishment of a working group on the tax and fiscal treatment of rental accommodation providers. The working group will examine and report on the tax treatment of landlords and put forward options, where identified and appropriate, for amendment to such tax treatment. The first meeting of the working group took place on 19 January 2017.

In addition, the Rental Strategy contains a number of actions of importance to landlords, which will be implemented in 2017. These include the introduction of unfurnished lettings in the case of long leases, a fast track process for effective termination procedures in cases of non-payment of rent and measures to improve the enforcement of Determination Orders issued by the Residential Tenancies Board and reduce the time taken for dispute resolution. The RTB will also establish a one stop shop for information on the Residential Tenancies Act and a voluntary accreditation scheme for landlords.

Construction Contracts

259. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the procedure whereby contractors, whether commercial or not for profit, can bid for contracts for the delivery of rapid build housing in Dublin, as outlined in the Government's housing action plan. [3059/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department has responsibility for the provision of funding for social housing construction projects delivered through local authorities and approved housing bodies. As they are the delivery agents for social housing, they conduct the procurement exercises for the projects, including rapid build/delivery solutions. Contractors, whether commercial or not for profit, are welcome to compete for these construction projects as and when they are advertised. All notices in relation to procurement are advertised on eTenders and, where required, in the EU Journal.

In addition, the Office of Government Procurement, has established a national multi-party framework agreement for the provision of rapid delivery housing projects. This was set up following a pre-tender Request for Information exercise with the market, a tendering process and two bidders briefing sessions, all of which occurred in 2016. Local Authorities and Approved Housing Bodies and other Framework Clients may award contracts under the Framework Agreement in accordance with the rules set out in the Agreement.

Questions Nos. 260 and 261 answered with Question No. 230.

County Boundary Reviews

262. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the position regarding the Carlow boundary report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3134/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): In June 2015, an independent statutory Committee was appointed to carry out a review of local government boundaries in Athlone, Carlow, Drogheda and Waterford. In each case, the committee was asked to carry out a review of the boundary between the respective local authorities and to make recommendations with respect to those boundaries and any consequential matters that they consider necessary in the interests of effective local government.

The report in relation to Carlow was submitted to me in late December 2016. I will be considering it along with the other boundary reports, which I intend to address as part of the overall report on local government matters to be submitted to Government and the Oireachtas in mid-2017 under the Programme for a Partnership Government.

Pyrite Resolution Board Data

263. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of applications to the pyrite remedial scheme, by county, in each of the years 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017; the number of applications which were approved and rejected, by county and by year; the number of repairs completed, in process and scheduled, by county and by year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3142/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The Pyrite Resolution Act 2013 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 to dwellings which have significant damage attributable to pyritic heave.

The latest figures available from the Pyrite Resolution Board indicate that 1,498 applications h ave been received under the pyrite remediation scheme (620 in 2014, 373 in 2015 and 505 in 2016 respectively) as set out in the following Table:-

-	Dublin City	Dun Laoghaire	Fingal	Kildare	Meath	Offaly	South Dublin
Application: Stage 1	2	3	126	2	34	7	1
Verification: Stage 2	0	0	90	0	38	1	0
Remedial Works Plan: Stage 3	3	4	147	0	46	1	0
Tendering: Stage 4	7	0	70	0	0	0	0
Decision to Contract: Stage 5	0	0	2 6	0	18	0	0
Remediation: Stage 6	0	0	205	2	35	0	0
Retention: Stage 7	4	3	242	8	12 7	9	11
Closed: Stage 8	29	10	1011	21	389	26	12

There were 77 unsuccessful applicants.

Ultimately, the Board, together with the Housing Agency, will arrange for all eligible dwellings to be remediated to a high standard and at no additional cost to the affected homeowners. Remediation works will continue to be carried out at the earliest possible opportunity having

regard to the existing demands of the scheme and the optimum use of available resources.

Pyrite Resolution Board Data

264. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of legal proceedings currently ongoing with the Pyrite Resolution Board, indicating the builders and developers that are in this process; the number of legal proceedings completed with the Pyrite Resolution Board, indicating the builders and developers and the amounts awarded to the PRB as contributions towards remedial works that were agreed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3143/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The Pyrite Resolution Board, with the support of the Housing Agency, is responsible for the implementation of the pyrite remediation scheme. In accordance with the provisions of the Act, the Board is independent in the performance of its functions, and as Minister, I have no role in the operational matters pertaining to the implementation of the scheme. The Board may be contacted by phone at Lo call 1890 252842 or by email to *info@pyriteboard.ie.*

Pyrite Remediation Programme

265. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to lower the damage rating for eligibility for remedial works for pyrite-affected homes; his further plans to assist home owners in accessing engineer reports on whether pyrite is present in a property and the extent to which it is present; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3144/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The Report of the Pyrite Panel (June 2012) recommended a categorisation system 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. The independent Pyrite Panel was clear in its view that only dwellings with significant damage due to pyritic heave (i.e. red category) should be remediated and that it would be unreasonable to expect dwellings not exhibiting such damage to be remediated. Dwellings which have no significant damage but have reactive pyrite in the hardcore material (i.e. amber category) should be monitored and only remediated if they display significant damage due to pyritic heave. This remains the position with regard to dwellings, which do not display significant pyritic damage.

In response to this 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 late January 2013, and provides the means by which dwellings, which may be affected by pyrite can be tested and categorised. In broad terms, the national standard sets out a two-step process to facilitate the testing and categorisation of dwellings.

The first step requires that a Building Condition Assessment be carried out; this comprises a desktop study and a visual non-invasive internal and external inspection of a dwelling to establish the presence or absence of visible damage that is consistent with pyritic heave and to quantify the extent and significance of such damage in that dwelling. Damage ratings of 0, 1 or 2 can be assigned to a dwelling under this process.

The second step involves the sampling and testing of the sub-floor hardcore material and is informed by the assignment of the Damage Condition Rating under the Building Condition Assessment process. At the conclusion of this two-step process, buildings may be categorised under I.S. 398-1:2013 into four categories which are broadly consistent with the traffic light system that was used by the Pyrite Panel as a means of prioritising pyrite remediation works.

The Pyrite Resolution Act 2013 provides for the making of a pyrite remediation scheme by the Pyrite Resolution Board for certain dwellings affected by significant pyrite damage. The pyrite remediation scheme is a scheme of "last resort" and is limited in its application and scope. The full conditions for eligibility under the scheme are set out in the scheme, which is available on the Board's website (*www.pyriteboard.ie)*.

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. 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. There are no proposals to amend eligibility criteria.

In late 2015, the National Standards Authority of Ireland commenced a review of I.S. 398-1:2013 in the light of practical experience since the standard was first introduced in January 2013. The standard is being updated and revised to reflect the on-site experiences and evidence gathered by technical experts, such as engineers, geologists, professionals providing sampling and testing services and other technical experts, who have been using the standard over the past four years. A public consultation was announced on the revision of I.S. 398-1:2013, which closed on 17 December 2016. My Department understands that it is anticipated that the revised standard will be published later this year.

Fire Service

266. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government when a project (details supplied) will proceed to the next stage; if this project will be given urgent consideration with a view to progressing it to construction stage in view of the fact much of the necessary preparatory work and procurement of site has been finalised for some time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3146/17]

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

In February 2016, my Department announced a five-year Fire Services Capital Programme with an allocation of €40 million, based on an annual €8 million allocation, to be used for the purchase of fire appliances and specialist equipment, building or upgrading of prioritised Fire Stations, an upgrade of the Communications and Mobilisation system and improvements to Training Centres.

Monaghan County Council has prioritised a fire station project in Castleblayney and this is included as part of this programme under the list of priority projects to be progressed for 2019.

While a new fire station for Ballybay is not provided for in the current five-year Fire Services Capital Programme, projects are reassessed on an annual basis and priority may be adjusted to bring forward projects offering best value-for-money and to take account of the state of readiness of projects.

Scheme to Support National Organisations

267. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the organisations and groups supported by the scheme to support national organisations; the funding each receives; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3164/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Scheme to Support National Organisations in the Community & Voluntary sector aims to provide multi-annual funding to national organisations towards core costs associated with the provision of services.

A new round of funding under the Scheme commenced on 1 July 2016, for a period of three years. I approved 71 organisations for funding, with a total envelope of €16.7 million over three years. This level of funding was well in excess of the indicated amount initially advertised and was an effort to fund as many organisations as possible under the Scheme. The following table provides details of the allocations to each organisation under the Scheme.

Organisation	Allocation over 3 year period
Active Retirement Network Ireland	€262,951
Age Action Ireland Limited	€216,265
Amen Support Services Limited	€181,707
Anam Cara Parental and Sibling Bereavement Support Limited	€269,920
Arthritis Ireland	€184,502
Asthma Society of Ireland	€208,028
Autism Spectrum Information Advice And Meeting Point Limited	€200,707
Barnardos - Republic of Ireland Limited	€261,818
Belong To Youth Services	€269,990
Breaking Through Limited	€214,440
Care Alliance Ireland	€253,036
Carmichael Centre for Voluntary Groups Limited	€266,126
Cherish Limited	€270,000
Children In Hospital Ireland	€269,952
Children's Rights Alliance-Republic Of Ireland Limited	€269,844
Chronic Pain Ireland Limited	€110,635
Community Action Network Limited	€266,224
Community Creations Limited	€172,500
Community Workers Limited	€269,648
Co-operative Housing Ireland Society Limited	€219,426
Disability Equality Specialist Support Agency Limited	€270,000
Disability Federation of Ireland	€232,338
Down Syndrome Ireland	€260,124
Dyslexia Association of Ireland	€204,970

Organisation	Allocation over 3 year period
Educate Together Ag Foghlaim le Chéile	€268,994
European Anti-Poverty Network Ireland Limited	€260,503
European Network Against Racism (ENAR) Ireland Limited	€225,780
Family Carers Ireland	€270,000
Focus Ireland Limited	€174,358
Free Legal Advice Centres Limited	€270,000
G.L.E.N. Limited	€265,788
Grow in Ireland	€153,576
Immigrant Council of Ireland Limited	€250,358
Inclusion Ireland - National Association For People With an Intellectual Disability	€270,000
INOU Limited	€268,500
Irish Association for Palliative Care	€150,428
Irish Athletic Boxing Association	€172,514
Irish Council For Social Housing	€84,445
Irish Deaf Society The National Association of the Deaf Limited	€269,700
Irish Foster Care Association Limited	€166,213
Irish Penal Reform Trust	€268,874
Irish Refugee Council Limited	€268,752
Irish Rural Link Co-Operative Society Limited	€267,058
Irish Senior Citizens National Parliament Limited	€265,066
Irish Stammering Association	€118,010
M.O.V.E. Ireland	€236,500
Medical Research Charities Limited	€242,344
Mental Health Reform	€269,085
Migraine Association of Ireland Limited	€102,996
Migrant Information Centre Limited	€267,926
National Association for Spina Bifida and Hydro-cephalus Ireland Limited	€204,806
National Women's Council of Ireland	€270,000
National Youth Council of Ireland	€253,122
New Communities Partnership (NCP) Limited	€194,186
Parents Plus Limited	€179,609
Rape Crisis Network Ireland (RCNI) Limited	€269,960
Rotha Teoranta	€269,768
Simon Communities of Ireland	€269,602
Social Analysis and Action for Justice Ireland Lim-ited	€269,870
Special Olympics Ireland	€270,000
Spinal Injuries Ireland	€265,800
The Irish Environmental Conservation Organisation for Youth-UNESCO Clubs Limited	€210,894
The Irish Hospice Foundation	€265,926
The Irish Local Development Network Limited	€262,000
The Men's Development Network Limited	€264,784
The Multiple Sclerosis Society of Ireland	€270,000
The National Network of Women's Refuges And Support Services Limited	€266,528

Organisation	Allocation over 3 year period
The Neurological Alliance of Ireland	€269,402
Threshold	€251,799
Volunteering Ireland Ltd	€210,354
Women's Aid Ireland	€239,584
Total	€16,660,913

Water Services

268. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the cost to the Exchequer if the existing subsidy to domestic group and private water users were to cover the full cost of those schemes to their users. [3166/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): To ensure parity of treatment between domestic consumers in the public water system and the group water sector, a subsidy grant was introduced by my Department for group water schemes in 1997. The subsidy is payable to a group water scheme towards their operating costs of providing water for domestic use. The subsidy is payable annually and paid on a per house basis once the scheme qualifies. The subsidy is intended for, on the basis of supply for consumption by an average household, a scheme meeting its operating costs in providing water for domestic use. The subsidy is paid to schemes by local authorities, who are recouped the expenditure in full through my Department's Rural Water Programme.

To ensure equity of treatment with households on public water supplies the subsidy rates were adjusted down in 2015 to reflect the new domestic water charging regime introduced on 1 January 2015. Subsequently in 2016 the subsidy rates were adjusted up to the pre-2015 levels to reflect the suspension of charges. The subsidy amounts recouped to local authorities by my Department for 2014 – 2016 are set out in the table (the adjustments to the subsidy rates are reflected in the variations in amount recouped over the 2014 – 2016 period).

Year	Subsidy Amount Recouped to Local Authorities
2014	€21.05 million
2015	€18.89 million
2016	€15.76 million

My Department will give further consideration to the subsidies available for the operation of group water schemes following Oireachtas decisions on the enduring funding model for public domestic water services so as to ensure continued parity of treatment between households connected to the public network and those on group water schemes. However, should domestic water charges not be restored, an estimate of the ongoing annual cost of the subsidy scheme to my Department (and in turn the Exchequer), is €24 million.

Irish Water Administration

269. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the current process for Irish Water when a leak or issue with a water supply occurs in an area (details supplied); if Irish Water deals with the issue and repairs it or if the local authority is issued with a job number and it carries out the repairs; and if each leak in one area requires the local authority to get a different job number or, if when issues have been notified to a local authority, it can work on resolving all issues that arise until solved. [3167/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Since 1 January 2014, Irish Water has statutory responsibility for all aspects of water services planning, delivery and operation at national, regional and local levels. Water supply issues are operational matters for the utility and one in which I have no function.

Irish Water has established a dedicated team to deal with representations and queries from public representatives. The team can be contacted via email at oireachtasmembers@water.ie or by telephone on a dedicated number, 1890 578 578.

Water Services Provision

270. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if Irish Water or the local authority in question is responsible for providing a water tankard for an area if residents in the area are left without a water supply for more than 24 hours. [3168/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Since 1 January 2014, Irish Water has statutory responsibility for all aspects of water services planning, delivery and operation at national, regional and local levels. The provision of water tankers is an operational matter for the utility and one in which I have no function.

Irish Water has established a dedicated team to deal with representations and queries from public representatives. The team can be contacted via email at oireachtasmembers@water.ie or by telephone on a dedicated number, 1890 578 578.

Planning Issues

271. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to local concerns regarding the lack of any local area plan in respect of the proposed substantial additional housing units proposed by his Department and Dublin City Council for the Finglas area; his views on the need to provide corresponding additional services in respect of schools, health, policing and so on in order that sustainability can be ensured; and if he will arrange the commissioning of such a development plan as a matter of urgency. [3178/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The City Council approved the Dublin City Development Plan 2016-2022 in October 2016. The development plan includes a schedule of local area plans, which the Dublin City Councillors agreed should be prepared in the lifetime of the development plan. These are local area plans for: Ballymun; Harold's Cross; Moore Street and Environs; Park West/Cherry Orchard; Phibsborough; Poolbeg West; and Stoneybatter, Manor Street and O'Devaney Gardens.

The Council has also approved the making of a number of Local Environmental Improvement Plans insofar as resources permit. The Local Environmental Improvement Plans schedule contained in the City Development Plan includes Finglas.

It is considered that the new City Development Plan provides the core strategy and framework to provide for much needed housing in all parts of the city with associated social and physical infrastructure.

Private Rented Accommodation Data

272. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the amount of former local authority housing that is now in the private rented sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3179/17]

273. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the amount of former local authority housing now in the private rented sector that is being subsidised through the payment of rent subsidies through RAS, HAP, RS and so on, ultimately paid to private landlords; his views on the rationality from the State's perspective of this practice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3180/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 272 and 273 together.

The 2015 Annual Report of the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) reported 319,609 registered tenancies with 170,282 landlords and 693,314 occupants in the private rental sector. The NESC Report, Ireland's Rental Sector: Pathways to Secure Occupancy and Affordable Supply, published in May 2015, estimates that over one-third of all households in the private rented sector are in receipt of social housing support.

In relation to the amount of former local authority housing that is now in the private rented sector, and the amount of former local authority housing now in the private rented sector that is occupied by tenants under the Rental Accommodation Scheme, the Housing Assistance Payment and Rent Supplement, my Department does not hold or collate this information.

The Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme 2016 came into operation on 1 January 2016, replacing the 1995 Tenant Purchase Scheme. Tenant purchase schemes are an important way to help people who would otherwise struggle to buy a home, to realise their home ownership ambitions, while at the same time supporting long-term commitment to a location by residents. The current scheme, through a claw-back mechanism, discourages the early re-sale of properties at a profit, thereby encouraging people to only buy houses they intend to live in. The new scheme is open to eligible tenants, including joint tenants, of local authority houses that are available for sale under the scheme.

Incremental purchase protects the State's investment in the sale of the house to the tenant by giving the housing authority a share of any profits made on the resale of the house within a reasonable period after purchase. This was not the case under the 1995 scheme. The local authority will use these funds to provide new housing or refurbish existing stock. Incremental purchase promotes sustainable communities as it encourages purchasers to stay in their homes for a reasonable period after the purchase. As part of the terms of the scheme purchasers must live in the house as their normal place of residence and get agreement from their local authority if they want to sell, let or sub-let the house. Purchasers are able to sell their house; however, within the incremental charge period they will have to pay back the value of the outstanding charge on the house to the local authority.

National Planning Framework

274. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the way in which the national planning framework will deal with surpluses of planned capacities for growth that exists in the strategic planning areas of the planning regions (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3194/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Significant progress has been made in recent years in addressing the issue of excessive zoning of lands within the planning process, particularly for housing, through the introduction of Core Strategies now required for all local authority development plans under Section 10(2A) of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended by the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2010. In 2011, my Department received a report from the then Regional Authorities on Regional Planning Guidelines implementation which indicated that, prior to the introduction of the above amendment, 41,788 hectares of land in total had been zoned for housing, sufficient for the provision of 1.1 million new homes or an additional population of 2.64 million people, including in certain in appropriate and poorly serviced locations.

This level of over-zoning was unwarranted, was too often based on aspirational planning, without regard for wider implications as to if or how all these lands could be developed over time and would have presented huge difficulties in terms of the co-ordination of future development and the associated services and infrastructure provision.

Following the introduction of amending provisions in the 2010 Act and drawing from guidance in the National Spatial Strategy and Regional Planning Guidelines, local authorities rapidly reviewed their development plans and local area plans such that the level of lands zoned and prioritised for housing as Phase 1 lands with in their statutory plans was scaled back to 11,113 hectares, or lands sufficient to provide for around 300,000 new dwellings, which would equate to approximately 12 years ' supply, in the context of the Economic and Social Research Institute's estimate of the new housing requirement of 25,000 units per annum.

The excess lands were either de-zoned or changed zoning objective to another appropriate use such as employment and amenity lands, or were identified for later phases of development, pending the utilisation of all lands zoned for priority development.

My Department monitors all city and county development plans and local area plans to secure broad alignment between the National Spatial Strategy, which will be succeeded later this year with the new National Planning Framework, and Regional Planning Guidelines last published in 2010 and local authority statutory plans.

My Department is currently engaged in technical analysis of the 2016 Census in the context of providing medium-to longer- term national and regional population and housing requirement estimates for the National Planning Framework, which, in turn, will inform new Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES), succeeding the existing Planning Guidelines. I will give consideration to advancing interim guidance to planning authorities on the appropriate population estimates that their statutory plans should provide for, in advance of the publication of the RSESs later this year, and on foot of the publication of the National Planning Framework, so that statutory plans reflect the latest Census data and plan pro-actively for the future on a sound and integrated basis.

More generally, my Department is satisfied that as regards the major metropolitan areas, in particular, where new housing demand is most acute, the existing round of Regional Planning Guidelines continue to provide a reasonable basis for planning for growth and housing provision and for consideration of housing proposals by planning authorities and An Bord Pleanála, ahead of updated guidelines being finalised.

Road Network

275. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and

Local Government when funding will be announced for a link road (details supplied). [3205/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The aim of the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund is to relieve critical infrastructural blockages to enable the accelerated delivery of housing on key development sites and to improve the economic viability of new housing projects in Dublin and in urban areas with high demand for housing. The €200 m Fund will be composed of an Exchequer allocation of €150 million, matched by a €50 million contribution from participating local authorities.

A Call for Proposals under the Fund was issued to local authorities on 26 August 2016, with a closing date for receipt of proposals of 14 October. It was open to all local authorities to apply, with funding to be allocated on the basis of a competitive bid process. Twenty-one local authorities have submitted a total of 74 project applications relating to specific sites or development land areas. Dublin City Council submitted a proposal in relation to the area, referred to in the Question.

The overall total cost of the 74 funding bid applications is approximately €800 m, with funding of some €600 million being sought from the Exchequer and local authorities agreeing to fund approximately €200 million as part of their matching fund requirements. It will not be possible to approve all applications, given the scale and value of applications received.

The viability of the applications is currently being examined in detail against the assessment criteria set out in the Call for Proposals, with a focus on the level of funding required and what it might leverage, the number of housing units that could be delivered, their strategic location and speed of delivery, and affordability levels of a proportion of the homes. Following completion of this analysis, I intend to announce successful applications during the first quarter of this year.

Carer's Benefit Applications

276. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an application for carer's benefit for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2533/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I confirm that my department received an application for carer's benefit from the person concerned on 20 October 2016. It is a condition for receipt of carer's benefit 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.

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 1 December 2016 of this decision, the reason for it and of his right of review and appeal.

The person concerned has requested a review of this decision and submitted additional evidence in support of his application. The review 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.

School Meals Programme

277. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Social Protection the steps he taking to ensure that food and beverages being served in schools here avoid being calorie-dense fried foods and processed food items; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2864/17]

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 some €40 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.

The objective of the scheme is to provide regular, nutritious food to children who are unable, due to lack of good quality food, to take full advantage of the education provided to them. Applicants to the scheme are directed to the Department's website which clearly advises that funding is for healthy nutritious food only and examples of food items are provided. Access to various healthy eating documents and guidelines are available on the school meals site including a link to the recently launched 'Healthy Food for Life – the Healthy Eating Guidelines and Food Pyramid' by the Department of Health.

Schools and organisations must reapply for funding in advance of each school year and are required to submit detailed records at the end of each school year. Expenditure on unhealthy food items is deducted from the following year's funding allocation. In addition, the Department initiated an on-site inspection programme in 2012 in participating schools to ensure that the scheme rules are being adhered to. The inspection process is being rolled out across all schools and includes an assessment of the type of food provided.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

School Meals Programme

278. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Social Protection his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding the free school meals programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3133/17]

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 some €40 million in 2016. As part of Budget 2017, I announced an additional €5.7 million for school meals which will benefit over 50,000 extra children.

Priority for new applications for funding has been given to schools which are part of the Department of Education and Skills initiative for disadvantaged schools "Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools" (DEIS) in line with the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, Better Outcomes Brighter Futures. From September 2016 additional funding is being provided to DEIS schools already participating in the scheme to provide breakfast and lunch to pupils. Also, some 17 new DEIS schools have joined the scheme for the current academic year and a further 8 have expressed an interest in joining.

The school referred to by the Deputy previously applied to join the scheme and was informed that no provision could be provided at that time as they were not designated DEIS status.

The additional funding allocated in Budget 2017 also provides for the inclusion in the scheme, from September 2017, of any additional schools not currently part of DEIS and deemed

to be disadvantaged following the completion of the review underway in the Department of Education and Skills. There is also some provision towards the extension of the scheme to breakfast clubs in non-DEIS schools from September 2017 which is the first time in many years that increased payments will be provided to schools outside of DEIS. Priority will be provided to those schools where there is most need and they will be contacted by the Department inviting them to join the school meals scheme in due course.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Farm Assist Scheme Appeals

279. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a decision has been made on a partial capacity benefit application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2537/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Partial Capacity Benefit (PCB) is a Social Welfare scheme which allows a person, who may not have full capacity for work, return to employment and continue to receive a payment from my Department. A person who applies for PCB will, in the first instance, be assessed by a medical assessor who will assess the restriction on their capacity for work.

The PCB application in respect of the person concerned has been received in my Department and has been referred for assessment to the Medical Advisor (MA) who has been asked to expedite this case. When the MA's opinion has been received, the matter will be considered further and the person concerned notified of the position.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Farm Assist Scheme Appeals

280. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a decision has been made on a farm assist appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2565/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that the appeal from the person concerned was referred to an Appeals Officer who has decided to hold an oral hearing in this case on 8 February 2017. The person concerned has been notified of the arrangements for the 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 any further assistance with this case please do not hesitate to contact Philip in my office.

Youth Unemployment Data

281. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the rate of youth unemployment here; how this figure compares with the European average; and if he will make a

statement on the matter. [2566/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The rate of youth unemployment was 14.5% in December 2016. This compares with the most recent available EU figure (from Eurostat) of 18.8% as at November 2016.

Reflecting the impact of government policy, and the overall improvement in the labour market, the rate of youth unemployment has fallen sharply from a peak of over 31.1% in 2012. At that time, the EU youth unemployment rate was 23.1%. Irish youth unemployment has thus fallen from well above the EU average in 2012 to significantly below the average at the end of 2016.

While this improvement is welcome, the Government recognises the importance of a continued focus on measures to facilitate young unemployed people find and sustain employment.

The key objective of Ireland's policy response to the EU Recommendation on a Youth Guarantee is to help newly unemployed young people find and secure sustainable jobs. In this regard there is monthly engagement by case officers with young people to assist them to prepare, review and, if appropriate, revise personal progression plans. Where young people do not find work relatively quickly, additional supports may be offered, both through reserved places on existing employment and training schemes and through youth-specific measures. Most such offers (over 70%) are in existing further education or training programmes. Others are in existing community-based employment programmes such as CE, Gateway and Tús. Pathways to Work 2016-2020 continues to prioritise these measures for the young unemployed and further commits to a number of additional measures.

I am confident these measures, and continuing economic recovery, will support further reductions in youth unemployment and add to the substantial improvements that have already been seen over the last few years.

Social Welfare Benefits Data

282. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of households in receipt of FIS; the number of households in receipt of the back-to-work family dividend; the number of households in receipt of both payments in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2567/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The total number of Family Income Supplement (FIS) claimants and Back to Work Family Dividend (BTWFD) recipients is as follows:

BTWFD	12,920
FIS	57,257
BTWFD and FIS	9,799

Not all recipients of BTWFD would automatically qualify for FIS as there are differences in the specific qualifying conditions for each scheme.

Paternity Leave Scheme

283. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of persons to date who have applied for paternity benefit; the number of persons who have received pater-

nity benefit in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2568/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The paternity benefit scheme became operational on 1st September 2016. The number of claims received and awarded in the period 1 September to 11 January 2017 is set out in the table:

01/09/2016 – 11/01/2017	Received	Awarded
Paternity Benefit	7,403	5,545

Based on the number of applications received to date the Department expects to receive around 20,000 applications for paternity benefit during 2017. The budget allocation in respect of paternity benefit for 2017 is €16m.

Rent Supplement Scheme Data

284. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of households by county in receipt of rent supplement; the number of households by county that have had rent supplement increased above the prescribed limit in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2569/17]

319. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the total number of persons currently in receipt of rent support on a county basis or in each local authority area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3230/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 284 and 319 together.

The rent supplement scheme is supporting approximately 48,000 tenants at a total cost of €253 million in 2017. A breakdown of rent supplement recipients by county is provided in the attached tabular statement, this information is not maintained by local authority area.

In recognition of the ongoing supply difficulties, my Department continues to implement a targeted case-by-case policy approach that allows for flexibility where landlords seek rents in excess of the limits. To date, approximately 10,900 persons at imminent risk of homelessness have been supported through increased rent supplement payments. There has been a significant reduction in these cases following the introduction of the increased rent limits from 1 July 2016. A county breakdown of these payments is provided in the tabular statement.

As the Deputies will be aware, the implementation of the Housing Assistance Payment (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 during 2017. Under HAP, responsibility for the provision of rental assistance to those with a long-term housing need transfers to local authorities, under the auspices of the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government.

From 1st December 2016, the HAP scheme is now operational in 28 of the 31 local authority areas. It is expected that HAP will be fully rolled out to the remaining Dublin administrative areas from 1st March 2017.

The HAP was first piloted in the Limerick area in early 2014, and there are now some 1,540 HAP supported tenancies in Limerick City and County. The number of HAP recipients in Limerick has exceeded the number of rent supplement recipients (c. 950). In addition to the ongoing transfer of tenancies from rent supplement to HAP, the majority of new applicants in Limerick

seeking State support towards their rent are being processed under HAP rather than rent supplement. This activity is reflected in the low number of increased payments provided under rent supplement in this area.

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

Table 1: Rent Supplement Recipients by County as at end December, 2016

County	Recipients
CARLOW	593
CAVAN	391
CLARE	423
CORK	4,958
DONEGAL	415
DUBLIN	20,561
GALWAY	2,506
KERRY	1,554
KILDARE	2,579
KILKENNY	319
LAOIS	871
LEITRIM	281
LIMERICK	954
LONGFORD	401
LOUTH	859
MAYO	1,074
MEATH	1,001
MONAGHAN	188
OFFALY	563
ROSCOMMON	566
SLIGO	289
TIPPERARY	901
WATERFORD	590
WESTMEATH	1,299
WEXFORD	1,960
WICKLOW	1,945
Grand Total	48,041

Table 2: Total Cumulative Increased Rental Payments by County as at 16 January 2017

County	Awards under National Tenancy Sustainment Framework	Awards under protocol with Threshold	Total no. of increased payments by County
CARLOW	74		74
CAVAN	63		63
CLARE	60		60
CORK	448	102	550
DONEGAL	-		-

County	Awards under National Tenancy Sustainment Framework	Awards under protocol with Threshold	Total no. of increased payments by County
DUBLIN	4,181	2,509	6,690
GALWAY	204	2	206
KERRY	193		193
KILDARE	549	3	552
KILKENNY	135		135
LAOIS	119		119
LEITRIM	99		99
LIMERICK	16		16
LONGFORD	310		310
LOUTH	155		155
MAYO	3		3
MEATH	430		430
MONAGHAN	1		1
OFFALY	64		64
ROSCOMMON	51		51
SLIGO	1		1
TIPPERARY	283		283
WATERFORD	62		62
WESTMEATH	369		369
WEXFORD	22		22
WICKLOW	389	3	392
Overall Total	8,281	2,619	10,900

Carer's Allowance Delays

285. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection his plans to tackle welfare fraud; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2570/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The majority of people in receipt of a payment from the Department of Social Protection receive what they are entitled to be paid. Nevertheless, my Department recognises that abuse of the welfare system is an ongoing reality and must be tackled. Anti-fraud measures are set out in the Department's Compliance and Anti-Fraud Strategy 2014 – 2018 and are designed to prevent and detect fraud, to ensure effective oversight of schemes, to pursue prosecution of offenders and the recovery of any overpaid entitlements identified. I will be publishing the report on the implementation of the Strategy for the year 2016 before the end of March.

All Departmental staff exercise a control and compliance function in processing new applications and reviewing existing entitlements. The systems used to support schemes are designed to detect wrongful claiming and to highlight anomalies. In addition, the Department's inspectorate undertakes detailed examination of claims on a risk assessed and random basis. This is supplemented by at least three fraud and error surveys of Departmental schemes annually and by the use of data matching and data analytics techniques.

In addition, my Department's Special Investigation Unit, which comprises trained inspectors and Garda officers, is tasked with undertaking targeted and systematic examination of claims to tackle fraud and to work with other enforcement agencies to identify more serious breaches of the law.

Cross-functional and targeted actions are undertaken - both internally and in joint operations with other national and international agencies - to ensure a strategic response to high risk sectors or where fraud is considered to be most prevalent. In particular, actions are focused on sectors of the economy where there is a risk of concurrent working and claiming social welfare payments. New forms of fraud continue to be identified and the approach of the Department needs to be sufficiently flexible to combat all threats.

Overall, my Department conducts around one million claim reviews annually comprising customer entitlement enquiries, inspections and special investigations. Early indications for 2016 are that these activities have prevented incorrect expenditure of over half a billion euro, in what my Department refers to as control savings.

The continued roll-out of the Public Services Card has considerably reduced the potential for identity fraud and my Department has deployed identity and analytics software and other intelligence systems to reinforce its fraud prevention work. Members of the public also play an important role in supporting these anti-fraud activities and some 19,000 reports from concerned citizens have been received during 2016. To this end, I plan to launch a fraud awareness campaign over the coming months in recognition of the important role the public plays in this regard.

I am looking at a number of additional anti-fraud measures that I hope to introduce in 2017. These include publishing the names of persons who are convicted of social welfare fraud and applying surcharges on overpayments resulting from fraud.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Delays

286. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason for the delay in dealing with a carer's allowance review for a person (details supplied); when a decision will issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2595/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The application for carer's allowance in respect of the person concerned was awarded on 19 January 2017 and the first payment is due to issue to the person's nominated post office on 9 February 2017.

Arrears of allowance due from 30 June 2016 to 8 February 2017 will issue shortly.

The person concerned was notified of these details on 19 January 2017.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Appeals

287. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will review the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2603/17]

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 19th January 2017, 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.

Social Welfare Benefits

288. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of claims made for health and safety benefit in 2014, 2015 and 2016; the sectors of employment involved and the number of applicants from each employment sector, in tabular form; if he will increase the weekly payment involved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2631/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The number of claims for health and safety benefit (HSB) received and awarded in each of the years 2014, 2015 and 2016 are as set out in the following table:

Health and Safety Benefit (HSB)		
-	Claims Received	Claims Awarded
2014	321	244
2015	314	229
2016	295	189

The Department does not record information regarding the sectors of employment involved or the number of applicants from each employment sector, as it is not relevant to qualification for health and safety benefit.

Benefit rates are graduated according to an applicant's earnings in the relevant tax year and reduced rates of HSB are payable where the average reckonable weekly earnings are less than the prescribed amount. Currently, a person with earnings of less than €300 per week in the relevant tax year receives a personal rate ranging from €84.50 to €147.30, while reduced rates for qualified adults may also apply. HSB recipients with average earnings over €300 per week in the relevant tax year receive the full personal rate of €188 per week.

HSB recipients will receive a €5 per week increase in the weekly headline rate and a 2.6% increase in the graduated rates of payment from 13th March 2017, as part of the measures announced in Budget 2017.

Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility

289. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will review the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2641/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The person in question was in receipt of another social welfare payment, or an increase was paid to another for his benefit, during the period 13 January 2016 to 13 December 2016. Consequently, the amount of social welfare already paid required calculation and was deducted from any arrears due. This process was completed by my department as quickly as possible. Disability allowance arrears issued to the person in question on 19 January 2017.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Jobseeker's Allowance Appeals

290. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will review an application for a jobseekers' allowance in respect of a person (details supplied); his views on the fact that a bank account held in the UK which was closed seven years ago and was rarely used by the person when they lived in the UK, should not be part of the application process in view of the fact the person lives here and has tried to get details from the bank without success. [2654/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that the appeals in respect of Jobseekers Allowance and Supplementary Welfare Allowance from the person concerned were referred to an Appeals Officer who has decided to convene an oral hearing in this case.

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

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

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Rural Social Scheme

291. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Social Protection his plans to make changes to the format of the rural social scheme and Tús schemes; his plans to amalgamate any of the community employment and work activation schemes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2679/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): My Department provides a range of programmes, including Tús, Rural Social Scheme (RSS) and Community Employment (CE), to cater for those most distant from the labour market. These programmes aim to enhance the employability of disadvantaged and unemployed persons by providing work experience and training opportunities for them within their communities while at the same time delivering a range of positive benefits within local communities.

Tús was introduced in 2011 and the numbers on CE were expanded as a direct response to the growth in the level of unemployment during the financial crisis. It is in this context that the Department did a comprehensive review of CE and the other employment schemes that was completed in late 2015. The findings, which have not been published to date, will be considered as part of a Memorandum to Government on work programmes in the coming weeks.

In any consideration of these schemes, it will be important also to be cognisant of the valuable community and voluntary services delivered to local communities. In this context, it is worth noting that I recently announced details about the roll out of 500 additional places on the RSS which increases the overall numbers on the RSS to 3,100. This is the first increase in places in over 10 years.

I trust that clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Payments

292. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will review the current rates for half rate home carers; and his views on whether the current rate does not reflect the amount of time and effort many carers put in to caring for a person, that this payment should reflect that and that without these carers the State would have substantial obligations and costs. [2687/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I would like to acknowledge the key role that carers have in our society. The importance of their contribution is reflected in the range of significant supports provided by my Department to support carers in their caring role and ameliorate the financial burden of caring – indeed it is worth pointing out that the income supports that carers receive from my Department are among the highest rates in Europe.

The income supports for carers from my Department include carer's benefit (CB), carers allowance (CA) including half-rate carer's allowance, carer's support grant (CSG), domiciliary care allowance (DCA), the household benefits package (HBP) to carers residing with the recipient of care), and the free travel scheme.

The CA is a means tested payment for people who are providing care and attention to a person who needs it. Half-rate CA is paid in addition to certain primary social welfare payments where the carer meets the criteria for both schemes. Furthermore half-rate CA is also paid in addition to a qualified adult rate increase where the carer's spouse, civil partner, or co-habiting partner is entitled to a payment for them on his/her claim.

Carers' providing care to more than one person are entitled to an additional payment. I must point out that the income disregard and means test for carers is the most generous within the social welfare system and, at the full payment rate, the amount of weekly earnings disregarded is €332.50 for a single person and €665 for a people who are married, in a civil partnership or cohabiting.

I have no plans to review the current arrangements around half-rate carer allowance payment. The CA payment, like all of my Department's schemes, is kept under review as part of the budgetary process.

I hope this clarifies the issue for the Deputy.

Civil Registration Legislation

293. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding the Civil Registration (Amendment) Bill 2014; and when the bill likely to complete its passage through the House of the Oireachtas.; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2714/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Civil Registration (Amendment) Bill 2014 passed all stages in both Houses of the Oireachtas and was enacted in December 2014.

The Act provides for a wide range of matters relating to the registration of life events in the State.

Certain provisions, such as those relating to marriages of convenience, were commenced in August of 2015 but it has not been possible to commence all sections of the Act. This delay is mainly due to industrial action by staff in the Civil Registration Service.

Staffing and resolution of industrial relations issues in the Civil Registration Service are a matter for the HSE. However, I am concerned about the matter and my officials, while not directly involved in the dispute, have made the HSE aware of these concerns. At this point I am not in a position to say when further provisions may be commenced.

Social Welfare Code

294. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of social welfare sanctions applied to those persons receiving payment as lone parents, in tabular form. [2795/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Penalty rates only apply to clients who are selected for the Activation process and fail to engage. One Parent Family Payment clients are not selected for Activation and therefore, no sanctions can be imposed on their payments.

The Jobseeker's Transitional payment is a special arrangement under the Jobseeker's Allowance scheme which aims to support lone parents into the workforce while they have young children. The payment is known as JST.

Jobseeker Transition clients are selected for Activation and therefore, sanctions for not engaging in the Activation process can apply.

- 240 penalty rates were applied to JST claims during 2016.

- Since June 2011, there have been 452 penalty rates applied to JST category claims.

Disability Allowance Eligibility

295. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a decision has been made on a review of an application for disability allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2866/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The application for disability allowance, based upon the evidence submitted, was refused on medical grounds and the person in question was notified in writing of this decision on 4 March 2016.

The person in question requested a review of the decision by a deciding officer (DO) and submitted additional evidence for consideration. The review has now been concluded by a DO but the outcome is that the decision to refuse on medical grounds has been confirmed. The person in question is being notified directly of the outcome of this review. They will also be advised of their right to appeal this decision to the independent social welfare appeals office.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Rural Social Scheme

296. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason for the new entrant term limitations for the rural social scheme, which has up to now been an income support for small under employed farmers that were entitled to stay on the scheme as long as their

situation remained the same; if he will address the hardship this change places on small farmers on RSS that are not unemployed and that do not want to move away from farming; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2873/17]

302. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will reverse the changes made to the rural social scheme limiting participants to two terms of three years but not consecutively in view of the fact that this is a very important income support for farmers with small holdings and that do not have full employment on their farms; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3130/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 296 and 302 together.

As the Deputies are aware, the rural social scheme (RSS) provides opportunities for farmers and fishermen and women who are currently in receipt of specified social welfare payments to work to provide certain services of benefit to rural communities. While communities benefit from the skills and talents of local farmers and fishermen, participants also have the opportunity to improve existing skills, or develop new skills, while performing valuable work in their local communities.

As part of the social welfare budget package for 2017, I announced an increase of €5 a week in the personal rate of payment for RSS participants from March 2017. In recognition of the crucial work undertaken in rural communities under the RSS, I also announced an additional 500 places on the scheme which will be rolled out over the coming weeks. This will increase the overall numbers on the scheme to 3,100.

Eligibility for participation on the scheme will continue to be limited to those in receipt of certain specified social welfare payments and all participants must also be actively engaged in farming or fishing. In future, all participants to the RSS will have to be over 25 years of age. I believe this is appropriate as it will give younger people an opportunity to explore other training or education options before entering a long-term work programme such as the RSS.

It should be noted that almost 50% of the current participants have been on the RSS for over 10 years. As a result, opportunities for new people to go on the scheme are very limited. It is in this context that I have introduced a 6 year overall participation limit on the scheme. This will ensure that there will be a throughput of places available. It should also be remembered that income support will still be available to eligible farmers and fishermen who are not on RSS in the form of Farm or Fish Assist.

Existing RSS participants will remain on the scheme as long as they continue to satisfy the eligibility conditions of the scheme. The new conditions outlined above will only apply to new RSS participants who commence on the scheme from 1st February 2017.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputies.

Departmental Staff Data

297. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of secretary generals in his department; the annual pay of each secretary general within his department at 1 Jan 2017; the expected change in that pay as a consequence of the provisions of the Lansdowne Road Agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2914/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): There is one Secretary General

employed in my Department. Her annual salary at 1 January 2017 was €176,350.

Under the provisions of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2015 (FEMPI Act 2015), for those on salaries in excess of €110,000 the salary reductions imposed under the FEMPI Act 2013 will be restored in three equal phases on 1 April 2017, 1 April 2018 and 1 April 2019. A circular setting out the revised salary rates applicable from 1 April 2017 to general Civil Service grades, including Secretaries General, is currently in preparation and will be issued by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in due course.

Departmental Staff Data

298. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of assistant secretaries general in his Department; the annual pay of each assistant secretary general within his Department at 1 January 2017; the expected change in that pay as a consequence of the provisions of the Lansdowne Road agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2930/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): There are ten Assistant Secretaries General employed in my Department. The annual cost for each Assistant Secretary General at 1 January 2017 is as follows: €119, 572 (x 2 Assistant Secretaries), €124,917 (x 2), €130,706, €136,496 (x 4) and €143,535.

Under the provisions of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2015 (FEMPI Act 2015), for those on salaries in excess of €110,000 the salary reductions imposed under the FEMPI Act 2013 will be restored in three equal phases on 1 April 2017, 1 April 2018 and 1 April 2019. A circular setting out the revised salary rates applicable from 1 April 2017 to general Civil Service grades, including Assistant Secretaries General, is currently in preparation and will be issued by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in due course.

Social Welfare Appeals

299. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Social Protection when he expects a social welfare appeal will be decided in respect of a person (details supplied). [2964/17]

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

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

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Youth Guarantee

300. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Social Protection his plans in regard to the youth guarantee (details supplied) in Ballymun. [3062/17]

307. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason the youth guarantee was not continued in Ballymun and rolled out as promised when the pilot scheme started. [3207/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 300 and 307 together.

Under the European Commission's call for proposals for preparatory actions under the 'Youth Guarantee', the Department of Social Protection obtained EU funding to pilot a Youth Guarantee Scheme in Ballymun. This was a once-off call for pilot projects. The purpose of the Ballymun Youth Guarantee (BYG) pilot project was to test key elements to inform the national roll-out of the Youth Guarantee. The project officially finished on the 31st December 2014.

Lessons learned from the Ballymun Youth Guarantee pilot project have informed the national roll-out of the Youth Guarantee in a number of ways.

First, the BYG project showed the importance of close engagement by case officers with young jobseekers. This has informed reforms to Intreo processes such that there is now monthly engagement with all young people by case officers to discuss and achieve personal progression plans.

Second, the BYG project identified a need for a more intensive approach with disadvantaged youth distant from the labour market, to build employability and work readiness skills. This approach has been taken forward in the First Steps programme.

A third learning was the importance of career guidance. *Pathways to Work* 2016-2020 commits to designing, developing and implementing an accredited professional development programme for Intreo case officers. This will benefit all jobseekers, including young jobseekers, and will contribute to improving the quality of Intreo services.

Finally, the BYG project was progressed through partnership working at national and local levels. The scale, scope and nature of this partnership working was facilitated by extensive, pre-existing community infrastructures and relationships in Ballymun. It is not feasible or necessarily desirable to replicate these structures in every community in which Intreo offices operate. Nevertheless, *Pathways to Work* 2016-2020 contains a number of actions to strengthen local arrangements and protocols for partnership working, including for example through Regional Skills Fora, which will include a specific focus on youth.

Already, youth unemployment has fallen from a peak of 31% in 2012 to 14.5% at the end of 2016. From a situation where youth unemployment here was well above the EU average of 23% in 2012, it is now significantly below the current EU average figure of 18.8%.

I am satisfied current policies, including measures drawn from the learning of the BYG project, will support further reductions in youth unemployment in the period ahead.

Question No. 301 withdrawn.

Question No. 302 answered with Question No. 296.

State Pensions

303. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Social Protection if the changes planned to come into effect in 2020 in the way the State pension (contributory) is calculated, taking total contributions into account rather than the current averaging system, will be retro-

spectively applied to persons currently receiving a reduced rate of State pension (contributory) due to the averaging system; if he has decided the number of full contributions that will be required to qualify for the full rate of State pension (contributory) on or after 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3135/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): There are a number of ways to qualify for a State pension. The rate of payment under the State pension (contributory) scheme is related to contributions paid over the years into the Social Insurance Fund, and credited contributions where applicable. As such, those with a stronger attachment to the workforce, who have paid more into that fund, are more likely to be paid at a higher rate under that scheme, than those with more intermittent contributions made during their working life.

At present, entitlement to the contributory pension is determined by means of a 'yearly average' calculation, where the total contributions paid or credited are divided by the number of years of the working life. The yearly average test has been in existence since 1961 when contributory pensions were first introduced. Payment rates are banded. For example, someone with a yearly average of 48 or more contributions will qualify for a full pension, whereas someone with a yearly average of 20-29 will qualify for a pension at the 85% rate.

Where people cannot qualify for a full rate contributory pension as a result of an intermittent PRSI record, the social protection system provides alternative methods of supporting such people in old age. For example, if their spouse has a contributory pension, they may qualify for an Increase for a Qualified Adult amounting up to 90% of a full rate pension, which by default is paid directly to them. Alternatively, they may qualify for a means-tested State pension (non-contributory), amounting up to 95% of the maximum contributory pension rate.

The total contributions approach (TCA) is one of a number of planned reforms to the State pension set out in the National Pensions Framework (NPF) commissioned by the then Government and published in March 2010. The aim of the TCA is to make the rate of contributory pension more closely match contributions made by a person. Officials of my Department are currently working on the detailed development of the TCA with a view to making proposals for consideration later this year. An important element in the final design of the scheme will be the position of people who have gaps in their contribution records for various reasons, and this factor is being considered very carefully in developing this reform. Although TCA is expected to replace the yearly average approach for new pensioners from 2020, that date is subject to change as this is a very significant reform with considerable legal, administrative, and technical elements in its implementation.

It should be noted that there will be people for whom the new scheme will be more beneficial, and others for whom the older basis was to their advantage. Therefore, if a cohort of pensioners is allowed choose the scheme which pays them at a higher rate, regardless of when they reached retirement age, this would inevitably result in a significant cost to the Exchequer, which would reduce the funds available for pensions generally.

The forthcoming independent Actuarial Review of the Social Insurance Fund will provide data that will allow my officials to accurately cost and project various options available under the TCA reform. Following the analysis of that data, it is intended to have a public consultation, in mid-2017, and following this, proposals on the final details of the scheme, including the number of years contributions required for a full pension, will be made by the Government to the Oireachtas before the end of the year.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Invalidity Pension Payments

304. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will review the case of a person (details supplied) who has applied for an invalidity pension; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3169/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The lady referred to has been awarded invalidity pension with effect from the 27 October 2016. Payment will issue to her nominated bank account on the 09 February 2017. Any arrears due from 27 October 2016 to 08 February 2017 (less any overlapping social welfare payment and/or outstanding overpayment) will issue in due course. The lady in question was notified of this decision on the 23 January 2017.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

JobPath Data

305. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of persons given penalties while attending the services of jobpath in Coolock since the service began to date, by month, in tabular form. [3203/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): 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 service is delivered by two companies, Seetec and Turas Nua.

The first referrals from the Coolock Intreo Centre were made in February 2016, and to date almost 700 clients have engaged with the service. A total of 24 clients have had a penalty rate applied.

It should be noted that all decisions regarding the application of penalty rates are taken by officials of the Department only: who apply standard rules and processes, which include written and verbal warnings and an opportunity for the jobseeker to re-engage prior to the application of a reduced payment rate.

The following table shows the numbers of clients engaged with the service who had a penalty rate applied, by month.

Month	No. Penalty Rates Applied
Feb-16	0
Mar-16	3
Apr-16	1
May-16	3
Jun-16	10
Jul-16	0
Aug-16	1
Sep-16	1
Oct-16	2
Nov-16	3
Dec-16	0
Total	24

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Youth Guarantee

306. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Social Protection if there has been a review of piloting a scheme similar to the youth guarantee for lone parents; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3206/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The implementation of a youth guarantee in the context of the Pathways to Work strategy was to ensure that young people were supported and positioned to benefit from the recovery in employment. This focused on engaging with, and supporting, long term unemployed and young jobseekers on the Live Register on a pathway into employment.

The Pathways to Work action plan includes an action related to lone parents which is to carry out a value for money review of the Jobseeker's Transitional Payment. This will now be incorporated into the Independent Review of the OFP reforms as set down in legislation. My Department is currently drafting the Request for Tender for this review.

While there are no further Pathways to Work actions that cover the activation of lone parents as a specific target group, I must highlight that all lone parents on a Jobseeker's Allowance (JA) or Jobseeker's Transitional Payment (JST) have access to activation supports. Lone parents on a One-Parent Family Payment (OFP) can avail of activation supports voluntarily if they so wish.

The activation of JST recipients has commenced. These customers are being engaged with by Intreo Case Officers in a supportive way via a one to one meeting where they get assistance to develop a personal progression plan. This plan can include education, training and employment supports. This approach is tailored to the needs of lone parents and the supports are available for up to seven years while they remain on JST. Given that this targeted and extensive support already exists I have no plans to implement anything further at this time.

Of the current cohort of JST recipients (approximately 14,500) there are currently over 6,000 in an Activation phase i.e. they have already been selected for activation and have been case managed, are scheduled for an engagement or are awaiting an appointment time. Over 3,000 have been fully case managed which means they have met with a Case Officer and have agreed a personal plan and are progressing with this plan. Of these approximately 1,600 have moved into some form of education and training ranging from personal development, to childcare to third level education. In total over 9,000 have been activated to date.

Former OFP recipients who moved to a JA Payment i.e. those with a youngest child 14 year of age or older, gain access to the Intreo supports via the standard activation process for jobseekers commencing with a group engagement with a Case Officer.

Question No. 307 answered with Question No. 300.

Social Welfare Appeals Status

308. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will finalise a social welfare appeal for a person (details supplied). [3211/17]

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 20 October 2016. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant papers and comments by or on behalf of the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought from the Department of Social Protection. These papers have been received in the Social Welfare

Appeals Office on 16 December 2016 and the case will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on 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

309. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will expedite an application for an invalidity pension for a person (details supplied). [3213/17]

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

The Department received an application for IP from the lady referred to on 08 December 2016. Her application was disallowed on the grounds that the medical conditions for the scheme were not satisfied. She was notified on the 20 January 2017 of this decision, the reasons for it and of her right of review and appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Departmental Schemes

310. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the extent to which backlogs have been addressed in respect of various headings and payments operated by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3221/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): My Department measures the performance of each scheme area on a monthly basis. Backlogs in each area can be measured by the number of claims pending a decision at the end of each month.

Figures for 2016 are currently being finalised by my officials, and I will supply the requested data directly to the Deputy as soon as this process is completed.

Social Welfare Schemes

311. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the degree to which adequate resources continue to be made available to his Department to meet exceptional needs payment requirements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3222/17]

315. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the extent to which community welfare services remain readily accessible in all areas throughout the country with particular reference to meeting out of hours and emergency needs when necessary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3226/17]

320. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the total number

of persons in receipt of a basis supplementary social welfare payment; the extent to which the numbers dependent on such payment has fluctuated in each of the past five years to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3231/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 311, 315 and 320 together.

The supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) scheme provides assistance to eligible people in the State whose means are insufficient to meet their needs and those of their dependants. The main purpose of the scheme is to provide immediate and flexible assistance for those in need who do not qualify for payment under other State schemes. Supports provided under the SWA scheme can consist of a basic primary weekly payment and/or a weekly/monthly supplement in respect of certain expenses, including rent, as well as single exceptional needs payments (ENPs) and urgent needs payments (UNPs). The Government has provided some €378 million for the SWA scheme in 2017 including €85.4 million for basic SWA and €31.5 million for ENPs & UNPs in 2017.

The SWA schemes are subject to a means test and are demand led. There has been a reduction in the numbers receiving support through the SWA schemes which can be attributed to the overall improvement in the economy, improvements in administration and policy changes in recent years. Claim processing times have improved with the introduction of the Intreo centres and establishment of integrated decisions teams which has reduced recourse to basic SWA payments. For example, decisions on jobseekers allowance and benefit applications are now processed almost immediately where all the supporting information is provided. The following tabular statement provides details of the number of basic SWA recipients at year end for the past five years, 2012-2016.

The Department may make a single ENP to help meet essential, once-off and unforeseen expenditure which a person could not reasonably be expected to meet out of their weekly income. Although ENP expenditure has reduced in recent years, the scheme is demand led and continues to provide assistance to those with exceptional needs taking into account the requirements of the legislation and all the relevant circumstances of the case in order to ensure that the payments target those most in need of assistance. Provisional expenditure for 2016 is €32 million, showing that expenditure under the scheme is stabilising in recent years in line with the improvement in the economy.

The ENP guidelines issued to staff in 2012 and 2013 have contributed to more streamlined and consistent approaches being taken to applications across the country. The guidelines do not affect the statutory discretion available to officers administering the scheme in issuing an ENP to assist an individual or household in any particular hardship situation which may arise. People who consider that they require an ENP should contact the local officials in the Community Welfare Service administering the scheme.

People claiming supports under the SWA scheme generally only interact with the Department on an occasional basis, for example, when seeking an exceptional needs payment or in claiming additional supports such as rent supplement. The availability of the Community Welfare Service (CWS) during normal office hours is therefore sufficient for general day to day requirements. CWS services are delivered through Intreo Centres and some 180 clinics nationwide.

However, in response to emergency situations such as those caused by severe weather events, local management assesses the response required to ensure that supports are provided to those affected as swiftly as possible. This may include provision of emergency or out of hours services and may be supplemented by facilitating clients with individual appointments

and making house calls.

I trust that this clarifies the issues raised for the Deputy.

Basic Supplementary Welfare Allowance recipients 2012 to 2016

Month	No. Penalty Rates Applied
Feb-16	0
Mar-16	3
Apr-16	1
May-16	3
Jun-16	10
Jul-16	0
Aug-16	1
Sep-16	1
Oct-16	2
Nov-16	3
Dec-16	0
Total	24

Note: Direct provision allowance recipients are included under Basic SWA until 2014.

Youth Unemployment

312. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the extent to which his Department continues to be in the position to avail of European Union support to alleviate youth unemployment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3223/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Government's primary strategy to reduce youth unemployment is through policies to create the environment for a strong economic recovery by promoting competitiveness and productivity. Economic recovery will underpin jobs growth and the availability of productive employment for young people. This strategy has been succeeding; by Q1 2016 the number of people in employment is up by over 200,000 from the lowest level reached in 2012.

Youth unemployment is estimated at 14.5% (29,400 persons) in December 2016 and has fallen from a peak of 31.2% in July 2012.

Policy on youth unemployment, framed in the context of the EU Recommendation on a Youth Guarantee, concentrates assistance to young people in finding and securing sustainable jobs. In 2015 monthly engagement by case officers with all young unemployed was implemented. For those who do not find employment, additional offers are provided for. Most such offers (over 70%) are in further education or training. Others are in community-based employment programmes such as CE, Gateway and Tus, or through the JobsPlus employment subsidy for private employment. Pathways to Work 2016-2020 continues to prioritise these measures for the young unemployed and additionally commits to: increasing the share of workplace-based interventions for youth unemployed; ensuring that monthly engagement, at a minimum, is consistently applied and maintained; restructuring the First Steps programme; and implementing the Defence Forces Skills for Life programme.

Annual Government expenditure on relevant programmes was estimated, in the Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan, at approximately €336 million. A number of the programmes involved – for example First Steps and the youth element of the JobsPlus Incentive Scheme, are

operated by the Department of Social Protection.

This expenditure is supported in part by the EU through the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) and European Social Fund (ESF). The YEI is being delivered in Ireland as a dedicated priority axis within the ESF Operational Programme for Education, Inclusion and Learning (PEIL) 2014-2020, for which the Irish Managing Authority is the Department of Education and Skills.

I am informed that the total amount allocated to YEI under PEIL is €204,436,257. This allocation is comprised of €68,145,419 of specific EU funding for YEI, with matching amounts from Ireland's ESF allocation and from Exchequer funding.

Live Register Data

313. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the extent to which the age profile of those persons on the live register continues to be monitored with a view to making any adjustments necessary to assist those most in need; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3224/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The official measure of unemployment is sourced from the Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS). Measures of unemployment from the QNHS are based on International Labour Office (ILO) definitions. To be 'ILO unemployed' a person must in the week before the survey be without work but available for work and have recently taken specific job-search steps. The Live Register, which captures those registering for unemployment benefits (including those working part-time and in casual work who draw partial unemployment payments), is an administrative record. It is not the official measure of unemployment, but can give indicative trends. My Department uses both Live Register and QNHS data for reporting and monitoring trends and adjusting policies accordingly at national level.

This includes providing data and trends broken down by age categories. The QNHS data, being prepared as part of the EU-wide Labour Force Survey, also allow Irish trends to be compared with international developments.

The Pathways to Work strategy, the key document setting out policy to facilitate the unemployed of all ages back into work, is underpinned by analyses of the labour market situation based on the statistical sources mentioned above.

By allocating activation resources to persons on the Live Register, the government's policy tends automatically to focus on those areas and age-groups in which unemployment is most concentrated. The focus on those most in need is further reinforced by the use of profiling to identify, among the newly unemployed, those most likely to face severe difficulties in re-entering employment. People identified as having a low PEX (probability of exit from unemployment) score are prioritised for intensive engagement and support from the Intreo employment service.

State Pensions

314. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the extent to which he has examined the ineligibility of entitlement to contributory old age pension for women who had to give up work in the public sector due to the marriage ban or who took time out to

rear their families and subsequently returned to the workforce but who do not qualify for a contributory old age pension despite having made a huge contribution to the social and economic well being of the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3225/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The State pension contributory is a very valuable benefit and is the bedrock of the Irish pension system. Therefore, it is important to ensure that those qualifying have made a sustained contribution to the Social Insurance Fund over their working lives. To ensure that the individual can maximise their entitlement to a State pension, all contributions paid or credited over their working life from when they first enter insurable employment until pension age are taken into account when assessing their entitlement and the level of that entitlement.

Since 1961, when contributory pensions were introduced, the average contributions test has been used in calculating the rate of pension entitlement. Entitlement is banded, with the maximum rate payable to those with a yearly average of 48-52 contributions, and the minimum rate payable to those with a yearly average in the range of ten to 14 contributions per year. Even if someone has only ten years (520 weeks) of paid reckonable contributions between their 16th and 66th birthdays, they would generally qualify for a State pension (contributory), although the rate payable would vary depending on their circumstances, and it will not always be their most advantageous payment to claim, particularly if they qualify for a full-rate State pension (non-contributory).

The homemaker's scheme was introduced in 1994 to make qualification for State pension contributory (SPC) easier for those who take time out of the workforce for caring duties. The scheme allows up to 20 years spent caring for children under 12 years of age, or incapacitated people, to be disregarded when a person's social insurance record is being calculated for pension purposes. The effect of this is to reduce the number of years by which the person's contributions are divided, thereby increasing their yearly average, making it easier for them to qualify for a maximum rate SPC. It does not involve the award of credits.

My Department reviews these and other provisions on an ongoing basis and has estimated that the cost of extending the Homemakers scheme to allow people to avail of the full 20 years currently allowed under the scheme, encompassing periods prior to 1994, could cost €290m in 2017. This figure would increase in subsequent years.

It is worth noting that the Actuarial Review of the Social Insurance Fund in 2012 confirmed that the Fund provides better value to female rather than male contributors. This is due to the redistributive nature of the Fund.

Where people who were unattached to the labour market during most of their adult lives cannot qualify for a contributory pension in their own right as they have paid few or no contributions, or cannot qualify for a full rate as a result of an intermittent PRSI record, the social protection system provides alternative methods of supporting such pensioners in old age. Therefore, if their spouse has a contributory pension, they may qualify for an Increase for a Qualified Adult amounting up to 90% of a full rate pension, which by default is paid directly to them. Alternatively, they may qualify for a means-tested State Pension (non-contributory), amounting up to 95% of the maximum contributory pension rate.

The marriage bar was abolished in 1973. Where such employees were in the public service, they paid a reduced (or modified) rate of PRSI. These contributions provided no cover for the State pension and, accordingly, the marriage bar would not have negatively impacted on their State pension entitlement, as they would, most likely, have had none if they had remained in the public service. It may, however, have impacted upon their eventual entitlement to a Public Service pension which is a matter for the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

The National Pensions Framework (2010) proposed that a "Total Contribution Approach" (TCA) should replace the yearly average approach, for new pensioners from 2020. The aim of this approach is to make the rate of contributory pension more closely match contributions made by a person. Officials of my Department are currently working on the detailed development of the TCA with a view to making proposals for consideration later in the year. This is a very significant reform with considerable legal, administrative, and technical elements in its implementation. An important element in the final design of the scheme will be the position of people who have gaps in their contribution records for various reasons, and this factor is being considered very carefully in developing this reform.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Question No. 315 answered with Question No. 311.

Social Welfare Schemes Data

316. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the applications for various social welfare payments which are most commonly refused on application and referred to appeal or an oral hearing; the number of cases subsequently rejected or approved on appeal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3227/17]

317. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of oral hearings that have taken place in the past twelve months in respect of the various payments made by his Department to social welfare recipients; the number of cases in which the original decision was overturned arising from the hearing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3228/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 316 and 317 together.

The following tables provide the details which have been requested by the Deputy in respect of 2015 and 2016.

The schemes with the highest number of appeals to the Social Welfare Appeals Office in 2015 and 2016 were - disability allowance (6,435 in 2015/4,912 in 2016), carer's allowance (3,188 in 2015/3,887 in 2016), jobseeker's allowance - means (2,174 in 2015/2,050 in 2016), jobseeker's allowance - payments (2,058 in 2015/2,031 in 2016), supplementary welfare allowance (2,125 in 2015/1,970 in 2016), invalidity pension (1,857 in 2015/1,362 in 2016) and domiciliary care allowance (1,258 in 2015/1,198 in 2016).

Details of appeal outcomes for the above schemes are set out in the following tables. Overall, 58.8% of the 25,406 appeals which were finalised in 2015 had a favourable outcome for the appellant, i.e. were either allowed in full or in part, or resolved by way of a revised decision by a Deciding Officer/Designated Person. 59.2% of the 23,220 appeals finalised in 2016 had a favourable outcome for the appellant.

Of the 18,913 appeals which were finalised by Appeals Officers in 2015, 6,886 (36.4%) were determined following an oral hearing. 4,444 (64.5%) of these had a favourable outcome for the appellant. Of the 16,990 appeals finalised by Appeals Officers in 2016, 6,527 (38.4%) were determined following an oral hearing. 4,251 (65.1%) of these had a favourable outcome for the appellant.

There are a number of reasons why a decision which was refused at first instance might be

successful on appeal and it is not necessarily the case that the first decision was wrong.

Where new evidence is provided with an appeal, the original decision may be revised by the Deciding Officer or Designated Person. This was the case in some 35% of favourable appeal outcomes in 2015 and some 37% of favourable appeal outcomes in 2016. Where the decision is not revised in the Department in light of the appeal contentions, further evidence is often provided by the appellant as the appeal process proceeds. In addition, the Appeals Officer may gain insights when they meet the appellant in person at oral hearing which may also influence the outcome of the appeal.

Social Welfare legislation provides that an Appeals Officer may determine an appeal without an oral hearing where s/he is of the opinion that it can be determined fairly on the basis of the documentary evidence provided. In general, where there is a conflict in the documentary evidence presented, an Appeals Officer will convene an oral hearing in order to explore the evidence and seek to resolve any conflict.

In addition, where an appellant requests an oral hearing, the request is generally granted unless the Appeals Officer is of the opinion that the appeal can be allowed on a summary basis, or where there is clearly nothing to be gained by granting an oral hearing. An example of this would be where the appeal question relates to PRSI contribution conditions or means and the underlying PRSI contribution figures or means are not disputed.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Appeal Receipts 2015 – 2016

-	2015	2016
Blind Person's Pension	22	13
Carers Allowance	3,188	3,887
Carers Benefit	93	95
Child Benefit	552	595
Disability Allowance	6,435	4,912
Illness Benefit	1,204	819
Death Benefit	1	1
Partial Capacity Benefit	42	42
Domiciliary Care Allowance	1,258	1,198
Deserted Wives Benefit	19	7
Deserted Wives Allowance	1	-
Farm Assist	201	196
Bereavement Grant	6	3
Family Income Supplement	447	510
Invalidity Pension	1,857	1,362
Liable Relatives	26	23
Maternity Benefit	71	87
Paternity Benefit	-	1
One Parent Family Payment	368	313
State Pension (Contributory)	264	366
State Pension (Non-Contributory)	348	397
State Pension (Transition)	3	2
Occupational Injury Benefit	65	56
Disablement Pension	347	298
Occupational Injury-Medical Care	4	4

-	2015	2016
Incapacity Supplement	12	9
Guardian's Payment (Con)	49	38
Guardian's Payment (Non-Con)	18	17
Jobseeker's Allowance (Means)	2,174	2,050
Jobseeker's Allowance	2,058	2,031
BTW Family Dividend	64	52
Jobseeker's Transitional	34	43
Recoverable Benefits & Assistance	26	24
Jobseeker's Benefit	735	637
Treatment Benefit	3	5
Carer's Support Grant *	124	164
Insurability of Employment	156	151
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	2,125	1,970
Survivor's Pension (Con)	40	49
Survivor's Pension (Non-con)	25	26
Widows Parent Grant	10	8
All Appeals	24,475	22,461

* Previously called Respite Care Grant

Outcome of Disability Allowance Appeals 2015– 2016						
		Favourable Decisions				
	Appeal Receipts	Revised Deciding OfficersDecisions	Appeals Allowed	Appeals Partly Allowed	Appeals Disallowed	Withdrawn
2015	6,435	1,443	3,384	85	1,751	77
2016	4,912	815	2,830	88	1,367	75

Outcome of Carer's Allowance Appeals 2015– 2016						
		Favourable Decisions				
	Appeal Receipts	Revised Deciding OfficersDecisions	Appeals Allowed	Appeals Partly Allowed	Appeals Disallowed	Withdrawn
2015	3,188	579	1,352	155	1,355	50
2016	3,887	815	1,375	145	1,237	52

Outcome of Jobseeker's Allowance (Means) Appeals 2015– 2016						
		Favourable Decisions				
	Appeal Receipts	Revised Deciding OfficersDecisions	Appeals Allowed	Appeals Partly Allowed	Appeals Disallowed	Withdrawn
2015	2,174	299	284	108	1,336	229
2016	2,050	338	287	120	1,216	198

Outcome of Jobseeker's Allowance (Payments) Appeals 2015– 2016						
		Favourable Decisions				
	Appeal Receipts	Revised Deciding OfficersDecisions	Appeals Allowed	Appeals Partly Allowed	Appeals Disallowed	Withdrawn
2015	2,058	260	536	116	972	175
2016	2,031	324	525	98	945	141

Outcome of Supplementary Welfare Allowance Appeals 2015– 2016						
		Favourable Decisions				
	Appeal Receipts	Revised Deciding OfficersDecisions	Appeals Allowed	Appeals Partly Allowed	Appeals Disallowed	Withdrawn
2015	2,125	373	634	77	1,069	177
2016	1.970	346	532	75	923	156

Outcome of Invalidity Pension Appeals 2015– 2016						
		Favourable Decisions				
	Appeal Receipts	Revised Deciding OfficersDecisions	Appeals Allowed	Appeals Partly Allowed	Appeals Disallowed	Withdrawn
2015	1,857	511	1,135	17	421	37
2016	1,362	642	682	10	302	18

Outcome of Domiciliary Care Allowance Appeals 2015– 2016						
		Favourable Decisions				
	Appeal Receipts	Revised Deciding OfficersDecisions	Appeals Allowed	Appeals Partly Allowed	Appeals Disallowed	Withdrawn
2015	1,258	313	571	40	226	8
2016	1,198	469	596	18	250	11

Number and Outcome of Appeals Determined following Oral Hearings 2015				
	Allowed	Partially allowed	Disallowed	No. of Oral Hearings
Blind Person's Pension	1	-	3	4
Carers Allowance	733	101	516	1,350
Carers Benefit	10	5	18	33
Child Benefit	29	12	37	78
Disability Allowance	1,497	44	550	2,091
Illness Benefit	109	6	88	203
Partial Capacity Benefit	3	-	2	5
Death Benefit	-	-	1	1
Domiciliary Care Allowance	242	7	82	331
Deserted Wives Allowance	1	-	-	1
Deserted Wives Benefit	5	4	2	11

Number and Outcome of Appeals Determined following Oral Hearings 2015				
	Allowed	Partially allowed	Disallowed	No. of Oral Hearings
Farm Assist	23	14	30	67
Bereavement Grant	1	-	1	2
Liable Relatives	-	-	1	1
Family Income Supplement	16	3	19	38
Invalidity Pension	451	8	147	606
Maternity Benefit	-	-	6	6
One Parent Family Payment	62	15	65	142
State Pension (Contributory)	18	2	19	39
State Pension (Non-Contributory)	34	17	47	98
State Pension (Transition)	0	1	1	2
Occupational Injury Benefit	8	-	9	17
Disablement Pension	77	10	56	143
Incapacity Supplement	5	-	-	5
Guardian's Payment (Con)	6	3	4	13
Guardian's Payment (Non-Con)	5	-	-	5
Jobseeker's Allowance (Means)	172	57	253	482
Jobseeker's Allowance	227	59	208	494
Jobseeker's Transitional	1	-	-	1
Recoverable Benefits & Assistance	1	-	-	1
Jobseeker's Benefit	45	19	37	101
Carer's Support Grant *	18	2	13	33
Insurability of Employment	17	-	34	51
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	207	24	187	418
Survivor's Pension (Con)	3	0	3	6
Survivor's Pension (Non-con)	3	1	2	6
Widows Parent Grant	-	-	1	1
All Appeals	4,030	414	2,442	6,886

* Previously called Respite Care Grant

Number and Outcome of Appeals Determined following Oral Hearings 2016				
	Allowed	Partially allowed	Disallowed	No. of Oral Hearings
Blind Person's Pension	3	-	2	5
Carers Allowance	844	85	550	1,479
Carers Benefit	8	2	5	15
Child Benefit	23	12	34	69
Disability Allowance	1,305	51	487	1,843
Illness Benefit	82	3	68	153
Partial Capacity Benefit	5	-	5	10
Domiciliary Care Allowance	263	7	109	379
Deserted Wives Benefit	4	1	3	8
Farm Assist	23	26	29	78
Liable Relatives	-	-	1	1
Family Income Supplement	32	5	20	57
Invalidity Pension	347	4	109	460
Maternity Benefit	9	1	4	14
One Parent Family Payment	49	15	50	114
State Pension (Contributory)	16	6	32	54
State Pension (Non-Contributory)	45	20	53	118
State Pension (Transition)	1	1	1	3
Occupational Injury Benefit	9	1	6	16
Disablement Pension	101	10	63	174
Incapacity Supplement	1	1	3	5
Guardian's Payment (Con)	9	1	5	15
Guardian's Payment (Non-Con)	8	1	2	11
Jobseeker's Allowance (Means)	136	56	182	374
Jobseeker's Allowance	225	59	221	505
Jobseeker's Transitional	3	1	8	12
Recoverable Benefits & Assistance	1	-	2	3
Jobseeker's Benefit	54	14	41	109
Carer's Support Grant *	20	2	11	33
Insurability of Employment	17	2	28	47

Number and Outcome of Appeals Determined following Oral Hearings 2016				
	Allowed	Partially allowed	Disallowed	No. of Oral Hearings
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	178	25	133	336
Survivor's Pension (Con)	9	5	6	20
Survivor's Pension (Non-con)	3	1	2	6
Widows Parent Grant	-	-	1	1
All Appeals	3,833	418	2,276	6.527

* Previously called Respite Care Grant.

Social Welfare Schemes

318. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will carry out an evaluation of the various social welfare payments that had to be reduced during the period of recession due to lack of resources with a view to identifying the most sensitive wherein some restoration could take place while keeping in mind the need for prudent management; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3229/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): In the preparation of this year's Budget, I gave consideration to a number of approaches to improve the position of social welfare recipients generally and to make the social insurance system more comprehensive. As part of this consideration, I took account of the views of members of the Oireachtas and a wide range of welfare representative groups including those relating to the reversal of measures which had to be introduced in order to stabilize the country's financial position.

The last Budget was a prudent budget within the resources available. It was a Budget which looked forward, not backwards. There were no giveaways. My aim was to make sure that everyone benefits from the recovery - employed, self-employed, retired people, people with disabilities, carers, those who cannot work, urban, rural, young and old.

More than 840,000 people will benefit from the first increase in weekly Social Welfare payments since 2009 and 650,000 from the €5 increase in the State pension. The Budget also set out to make work pay through reforms to the PRSI system, including a new deal for the self-employed and it includes a number of targeted measures to assist lone parents, farmers and school children.

In addition, I was able to pay a Christmas Bonus at an increased rate of 85%. The Bonus was one of the first items to be abolished at the start of the financial crisis and was now been restored on a progressive basis by the previous and current Governments. It should be noted that the Bonus paid last December cost close to €220 million.

In addition to providing cash increases to all those in receipt of weekly welfare payments, I was also anxious to begin reforming the social insurance system. Budget 2017 expands the new deal for up to 380,000 self-employed people who pay PRSI at the S class. This includes people like farmers, professionals, taxi drivers and tradesmen who will have new benefits extended to them from next year.

From March, Class S contributors will be able to avail of Treatment Benefit, which includes free eye and dental exams, and contributions towards the cost of hearings aids and contact

lenses. In addition, and more significantly, self-employed contributors will be eligible for the Invalidity Pension. For the first time, this will give the self-employed access to the safety-net of State income supports if they have a serious illness or injury that prevents them from working without having to go through a means test. This will be available from December 2017.

These measures are all part of the Government's policy of making work pay and encouraging self-employment and entrepreneurship.

There is also a package of measures supporting lone parents in the Budget, encouraging them into the workplace and into education, and helping to reduce their childcare costs. All lone parents on One-Parent Family Payment and Jobseeker's Transition and Jobseekers Allowance will benefit from the €5 increase in the weekly rates of payment.

A new €500 annual Cost of Education Allowance will be made available to Back to Education Allowance participants with children from the next academic year in September. This will help parents, including lone parents, to return to education.

The income disregards for the One Parent Family Payment and Jobseeker's Transition payment will rise by €20, from €90 to €110 per week, reversing in part previous reductions, to encourage one parent families to stay in, and return to, work. This will benefit lone parents earning more than €90 per week. For those earning €110 per week or more, it will increase the combined social welfare and earnings income by up to €15 per week.

The Single Affordable Childcare Scheme being provided by the Government will also significantly reduce the cost of childcare for lone parents and is a step change in state support for childcare in Ireland.

The Budget focus on children is on the provision of services rather than on income supports. Ireland already has the third highest child benefit in the western world. Where we fall down is on the cost of education and child care and access to services like health and speech and language therapy. So, this is where resources will be focused in future. This includes the Childcare package that I just mentioned, the extension of medical cards to all recipients of Domiciliary Care Allowance and measures in Education, like more teachers and SNAs and better and new school buildings.

For my Department, the main Budget provision for children is increased funding for school breakfasts. This includes extending the School Breakfast programme to the new DEIS schools from next year. Also, we are opening the free breakfast programme to non-DEIS schools. Up to 35,000 children in non-DEIS schools will benefit from free breakfasts. This is in recognition that the majority of disadvantaged children do not attend a DEIS school. School breakfasts have been shown to increase attendance and improve concentration.

There is also a special increase of an additional €10 in payment for guardians who take care of orphans, or those children who cannot be cared for by their parents.

As part of the Government's commitment to rural Ireland, I announced the total reversal of cuts to Farm Assist, a programme which helps more than 8,000 farm families. At a time of falling farm incomes, it's essential that we strengthen the safety net for farmers who are on the margin. And even for farmers who do not qualify for Farm Assist, they have the reassurance of a strong safety net should they need it. The introduction of additional income disregards for farmers with children further ensures that farm families will benefit.

I also introduced a number of other targeted improvements. Looking ahead, our priority is that everyone in Irish society can, and will, benefit under this Government from the economic recovery. This includes people who rely on welfare payments whether on a long or short term

basis. While I will continue to have regard to the impact of the measures introduced during the crisis, the best approach in future Budgets is not necessarily reversing all of individual measures introduced in past years. This is the approach adopted by some in this House. My approach was to ensure that the level of income support for all was improved while at the same time enhancing the social protection system through a wide range of targeted improvements. I plan to continue this approach in future Budgets, as resources allow.

Question No. 319 answered with Question No. 284.

Question No. 320 answered with Question No. 311.

Social Welfare Benefits Data

321. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of persons whose application for dental benefit have been approved in each of the past five years to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3232/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The numbers of Dental Benefit claims paid in each of the last five years are as follows:

Year	Dental Benefit claims
2012	270,600
2013	298,700
2014	310,350
2015	312,700
2016	319,600

Stats are compiled on a monthly basis, those relating to January 2017 are not yet collated.

Brexit Issues

322. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has opened discussions with the EU Commission on mutual recognition agreements between the EU and UK to smooth the impact of Brexit on trade between Ireland and the UK and particularly in relation to all island trade on the island of Ireland. [2811/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Government welcomed the further clarity provided by Prime Minister May in her address of 17 January. Prime Minister May has made clear that she wishes to secure the closest possible future economic relationship for Britain with the EU, a goal that Ireland shares.In her speech, Prime Minister May highlighted the specific and historic relationship between Britain and Ireland. In this context, she made clear that her priorities include maintaining the Common Travel Area and avoiding a return to a hard border with Northern Ireland, both of which are welcome. The alignment between our concerns regarding the economy and trade and the objective of the UK to have a close, and friction-free, economic and trading relationship with the EU, including with Ireland, is also very important.

However, it is important to note that the negotiations on the UK's withdrawal from the EU have not yet begun. The trading arrangements between the EU and UK, once the UK leaves the EU, will be the subject of negotiation. For the Government's part, we have been very clear about our priorities for the upcoming negotiations: minimising impact on trade and the economy; protecting the Northern Ireland Peace Process; maintaining the Common Travel Area; and

influencing the future of the European Union.

A critical part of our work is ensuring that these priorities are heard and understood across Europe and are reflected in the EU's position for the forthcoming negotiations. An extensive programme of engagement with all other EU Governments and the EU institutions is under way. To date, there has been over 60 engagements are either political or senior official level.

This programme of engagement includes ongoing meetings with the European Commission's Task Force on Brexit. These meetings are an opportunity to set out in detail Ireland's concerns and priorities. Feedback to date from this comprehensive engagement has been very encouraging. There is a sound understanding of the unique circumstances which pertain on this island and I would note that in his first official comments, Michel Barnier, the lead negotiator for the Commission, highlighted the need to address Irish issues.

Human Rights

323. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the progress that has been made in the area of the State's human rights record following the report by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights since May 2016. [3127/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is responsible for coordinating the submission of Ireland's national reports under various international human rights treaties including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. However domestic implementation of commitments and recommendations is a matter for relevant Government Departments. Ireland's last periodic report under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights was considered by the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in June 2015 and its concluding observations, issued in July 2015, made recommendations across the whole of Government on a wide range of issues. Information on progress on specific recommendations may be obtained directly from relevant Government Departments.

European Council Meetings

324. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on the recent Foreign Affairs Council meeting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2548/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I attended the most recent Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) meeting in Brussels on 16 January where Syria and the Middle East Peace Process were on the agenda. This was the first meeting of the FAC this year, and Ministers had a good exchange on the opportunities and challenges facing us in the short term, and how the EU can make an active and effective contribution to international peace and security, in particular in its own neighbourhood. The Finish Foreign Minister also reported briefly on his recent visit to Turkey. I came to Brussels directly from Paris where I participated in an important international conference on the Middle East Peace Process hosted by President Hollande. The Conference sent a clear message that the international community believes that the only sustainable solution to the conflict is a negotiated two state solution. Ministers had an informal exchange over lunch on the outcome of the Paris Conference.

The FAC also addressed the situation in Syria in light of the recent cessation of hostilities, which was broadly welcomed by Foreign Ministers, and the upcoming talks in Astana. The

need for the EU to strengthen its diplomacy to revive the UN-led negotiations was discussed. I fully support the efforts of the EU High Representative, Federica Mogherini, to build cooperation between the EU and the regional and international stakeholders on a way forward for Syria. Ireland and its EU partners reaffirmed our support for the central role of the United Nations in working for a political transition and peaceful settlement of the conflict in Syria. The illegal denials of humanitarian access must end.

I also had a useful discussion on the implications of Brexit with the Spanish Foreign Minister, Alfonso Dastis Quecedo, in the margins of the Council meeting.

Northern Ireland

325. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on his recent meetings with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2549/17]

340. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on the informal talks that took place following the resignation announcement by the Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland, Mr Martin McGuinness. [1710/17]

343. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on the meetings held on 12 January 2017 and any other dates held by both the Irish and British governments to try and avert Assembly elections since the resignation announcement of the Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland. [1902/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 325, 340 and 343 together.

I have been in regular contact with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, James Brokenshire MP, as part of the Government's intensified engagement in recent weeks on the political situation in Northern Ireland. I met in Belfast with the Secretary of State on 14 December, 12 January and 19 January. We have also spoken by phone on a number of occasions.

I had also spoken by phone to Martin McGuinness on 19 December (following the Assembly debate on the motion to exclude the then First Minister) and again immediately following his resignation as deputy First Minister on 9 January. On 12 January, I met with the DUP leader Arlene Foster, and a Sinn Féin delegation led by Martin McGuinness. This followed on from contacts earlier in the week by telephone with the leaders of the SDLP, UUP and Alliance Party.

The Taoiseach has of course also been actively engaged and was in direct contact with the British Prime Minister, as well as the leaders of both the DUP and Sinn Féin.

It was clear, immediately following the resignation of the deputy First Minister, that the prospect of a resolution ahead of the triggering of an Assembly election was slim. However both Governments, in their capacity as co-guarantors of the Good Friday Agreement, made full use of the narrow window available to ensure that any avenues for resolution between the parties prior to an election were fully explored.

In the event, an Assembly election has been triggered and it is important to emphasise that this eventuality is one covered by the legislation governing the devolved institutions in Northern Ireland. When parties in an administration cannot agree, an election is the consequence and the outcome of that is now for the electorate in Northern Ireland to determine.

The Secretary of State and I have agreed that both Governments should continue to work closely together in the weeks to come, looking ahead to the post-election period, when a new power-sharing Executive will need to be formed. We have also urged the parties to approach the election campaign in calm and respectful terms, conscious that polarizing rhetoric and frayed relationships will damage the prospects of forming an Executive after the votes have been counted.

We must all be mindful that effective devolved Government, underpinned by a genuine spirit of partnership, is what the people of Northern Ireland voted for in 1998 and what they expect their politicians to deliver.

After the election, it will therefore fall to the parties to form a power-sharing Executive and this will require them to find a way forward on issues which contributed to the calling of the election. The Government is of course always ready to support and assist the parties in any way we can. Our commitment as a co-guarantor of the Good Friday Agreement is a constant one – in good times and bad.

The Government will continue to work with the British Government and the political parties to support the fulfilment of the full promise of that Agreement and to advance political stability, reconciliation and economic prosperity in Northern Ireland.

Middle East Peace Process

326. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on the Paris peace talks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2550/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I attended the Conference on the Middle East Peace Process in Paris on 15 January, which was hosted by President Hollande. Some 70 countries and international organisations participated in the meeting, which was a follow up to the first conference held in Paris in June 2016, which I also attended. This "French Initiative" was aimed at reigniting a stalled peace process, and reaffirming international support for the two state solution to the conflict between Israel and its Arab and Palestinian neighbours. Contrary to intentions, the meeting did not include the parties themselves, as Israel refused to attend or to engage in any way with the French initiative. This was regrettable and mistaken. The conference adopted a Declaration which clearly expressed the view of the broad international community that the two state solution was the only way forward. This followed on and reinforced the similar message in Security Council Resolution 2334, adopted in December, which I welcomed at the time.

However, there was also great concern among all participants about threats to the viability of that solution, stemming principally from the settlement policy of the Israeli Government. The Middle East Peace Process has been effectively stalled for three years, and there is no clear view on how to renew it. Uncertainty about the direction which the new US Administration will take was, of course, one factor in that regard.

The Paris Conference, and the initiative taken by France during 2016, can be said therefore to have been partially successful, particularly in maintaining an international focus on the issue at a time when other events in the Middle East have been dominating attention. France is to be commended for initiating and persevering with this challenging work, despite the many and clearly anticipated difficulties inherent to it. The wider ambition, of helping to restart the peace process, remains to be achieved, and is a task for the whole international community. Ireland will continue be a strong and active voice in this priority policy area. I will also ensure that the

Middle East Peace Process remains on the agenda of the European Union.

Brexit Issues

327. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the way in which his Department is preparing in advance of Article 50 being triggered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2551/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union provides the legal framework for withdrawal by a Member State. The British Prime Minister has said that she intends to trigger Article 50 no later than the end of March this year. An agreement between the EU and the UK on British withdrawal has to be concluded within two years. Of course, separate negotiations on a future UK-EU relationship will also need to take place. The greater clarity provided in the speech on 17 January by the British Prime Minister is welcome, as is her stated objective that once outside the EU, the UK wants to have a positive and constructive relationship with the EU, an objective we very much share. The Government is very clear on Irish priorities: to protect our economic interests; to protect the Good Friday Agreement; to maintain the Common Travel Area with the UK; to ensure an invisible border; and to maintain the integrity and unity of the EU, which is itself a core national interest.

Now that we have further detail on the type of future relationship with the EU that the UK will seek and as we approach the start of the Article 50 negotiations, the Government's detailed preparatory work, which began over two years ago and has steadily intensified since then, will increasingly focus on the negotiations themselves, as well as on the analysis of the impacts of Brexit.

Given the cross-cutting nature of the EU-UK dossier, a number of Divisions within my Department are devoting a considerable share of their resources to the key issues. They include the EU Division, which has a dedicated EU-UK Unit; the Ireland, United Kingdom and Americas Division; the Legal Division; and the Trade Division. The overall Departmental effort is led and coordinated by the Secretary General and by the Department's Management Board, a sub-committee of which meets each week.

With respect to the Article 50 negotiations, EU Division – re-established in the Department further to a Government decision in July of last year – is leading on preparations, within the framework of the whole-of-government approach to Brexit, which is led by the Department of the Taoiseach.

There is daily contact with the Department of the Taoiseach and there is also close engagement with other Government Departments, many of whom have established "Brexit" teams. In addition, there is also daily contact with our Permanent Representation in Brussels and regular interaction with our Embassies in all twenty-seven other EU Member States. Our Embassies are in constant touch with the authorities in their countries of accreditation. We also ensure that our missions world-wide are properly briefed on developments. In addition, there is an intensive ongoing programme of detailed discussions with colleagues in other Member States and in the EU institutions, whether in Dublin, Brussels or in other capitals.

Ireland will be part of the EU team of 27 Member States in the negotiations process, so therefore sensitizing EU partners and the EU institutions to Ireland's particular and unique circumstances is very important. It is of course also essential to understand the objectives and concerns of others.

This work is led by the Taoiseach who engages regularly with other EU leaders, as I have done and continue to do with all twenty-seven of my Foreign Minister counterparts and as Minister of State Murphy is doing with his opposite numbers.

Engagement with EU embassies in Dublin is also very important: to that end I will meet with EU Ambassadors on 20 January to share the Government views on Brexit and to set out our preparations for the Article 50 negotiations.

As we move toward the negotiation phase, I remain confident that, given the extensive work which has been undertaken to date, Ireland will be prepared and ready to protect and defend the best interests of Ireland and Irish citizens.

Ministerial Meetings

328. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the meetings he has had with the Export Trade Council since 23 June 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2552/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Since its establishment, the Export Trade Council has generally met twice annually. However, I increased the volume of meetings in the lead up to the UK referendum and since 23 June, I have chaired meetings of the Export Trade Council (ETC) on 20 July 2016 and on 18 October 2016. I will be convening the first meeting of 2017 on 7 February. The Export Trade Council was established in 2011 in order to strengthen cooperation and coordination across all Government Departments and State Agencies involved in the promotion of trade, tourism and inward investment. It brings together senior Ministers with an economic focus, the heads of State Agencies, and members drawn from the private sector, including IBEC, the Irish Exporters Association, and a number of business people with expertise in specific sectors. As such it constitutes a unique and invaluable forum for thorough and wide reaching discussions on the opportunities and challenges facing companies exporting from Ireland. These exchanges are all the more vital in light of current challenges and complexities in the global trading environment and developments in our relationship with key trading partners, notably the UK in the context of Brexit.

Indeed, the meeting on 20 July last year was convened in the wake of the British referendum decision to leave the European Union. We had a very productive and substantive discussion which helped identify challenges and opportunities in shaping a whole-of-government response. The meeting also reaffirmed market diversification and intensification as a key priority and mitigating strategy, helping to strengthen the resilience of our economy.

In keeping with this important goal the ETC meeting on 18 October had a particular focus on the Asia Pacific region and the opportunities for expanding and deepening market penetration in this crucial region for Irish exporters. Ireland's Ambassadors in Beijing and Tokyo attended the meeting to convey the unique insights of their respective Local Market Teams on this key topic. The discussions took place in the context of the development of cross-sectoral whole of Government Strategies for the Asia-Pacific and Americas region, as set out in the Programme for Partnership Government, and the development of a new over-arching Trade, Tourism and Investment Strategy.

The development of the new Trade, Tourism and Investment Strategy, *Trading Better*, is well under way. It is being led jointly by my Department and the Department for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation. As part of this process, a stakeholder consultation has just been completed and its results are being assessed and inputted into the strategy.

The upcoming meeting of the ETC on 7 February will be an opportunity to update on this ongoing work and to review developments of importance in the international trading environment, including Brexit and trade related goals of the incoming U.S. administration.

International Terrorism

329. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on recent developments in Turkey, including the bomb attack in Istanbul; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2624/17]

342. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the increased violence in Turkey and in particular, the bombings in Istanbul, which have resulted in many lives being lost. [1907/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 329 and 342 together.

I was deeply shocked by the twin bomb attack outside the Vodafone Arena football stadium in Istanbul on 10 December, in which 46 people tragically lost their lives, most of them police officers, and some 160 people were injured. I issued a statement on 11 December, in which I expressed, on behalf of Ireland, my utter condemnation of the appalling attack and extended my condolences to the families of all those affected by this horrific event. Our Embassy in Ankara joined with other EU representatives in Turkey in a statement which unequivocally condemned this despicable act of terrorism.

In addition to this heinous attack, Turkey has endured several other terrorist attacks over the past this year carried out predominantly by ISIS or the PKK and its affiliates. Over the course of 2016, more than 600 people lost their lives in some 20 terrorist attacks. Turkey has already suffered three terrorist attacks since the beginning of this year. I issued a statement after the deplorable mass shooting at the Reina nightclub in Istanbul in the early hours of New Year's Day, in which 39 were brutally murdered. Only a few days later, on 5 January, a car bomb exploded at a checkpoint in Izmir, killing two people and on 16 January, at least four policemen lost their lives in a bomb attack on a police vehicle in Diyarbakir, south-east Turkey.

I utterly reject terrorism in all its forms. Ireland, along with our European partners, stands in solidarity with Turkey in the fight against terrorism.

I remain deeply concerned about the overall situation in Turkey in respect of human rights, democracy, rule of law and freedom of expression which are all issues of concern particularly in the aftermath of the attempted coup in July 2016 and the extended state of emergency, which is still in place. The concerns of the EU, which are fully shared by Ireland, were set out in a detailed statement on 8 November last. Unfortunately, these concerns remain current and are still valid.

EU Meetings

330. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if recent developments in Turkey, including the preliminary approval of a new constitution, were discussed at the recent meeting of the EU Foreign Affairs Council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2625/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Turkey was dis-

cussed briefly at the most recent meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council, which I attended last week on 16 January. The constitutional reform package was not discussed.

The issue of constitutional reform has been on the agenda of President Erdogan and the AKP party for a considerable time. Last Friday the Turkish parliament approved a comprehensive package of constitutional amendments proposed by the President. Among the proposals are provisions for an increase in the number of MPs from 550 to 600, a lowering of the minimum age to sit in Parliament to 18 from 25, holding parliamentary and presidential elections concurrently every five years, and a considerable expansion of the executive powers of the President. The next step is a referendum on the complete package which, although no date is yet confirmed, is expected to take place in April.

Given the concerns at EU level and internationally about democracy and the rule of law in Turkey, and given the removal of parliamentary immunity from some 130 democratically elected representatives last May and the subsequent arrest of opposition MPs in November, there are serious considerations about the substance, timing and context of the constitutional proposals.

The Council of Europe, through the Venice Commission, is studying the constitutional package and is scheduled to report on its findings on 10 March. This assessment will be important in informing the position that the EU and Ireland take on the proposed reforms.

Foreign Conflicts

331. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the fact that a state of emergency has been declared in Gambia; the potential implications of this for the inauguration of a new president; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2821/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe McHugh): The declaration of a state of emergency by Gambia's former President Jammeh and the move by the Gambian Parliament to extend his term by an additional three months were a clear attempt to undermine the integrity of the electoral process and frustrate the will of the Gambian people. They were a cause for serious concern and were rightly condemned by the United Nations Security Council.

Therefore, I welcome the developments in the Gambia over recent days. I am pleased that the former President has now accepted the election results and left the country, allowing for a peaceful transfer of power. This positive outcome is a testament to the value of political dialogue and an indication of the important role played by regional organisations in the peaceful resolution of political crises.

I wish to commend, in particular, the determination of West Africa's political leaders to persuade former President Jammeh to step down and respect the democratic will of the Gambian people. It is another important step forward for West Africa's democracies, where the peaceful handover of power is increasingly the norm. I also wish to commend the actions of the Gambian people whose patience and peaceful political engagement contributed in no small measure to the former President's decision to leave the country.

I join with EU High Representative/Vice-President Frederica Mogherini in wishing President Barrow every success in his new role. Ireland stands ready to work with the European Union in supporting the new administration in the Gambia, in line with the principles of human rights, democracy and the rule of law, as well as those of sustainable and inclusive development.

United Nations

332. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade when he plans to meet the new UN Secretary General, Mr. António Guterres; the proposals he will raise with the Secretary General on the urgent reform and strengthening of the UN; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2881/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have written to Secretary General Guterres congratulating him on his appointment, and I look forward to meeting with him. I believe that his considerable national and international political experience and his familiarity with the work of the UN leave him well placed to address the challenges that face the organisation. Ireland welcomes the more transparent and open selection process which led to Mr Guterres' appointment, and looks forward to working with him on our shared goals, including on UN reform.

In the seven decades since its foundation, the UN has been at the heart of significant global progress on a range of issues of importance to Ireland, including sustainable development, human rights, disarmament and conflict resolution. Ireland is convinced that the principle of multilateralism upon which the UN is founded, offers the best approach to tackle the complex and interconnected issues facing the world. However, we recognise that in addition to the UN's many successes and achievements, there have also been failures. The ongoing crises in the Middle East and Africa illustrate clearly the urgent need for the UN to develop the capacity to respond more effectively to conflict.

Ireland welcomes Mr. Guterres' identification of conflict prevention and the pursuit of sustainable peace as a core priority for his term in office. In our statement to the Security Council on 10 January, Ireland underlined our support for this approach. I believe there is a responsibility for the UN to focus more directly on the reason for its foundation – to prevent war, rather than to react to it once it has been waged. I look forward to discussing this subject with Mr. Guterres.

This prioritisation reflects the urgent need to respond to the causes of conflict which are at the root of the migration and humanitarian crises facing the world today, and is in line with Ireland's approach to peace and security in our own foreign policy. We agree that the implementation of the recommendations of the three high-level reviews of the UN's response to situations of conflict will serve as a useful first step in this regard. Ireland engaged fully with the reviews on (1) UN Peace Operations, (2) Peacebuilding Architecture and (3) Women, Peace and Security, and has called for the implementation of their recommendations as part of our advocacy for UN reform.

Ireland will also continue to advocate for reform of the UN Security Council. We believe that the UN Security Council must become more representative, more transparent and more efficient to ensure that the UN can respond appropriately to situations of conflict and mass atrocity. The blockages and inaction of the Council in recent years have greatly damaged its credibility and have resulted in disastrous consequences for people living in conflict zones. As a member of the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency (ACT) group of states, Ireland advocates for reforms to the membership and working methods of the Security Council, including the use of the veto. We will continue to use this and other available fora to call for reform.

Ireland also welcomes Mr. Guterres' commitment to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Adopted in 2015, these ambitious goals have the potential to transform our world by 2030. Their comprehensive and interconnected nature mean that the UN institutions and Member States will need to work in a more coordinated and collaborative

manner than ever before in order to achieve success. Reform of UN structures and ways of working will be required.

The nature of much of the UN's working environment, often in places of crises, armed conflict and underdevelopment, means that it faces challenges which most organisations do not have to face. In order to ensure that the UN addresses these challenges, the UN needs to be in a position to plan and respond as effectively as possible. In this respect, effective management of its financial and human resources is crucial. Ireland will support the new Secretary-General in his efforts to improve delivery and accountability both at UN Headquarters and in the field, including in peacekeeping operations.

Departmental Staff Data

333. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of Secretaries General in his Department; the annual pay of each Secretary General within his Department at 1 Jan 2017; the expected change in that pay as a consequence of the provisions of the Lansdowne Road agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2909/17]

334. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of assistant Secretaries General in his Department; the annual pay of each assistant Secretary General within his Department at 1 January 2017; the expected change in that pay as a consequence of the provisions of the Lansdowne Road agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2925/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 333 and 334 together.

The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the following table:

My Department has 18 Assistant Secretary Generals, 3 Deputy Secretary Generals, 1 Secretary-General III, 2 Second Secretaries, 1 Secretary-General II and 1 Secretary General (DFA) salary scale.

Grade	Number in Grade	Annual Salary scale with effect from 1 July 2013
Assistant Secretary General	18	€119,572 - €124,917 - €130,706 - €136,496(Non PPC scale)€125,761 - €131,385 - €137,481 - €143,535(PPC scale)
Deputy Secretary	3	€156,380
Secretary General III	1	€167,300
Second Secretary	2	€175,126
Secretary General II	1	€176,350
Secretary General I	0	€185,350
Secretary-General (DFA)	1	€199,381

Under the provisions of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2015 (FEMPI Act 2015), for those on salaries in excess of €110,000 the salary reductions imposed under the FEMPI Act 2013 will be restored in three equal phases on 1 April 2017, 1 April 2018 and 1 April 2019. A circular setting out the revised salary rates applicable from 1 April 2017 to general Civil Service grades, including Secretaries General and Assistant Secretaries General, is currently in preparation and will be issued by the Department of Public Expenditure and Re-

form in due course.

Registration of Births

335. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade when a decision will be made in respect of an application for foreign birth registration submitted by a person (details supplied); the reason for the delay in processing the application in view of the fact that all supporting documentation requested has been provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2971/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Applications for Foreign Births Registration generally take between four and six months to process from the time all the required documentation has been submitted.

The application referred to by the Deputy was received in my Department on 01 September 2016. Following an examination of the application, further supporting documentation was requested from the applicant on 23 November 2016 and was subsequently received by my Department on 9 January 2017.

A determination will be made and the applicant notified in the coming weeks, which is within our processing targets.

Syrian Conflict

336. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will discuss the increased violence and attacks particularly on civilians in Aleppo at the next EU Council meeting. [37349/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have discussed the protection of civilians, the humanitarian crisis and the continued pursuit of a sustainable political resolution to the Syrian conflict, as well as in Aleppo specifically, at the Foreign Affairs Council on many occasions, most recently in January. While it has not yet been confirmed whether Syria will be on the agenda for the February meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council, I will use any appropriate opportunity to underline Ireland's' concerns on the matter.

Ireland and our EU partners remain fully supportive of the central role of the United Nations in working for a political transition and settlement of the conflict in Syria. We are considering how the EU can best strengthen its diplomatic efforts to build cooperation with other regional and international stakeholders to assist the UN in finding a way forward. I will continue to engage actively within the EU, in particular at future Foreign Affairs Council meetings, and globally until our objectives are realised.

North-South Ministerial Council

337. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on the discussions at the recent North-South Ministerial Council meeting with regard to the report on infrastructure commitments in the Fresh Start agreement and the North West Gateway initiative. [38576/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): At the Plenary

meeting of the North South Ministerial Council on 18th November 2016 in Armagh the Council considered an update by a group of Senior Officials from relevant Departments, North and South, on the progress being made on implementing the commitments by the Government, set out in Section E of the Fresh Start Agreement, to provide support and funding for North-South infrastructure projects.

The Council welcomed the meetings held in October 2016 between officials and key stakeholders about the possible options for the Narrow Water Bridge Project and noted that further discussions would be held in January 2017.

It was also noted that Phase One of the re-opening of the Ulster Canal from Lough Erne to Castle Saunderson is progressing and that the tender for the final stage of Phase One was expected to issue shortly with a planned site commencement in spring 2017. Ministers also welcomed the establishment of an Ulster Canal Advisory Forum of key stakeholders which held its first meeting in September and which will be looking at funding paths for further development of the Canal.

The Council noted that a Public Inquiry into the A5 road project is underway in Northern Ireland and that the Inspector's report is expected around May 2017. Subject to the successful completion of statutory procedures, a decision can then be made regarding progression to the construction stage, which remains programmed for late 2017. Under the Fresh Start Agreement the Government committed to providing an additional £25m to the A5 project on top of the £50m already committed. This project will deliver much improved access to Donegal and the North West region.

The Council also received an update in relation to the North West Gateway Initiative. Ministers welcomed the establishment by Donegal County Council and Derry City and Strabane District Council of the North West Strategic Growth Partnership which will aim to work with central government North and South to ensure the North West region can reach its full potential.

The North South Ministerial Council Plenary meeting was advised that Derry City and Strabane District Council and Donegal County Council have finalised governance, financial management and administrative arrangements for oversight and delivery of the North West Strategic Growth Plan and the associated €5m North West Development Fund which was established under Fresh Start. I am pleased that my own Department has played a leading role in this regard – contributing €2.5 million to the Fund.

It is the intention that a further update on the Fresh Start infrastructure commitments and the North West will be brought to the next NSMC Plenary meeting.

Brexit Issues

338. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on Mr. Michel Barnier's comments on 6 December 2016 regarding Brexit and in particular his comments regarding the conclusion of the Brexit negotiations being in autumn 2018. [40117/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Michel Barnier took office as head of the European Commission's Brexit Taskforce on 1 October 2016. As agreed at the meeting of the EU 27 Heads of State or Government at their meeting on 15 December, Mr. Barnier be the EU's chief negotiator with the UK once the British Government has triggered Article 50, which the British Prime Minister has confirmed will be no later than the end of March.

In the negotiations, the Commission and Mr. Barnier will be mandated by the Council, under the political guidance of the European Council.

Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union provides the legal framework for withdrawal by a Member State. As set out in the Article and as stated by Michel Barnier during his press conference on 6 December, an agreement between the EU and the UK on British withdrawal has to be concluded within two years of the triggering of Article 50 unless there is a unanimous decision by the European Council to extend this period. This timeframe includes both the negotiations themselves and the approval processes for the agreed outcome on both the EU and UK sides. This includes the need for the European Parliament to give its consent to the withdrawal agreement. In terms of the UK, Prime Minister May confirmed in her speech on 17 February that she will seek the approval of the UK Parliament for the agreement. The time to complete these procedures must be built into the two year period.

The exit agreement has to take account of the framework for future relations between the EU and UK. This broader issue should therefore be discussed in the same timeframe and it is to be hoped that a joint understanding will be reached. However, formal negotiations on a future EU-UK agreement or agreements can only begin after the UK has left the EU. Given Prime Minister May's recent statement, these negotiations are likely to be complex and multifaceted and may well last a period of several years. Ratification by all Member States and the European Parliament is also most likely to be required.

Consideration will also need to be given in due course to the need for a transition period between both agreements, which would also need to be negotiated and agreed by both sides.

Regarding Michel Barnier's wider comments last month, I welcome his clear statement that Irish issues will be a priority in the forthcoming Brexit negotiations.

Ireland's engagement with Mr. Barnier and his Taskforce at political and official levels has been and continues to be very constructive. Dublin was one of the first capitals visited by Mr. Barnier in his Brexit role. During his visit on 12 October last, in addition to my own bilateral meeting with him, he had very positive discussions with the Taoiseach, the Tánaiste, and the Minister of State for European Affairs.

For my own part I had an excellent exchange with Mr. Barnier; he is well-known to us in Ireland, has a strong appreciation of our close historical, political and economic ties with the UK, and also knows of our strong commitment to EU membership. During our discussions, I took the opportunity to emphasise Ireland's unique set of priorities with regard to Brexit, and the many complex issues relating to Northern Ireland, the Common Travel Area and the depth of our economic and trade relationship with the UK.

Mr. Barnier will have a critically important role to play in the forthcoming negotiations. At political and official levels we will continue to work closely with the Commission team as we address the particular challenges ahead.

Northern Ireland

339. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on the latest developments on the Fresh Start agreement. [40119/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Full and timely implementation of the Good Friday Agreement and successor agreements, including the 2015 Fresh Start Agreement, is a key priority for the Government, as reflected in the Programme for

a Partnership Government.

The forthcoming coming election in Northern Ireland will obviously impact on delivery of Fresh Start by the devolved institutions. Effective devolved Government, underpinned by a genuine spirit of partnership, is what the people of Northern Ireland voted for in 1998 and what they expect their politicians to deliver and the Government will work with all parties in support of this in the post-election period.

In the fourteen months since the Fresh Start Agreement was signed there has been sustained progress with implementation, with each administration actively pursuing the necessary work to fulfil the respective commitments.

Progress on implementing the provisions of both the Fresh Start and Stormont House Agreements are considered at periodic review meetings. These are co-convened by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and I, who attend them along with the First and deputy First Ministers and, where relevant to her portfolio, the Northern Ireland Minister for Justice. These review meetings are important in providing political direction and momentum for the full implementation of the Agreements. The last review meeting was held in Belfast on 14 December 2016.

The Fresh Start Agreement provided for the establishment of the Joint Agency Task Force on cross-border crime. That Task Force was launched in Dublin in December 2015, and has quickly become 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 also 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.

A key element of the Fresh Start Agreement relates to the ending of the legacy of paramilitarism and there was substantive progress on this front in the second half of 2016.

Following on from a report by an Expert Panel, the Northern Ireland Executive published its Action Plan on Tackling Paramilitary Activity, Criminality and Organised Crime in July. On 13 September, I signed an international agreement with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to establish the Independent Reporting Commission (IRC). 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, with the aim of getting the IRC legally established as soon as possible.

Following the December review meeting, both Governments and the Northern Ireland Executive announced the appointees to the Independent Reporting Commission. These Commissioners bring a wealth of experience and a broad range of skills. The Government has appointed

Mr. Tim O'Connor a former Secretary General to the President and former senior official of my Department , with considerable experience of the peace process.

The Northern Ireland Executive and the British Government have also proceeded 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.

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.

On 6 December, the then First and deputy First Minister announced the formation of a civic advisory panel, which was provided for under the Stormont House and Fresh Start Agreements. The 6-person panel will consider specific issues relevant to the Executive's Programme for Government and engage with civic society stakeholders. Reporting to the Executive, the panel may also propose subjects it wishes to consider.

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 will continue to engage with the Secretary of State and with the parties in Northern Ireland, to see how we can find a route to a final agreement on legacy issues. There has been positive work and discussions ongoing over the last number of months. There remain a number of outstanding issues, but 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. The Government will continue its engagement to achieve the establishment of these legacy institutions at the earliest possible opportunity following the Assembly election.

Question No. 340 answered with Question No. 325.

Dublin-Monaghan Bombings

341. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will provide an update on the inquiry into the Dublin-Monaghan bombings. [1711/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Dealing with the legacy of the past relating to the conflict in Northern Ireland is a major priority for me as Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade and for the Government. This commitment is reflected in the Programme for a Partnership Government, which makes specific reference to pursuing the issue of the Dublin Monaghan bombings.

The All-Party motion on the 1974 Dublin Monaghan bombings adopted in this House on 25 May last year has, like those adopted in 2008 and 2011, been conveyed to the British Government. These motions call on the British Government to allow access by an independent, inter-

national judicial figure to all original documents relating to the bombings.

The Government is committed to actively pursuing the implementation of these all-Party Dáil motions, and has consistently raised the issue with the British Government. The Taoiseach has raised the issue with Prime Minister May, emphasising the Government's continued support for the Dáil motions. I have also raised the matter on a number of occasions with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, James Brokenshire, most recently at our meeting in Belfast on 19 January.

In our discussions, I have advised Secretary of State Brokenshire that the Dáil motions represent the consensus political view in Ireland that an independent, international judicial review of all the relevant documents is required to establish the full facts of the Dublin Monaghan atrocities. I have also underlined to the Secretary of State that the absence of a response from the British Government is of deep concern to the Government and indeed this House, and emphasised the urgent need for a response from the British Government.

Secretary of State Brokenshire has acknowledged the importance that the Government and Dáil Éireann attach to this case, but indicated that the British Government is still considering how it could respond in a way which would adequately address the motions and be consistent with its obligations.

The Government will continue to pursue this matter with the British Government, urging them to provide a satisfactory response to the motions that have been adopted by this House.

There are many families throughout these islands and beyond who continue to deal not only with the awful pain of losing a loved one, but also with the struggle for answers decades after these traumatic events. Accordingly, the establishment of a new comprehensive framework for dealing with the past, as envisaged in the Stormont House Agreement, is a priority for the Government.

I am continuing to engage with the Secretary of State and with the Northern Ireland parties to ensure the Executive is up and running as soon as possible after the upcoming Assembly elections, so that a way can be found to achieve a final agreement on legacy issues at political level. There has been positive work and discussions ongoing over the last number of months. There remain a number of outstanding issues, but 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. The Government will continue its engagement to achieve the establishment of these legacy institutions at the earliest possible opportunity following the Assembly election.

Question No. 342 answered with Question No. 329.

Question No. 343 answered with Question No. 325.

Northern Ireland

344. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on advancing political stability post the elections in Northern Ireland on 2 March 2017 and having a full functioning executive thereafter and implementing the outstanding areas of the full Good Friday Agreement and subsequent agreements. [2733/17]

355. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the actions his Department has planned in the event of the power-sharing Administration in Northern Ire-

land not being formed after new elections. [1991/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 344 and 355 together.

As a co-guarantor of the Good Friday Agreement, the Government is constantly engaged with the British Government, the Northern Ireland Executive and the political parties to support the peace process and political progress in Northern Ireland on the basis of the Agreement. In recent weeks, both the Taoiseach and I had intensified contacts with the parties and the British Government on the political difficulties that were threatening the continuation of the Executive.

Following the resignation of the deputy First Minister on 9 January, it was clear that the prospect of a resolution ahead of the triggering of an Assembly election was slim. However both Governments, in their capacity as co-guarantors of the Good Friday Agreement, made full use of the narrow window available to encourage that any avenues for resolution between the parties prior to an election be fully explored.

In the event, an Assembly election has been triggered and will be held on Thursday 2 March. It is important to emphasise that this eventuality is one covered by the legislation governing the devolved institutions in Northern Ireland. When parties in an administration cannot agree, an election is the consequence and the outcome of that is now for the electorate in Northern Ireland to determine.

In my discussions with each of the party leaders in Northern Ireland, I have urged all parties in the election to be measured and responsible in their rhetoric so that the political institutions of the Agreement will not be damaged in the longer-term. I will continue to underline this imperative in the weeks ahead.

Effective devolved Government, underpinned by a genuine spirit of partnership, is what the people of Northern Ireland voted for in 1998 and what they expect their politicians to deliver. After the election, it will therefore fall to the parties to form a power-sharing Executive and this will require the parties to find a way forward on issues which contributed to the calling of the election. In this regard, it is of the utmost importance that all parties bear in mind the principles of mutual respect, partnership and equality, which underpin the Good Friday Agreement. The Government is of course always ready to support and assist the parties in any way we can. Our commitment as a co-guarantor of the Agreement is a constant one – in good times and bad.

A number of elements of the Good Friday Agreement and St Andrews Agreement have not yet been fully implemented. The Government's firm position is that the Good Friday Agreement and the successor Agreements must be implemented in full, and this is reflected in the Programme for a Partnership Government. The Agreements, and the principles and values underpinning them, are at the core of the Government's approach to peace, reconciliation and prosperity on this island.

Several of the outstanding provisions are specifically referenced in the 2014 Stormont House Agreement including provisions on the Irish language, the obligation to promote a culture of tolerance, mutual respect and mutual understanding at every level of society and new priorities for North South cooperation. The Stormont House Agreement provides for regular review meetings with the participation of the Government, the British Government and the Executive party leaders.

At the last two Review Meetings – most recently in December – I had the opportunity to draw attention to these outstanding commitments, which go to the heart of the Good Friday Agreement, so that they remain on the political agenda.

The Government views as a solemn responsibility our role and mandate as co-guarantor of the Good Friday Agreement. We have been unstinting in our efforts to uphold the principles of the Agreement and to advance the full implementation of all provisions.

The Government will continue to work with the British Government and the political parties to fulfil the full promise of the Good Friday Agreement and to advance political stability, reconciliation and economic prosperity in Northern Ireland.

Human Rights

345. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade when he expects the report on business and human rights to be published. [3087/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Following the publication of the Working Outline of the National Plan on Business and Human Rights in late 2015, my Department engaged in an extensive consultation process with the aim of ensuring the broadest possible participation in the development of the Plan. Work on the Plan is nearing conclusion and I expect that it will be published within the next three months.

Ireland continues to engage in EU and UN discussions aimed at promoting the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. Most recently, Ireland, together with other EU Member States, reiterated our collective commitment to the implementation of the UN Guiding Principles at the fifth UN Annual Forum on Business and Human rights in Geneva in November 2016.

Overseas Development Aid Expenditure

346. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has engaged with the Minister for Finance regarding Ireland's development aid budget commitment of reaching 0.7% GNI; and the timeframe for doing so. [3088/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe McHugh): The Government is strongly committed to Ireland's overseas aid programme, and to its place at the heart of our foreign policy. Our policy for international development, "One World, One Future", clearly articulates our commitment to the UN target of providing 0.7% of Gross National Product (GNP) in Official Development Assistance (ODA) as economic conditions allow.

In the Programme for Government we have set out our ambition to make progress towards the UN target as resources permit. It is important this progress is made in a sustainable and manageable way, which continues to strengthen Ireland's recognised role as a reliable and effective partner in providing development assistance.

Since 2011 we have made annual contributions in excess of €600 million and have cumulatively allocated over of €4.5 billion in the period 2011 to 2017. This represents a remarkable commitment of public funds towards development and humanitarian assistance for some of the most vulnerable people in the world.

I am pleased that we have been in a position to begin to increase funding for ODA, allocation an additional €40 million for 2016 and a further €10 million for 2017. The total 2017 allocation for ODA will be €651 million.

Based on current Department of Finance forecasts for GNP we anticipate the ODA/GNP percentage outturn for 2016 to be in region of 0.3% with a similar level projected for 2017. The reduction in the percentage has been affected by the step change in the measurement of Ireland's GNP.

I can reaffirm our commitment to making incremental, sustainable progress towards achieving the 0.7% UN target by 2030, over the period of the Sustainable Development Goals. While budget allocations are ultimately a matter for Government, I want to assure the Deputy that I, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, will continue to make the strongest possible case for increasing annual allocations to ODA over the lifetime of this Government.

Nuclear Proliferation

347. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will outline Ireland's engagement regarding the UN talks on nuclear proliferation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3089/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): A UN-mandated Diplomatic Conference to negotiate a treaty to prohibit Nuclear Weapons leading to their total elimination will begin in New York on 27 March. Ireland will pay an active role in these negotiations. It is our view that the negotiations will provide a solid basis for much needed progress on nuclear disarmament. The negotiations will be open to all States, to civil society partners and to international organisations to ensure the broadest possible level of agreement and Ireland is encouraging widespread participation.

The Conference has come about as a result of a UN Resolution brought forward by Ireland, together with our partners Austria, Brazil, Mexico, Nigeria and South Africa. This was adopted at the UN General Assembly in October with 123 states voting in its favour and will mark the first nuclear disarmament multilateral negotiations in over 20 years.

Nuclear disarmament is a long-standing priority for Irish foreign policy. We remain resolute in our commitment to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the cornerstone of non-proliferation architecture. The Resolution makes clear that the planned negotiations will be a part of a process towards the total elimination of nuclear weapons. It also underlines that any new legal instrument that comes about from the negotiations will reinforce the NPT, not weaken it. Ireland will continue to assert this in all future engagement and negotiations as we maintain our historic commitment to nuclear disarmament.

Diplomatic Representation

348. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to examine the possibility of reopening the Irish embassy to the Islamic Republic of Iran in Tehran; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3090/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Embassy of Ireland in Ankara is accredited on a non-residential basis to Iran. Ireland is also represented in Iran by an Honorary Consul.

The configuration of the State's diplomatic and consular network is kept under ongoing review by the Government. A range of factors are taken into account in considering our diplomatic representation overseas. These include our national political, economic and trade priori-

ties, as well as the availability of resources.

The Government is of course conscious of the political, economic and trade factors that might warrant the opening of resident diplomatic missions in Iran and elsewhere, and this is taken fully into account in the ongoing review of Ireland's diplomatic and consular network.

Overseas Development Aid

349. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if Ireland, through his Department or through Irish Aid, can support those Iraqi refugees, predominantly Christians living in Jordan who have been dependent on the fund-raising activities of persons and groups to provide them with food, shelter, health care and education. [3202/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe McHugh): Ireland continues to respond to the immense humanitarian needs arising from the crises across the Middle East region. We recognise the need to support the countries such as Jordan which have demonstrated remarkable generosity in hosting refugee communities fleeing from conflict in Syria and Iraq.

In 2016, Ireland provided more than €3 million through the Irish Aid humanitarian programme, managed by my Department, to meet the humanitarian needs of Iraqis, including vulnerable populations inside Iraq in besieged areas, those displaced internally, and those who have been forced to flee to neighbouring countries.

Irish Aid funding, channelled through NGO and UN partners best placed to respond, was 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.

In 2016, Ireland also provided €1.5 million to the UN's Jordan Humanitarian Fund, which allocates critical funding to local and international NGO partners to meet the urgent needs of refugees now residing in Jordan.

Ireland has previously provided funding to support the work of the UN Refugee Agency in Jordan, which aims to provide protection and life-saving assistance to refugees fleeing violence and conflict in the region.

Through Ireland's annual contributions to European Union institutions, we support the EU's humanitarian actions in Iraq and Jordan. To date, the European Commission has contributed more than €750 million in assistance to refugees and vulnerable communities in Jordan, including Iraqi, Syrian, and Palestinian refugees.

The protection of vulnerable communities across the Middle East, including the threat to ancient Christian communities in Iraq and elsewhere, is of deep concern to Ireland. In his address to the UN General Assembly in October, Minister Flanagan raised the plight of religious minorities in particular.

We are continuing to monitor closely the complex situation in Iraq and the region and will continue to provide assistance to the most vulnerable.

Military Aircraft Landings

350. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade further to Question No. 1627 of 17 January 2017, the status of the liaison with the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport in regard to the further actions that might be taken to ensure US airlines on charter to the US military comply fully with regulations here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3233/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): In line with our respective responsibilities for military and civil aircraft, my Department works closely with the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport on issues relating to landings by aircraft at Irish airports with a view to ensuring compliance with the relevant conditions applicable in this area. Officials from my Department are in contact with their counterparts in the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport in respect of the matter to which the Deputy refers and on which our concerns have been made known to the US Embassy.

EU Meetings

351. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the position taken and the points raised by Ireland at the joint meeting of EU Foreign Affairs and Defence Ministers on 14 November 2016 to discuss the implementation of the EU Global Strategy and the Common Security and Defence Policy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3234/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The EU Global Strategy (EUGS) commits the EU to promoting peace, security, prosperity, democracy, human rights and the rule of law. These objectives are to be pursued through a comprehensive approach using the range of instruments available to the European Union, including political, diplomatic, economic development, trade, peace-keeping and crisis management tools.

Five priority areas have been identified for implementation of the EU Global Strategy. These include strengthening the EU's capacity, through its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), to promote international peace and security within a rules-based global order underpinned by the United Nations.

On 14 November EU Foreign Ministers met in joint session with EU Defence Ministers. At that meeting, Ministers adopted conclusions in which they stated their commitment to strengthening the Union's ability to act as a security provider and to enhance its capacity, through the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), to foster human security, tackle the root causes of conflict and thus resolve crises outside the EU's borders.

Ireland is a strong supporter of initiatives, through the CSDP, which improve the capacity of the Union to contribute to international peace and security and in support of the UN. We support cooperation with international partners where this adds value and contributes to the achievement of these objectives.

In this context, the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), and cooperation with other organisations in this area, is grounded within the EU Treaties and the Lisbon Protocol which protects Ireland's traditional policy of military neutrality. The Council Conclusions expressly stipulated that the specific character of the security and defence policy of all EU Member States will be fully respected in the implementation of the Global Strategy.

Visa Agreements

352. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if Saudi Arabia's human rights record, in addition to the issue of potential war crimes having been recently committed in Yemen by Saudi Arabia and its allies, will form part of his Department's exploration of the possibility of Ireland negotiating a bilateral agreement with Saudi Arabia. [3235/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Saudi Arabia significantly increased its visa fees in October 2016. Many other countries have negotiated, or are in the process of negotiating, bilateral agreements with Saudi Arabia to lower visa costs. I consider it important that Irish citizens would also benefit from reduced visa fees, and so my Department is currently exploring the possibility of negotiating a bilateral agreement to this effect. This will require consultation with other Government Departments, in particular that of my colleague the Minister for Justice and Equality, Frances Fitzgerald TD.

Facilitating travel between Ireland and Saudi Arabia is imperative if Irish companies are to benefit from the potential of the Saudi market. It is one of my Department's goals to advance Ireland's prosperity by promoting Irish economic interests internationally, and our economic relationship with Saudi Arabia presents many opportunities in this regard.

Ireland has strong economic ties with Saudi Arabia, a designated priority market for Ireland under the Government's Trade, Tourism and Investment Strategy, and is our most significant trading partner in the Middle East. Bilateral trade was worth almost €2 billion in 2015, and the balance of this trade is overwhelmingly in Ireland's favour. It is therefore an economic relationship with considerable benefit for the Irish economy and Irish jobs. In November, I led a trade mission to the Gulf, accompanied by 36 Irish companies and Enterprise Ireland. I saw first-hand the interest that Irish businesses have in Saudi Arabia.

However, the economic partnership that we have with Saudi Arabia does not prevent us from raising human rights and other issues, through the appropriate channels. In addition to trade-specific events, I had meetings with Saudi Government Ministers on my November trip, including the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Nizar Madani. While the detail of this meeting is confidential, I can confirm that I raised human rights issues with Minister Madani. We also discussed the conflict in Yemen, and I can confirm that I expressed Ireland's concern about the appalling humanitarian situation resulting from the conflict, and about attacks on civilian infrastructures.

I have made my position on the war in Yemen very clear in this House. I unreservedly condemn all deliberate targeting of civilians, and I urge all parties to the Yemen conflict to respect International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights Law. Whether war crimes have been committed is a legal question to be decided by the courts. I have also been consistent in supporting calls for an international investigation into allegations of violations of International Humanitarian Law and the Law of War in Yemen, most recently at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva last September.

Ireland has a multifaceted relationship with Saudi Arabia, and the different elements of our engagement are not mutually exclusive. Our economic relationship benefits Ireland's economy and trade, and I will continue to negotiate bilateral agreements to progress this. I am equally committed to promoting our diplomatic relationship, in order to facilitate our continued engagement with the Kingdom on human rights and on other matters.

Trade Sanctions

353. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will raise

the issue of an EU-wide boycott of goods from Israeli settlements with his EU counterparts in view of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2334 which describes Israel's settlements in the West Bank and east Jerusalem as illegal and a flagrant violation under international law. [3236/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I welcomed the passing of Security Council resolution 2334, which restated important international positions on the Middle East Peace Process and on critical issues such as settlements. The reiteration that settlements are illegal under international law was timely, but it is not new. This has been the clear position of the Government, of the EU, and of the broader international community, for many years.

I was supportive of the Security Council's call on States to distinguish in their dealings between the territory of Israel and of the occupied territory. This is been a view which I have argued for at EU level and, as reported here to the House on many occasions, there have been a number of important steps taken in that regard in recent years, including in relation to product labelling and EU research funding.

I am not in favour of a trade boycott against Israel. I would be open to considering any proposal to the effect that the EU should consider excluding products from illegal settlements from the EU market. However, it is quite clear that there is little prospect of such a proposal gaining wider support at present.

Undocumented Irish in the USA

354. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the discussions he has had with US officials on changes to policy regarding the undocumented Irish in the United States. [40020/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Achieving relief for undocumented Irish migrants in the US and agreement on a facility for future migration between Ireland and the US are longstanding Government objectives. We continue to be committed to these aims notwithstanding the changed political context in the United States.

The Government has raised the issue of immigration reform with US interlocutors – including at the highest levels – on many occasions. I personally raised the issue when I met then-Secretary of State John Kerry in Co. Tipperary, on 30 October 2016. I also raised it when I spoke to Speaker Paul Ryan by telephone on 23 November 2016.

The Government has also availed of every opportunity to sensitise the new Administration to our concerns and interests regarding immigration reform, and the plight of the undocumented Irish in particular. The Taoiseach raised the matter in his separate telephone conversations with then President-elect Trump and Vice-President-elect Pence in the days following the Presidential election. The issue will also feature high on the agenda for my planned visit to Washington DC in early February. The upcoming St. Patrick's Day engagements will provide a further opportunity to express to senior figures in the new Administration and Congress our aims and concerns in relation to the undocumented.

In addition to these political efforts, our Embassy in Washington and our Consulates throughout the United States will continue to engage with Irish community groups in relation to their concerns. In recent days, the Ambassador Anderson convened a meeting of senior immigration stakeholders at our Embassy in Washington in order to hear directly from those who work most closely with the undocumented Irish.

We will also continue to support organisations that deliver frontline advisory services and community care to Irish emigrants through the Emigrant Support Programme. More than 70% of the funds allocated through this programme are directed towards welfare services, including in support of the undocumented Irish in the U.S. In the last funding round for the Emigrant Support Programme, organisations in the U.S were allocated more than €2.3 million in funding.

The Government, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and our Embassy in Washington continue to work closely with Irish-American community leaders in actively pursuing all viable opportunities to advance immigration reform. We will encourage and promote any realistic possibilities for a solution that may arise.

Question No. 355 answered with Question No. 344.

Military Neutrality

356. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on whether Ireland's neutrality is in question due to the shift towards an alliance with Britain, Europe and the United States; if Ireland has entered into agreements with foreign powers on air defences without consulting Dáil Éireann; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39827/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): On 24 November last year, the Dáil debated the Thirty-Fifth Amendment of the Constitution (Neutrality) Bill 2016. The debate provided a valuable opportunity to re-state the Government's commitment to Ireland's longstanding policy of military neutrality.

As I said at the time, I am satisfied that Ireland's longstanding policy of military neutrality is safeguarded through existing Constitutional provisions, through the Protocol to the Lisbon Treaty, the Defence Acts, and the long-term policy strategies adopted by Government.

My Department's statement of foreign policy, The Global Island, approved by Government in January 2015, states clearly that, "Our policy of military neutrality remains a core element of Irish foreign policy". This was further reinforced in the ten year strategy on defence policy set out in the White Paper on Defence.

These policy settings have been developed in the context of a robust constitutional and legal framework.

Article 29 of the Constitution commits the State to uphold "the ideal of peace and friendly co-operation amongst nations" and to "the principle of the pacific settlement of international disputes."

The 'Triple Lock' arrangement, which governs the deployment of Irish Defence Forces overseas, is set out in the Defence Acts and provides that: the deployment for overseas peace support operations may only be made if that operation is mandated by the United Nations; deployment must also be approved by the Government; and, if it is proposed to deploy more than 12 personnel, a Dáil Resolution must also be approved.

The Lisbon Treaty includes a legally binding Protocol which recognises Ireland's traditional policy of military neutrality.

Ireland's commitment to the policy of military neutrality is complemented by a strong commitment to the United Nations and its work around the world. Irish troops participate in

peacekeeping and, where necessary, peace enforcement. Our Defence Force personnel have a well-deserved, high reputation internationally for their contribution in this area which extends, unbroken, over more than fifty years.

The Government's engagement in international security cooperation is aimed at ensuring public safety and is conducted with full respect for Irish sovereign decision-making authority and for Ireland's long standing policy of military neutrality.

Safety of Irish Citizens Abroad

357. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will telephone President Duterte on behalf of a person (details supplied); if he will meet with the person's spouse to hear their perspective; and if he will verify the location of the person's passport. [1743/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am very aware of the extremely difficult circumstances in which this individual and his family find themselves. I have personally raised my concerns about the case, and about the health and wellbeing of the individual concerned, with my Philippines counterpart, most recently at the UN in New York last September.

This is an ongoing legal case. At this time, the priority focus of our Embassy is on follow up to the request to seek to have the appeal process expedited on humanitarian grounds. This request was reiterated at a meeting earlier this month with senior Philippines Foreign Ministry officials.

Our Embassy has also followed up with the individual's lawyer, the appropriate channel, in relation to the individual's passport, which is being held as a condition of bail. I understand that the citizen has been given confirmation by the Philippines authorities on the whereabouts of his passport.

This citizen's spouse wrote to me in November outlining her serious concerns for her husband. Officials from my Consular Assistance team in Dublin are in direct contact with the individual's spouse, with the most recent correspondence just last month. Department officials met with her in July 2015. My officials will remain in contact with the individual concerned and her spouse, and will consider any meeting request from the spouse if one is received.

At all times, in considering options and actions in this case, our clear objective is to advance the citizen's best interests and, importantly, to avoid any action that might be counterproductive to his interests. In this context, it is my considered view that a direct approach to President Duterte drawing attention to the citizen's situation would not be an appropriate course of action at this time. However, all potential actions are being kept under active and ongoing review.

Let me assure you that my Department continues to prioritise this case and that Department officials in Dublin, our Embassy in Singapore and our Honorary Consulate in the Philippines will continue to provide all appropriate consular assistance to this individual and to his family.

Ministerial Correspondence

358. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on any reply he may have received from the Egyptian Prime Minister to his letter of November 2016 mentioned in Dáil Éireann on 23 November 2016. [1611/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): This complex and long-running consular case continues to be a top priority for the Government and substantial resources and time are being devoted to it, by the Taoiseach, by me as Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, by officials in my Department, by our Ambassador and his team in Cairo, and by the entire Irish diplomatic network. The Government is doing everything it possibly can to ensure that the Egyptian authorities are in no doubt about our determination to see this young man returned to his home and his family.

The Taoiseach has spoken directly and personally with Egyptian President el-Sisi on numerous occasions calling on him to exercise his powers under Egyptian law to resolve this case and return this young man to Ireland. He has done so in face-to-face meetings on two occasions and also by telephone and by letter.

The letter to which the Deputy refers in his question was sent by the Taoiseach to President el-Sisi on 17 November. A reply from President el-Sisi dated 17 December sets out his approach to this case in a manner consistent with our numerous contacts.

The Egyptian President has consistently advised us that the separation of powers and the independence of the judiciary must be respected, and that the Egyptian Government cannot intervene until after the trial has concluded. The President has also consistently made clear to us that he is anxious to resolve this issue as soon as he can, and that he will be able to intervene in the case once the trial has ended. I welcome the fact that he reiterated this to the Oireachtas delegation when they met with him in Cairo on January 11th.

I and my colleagues in Government and our officials at every level will continue to do everything possible and appropriate to engage with the authorities in Cairo on this citizen's behalf both directly and through and with EU and international partners.

Superannuation Schemes

359. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if his Department is examining the equality issues of public sector employees who are unmarried, that is single, divorced or widowed and without children, but are contributing 1.5% of their monthly gross salary to the spouses' and children's superannuation scheme; if he has appointed officials to examine the equality issues of this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2827/17]

365. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of public sector employees who are unmarried, that is, single, divorced or widowed, and without children, but are contributing 1.5% of their monthly gross salary to the spouses' and children's superannuation scheme; the number of public sector employees in these categories with no dependent children whose children are over 18 years of age, but are contributing 1.5% of their monthly gross salary to the spouses' and children's superannuation scheme; the financial contribution of both of these groups to this superannuation scheme; the total number of public sector employees contributing 1.5% of their monthly gross salary to the spouses' and children's superannuation scheme; the value of this superannuation scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2825/17]

366. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the total number of recipients of payments from the spouses' and children's superannuation scheme in each of the years 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017; the total value of each of these superannuation scheme payments for each of these years; the total number of public sector em-

ployees; the total number of public sector employees who are unmarried, that is single, divorced or widowed with no children; the total number of public sector employees who are unmarried, that is single, divorced or widowed with children over 18 years of age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2826/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 359, 365 and 366 together.

My responsibility extends to the Superannuation Schemes for Civil Servants and my response only refers to that sector. For information on the wider Public Service I would direct the Deputy to the respective Ministers with responsibility for the other sectors of the Public Sector. My Department does not hold personal information of Civil Servants to the level of detail requested by the Deputy in relation to marital status and children.

There are two separate Spouses' and Children's Pension Schemes for the Civil Service, one for Established Staff and one for Non-Established Staff. Within each Scheme there are two further categories (i) the Original Scheme and (ii) the Revised Scheme. For Established Staff the Original Scheme was introduced for male staff in 1968 and for female staff in 1981, and the Revised Scheme was introduced for all staff in 1984. For Non-Established Staff the Original Scheme was introduced for male staff in 1978 and the Revised Scheme was introduced in 1986, at which time membership was extended to female staff.

When the Original Scheme was introduced, all eligible staff serving at the time of its introduction were given an option to join. When the Revised Scheme was introduced it replaced the Original Scheme and applied automatically to all people recruited after its introduction. Again, all eligible staff serving at the time of the introduction of the Revised Scheme were given an option to join (regardless of whether they had been members of the Original Scheme). Therefore, depending on the date of appointment, and depending also on any membership options the employee may have exercised in the past, an employee may be a member of the Original or the Revised Scheme or of neither.

The main differences between the Original and the Revised Schemes are that the Revised Scheme covers marriages after retirement (the Original Scheme did not) and a broader category of eligible children. Where a member was unmarried at the time of retirement, the Original Scheme provided for a refund of some or all the contributions paid by that member.

It is generally not possible to determine that a person will never benefit from the revised spouses' and children's pension scheme as it provides cover for marriages and civil partnerships after retirement. Furthermore, children conceived after retirement, children born outside of marriage, step-children where the marriage took place after retirement and children adopted after retirement are all covered under the revised scheme.

Civil Service spouses' and children's schemes are structured on a group insurance basis and the member contribution rates take account of the fact that payment of benefits will not arise in respect of all members. I have no plans to review these arrangements

Records maintained by my Department indicate that there were just over 37,500 employees in the civil service at the end of Q3 2016. The detail sought by the deputy with regard to recipients of payments from the spouses' and children's scheme for the civil service is shown in the following table. The 2017 data is with respect to just one pay period.

Total paid out under spouses and children scheme in year	2014	2015	2016	2017*
(€'000)	43,311	44,555	43,684	1,681
Number of payees	4,177	4,122	4,004	4,165

* One pay period has elapsed year to date Details on numbers contributing 1.5% of their gross salary to the Spouses and Children's contributions are not readily available.

An Clár Brústocaireachta

360. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Dara Calleary** den Aire Caiteachais Phoiblí agus Athchóirithe an síleann sé go bhfuil sé inghlactha nach bhfuil comhfhreagras maidir leis an gClár Brústocaireachta á sheoladh trí mheán na Gaeilge nó go dátheangach chuig grúpaí brústocaireachta cé gur tugadh geallúint go ndéanfar amhlaidh i mí Eanáir 2016; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [2539/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Tá an Coimisiún um Chaighdeáin in Oifig Phoiblí (an Coimisiún) freagrach as an Clár Brústocaireachta a chaomhnú. Is comhlacht reachtúil neamhspleách é an Coimisiún agus dá bhrí sin níl sé freagrach don Aire Caiteachas Phoiblí agus Athchóirithe maidir lena chuid dualgas a chomhlíonadh. Mar sin féin, tuigim go bhfuil oibriú an Chláir Bhrústocaireachta dátheangach. Soláthraítear na seirbhísí go príomhúil tríd an láithreán gréasáin atá ar fáil i nGaeilge agus i mBéarla. Is féidir le húsáideoirí an láithreáin gréasáin clárú agus comhdú a dhéanamh ar líne trí cheachtar teanga oifigiúil. Is féidir leo treoir a fháil ar gach gné d'oibriú an tsuímh gréasáin - ceisteanna coitianta agus físeáin teagaisc san áireamh i nGaeilge agus i mBéarla. Tuigim fosta, de réir a ndualgais faoi Acht na dTeangacha Oifigiúla, go ndéanann an Coimisiún a dhícheall freagra a thabhairt ar chomhfhreagras agus ar chumarsáid sa teanga oifigiúil ina ndéantar an fiosrúchán agus táthar ag scrúdú conas is féidir freagra a thabhairt ar fhiosruithe níos luaithe. Ar deireadh, tuigim go bhfoilsítear clárúcháin agus tuairiscí ar an chlár sa teanga inar lorgaíodh iad. Níl sé beartaithe go mbeidh ar dhaoine a chláraíonn leis an suíomh deir an Coimisiún go bhfuil beagnach 9,000 iarratas déanta go dtí seo - iarratas a dhéanamh sa dá Theanga Oifigiúil.

Community Employment Schemes Supervisors

361. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when a meeting of the high-level forum which was set up to deal with outstanding issues relating to community employment supervisors and assistants will meet in view of the fact that a new chairperson has been appointed to this forum. [2615/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In light of the recent appointment of a new Chair to the High Level Forum a meeting is accordingly being arranged between the parties concerned with a view to scheduling a date in the first quarter of 2017.

Public Sector Pensions Legislation

362. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the timeframe for the repeal of FEMPI legislation in respect of retired public servants; and if he will

make a statement on the matter. [2701/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The FEMPI measure in respect of public service pensioners is the Public Service Pension Reduction (PSPR). The PSPR reduces the pay-out value of pensions with pre-PSPR values above specified thresholds in a progressively structured way which has a proportionately greater effect on higher value pensions. At all times, public service pensions up to a value of €12,000 have been unaffected by PSPR, while a higher exemption threshold of €32,500 has applied to pensions awarded from 1 March 2012 onwards.

PSPR is being significantly reversed in three stages under FEMPI 2015, with PSPR-affected pensioners getting pension increases via substantial restoration of the PSPR cuts on 1 January 2016, 1 January 2017 and 1 January 2018. When fully rolled-out from 1 January 2018, the changes will mean that all public service pensions with pre-PSPR values of up to €34,132 will be fully exempt from PSPR, while those pensioners not fully removed from the reach of PSPR will, in the majority of cases, benefit by €1,680 per year. The cost of these changes is estimated at about €90 million on a full-year basis from 2018.

As we move beyond FEMPI and PSPR restoration towards more normal pay and pension setting conditions in the public service, the issue of how to adjust the post-award value of public service pensions through appropriate pay or other linkages will be considered by Government.

Health and Social Care Professionals Regulation

363. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will ensure more regulation in the beauty industry (details supplied). [2742/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform has no role in relation to the regulation of the beauty industry.

Standards in Public Office Commission

364. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if workers in the health service are obliged to make declarations under the Standards in Public Office Acts; and if so, the criteria for same. [2744/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): All positions of employment in the Health Service Executive across all grade categories where the minimum salary point is equal to or above the minimum point of Grade VIII have been prescribed in regulations as designated positions of employment for the purposes of the Ethics in Public Office Acts 1995 and 2001. Employees of the HSE who occupy designated positions of employment are required under section 18 of the Ethics in Public Office Act 1995 to make an annual statement of interests (if any). The interests concerned are the interests of the person, and the interests, of which the person has actual knowledge. This also includes the interests of his or her spouse or civil partner or a child of the person or of his or her spouse, which could materially influence the person in the performance of his/her official functions. Where a person has an interest to disclose, he/she must furnish his/her statement to the Director General of the HSE. Section 18 of the Ethics in Public Office Act 1995 also requires a person who occupies a designated position of employment in the HSE who has a material interest in a function of his or her position to be performed to prepare and furnish a statement in writing of those facts to

the Director General of the HSE. The person should not perform the function unless there are compelling reasons requiring him/her to do so. If the person proposes to perform the function, he/she should, before doing so or, if that is not reasonably practicable, as soon as possible afterwards, prepare and furnish a statement in writing of the compelling reasons to the Director General of the HSE.

Questions Nos. 365 and 366 answered with Question No. 359

Public Private Partnerships Data

367. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the details of current public private partnership, PPP, projects in which the State is involved; the value of PPP projects to which the State was party for each year from 2004 to 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2828/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The following table represents the Public Private Partnership (PPP) projects which have reached financial close up to end-2016, commencing from 2002.

Current PPP and Concession Projects

Project	Sponsoring Authority Asset Type	Operational From
Pilot Schools Bundle	Education Schools	2002
National Maritime College	Education - 3rd Level	2004
Cork School of Music	Education 3rd Level	2007
Schools Bundle 1	Education Schools	2010
Schools Bundle 2	Education Schools	2011
Schools Bundle 3	Education Schools	2013
Schools Bundle 4	Education Schools	2016
Schools Bundle 5	Education Schools	2017
M4 Kilcock - -Kinnegad Motorway*	Transport Road	2005
M1 Dundalk Western Bypass*	Transport Road	2005
M8 Rathcormac Fermoy Bypass*	Transport Road	2006
N25 Waterford Bypass*	Transport Road	2009
M6 Galway Ballinasloe Motorway*	Transport - Road	2009
M7/M8 Portlaoise Motorway*	Transport Road	2010
Limerick Tunnel*	Transport - Tunnel	2010
M3 Clonee Kells Motorway*	Transport Road	2010
M50 Upgrade	Transport Road	2010
Motorway Service Area*	Transport Services	2010
M11 Arklow Rathnew Upgrade	Transport Road	2015
M17/M18 Gort Tuam Motorway	Transport Road	2017
M11 Gorey Enniscorthy Motorway	Transport Road	2019
N25 New Ross Bypass	Transport Road	2019
Dublin Bay	Irish Water Treatment Plant	2003
Cork	Irish Water Treatment Plant	2004
Balbriggan/Skerries	Irish Water Treatment Plant	2006
Donegal	Irish Water Treatment Plant	2008

Project	Sponsoring Authority Asset Type	Operational From
Portrane/Donabate/Rush/Lusk	Irish Water Treatment Plant	2010
Tullamore	Irish Water Treatment Plant	2010
Shanganagh	Irish Water Treatment Plant	2011
Letterkenny	Irish Water Treatment Plant	2011
Srowland	Irish Water Treatment Plant	2011
Criminal Courts Complex	Courts Service Courts	2009
Courts Bundle	Courts Service Courts	2017
National Conference Centre	Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs Convention Centre	2010
Primary Care Bundle	Health - Primary Care Centres	2017
Dublin Waste to Energy*	DCC - Incinerator	2017

* Denotes Concession Project

These 36 projects underpin a significant investment in infrastructure with a combined contractual value of over €5.5 billion. The aggregate contractual value of the projects which have reached financial close since 2004 amounts to over €4.8 billion. At present, only the aggregate contractual value by sector is published by the CSO in relation to these projects. However, in the interest of providing greater transparency in relation to PPPs, my Department is actively engaging with the various Sponsoring Authorities with a view to publishing details of the individual contractual values for all PPPs on the www.ppp.gov.ie website, and hopes to be in a position to do so in the coming weeks.

Departmental Staff Data

368. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of Secretaries General in his Department; the annual pay of each Secretary General within his Department at 1 Jan 2017; the expected change in that pay as a consequence of the provisions of the Lansdowne Road agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2913/17]

369. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of assistant secretaries general in his Department; the annual pay of each assistant secretary general within his Department at 1 January 2017; the expected change in that pay as a consequence of the provisions of the Lansdowne Road agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2929/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 368 and 369 together.

I wish to inform the Deputy that there is one Secretary General in my department, who is on the Non PPC Secretary General pay scale, of which there is only one point. There are five Assistant Secretaries in my department, three of which are on the Assistant Secretary Non PPC scale and two on the PPC Assistant Secretary level pay scale. Incremental progression on the Assistant Secretary scales is subject to government pay policy, see pay scales are below:

Secretary General - Non PPC - €185,350

Assistant Secretary - PPC - €125,761, €131,385, €137,481, €143,535.00

Assistant Secretary - Non PPC - €119,572, €124,917, €130,706, €136,496

Under the provisions of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2015 (FEMPI Act 2015), for those on salaries in excess of €110,000 the salary reductions imposed under the FEMPI Act 2013 will be restored in three equal phases on 1 April 2017, 1 April 2018 and 1 April 2019. A circular setting out the revised salary rates applicable from 1 April 2017 to general Civil Service grades, including Secretaries General and Assistant Secretaries General, is currently in preparation and will be issued by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in due course.

Lansdowne Road Agreement Implementation

370. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the cost in 2017 and on a 12-month basis to his Department of bringing forward the increases due under the Lansdowne Road agreement from September to April; the way in which this cost will be funded; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2945/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The additional cost arising from the Government Decision in relation to the Lansdowne Road Agreement is €120 million. The required funds will need to be met from available public resources taking into account the scope for reallocation of expenditure while also ensuring that core public services are not adversely impacted as a result of this decision.

The extent to which Departments are in a position to meet this additional cost will only be determined later in the year. The Government will monitor the position closely and will consider how best to meet any additional funding requirements where the need arises. However, given that this additional cost represents 0.2 per cent of total gross voted current expenditure, most Departments should be in a position to absorb additional costs arising from this decision. As reported in the end-December Exchequer returns, gross voted current expenditure for 2016 finished c. 0.2 per cent behind profile.

Civil Service Management

371. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of the previously agreed upgrade of Civil Service staff officers to executive officers; if this upgrade took place on 2 January 2017; if not, the reason it has not taken place; the future plans for this upgrade; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2979/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The matter of the amalgamation of the Civil Service Staff Officer grade with the Executive Officer grade is currently under deliberation between the management and union side parties concerned. As this deliberative process has yet to be concluded it is considered that it would not be appropriate in the circumstances to comment on any issues that may arise between the parties concerned.

Public Sector Staff Recruitment

372. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the reason the position for conservation ranger advertised in autumn 2016 closed before midnight on the last day for accepting applications when this was not specified on the application form; the reason an application from a person (details supplied) who went to lodge an application in the late afternoon on the last day for accepting applications was rejected by the system and

could not be lodged; the steps he will take to ensure that this application is now accepted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3082/17]

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

I am informed by the PAS that the closing date and time for the competition in question, i.e. Conservation Ranger, was 3pm on Thursday 1 December, 2016. This was clearly stated on Page One of the Candidates information Booklet, which candidates are advised to read carefully. That booklet also states under the Section entitled "The Selection Process" that "Completed applications should be made online through www.publicjobs.ie no later than **3.00pm on Thursday 1st December, 2016**. Applications will not be accepted after that date".

The PAS has informed me that they are not in a position to accept a late application for the competition at this stage.

Public Procurement Contracts

373. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the steps he is taking to ensure that third level colleges and education centres are compliant with tendering procedures and national procurement guidelines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3105/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): EU Directives and national regulations impose legal obligations on public bodies in regard to advertising and the use of objective tendering procedures for awarding contracts above certain value thresholds. The basic principle is that competitive tendering should be used other than in justifiably exceptional circumstances. Even in the case of procurement which might not be subject to the full scope of EU Directives, the EU Commission and European Court of Justice have ruled that EU Treaty principles must be observed. The essential Treaty principles include non discrimination, equal treatment, transparency, mutual recognition, proportionality, freedom to provide service and freedom of establishment. There is also a requirement to publicise contracts of significant value to a degree which allows parties in other Member States the opportunity to express an interest or to submit tenders.

Individual contracting authorities are responsible for establishing arrangements for ensuring the proper conduct of their affairs, including conformance to standards of good governance and accountability with regard to procurement. Contracting Authorities cannot favour or discriminate against particular candidates and there are legal remedies which may be used against any public body infringing these rules. It is the responsibility of contracting authorities to satisfy themselves that the requirements for public procurement are adhered to and to be fully conversant with the current value thresholds for the application of EU and national procurement rules.

In relation to compliance, public bodies are subject, at the Comptroller and Auditor General's discretion, to examination regarding the economy and efficiency of their operations and the adequacy of the management systems that they have in place to appraise the effectiveness of their operations. This includes their adherence to EU and National rules on public procurement.

Lansdowne Road Agreement Implementation

374. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the revised pay scales for Secretaries General from 1 April 2017 following pay restoration measures under the Lansdowne Road Agreement. [3129/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): A circular setting out the revised salary rates applicable from 1 April 2017 to general Civil Service grades, including Secretaries General, is currently in preparation and will be issued by my Department in due course.

As the Deputy may be aware, under the provisions of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2015 (FEMPI Act 2015), those on salaries in excess of €110,000 shall have the salary reductions imposed under the FEMPI Act 2013 restored in three equal phases on 1 April 2017, 1 April 2018 and 1 April 2019.

Office of Public Works Properties

375. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when the Office of Public Works will finalise the purchase of a property which is necessary to ensure the delivery of public services in proper accommodation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3181/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán Canney): The OPW is progressing the legal matters relating to the acquisition of the site as a matter of high priority. This process will be completed as soon as possible.

Gaeltacht Policy

376. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs her plans to re-introduce the gaeltacht housing grants; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2536/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Seán Kyne): The scheme of housing grants under the Housing (Gaeltacht) Acts was suspended with effect from 7 April 2009. There are no plans to restore the scheme at present.

The priority within my Department at present is to implement the various measures laid out in the 20 Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030.

State Bodies Data

377. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the details of all projects for which funding and business supports have been approved by Údarás na Gaeltachta, including details of the business type and activities carried out with respect to each; the details of the funding type and headings under which funding was granted with respect to each, for each of the years 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017 to date, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2685/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Seán

Kyne): The information sought by the Deputy is published by Údarás na Gaeltachta in its Annual Report and Accounts which are laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas each year. The body's 2014 and 2015 Annual Report and Accounts have already been laid before the Houses and that those in respect of 2016 and 2017 will be laid in due course.

North-South Implementation Bodies

378. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the reason the budget for Foras na Gaeilge was cut despite an increase of 12% for her Department. [2707/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Seán Kyne): The annual budget for Foras na Gaeilge is subject to approval by the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC), given its status as an agency of An Foras Teanga, a North South Implementation Body co-funded by my Department and the Department for Communities in Northern Ireland.

Once discussions between the Finance Departments in both jurisdictions on the budgetary position for 2017 have been finalised, Foras na Gaeilge's draft business plan and budget for 2017 will be brought before the NSMC for approval.

In the interim, I am pleased to inform the Deputy that an indicative provision of €13.989m has been provided within my Department's Vote for 2017 in respect of An Foras Teanga, representing an increase of €0.788m or a 6% increase over 2016.

Irish Language

379. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if all State services and State-sponsored bodies are covered under the remit of the language commissioner. [2708/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Seán Kyne): Details are available on the website of the Office of An Coimisinéir Teanga on all public bodies covered by the Official Languages Act 2003. The Official Languages Act 2003 (Public Bodies) Regulations 2006 (S.I. No. 150 of 2006) came into effect on 1 May 2006. The purpose of these Regulations was to update the list of public bodies in the First Schedule to the Official Languages Act, having regard to changes in the public sector since the commencement of the Act in 2003.

The matter of drafting new Regulations further updating the Schedule is currently being progressed by my Department.

State Bodies Data

380. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the level of Údarás na Gaeltachta supported jobs at 1 January 2016 and at 31 December 2016, by county, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2722/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Seán

Kyne): The information requested by the deputy in respect of the years ending 31 December 2015 and 31 December 2016 is outlined in tabular format.

County	2015	2016
Dún na nGall	2,058	2,081
Maigh Eo	665	640
Gaillimh	2,879	2,941
An Mhí	239	211
Ciarraí	665	671
Corcaigh	614	675
Port Láirge	148	129
Total	7,268	7,348

Departmental Staff Data

381. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the number of Secretaries General in her Department; the annual pay of each Secretary General within her Department at 1 Jan 2017; the expected change in that pay as a consequence of the provisions of the Lansdowne Road agreement; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2902/17]

382. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the number of assistant secretaries general in her Department; the annual pay of each assistant secretary general within her Department at 1 January 2017; the expected change in that pay as a consequence of the provisions of the Lansdowne Road agreement; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2918/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 381 and 382 together.

There is one Secretary General in my Department. I am advised that the rate of pay for the Secretary General is €167,300.

There are four Assistant Secretaries in my Department. The pay scale for Assistant Secretary is €119,572 - €124,917 - €130,706 - €136,496.

Under the provisions of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2015 for those on salaries in excess of €110,000 the salary reductions imposed under the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2013 will be restored in three equal phases on 1 April 2017, 1 April 2018 and 1 April 2019.

A circular setting out the revised salary rates applicable from 1 April 2017 to general Civil Service grades, including Secretaries General and Assistant Secretaries General, is currently in preparation and will be issued by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in due course.

Culture Ireland Grant Scheme

383. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the supports available to Irish artists, from her Department and other organisations that receive government funding, that have been invited to exhibit their work abroad in prestigious venues; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2952/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department's Culture Ireland programme promotes Irish arts worldwide by creating and supporting opportunities for professional Irish artists and companies to present and promote their work at strategic international festivals and venues. Culture Ireland operates three major grant rounds throughout the year according to the following timeframe:

Grant Round	Grant Deadline	Timing of Projects
Spring	15 February 2016	May 2016 onwards
Summer	15 June 2016	September 2016 onwards
Autumn	16 October 2016	January 2017 onwards

Applications are accepted from Irish artists and art organisations as well as international presenters for funding for all forms of the arts as defined in the Arts Act 2003 for consideration under these regular grant rounds. Applications must meet the following basic eligibility requirements:

1. Applications must be in respect of Irish professional artists or arts organisations.

2. Applications must be in respect of an art form defined under the Arts Act 2003.

3. Only international events are supported (i.e. outside the island of Ireland).

4. The event must be accessible to an open public audience and fees must be payable to the artists or arts organisations.

5. Funding support is limited to travel and travel related costs.

Further information on funding and eligibility criteria can be found on the Culture Ireland website by using the following link, http://www.cultureireland.ie/funding. In addition, information regarding some of the artists that Culture Ireland has supported is available on http://applications.cultureireland.ie/index.php?r=reports/outcomeGrants.

Earcaíocht agus Soláthar Foirne Tríú Leibhéal

384. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Catherine Connolly** den Aire Ealaíon, Oidhreachta, Gnóthaí Réigiúnacha, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta an n-iarrfaidh sí ar Údarás Ollscoil na hÉireann, Gaillimh athbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar an gcinneadh gan líofacht sa Ghaeilge a bheith riachtanach don phost mar Uachtarán na hOllscoile as seo amach; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [3025/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Seán Kyne): Is ceist d'Údarás Ollscoil na hÉireann, Gaillimh na riachtanais do post Uachtarán na hOllscoile a leagan amach. Tuigfidh an Teachta, dá réir, nach bhfuil aon ról agam maidir leis an saincheist seo.

Straitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge

385. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Ealaíon, Oidhreachta, Gnóthaí Réigiúnacha, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta an bhfuil athbhreithniú déanta ag a Roinn nó ag dream atá coimisiúnaithe ag a Roinn ar dhul chun cinn fheidhmiú na Straitéise Fiche Bliain don Ghaeilge; má tá, cén uair a fhoilseofar é; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [3078/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Seán Kyne): Mar a luaigh mé sa bhfreagra a thug mé ar Cheisteanna Dála 760, 761 agus 762 le gairid, is í an *Straitéis 20-Bliain don Ghaeilge 2010 – 2030* bunchloch pholasaí an Rialtais maidir leis an nGaeilge. Ós rud é go raibh an Straitéis cúig bliana ar an bhfód ag deireadh 2015, eagraíodh díospóireacht oscailte ina leith i mí na Nollag 2015 ar mhaithe le breathnú siar ar an méid a bhí déanta go dtí sin maidir lena cur i bhfeidhm chomh maith le breathnú chun cinn ar na tosaíochtaí ina leith don tréimhse cúig bliana atá romhainn. Mar chuid den phróiseas, reáchtáladh sraith cruinnithe poiblí ag an tráth sin agus lorgaíodh aighneachtaí scríofa ón bpobal agus ó pháirtithe leasmhara araon.

Ceapadh Acadamh na hOllscolaíochta Gaeilge, OÉ Gaillimh ag an am ar mhaithe le tuairisc maidir leis an díospóireacht oscailte agus na príomhthosaíochtaí straitéiseacha don tréimhse amach romhainn a chur i dtoll a chéile. Tá tuairisc an Acadaimh á breithniú faoi láthair ag mo Roinn i dtreo í chur faoi bhráid an Choiste Chomhairligh a ceapadh ag tús 2014 le comhairle a chur ar fáil maidir le cur i bhfeidhm na Straitéise go luath. Agus tuairimí agus moltaí an Choiste a bheith faighte ina leith, tá sé i gceist agam na príomhthosaíochtaí straitéiseacha don tréimhse cúig bliana go deireadh 2021 a fhoilsiú.

Clár Tacaíochta Teaghlaigh

386. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Ealaíon, Oidhreachta, Gnóthaí Réigiúnacha, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta cén scéim a cuireadh in áit Scéim Labhartha na Gaeilge; cén líon daoine atá cláraithe sa scéim ar fud na tíre (briste síos de réir contae); cén chaoi a n-oibríonn an scéim; an bhfuil measúnú á dhéanamh ar na teaghlaigh atá páirteach sa scéim lena chinntiú gur teaghlaigh iad a labhraíonn Gaeilge; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [3079/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Seán Kyne): Cuireadh deireadh le Scéim Labhairt na Gaeilge agus seoladh an Clár Tacaíochta Teaghlaigh ina háit i mí Aibreáin 2012. Is í aidhm an Chláir seo, a ceapadh mar bheart faoi leith le cúram a dhéanamh de réimsí na Gaeltachta agus an Teaghlaigh de chuid na Straitéise 20-Bliain don Ghaeilge 2010-2030, tacú ar bhealach ilghnéitheach le treisiú na Gaeilge i dteaghlaigh Gaeltachta. Faoin gClár, cuirtear cúnamh ar fáil trí scéimeanna agus tionscnaimh faoi leith de chuid mo Roinne ar leasa theaghlaigh na Gaeltachta atá ag tógáil clainne le Gaeilge nó a dteastaíonn uathu é sin a dhéanamh. Mar léargas ar chuid de na bearta atá curtha i bhfeidhm nó idir lámha faoin gClár Tacaíochta Teaghlaigh, luafainn go sonrach:

- an tionscnamh faoin bhfuil pacáiste teanga á chur ar fáil do theaghlaigh óga atá ag tógáil clainne le Gaeilge - lena n-áirítear teaghlaigh Ghaeltachta ar ndóigh. Tá an pacáiste teanga comhdhéanta de leabhair, dlúthdhioscaí agus DVDanna chomh maith le leabhrán le comhairle phraiticiúil faoin ábhar. Ina theannta sin, ar mhaithe le feasacht a chothú gur ann don phacáiste teanga agus faoi na buntáistí a bhaineann le clann a thógáil le Gaeilge, scaiptear leathán eolais faoin tionscnamh trí sheirbhísí máithreachais Fheidhmeannas na Seirbhísí Sláinte a dhéanann freastal ar na mórcheantair Ghaeltachta. Tugtar sonraí maidir le dáileadh tíreolaíoch an phacáiste sa tábla ag Aguisín 1 thíos.

- *Scéim Seirbhísí Réamhscoile agus Iarscoil* e - ar cuireadh tús léi in 2014. Faoin scéim seo, cuirtear cúnamh ar fáil do sheirbhísí áirithe réamhscoile sa Ghaeltacht le cumasú dóibh gníomhaíochtaí faoi leith a chur ar bun ar mhaithe le cabhrú tuilleadh le teaghlaigh óga na Gaeltachta ó thaobh na Gaeilge de.

- an maoiniú suntasach atá á chur ar fáil ar bhonn bhliantúil don eagraíocht Tuismitheoirí na Gaeltachta ar mhaithe le cabhrú lena gníomhaíochtaí ar son theaghlaigh na Gaeltachta atá ag

tógáil clainne le Gaeilge.

- na forbairtí éagsúla atá déanta le tamall de bhlianta anuas faoi scáth an Chláir chun barr feabhais a chur ar *Scéim na gCúntóirí Teanga* de chuid mo Roinne. I measc na bhforbairtí sin tá tacaíochtaí breise teagaisc curtha ar fáil do na cúntóirí teanga chomh maith le deiseanna breise saibhrithe teanga á gcur ar fáil le cuidiú le cainteoirí líofa Gaeilge sa Ghaeltacht.

- an cúnamh reatha a chuirtear ar fáil ar bhonn leanúnach le cumasú d'eagraíochtaí Gaeltachta sraith leathan gníomhaíochtaí a reáchtáil ar leasa na Gaeilge ar bhonn teaghlaigh sa Ghaeltacht, lena n-áirítear Muintearas, An Crann Óg, Fíbín, CLG – Comhairle Chonnacht agus Comharchumann Forbartha Chorca Dhuibhne.

Mar gheall ar an leithdháileadh breise atá curtha ar fáil i mbliana do scéimeanna Gaeilge agus Gaeltachta, gan trácht ar an gcistíocht bhreise atá ar fáil go sonrach le cabhrú tuilleadh le cur i bhfeidhm na Straitéise 20-Bliain don Ghaeilge 2010-2030 agus an chóras phleanála teanga, is féidir leis an Teachta a bheith cinnte de go leanfar ar aghaidh ag tacú mar is cuí le staid reatha na Gaeilge mar theanga pobail agus teaghlaigh sa Ghaeltacht i gcomhréir le haidhmeanna na Straitéise.

Aguisín 1

-	Sonraí faoi dháileadh an phacáiste teanga
Co An Chabháin	29
Co an Chláir	142
Co an Dúin	49
Co an Longfoirt	5
Co Aontroma	254
Co Ard Mhacha	33
Co Átha Cliath	1,222
Co Cheatharlach	26
Co Chiarraí	317 (97 ón nGaeltacht)
Co Chill Chainnigh	27
Co Chill Dara	182
Co Chill Mhantáin	169
Co Chorcaí	368 (24 ón nGaeltacht)
Co Dhoire	129
Co Dhún na nGall	297 (124 ón nGaeltacht)
Co Fhear Manach	8
Co Laoise	19
Co Liatroma	5
Co Loch Garman	66
Co Lú	78
Co Luimnigh	127
Co Mhaigh Eo	191 (15 ón nGaeltacht)
Co Mhuineacháin	28
Co na Gaillimhe	638 (227 ón nGaeltacht)
Co na Iarmhí	34
Co na Mí	186 (5 ón nGaeltacht)
Co Phort Láirge	74 (11 ón nGaeltacht)
Co Ros Comáin	25
Co Shligigh	29
Co Thiobraid Árann	45

-	Sonraí faoi dháileadh an phacáiste teanga
Co Thír Eoghan	54
Co Uíbh Fhailí	27
lasmuigh d'Éirinn	93
Gan fios	9
Iomlán	4,985

CLÁR Programme

387. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if her attention has been drawn to the potential of three phase electric power; if her attention has been further drawn to its potential in assisting the rural economy; and if there is any intention to restore grants for its installation. [3126/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Michael Ring): I understand that the former Farm Electrification Grant Scheme for Disadvantaged Areas included a grant for Three-Phase electricity supply on farms. This scheme was administered and funded through the former Department of Community Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, and subsequently by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government up to 2011. The Farm Electrification Grant Scheme ceased operation towards the end of 2011.

Previously the CLÁR scheme, a targeted investment programme for small scale infrastructure in disadvantaged rural areas, provided funding to support micro enterprise to convert from single phase to three phase electricity. However, the scheme was closed for new applications in 2009.

I have recently reopened the CLÁR programme, and have secured a budget of €5M for CLÁR in 2017. While I currently have no plans to introduce a grant scheme for Three-Phase electricity, I will keep the matter under consideration in the context of the development of new schemes that can support rural economies.

Turf Cutting Compensation Scheme

388. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 780 of 17 January 2017, the position regarding a specific case (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3173/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): An application for compensation under the cessation of turf cutting compensation scheme has been received by my Department from the individual referred to in the Deputy's Question.

I am advised that a payment of €1,500 in respect of Year 1 of 15 (2012), a payment of €1,518 in respect of Year 2 of 15 (2013) and a payment of €1,521 in respect of Year 4 of 15 (2015) have been made to this applicant. In addition, a once-off payment of €500 has been made to the applicant in respect of the signing of a legal agreement under this scheme.

The qualifying criteria for the scheme as it refers to special areas of conservation are that:

- The claimant must have a legal interest in one of the 53 raised bog special areas of conservation – ownership or turbary right;

- The claimant must have been the owner or entitled to exercise turbary rights on the land in question on 25 May 2010;

- The turbary on the site must not be exhausted;

- The claimant must have been cutting turf on the land in question during the relevant five year period; and

- No turf cutting or associated activity is ongoing on the property.

An onsite inspection of the bog plot in question is required, as part of my Department's verification procedures. My officials have been in contact with the representative of the applicant to arrange same.

Following this inspection, my Department will be in a position to examine the application further.

Commencement of Legislation

389. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Health when sections 2 and 3 of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 will be commenced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2575/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): It was indicated upon the enactment of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 that an appropriate transition period would be required in order to carry out significant preparatory work to facilitate a seamless transition to the new regulatory framework laid out in the Act. That work is underway, involving officials from my Department. It is intended that Parts 2 and 3 will be commenced later this year.

Blind Welfare Allowance Data

390. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons in receipt of the blind welfare allowance; if all current recipients of the blind welfare allowance had their eligibility assessed using the same means test; if he will publish details of the blind welfare allowance means test; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2686/17]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

391. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be issued with a hospital appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3103/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Question No. 392 withdrawn.

Services for People with Disabilities

393. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if suitable long-term accommodation will be provided for a person (details supplied) in County Cork. [2535/17]

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

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

394. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Minister for Health if, in view of the fact that the urology outpatient waiting list at Waterford University Hospital is now 48-plus months, the proposals he has to rectify the situation. [2541/17]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

395. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite an appointment with the orthodontic service for a person (details supplied). [2561/17]

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

Services for People with Disabilities

396. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be granted a date for an assessment of needs to be carried out. [2564/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Govern-

ment 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.

Health Services Expenditure

397. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the expenditure incurred by the Health Service Executive, HSE, in hiring consultants in each of the years 2011 to 2016, in tabular form; the specific projects for which consultants were hired; the expenditure incurred on each project; and the payment per project to consultants. [2571/17]

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

Health Services Expenditure

398. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health if the Health Service Executive, HSE, is funding the provision of accommodation at a location (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2582/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): My Department has been advised by the Health Service Executive that it is not involved in the provision of accommodation at the location mentioned.

Taxi Licences

399. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if he will amend tendering arrangements for taxis to ensure that greater weighting is given to the availability of wheelchair-accessible taxis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2584/17]

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

Health Services

400. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of the review of international public funding models for fertility treatment; when the general scheme of legislative provisions dealing with assisted human reproduction, AHR, will be published; the timeframe for the legislation dealing with AHR; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2585/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Deputy will be aware, in February 2016, the Health Research Board (HRB) was engaged to conduct a comprehensive review of international public funding models. This HRB evidence review is due to be finalised in the

coming months. The HRB evidence review will then be analysed by officials in my Department in the context of considering policy options for a potential public funding model for assisted human reproduction (AHR) treatment. It is envisaged that the final evidence review will be published both on my Department's website and on the HRB's own website at the earliest opportunity.

Officials in my Department are currently drafting the General Scheme of legislative provisions on AHR and associated research, and it is envisaged that the General Scheme will be completed in the first half of 2017. This comprehensive piece of legislation will regulate a range of practices for the first time, including: gamete (sperm or egg) and embryo donation for AHR and research; surrogacy; pre-implantation genetic diagnosis (PGD) of embryos; posthumous assisted reproduction; and stem cell research. Once the General Scheme has been completed, and has been approved by Government for publication it will be uploaded on the Department's website and be submitted to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Health and Children for pre-legislative scrutiny.

Disease Management

401. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide a date to meet with a group (details supplied) to discuss Lyme disease; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2586/17]

459. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health his views on the issues raised at a meeting on 2 August 2016 between officials from his Department and advocates for support and services for Lyme disease patients; his plans to assist persons seeking diagnosis relative to lyme disease; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2830/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 401 and 459 together.

Lyme borreliosis can be asymptomatic or have a range of clinical presentations. Current best advice is that diagnosis should be made only after careful examination of the patient's clinical history, physical findings, laboratory evidence and exposure risk evaluation. Exposure to ticks prior to disease manifestations is necessary for the diagnosis of Lyme borreliosis. Since an awareness or recollection of a tick-bite is not always present, however, this should not exclude the diagnosis of Lyme borreliosis. Later stages require the use of antibody detection tests (or advanced DNA detection techniques). Testing for Lyme Disease is undertaken in most of the larger hospitals in Ireland. In undertaking Lyme testing, it is essential that the results are interpreted in the light of the clinical condition of the patient. If the result of this initial screen is equivocal, the patient's samples are referred to the U.K.'s Public Health England Porton Down facility which uses a two-tier system recommended by American and European authorities. This involves a screening serological test followed by a confirmatory serological test.

I understand that representatives from Tick Talk met with Minister of State Marcella Corcoran Kennedy on 2nd August, 2016.

A member of the Group has been invited to be the patient representative on a Lyme Borreliosis Sub-Committee which has been established by the Scientific Advisory Committee of the Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC). The aim of this Sub-Committee is to develop strategies to undertake primary prevention in order to minimise the harm caused by Lyme Borreliosis in Ireland. In addition to staff from the HPSC, the membership of the Sub-Committee includes specialists in Public Health Medicine, Consultants in Infectious Diseases, Clinical

Microbiology, Occupational Health an Entomologist from the Parks and Wildlife Service, a representative from the Local Government Management Agency and an Environmental Health Officer.

The initial work of the Lyme Borreliosis Sub-committee involves a survey of laboratory methods for the diagnosis of Lyme borreliosis in Ireland, the development of Lyme borreliosis guidance for general practitioners, the publication of medical media articles to highlight diagnostics and laboratory methods relating to Lyme borreliosis available in Ireland for general practitioners, and ongoing work in drawing together the Final Report of the Sub-committee.

Medicinal Products Licensing

402. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Health the Health Products Regulatory Authority plans to have cannabidiol made available by prescription for treatment of epilepsy. [2587/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Cannabidiol (CBD) is derived from cannabis. However, since it does not have psychoactive properties it is not controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Acts.

While I am aware that CBD oil is sometimes marketed as a nutritional or dietary supplement, it should be noted that it is not authorised as a medicinal product in Ireland. Under European and Irish legislation, before a medicine can be placed on the Irish market, the manufacturer must seek an authorisation from the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) or, in the case of certain medicinal products, the European Medicines Agency. A determination on an application for authorisation of a medicinal product is based on a rigorous scientific assessment of the application against the criteria of safety, quality, efficacy, legal and regulatory requirements. I have no role in the process of authorising medicinal products.

No application has been received from any company for any products containing CBD. The HPRA are open to receiving such applications.

Elsewhere products containing CBD are undergoing clinical trials for the treatment of a number of medical conditions, including severe, intractable (treatment-resistant) epilepsy. There is no prohibition on an Irish registered doctor recommending CBD for a patient under his/her care if they deem that treatment option to be clinically appropriate for their patient.

Medical Card Eligibility

403. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health his plans to issue a generic medical card that may be used by vulnerable persons to allow them to attend a doctor's surgery not in his or her locality (details supplied). [2605/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): A person who is in receipt of a medical card must register with a General Practitioner. If they move temporarily from their official postal address , and are resident in a place not ordinarily served by their medical card GP, they will be regarded as a "temporary resident" and can avail of medical services with any GP registered to provide GMS services.

The question of a person submitting a change of doctor request may arise if the cardholder intends to relocate to a new area for longer than three months and/or on a permanent basis.

Hospital Appointments Status

404. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2607/17]

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 Delays

405. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied). [2608/17]

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

406. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Health if the freestyle libre device (details supplied) will be made available through Health Service Executive, HSE, funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2614/17]

474. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if approval will be given for the freestyle libre (details supplied) to be made available on the long-term illness scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2896/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 406 and 474 together.

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 to the Deputy.

Respite Care Services Provision

407. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) in County Kerry are being charged for long-term respite care services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2616/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the individual case referred to is a service matter for the Health Service Executive, I have asked the HSE to look into the particular matter raised and to reply directly to the Deputy.

On 1 January 2017, "long stay contributions" under sections 67A to 67D of the Health Act 1970 and the Health (Residential Support Services Maintenance and Accommodation Contributions) Regulations 2016 replaced the system of long stay charges for in-patient services, which was in place from July 2005 until 31 December 2016 under the now-repealed section 53 of that Act.

Long stay contributions apply to all forms of residential support services, other than acute in-patient services and nursing home services provided to those supported under the Nursing Homes Support Scheme (Fair Deal). In line with the previous long stay charges system:

- Long stay contributions apply to the maintenance and accommodation elements only of services which are provided by the HSE or by agencies funded to provide services on behalf of the HSE under section 38 of the Health Act 2004.

- Contributions become payable when a person has already received at least 30 days of such services during the immediately preceding 12-month period. Accordingly, many episodes of respite care would not result in a requirement to make a long stay contribution towards maintenance and accommodation costs.

The Health (Residential Support Services Maintenance and Accommodation Contributions) Regulations 2016 provide for three different schedules of income-based long stay contributions towards accommodation and maintenance costs in three accommodation categories:

- Category A refers to accommodation where full-time (24 hour) nursing and/or medical care is provided, subject to a maximum of €25 daily (€175 per week) for a person whose income is €208 per week or more.

- Category B relates to contributions payable by those in accommodation where part-time nursing and/or medical care is provided and is subject to a maximum of €18.57 daily (€130 per week) for a person whose income is €194 per week or more.

- Category C relates to all other non-nursing settings (such as independent living settings), subject to a maximum of €10 daily (€70 per week) for a person whose income is €188 per week or more.

Affordability and the avoidance of financial hardship are built-in features of the long stay contributions provisions. In all three accommodation categories, the contribution rate schedules are sliding scales, with proportionally lower contribution rates applying to those on lower incomes. Additionally, section 67D of the Health Act 1970 provides that the HSE may reduce or waive a contribution where appropriate, in order to:

- avoid undue financial hardship on the part of the service user and/or on the part of the service user's dependants

- advance a service user's identified needs (e.g. care plan objectives), or

- take account of separate contributions (if any) made by a service user towards his or her maintenance or accommodation costs.

To assist in the fair application of the framework, the HSE has published national guidelines for the correct determination of long stay contributions and comprehensive waiver guidelines (approved by the Ministers for Health and Public Expenditure and Reform) on the individual circumstances where such contributions may need to be reduced or waived. The guidelines specify that service providers must have regard to the individual circumstances of each service user and his or her dependants. The guidelines ensure that the applicable contribution may be reduced or waived where appropriate, taking account of each person's income and necessary outgoings, including reasonable regular financial commitments, with a view to ensuring there is no unfair burden on the service user or on his or her dependants.

The features of the long stay contributions framework ensure that it is reasonable and fair and that each service user's contributions are based on what he or she can afford, taking account of the service user's individual circumstances.

Health Services

408. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health if the mobile catheterisation lab which has been announced by the Minister of State for Training, Skills and Innovation will be for the use of University Hospital Waterford alone or if it will be shared with other hospitals; if it is to be shared, the details of the arrangement that will be put in place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2617/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Budget 2017 makes specific provision for those patients waiting longest for treatment within the health service. In this context, I am considering a national cardiology waiting list initiative which will address waiting times for cardiology treatments in a number of hospitals, including University Hospital Waterford (UHW). A range of measures are envisaged including sharing of facilities and resources within and between Hospital Groups, use of private facilities and the deployment of a mobile cath lab. I have written to the Director General of the HSE about the proposed initiative and I expect that further details will be made available in the coming weeks.

Hospital Services

409. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide information (details supplied) regarding University Hospital Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2618/17]

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

Psychological Services

410. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if he will secure an urgent assessment appointment with a child psychologist for a person (details supplied) who has been waiting for over nine months for an urgent appointment. [2620/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Govern-

ment 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.

Health Services Staff Recruitment

411. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the steps being taken to find an interim replacement for the position of child psychologist in the Roscommon area to replace the current child psychologist who is currently on sick leave since March 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2621/17]

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

412. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health his views on recent reports in the media that service users from a Health Service Executive, HSE, funded centre (details supplied) in Ballina have been facilitated by that service to attend hare coursing events, including two outings to coursing meetings in Loughrea, County Galway, and Liscannor, County Clare. [2628/17]

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.

Medical Goods Regulation

413. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Health if the range of low-protein products available through the long-term illness scheme has been kept up to date; if the low-protein products required for persons suffering from Phenylketonuria is provided for under the long-term illness scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2632/17]

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 to the Deputy.

Services for People with Disabilities

414. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Health if he will comment on reports of hare coursing being an activity supported as part of a therapeutic service (details supplied) in County Mayo; his views on hare coursing being supported in this way; if there are other parts of the health service giving any support to hare coursing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2633/17]

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.

Disease Management

415. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Health to outline the steps that have been taken to put in place a successor to the national rare disease plan 2014-18; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2634/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): My department is committed to implementing recommendation 48 of our National Rare Disease Plan that was published in July 2015. This provided that: 'There should be an overall review of the National Rare Disease Plan prior to the development of the next plan in 2019.'

Home Care Packages Provision

416. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if a home care package will be facilitated in the case of persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2637/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Medical Card Drugs Availability

417. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health to outline the reason MacuShield is no longer available under the general medical services scheme or the hardship scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2638/17]

453. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if he will reinstate MacuShield on the medical card for older persons suffering from macular degeneration. [2815/17]

473. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Health to outline the position regarding the future plan for the availability of MacuShield on the medical card; if it is to be removed; if there is a generic alternative; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2883/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 417, 453 and 473 together.

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 to the Deputy.

Medical Card Drugs Availability

418. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health to list the medicines taken from the general medical services scheme in the past 12 months; the reason for removal; the options available to persons who cannot afford medications that have been removed from the GMS scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2639/17]

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 to the Deputy.

Primary Care Services Provision

419. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health to set down in tabular form the total number of referrals from Caredoc Clonmel to the accident and emergency departments of South Tipperary General Hospital and University Hospital Waterford in each of the years from 2010 to 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2646/17]

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 for direct reply.

Vaccination Programme

420. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health to outline his plans to extend the meningitis B vaccine scheme to children born before 1 October 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2648/17]

471. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health to outline his plans to extend the meningitis B vaccine beyond those babies born after October 2016; if he has received any submissions on this vaccine; if any reimbursement has been made to those who paid if their babies were born before that time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2874/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 420 and 471 together.

The HSE Service Plan included additional funding of €2.5 million for the expansion of the Primary Childhood Immunisation Schedule in 2016. Two changes were made to the Primary Childhood Immunisation Schedule which came into effect on 1 December, 2016 with the in-

troduction of Men B and Rotavirus for all babies born on or after 1 October, 2016. All vaccines administered through the Primary Childhood Immunisation Schedule are provided free of charge. Ireland is the second country in Europe to make the vaccine available free of charge as part of its national immunisation programme.

NIAC makes many recommendations in relation to "at risk groups" but not all of these are included in the current immunisation schedule. The introduction of the vaccine to the childhood immunisation programmes means that all children born on or after 1 October 2016, including those in "at risk groups", will automatically receive the vaccine. However, there are no plans at this stage to introduce a catch-up programme for older children. Those who have a medical card are eligible to have the vaccine administered by their GP free of charge. However the purchase of the vaccine is not covered by the medical card scheme.

Nursing Home Services

421. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health if he will reverse the decision to close a nursing home (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2649/17]

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.

Mental Health Services Provision

422. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health when funding will be made available to open a facility (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2650/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): Significant funding of €1.15 million was allocated by Minister of State for Mental Health and Older People Helen McEntee to the HSE Community Healthcare Organisation Kerry/Cork to allow for the opening of Deer Lodge Mental Health Unit. This funding announcement was made in December.

Work is now underway on the recruitment of staff and on commissioning the building to allow for the opening of Deer Lodge as soon as possible. Discussions with unions are also underway, and meetings took place as recently as last week.

The opening of Deer Lodge will provide for a modern, single room accommodation facility to replace the old O'Connor unit which is currently in use and of an inadequate standard.

Medical Card Applications

423. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite the application for a medical card for a person (details supplied). [2655/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has es-

tablished a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information was issued to Oireachtas members.

Hospital Waiting Lists

424. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be issued with a date for an outpatient appointment; the reason for the delay in issuing a date for an appointment in view of the fact that it is an urgent case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2656/17]

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

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

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

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Review

425. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Health if he will review the fair deal scheme to include home care packages; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2657/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): Government policy is to promote care in the community for older people so that they can continue to live in their own homes for as long as possible and long-term nursing care should be a last resort after home support and other community based supports have been exhausted. However, the main statutory scheme for older people is the Nursing Homes Support Scheme, which provides for a system of financial support for those assessed as needing long-term nursing home care.

The Department has commenced an examination of options to bring greater national consistency to the regulation and financing of home care. This work began in 2016 with a review by the Health Research Board of how home care is regulated and funded in comparable jurisdictions, commissioned by the Department. The review will be finalised shortly and will be used to inform the development of policy proposals for the regulation and funding of these services.

The development of a regulatory and funding model for home care services is a complex undertaking involving very significant legislative, operational and financial resources. It is considered that the best option for the future may be a statutory home care scheme specifically designed for home care. The Department's intention is that regulation of the home care sector will be done in parallel with the development of a scheme.

In addition, a public consultation process will be launched in the coming months to allow

stakeholders, including older people, their families and healthcare workers to express their views regarding a new homecare scheme. As is usual with public consultations, details will be publically announced when they have been finalised.

The development of a statutory home care scheme is a priority for me, as Minister, and I can assure the Deputy it will be progressed as a matter of urgency.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Review

426. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the recent documentary "We Need to Talk About Dad"; his views on whether the fair deal scheme is overly complex; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2660/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): I am aware of the documentary referred to and the issues raised, and would like to assure the Deputy that help is available to anyone who may need additional assistance in applying for support under the Fair Deal Scheme, and work on implementing improvements is well underway.

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.

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, including recommendations in relation to improving and simplifying the application process. This includes:

- reviewing documents with advice from the National Adult Literacy Agency to ensure that they are as user-friendly, clear and informative as possible;

- ensuring that there is clear guidance on where relevant information can be found;

- making sample application forms available;

- reviewing the content of correspondence with applicants to make sure that it is clear; and

- standardising informal advice provided to applicants in relation to the nursing home loan element of the Scheme.

Work on implementing these improvements is well underway by the HSE, and this should assist with making the process of applying for support under the Fair Deal Scheme more manageable, understandable and efficient for people who are at a vulnerable stage in their lives.

The HSE website provides helpful information and guides which explain the application process. There are also Nursing Homes Support Offices located throughout the country who are available to assist with any queries in relation to the Scheme. Contact details for these offices are also available on the HSE website.

Hospital Waiting Lists

427. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be issued with a date for a physiotherapy appointment; if he will ensure that the person's case will be prioritised in view of the severity of their medical condition; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2662/17]

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

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

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

Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland

428. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health to outline the reason a person (details supplied) who secured fulltime employment at University Hospital Waterford in early December 2016 is still waiting for a personal identification number from Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland. [2663/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Department Officials have sought and received a report from the NMBI on this matter and the contents of that report are set out in the following paragraphs.

The applicant, who undertook her training in the UK, was issued with an application pack on 19 October 2016. She applied for consideration of registration in the General Nurse Division of the Register on 7 November 2016. The NMBI required verification of registration and good standing from the Nursing and Midwifery Council in the United Kingdom and that verification was received by the NMBI on 5 January 2017.

This application is currently being assessed in the Registration Department and a decision will be reached on her application later today. Subject to a positive decision on the matter, the applicant will be informed of this decision and will be requested to pay the final €145 registration fee. On receipt of this fee her application will be finalised as soon as the payment is processed in the NMBI's Finance Department.

Hospital Groups

429. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health to outline his plans regarding representation by management or clinicians at Mallow General Hospital on the South/South West Hospital Group. [2666/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Hospital Groups have been established on a non-statutory administrative basis in line with the Government's programme for reform of the

health service. The establishment of Hospital Groups is designed to deliver more responsive and equitable access to vital services for all patients. Potential benefits include increased efficiency and greater cost-effectiveness, better outcomes for patients, improved accountability and a stronger role for smaller hospitals in the delivery of health services.

Mallow General Hospital is one of nine hospitals that comprise the South/South West Hospital Group (SSWHG). The Hospital Group Board is chaired by Professor Geraldine McCarthy and I hope to appoint the rest of the Board in the near future. In that regard, the Department has commenced advertising through the Public Appointments Service (PAS) for candidates with the necessary expertise, competencies and experience for appointment to the Hospital Group Boards. Applications for the SSWHG Board will be invited in due course.

Patient Data

430. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide a breakdown of the activity levels at Mallow General Hospital and the number of patients that are considered inpatients at the hospital but treated in other hospitals and then returned to Mallow General Hospital for continuing care as inpatients for each of the years 2014 to 2016. [2667/17]

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

Hospital Beds Data

431. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health to set out the number of beds used at Mallow General Hospital. [2668/17]

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

Hospital Services

432. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health to set out the definition of acute medical care as it relates to Mallow General Hospital; and whether bypass protocols for Mallow General Hospital are strident, such that more acute medical care could be carried out at the hospital to alleviate pressures in Cork city. [2669/17]

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

Hospital Appointments Delays

433. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that patients of the neurology department in Beaumont Hospital have had appointments cancelled without advance notice, resulting in patients presenting for appointments and being sent home; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2672/17]

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.

Ambulance Service Data

434. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of occasions on which an ambulance has been called to the acute mental health unit on the grounds of Cork University Hospital to transfer a patient to the emergency department in CUH from the date of opening of the unit to the present day, by date, in tabular form; the response time in each case in addition to the base from which the ambulance travelled to carry out the transfer; if there are any long-term plans to avoid tying up ambulances for the transfer of patients across the campus; if the matter of the way patients would be transferred from the acute mental health unit to the emergency department at CUH was discussed when the unit was being designed and before the unit opened; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2674/17]

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

Medicinal Products Availability

435. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the actions his Department and the HSE have taken to ensure the continued supply of Respreeza for those persons who were part of the original clinical trial which is due to end on 31 January 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2678/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines under the community drugs schemes, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013.

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 which may have been sought by the HSE 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:

I am informed that the HSE received a request and economic dossier from the manufacturer of Respreeza for maintenance treatment of emphysema in adults with documented severe alpha1-proteinase inhibitor deficiency.

In June of this year the HSE asked the NCPE to carry out a health technology assessment on the cost effectiveness of this treatment. The NCPE completed its assessment and made a recommendation on 9 December 2016. The NCPE determined that the manufacturer failed to demonstrate cost-effectiveness of the drug and did not recommend it for reimbursement.

A summary of the health technology assessment has been published on the NCPE website and is available at: http://www.ncpe.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/NCPE-website-summary_Final.pdf

The HSE will consider the NCPE assessment, and other expert advice, as part of its decision-making process for reimbursement. This decision will be made on objective, scientific and economic grounds by the HSE in line with the 2013 Act.

The operation of compassionate access schemes is at the discretion of manufacturers. There is no provision in Irish legislation for the approval of compassionate use programmes for specific groups of patients with an unmet medical need. I have previously asked manufacturers to show compassion and to maintain compassionate access schemes for patients during the assessment process by the HSE and this remains the position. The manufacturer has informed the NCPE that there are 17 patients in the compassionate programme receiving Respreeza which will continue until the end of January 2017.

Hospital Appointments Status

436. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment will be provided for a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2682/17]

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

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

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

Medicinal Products Availability

437. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Health the consideration that has been given to providing the drug nusinersen to those persons suffering from type 1 spinal muscular atrophy; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that doctors are reporting this drug to be the first to have clinically meaningful outcomes for children with this condition; the efforts that can be made to speed up access to this drug for those persons affected; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2683/17]

486. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Health if he will consider a case (details supplied) and make the necessary arrangements for the drug nusinersen to be made available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3108/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 437 and 486 together.

The Health Service Executive (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. The decisions on which medicines are reimbursed by the taxpayer are made on objective, scientific and economic grounds by the HSE.

For a medicine to be considered for reimbursement it must first have a marketing authorisation from the European Medicine Agency (EMA), before being assessed under the 2013 Act.

The EMA provides independent recommendations on medicines for human and veterinary use, based on a comprehensive scientific evaluation of data.

The EMA's evaluations of marketing authorisation applications provide the basis for the authorisation of medicines in Europe. This is separate to the Statutory Assessment process conducted by the HSE.

I understand from the HSE that Biogen have applied to the EMA for market authorisation in the EU for the drug Nusinersen brand name Spinraza. The application to the EMA was submitted in Autumn 2016. The EMA assessment process generally takes around one year.

Should Nusinersen receive European marketing authorisation, the manufacturer would then be open to make an application to the HSE to have the product reimbursed under the community drug schemes.

The operation of patient access schemes is at the discretion of manufacturers. There is no provision in Irish legislation for the approval of compassionate use programmes for specific groups of patients with an unmet medical need. However I understand that following an application from a consultant paediatric neurologist at Temple Street hospital, the company has extended their early access programme to two of his patients with SMA Type 1 and that the patients' families have been informed.

Ombudsman's Remit

438. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Health if the Office of the Ombudsman, in investigating a complaint against a doctor in a hospital, has access to clinical investigations; if not, the reason; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2691/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Medical Council is designated as the regulatory body for all registered medical practitioners under the Medical Practitioners Act 2007. It has a statutory role in protecting the public by promoting the highest professional standards among medical practitioners practising in the Republic of Ireland. Under the Act the Medical Council is the body responsible for examining complaints against medical practitioners. Parts 7, 8 and 9 of the Act set out how complaints are managed by the Council.

When the Medical Council receives a complaint the Preliminary Proceedings Committee (PPC) investigate the complaint. From the PPC the complaint may be referred to the Fitness to Practice (FTP) Committee, where a final determination on the doctor's fitness to practice is made by the Council based on the evidence provided to the FTP Inquiry and FTP Committee's report.

The functions and powers of the Ombudsman are set out under the Ombudsman Act 1980, and responsibility for the Office of the Ombudsman comes under the aegis of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

The Ombudsman published a report in 2015 entitled "*Learning to Get Better - An investigation by the Ombudsman into how public hospitals handle complaints"***.** One of the recommendations in that report was "Consideration should be given on a wider front to amending the statutory complaints process (and the remit of the Ombudsman) to allow for the inclusion of clinical judgement as the subject about which a complaint can be made". Under current leg-

islation the Ombudsman cannot examine complaints which relate to a person acting on behalf of the HSE and which, in his opinion, relate solely to the exercise of clinical judgement in the diagnosis or care or treatment of a patient. However, the Ombudsman can examine the administrative actions of healthcare professionals and administrators taken in the course of clinical work which do not involve clinical judgement.

My Department's National Patient Safety Office is conducting a review of the statutory complaints process and this will include consideration of the recommendations in the Office for the Ombudsman report of 2015. The review will also examine how the HSE examines complaints in accordance with its obligations under Part 9 of the Health Act 2004.

Medicinal Products Availability

439. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Health the status of his negotiations with the supplier of the Orkambi drug; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2694/17]

454. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health the status of talks between a company (details supplied) and the HSE regarding the drug Orkambi [2816/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 439 and 454 together.

The HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines under the community drugs schemes, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013.

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 which may have been sought by the HSE 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:

1. the health needs of the public;

2. the cost-effectiveness of meeting health needs by supplying the item concerned rather than providing other health services;

3. the availability and suitability of items for supply or reimbursement;

4. 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;

5. the potential or actual budget impact of the item or listed item;

6. the clinical need for the item or listed item;

7. the appropriate level of clinical supervision required in relation to the item to ensure patient safety;

8. 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

9. the resources available to the HSE.

I am informed that, following a request from the HSE, the NCPE carried out an assessment of the manufacturer's economic dossier submitted in March 2016 on the cost effectiveness of Orkambi. This dossier included details on all relevant costs and relevant cost offsets including 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 and this is available on its website. It was submitted to the HSE in June 2016. The NCPE determined, following an evaluation of the economic dossier, that the manufacturer failed to demonstrate cost-effectiveness or value for money from using the drug. The NCPE have confirmed that all relevant costs were included in the analysis. In line with the HSE's assessment process, the HSE Drugs Committee considered the NCPE recommendation, the manufacturers submissions and commercial offer and other information. Following this consideration the Drugs Committee did not recommend reimbursement at the current price. The HSE Directorate considered the Drugs Committee's recommendation in December and the Directorate took the decision not to reimburse at the current price offered by the company.

The HSE has since re-entered into negotiations with Vertex, the manufacturer of Orkambi, with a view to significantly reducing the cost of Orkambi. This process is on-going. A meeting was held in December and again in early January. Following completion of this process the HSE's Drugs Committee will make a recommendation on the cost-effectiveness of Orkambi to the HSE Directorate for a decision, taking into consideration the manufacturer's latest price offerings. Again, this decision will be made on objective, scientific and economic grounds in line with the 2013 Act.

I fully support the HSE in its efforts to reduce the price of this medicine and I would call on all public representatives, including the members of this house, to do the same.

Hospital Facilities

440. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when it is expected funding might be provided for the endoscopy unit at Naas General Hospital having particular regard to the urgent needs of the hospital at this time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2702/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The project to be delivered at Naas General Hospital is more extensive than the endoscopy services department referred to. It also includes accommodation and ancillary services to support the new physical medicine, physical therapy, oncology services and day procedures departments, a duplex (rather than simplex) reverse osmosis filtration system and two lifts. All stages of capital projects, including the design and tendering processes, are subject to review to ensure that the projects deliver value for money. This includes, where possible, 'future proofing' to ensure that capital developments meet not just current standards but that provision is made for additional capacity and/or improved equipping and that these are addressed appropriately. This has resulted in a significant increase in the scope of the project and as a consequence its estimated cost.

Funding will be considered in the context of the future capital envelope for the health service and the overall priorities for future service development in the Dublin Midlands Hospital Group. It is proposed that there will be a mid-term review of the State's capital envelope, which will assess progress, review emerging pressures and demands. It is expected that this mid-term

review will be completed in 2017.

Medical Aids and Appliances Applications

441. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an application for a new wheelchair in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2703/17]

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

Health Services Provision

442. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health if a review of the case of a person (details supplied) will take place to regularise treatment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2706/17]

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.

In relation to this transport arrangement, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Health Insurance Levy

443. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health his views on the fact risk equalisation charges on health insurance policies are being categorised as Government levies by health insurers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2711/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The voluntary health insurance system in Ireland operates on the basis of community rating whereby everyone pays the same price for the same product (adjusted to reflect any loadings applicable under Lifetime Community Rating). Our community rated market is supported by a Risk Equalisation Scheme funded by a community rating levy payable by insurers on all written policies. The legislative basis for the levy is provided for in the Stamp Duties Consolidation Act 1999. The levy is collected by the Revenue Commissioners from insurers and all of the monies collected are paid over to the Risk Equalisation Fund administered by the independent regulator - the Health Insurance Authority. The Authority redistributes the monies back to the health insurance companies by way of credits in respect of older and sicker people. The scheme is designed to protect community rating by spreading the cost of insuring older and sicker people across the market and allows all people to continue to pay the same net amount for a given health insurance product.

Speech and Language Therapy Provision

444. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the reason there is no publicly funded speech therapist in Cootehill town (details supplied); the date for the refilling of this

post; the options for families attending this facility for speech and language in the meantime; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2717/17]

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.

National Children's Hospital Status

445. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the status of the tendering process for the construction of the new national children's hospital at the St. James's Hospital site; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2718/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The National Paediatric Hospital Development Board, which is the statutory body charged with delivery of the capital project, has recently completed evaluation of the tenders, received at the end of October 2016, for the main & specialist contractors for the new children's hospital and for the two Paediatric OPD and Urgent Care Satellite Centres at Tallaght and Connolly Hospitals.

Maternity Services

446. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the status of the relocation of the Coombe Women and Infants University Hospital to St. James's Hospital; the status of the tender process associated with this relocation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2719/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As announced in June 2015, the Coombe Women & Infants University Hospital will relocate in time to the St. James's campus, achieving tri-location of adult, paediatric and maternity services. The National Maternity Strategy, published in January 2016, reaffirms the delivery of tri-located maternity services on the campus with the new children's hospital and St James's Hospital. A site for the proposed maternity hospital is identified in the Site Master Plan for the St. James's campus, and the new children's hospital design has incorporated the required operational links with both maternity and adult hospitals.

While the construction of the new maternity hospital on the campus will not commence until the new children's hospital is completed, consideration will be given to the work required to progress the new maternity hospital design, including any associated tender processes.

Medicinal Products Prices

447. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the cost of Orkambi in each EU member state; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2721/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines 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.

Home Help Service Provision

448. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 1342 of 16 September 2016 and media reports (details supplied), his plans to reorient the funding model for home care packages and home help hours; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2746/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): Government policy is to promote care in the community for older people so that they can continue to live in their own homes for as long as possible and long-term nursing care should be a last resort after home support and other community based supports have been exhausted. However, the main statutory scheme for older people is the Nursing Homes Support Scheme (NHSS), which provides for a system of financial support for those assessed as needing long-term nursing home care.

The Department has commenced an examination of options to bring greater national consistency to the regulation and financing of home care. This work began in 2016 with a review by the Health Research Board of how home care is regulated and funded in comparable jurisdictions, commissioned by the Department. The review will be finalised shortly and will be used to inform the development of policy proposals for the regulation and funding of these services.

The development of a regulatory and funding model for home care services is a complex undertaking involving very significant legislative, operational and financial resources. It is considered that the best option for the future may be a statutory home care scheme specifically designed for home care. The Department's intention is that regulation of the home care sector will be done in parallel with the development of a scheme.

In addition, a public consultation process will be launched in the coming months to allow stakeholders, including older people, their families and healthcare workers to express their views regarding a new homecare scheme. As is usual with public consultations, details will be publically announced when they have been finalised.

The development of a statutory home care scheme is a priority for me, as Minister, and I can assure the Deputy it will be progressed as a matter of urgency.

Hospital Appointments Status

449. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health if a date for a cataract operation will be provided to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2792/17]

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

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

are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

Community Intervention Teams

450. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health the way in which the services of the community intervention teams in south and north Tipperary have been advertised to hospitals, general practitioners and other community sources to ensure that as many referrals as possible are made that will keep persons out of hospital and away from accident and emergency departments; his plans to advertise the service directly to the public; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2802/17]

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

451. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff posts in each public and voluntary hospital that are funded by pharmaceutical companies or other medical supplies companies, in tabular form; the details of the posts; and the value of the funding [2807/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

Long-Term Illness Scheme Coverage

452. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons under 16 years of age with a long-term illness card for the medical condition mental illness per CHO in 2016 and to date in 2017; if there are young persons between 16 and 18 years of age with a long-term illness card and, if so, the number; his plans to increase the age to 18 years of age for this card for the medical condition mental illness; the cost of such an expansion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2809/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): There are no plans to amend the list of conditions covered by the Long Term Illness Scheme.

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 to the Deputy.

Question No. 453 answered with Question No. 417.

Question No. 454 answered with Question No. 439.

Medicinal Products Licensing

455. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if, in view of the publicity in recent days surrounding the possible exemption on the usage of cannabis-based medicines, he will provide clarification on this and the way in which a person would proceed with an application for an exemption; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2818/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Cannabis is strictly controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Acts, 1977 to 2016 and the Regulations made thereunder.

You will already be aware, it is open for an Irish registered doctor to apply for a licence for a cannabis-based product for an individual named patient, under their care. The appropriateness of any particular treatment is a matter between the patient and their doctor, I have no role in this process.

This information has been provided to individuals who contacted my Department for information and has been stated publicly by myself on a number of occasions. However, to date, just one application has been received from a doctor and following review, a licence has been granted to that doctor.

An application for a controlled drug licence for a Schedule 1 drug such as cannabis, is a very serious matter and can only be made for a named patient by a doctor registered with the Medical Council. I would expect that an application would be from a doctor actively involved in the treatment of their patient.

The main elements of an application will include:

- An outline of the treatment the patient has received to date and justification from the doctor as to why it is appropriate in their patient's specific circumstances to prescribe a Schedule 1 drug.

- If the patient's consultant is not the applicant, the views, if any, of the consultant in relation to the application.

- Details of the cannabis-based product which it is proposed to prescribe and administer to the patient.

- The source of the cannabis-based product.

- The arrangements for the ongoing monitoring and care of the patient once the cannabis-based treatment has commenced.

No other exemption exists in Irish legislation for the usage of cannabis for medicinal purposes.

Proposed Legislation

456. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the progress which has been made concerning the drafting of legislation to establish a new transport support scheme, which will replace the now closed motorised transport grant scheme; when it is expected that this process will be formally completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2820/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): Conscious of the reports of the Ombudsman in 2011 and 2012 regarding the legal status of both the Mobility Allowance and Motorised Transport Grant Scheme in the context of the Equal Status Acts, the Government decided to close both schemes in February 2013.

The Government is aware of the continuing needs of people with a disability who rely on individual payments that support choice and independence. In this regard, monthly payments of up to €208.50 have continued to be made by the Health Service Executive to 4,700 people who were in receipt of the Mobility Allowance.

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

- There is a firm statutory basis to the Scheme's operation;

- There is transparency and equity in the eligibility criteria attaching to the Scheme;

- Resources are targeted at those with greatest needs; and

- The Scheme is capable of being costed and is affordable on its introduction and on an ongoing basis.

The Deputy may be interested to note that people who previously benefitted from the now-closed Motorised Transport Grant, may, if they satisfy the criteria under that scheme, be eligible for tax relief under the Drivers and Passengers with Disabilities Tax Relief Scheme. This scheme is the responsibility of my colleague, the Minister for Finance and is operated by the Revenue Commissioners. Details of the scheme can be found on *www.revenue.ie*.

Health Services Data

457. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the information available to him on the incidence of foetal alcohol syndrome over the past ten years; and if he will consider introducing a comprehensive testing and education programme to address this issue. [2823/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): The provision of services to prevent and treat foetal alcohol syndrome 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.

Health Services

458. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if he will arrange to have a person (details supplied) assessed by the HSE for extended assistance under a scheme. [2829/17]

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.

Question No. 459 answered with Question No. 401.

Departmental Bodies

460. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health the timeframe within which

CORU is expected to validate and register persons who qualified as radiographers outside of Ireland and are seeking the validation due to the fact they have been offered employment with the HSE; if those persons who have applied and are waiting for the validation will be fast-tracked; if there is a backlog in this process; and if so, the action he will take to speed up the process. [2832/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Directive 2005/36/EC applies to all European Economic Area (EEA) nationals with EEA qualifications who wish to practise a regulated profession in an EEA Member State other than that in which they obtained their professional qualifications. Its intention is to make it easier for such professionals to practise their professions in EEA countries other than their own but due safeguards are provided in the assessment of the qualification for public health and safety and consumer protection.

The General System of the Directive, into which professions such as the profession of radiographer fall, provides for an assessment on a case-by-case basis of the formal qualifications and professional experience of an individual applicant against the qualifications required to practise in the host Member State and for a final decision to be communicated to the applicant within 4 months of submission of a complete application.

In Ireland, the Radiographers Registration Board at CORU is the competent authority under the Directive for the recognition of non-Irish radiography qualifications for the purposes of registration under the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005. A similar system for recognising foreign professional qualifications outside the scope of the Directive is also in place under the Act.

As the outcome of a particular application cannot be guaranteed, and given the time lines involved due to the individual nature of each application, CORU's website advises applicants not to make any travel or employment arrangements which depend on their qualifications being recognised. Likewise, the Health Service Executive (HSE) does not offer any post until candidates are registered with CORU and strongly recommends that anyone interested in pursuing a career in radiography with the HSE commences the validation/registration procedure as early as possible.

Hospice Services Provision

461. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Health when the funding will be provided for the promised level three hospice unit for the midlands; the timeframe for same to become available for use by patients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2843/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Hospital Waiting Lists

462. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health when an operation will be provided for a person (details supplied); the reason for the delay in issuing a date for this procedure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2847/17]

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

Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

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

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

Hospital Appointments Delays

463. **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. [2848/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospitals Data

464. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health the total capital funding that has been spent at Our Lady's Hospital, Cashel, County Tipperary between 2008 and 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2849/17]

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.

Cancer Services Provision

465. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if patient referrals to the oncology department at a hospital (details supplied) for chemotherapy treatment are currently being made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2852/17]

466. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons who have received chemotherapy treatment as part of cancer services at a hospital (details supplied) for each month in 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2853/17]

467. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons who have been referred from the oncology department at Letterkenny University Hospital to Galway University Hospital in order to receive chemotherapy treatment for each month in 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2854/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 465, 466 and 467 together.

The Deputy's questions relate to service delivery matters and accordingly I have asked the HSE to respond directly to him.

Hospital Waiting Lists

468. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be issued with a date for an orthopaedic operation; the reason for the delay in issuing a date for surgery in view of the fact that this is an extremely urgent case; if the person can undergo this surgery in another hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2857/17]

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

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

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

Health Services

469. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Health the reason an essential facility for the care of vulnerable persons with dementia (details supplied) run with the support of the Alzheimers' Society of Ireland, at Kilglass, Enniscrone, County Sligo for the past four years will cease to operate from 24 February 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2865/17]

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.

School Meals Programme

470. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the levels of oversight he has regarding the setting out of menus in school canteens; the number of healthy eating and-or food education initiatives his Department is involved in; and if he will make a statement on the

matter. [2868/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): As a Minister of State for Health Promotion, I have no role in oversight for schools menus. Issues which occur in schools are a matter for the Minister for Education and Skills. My Department and the Health Services Executive (HSE) continues to support the Department of Education and Skills in the implementation of the curriculum and to improve health promotion in school settings. We will continue to work with the Department of Education and Skills on matters including a whole-school approach to healthy lifestyle programmes including, but not limited to the curriculum, on nutrition, physical activity and exercise, smoking, alcohol, mental well-being and sexual health as was indicated in Action 1.1 of, "A Healthy Weight for Ireland - Obesity Policy and Action Plan 2016-2015." Under Action point 1.1, it is also intended to develop National Food Standards for primary schools.

This Policy is particularly concerned with overweight and obesity in children and young people. Prevention is the primary focus of the Obesity Policy and Action Plan and preventing children from becoming overweight must form the cornerstone of prevention efforts. It covers a ten year period until 2025 and sets targets to be achieved and actions that will produce measurable outcomes. The first part is set out as the "Ten Steps Forward." Each Step includes a number of priority actions, many of which have already commenced.

The HSE work with the Department of Health and Department of Education and Skills to deliver Healthy Food policy workshops and training to teachers across primary and post-primary schools. In terms of initiatives in schools, the HSE: provides information tools and resources to schools such as 'Eat Smart Move More booklet', reward chart and posters, 'Healthy Lunchbox' leaflets; it funds the Irish Heart Foundation Health Promotion Programme which is rolling out a Happy Heart@School Catering Award in post-primary schools the HSE is in the process of providing all schools with a bi-lingual set of 'Healthy Eating for Life' resources which were launched in November 2016 by my Department. The HSE also provides training for the community based cooking programmes Healthy Food Made Easy/Cook-it which some schools have adapted and integrated into their curriculum for Transition Year students.

Question No. 471 answered with Question No. 420.

Hospital Consultant Recruitment

472. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health if funding will be allocated for two additional full-time consultant respiratory physicians for Beaumont Hospital. [2878/17]

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

Question No. 473 answered with Question No. 417.

Question No. 474 answered with Question No. 406.

Lansdowne Road Agreement Implementation

475. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health the cost in 2017 and on a 12-month basis to the HSE of bringing forward the increases due under the Lansdowne Road agreement from September to April; the way in which this cost will be funded; and if he will

make a statement on the matter. [2900/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I am advised by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform that the overall increases for the public service (including the Health Service Executive) are estimated to cost approximately €120 million and will be met from available public resources, taking into account the scope for reallocation of expenditure, while also ensuring that core public services are not adversely impacted as a result of this decision.

I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly with regard to their costs.

Departmental Staff Data

476. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health the number of Secretaries General in his Department; the annual pay of each Secretary General within his Department at 1 January 2017; the expected change in that pay as a consequence of the provisions of the Lansdowne Road agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2910/17]

477. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health the number of assistant secretaries general in his Department; the annual pay of each assistant secretary general within his Department at 1 January 2017; the expected change in that pay as a consequence of the provisions of the Lansdowne Road agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2926/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 476 and 477 together.

The information requested by the Deputy is set out as follows:

Grade	Number of Staff	Rate of Pay
Secretary General	1	176,350
Deputy Secretary	1	161,552
Assistant Secretary	1	164,388
Assistant Secretary	1	136,496
Assistant Secretary	1	131,385
Assistant Secretary	2	125,761
Assistant Secretary	3	119,572

Under the provisions of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2015 (FEMPI Act 2015), for those on salaries in excess of €110,000 the salary reductions imposed under the FEMPI Act 2013 will be restored in three equal phases on 1 April 2017, 1 April 2018 and 1 April 2019. A circular setting out the revised salary rates applicable from 1 April 2017 to general Civil Service grades, including Secretaries General and Assistant Secretaries General, is currently in preparation and will be issued by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in due course.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Administration

478. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health further to commitments made in the programme for Government, when he will provide additional funding for the nursing home support scheme and introduce changes to remove discrimination against small businesses and family farms under the fair deal nursing home scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2950/17]

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.

Funding for the Scheme in 2017 is €940 million. This represents an increase of €18.5 million on 2016 expenditure, and will enable an additional 500 people to be supported in 2017, increasing the numbers supported under the Scheme to just over 23,600 by the end of the year. Time spent on the placement list for funding is not expected to exceed four weeks during 2017.

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, including 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 implementation of certain recommendations contained in the Review. The proposals put forward by the IFA are currently being considered. Once all of the relevant Review recommendations have been considered, any amendments required to the Scheme will be identified. Any changes to the Scheme which require legislative implementation will be addressed collectively.

National Positive Ageing Strategy Implementation

479. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the progress that has been made on the implementation of the national positive ageing strategy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2953/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): The National Positive Ageing Strategy (NPAS), published on 24 April 2013, provides a framework for co-operation to address age-related policy and service delivery across Government and society in the years ahead. The Strategy is intended to promote older people's health and well being so that older people can continue to contribute to social, economic, cultural and family life in their own communities for as long as possible, thereby representing a vision for an age-friendly society. The Strategy highlights that ageing is not just a health issue, but rather requires a whole of Government approach to address a range of social, economic and environmental factors that affect the health and wellbeing of our ageing citizens. The Department of Health has an overall coordinating and collating role for the Strategy and a more direct role for the health-related objectives.

At the launch of the Strategy, a commitment was made to publish an Implementation Plan to facilitate the translation of the Goals and Objectives of the Strategy into action on the ground. The approach to implementation originally included in the Strategy would have worked where a finite number of discrete and concrete steps could be taken after which the implementation could be deemed complete. However, many of the objectives included in this Strategy are quite broad, and can be viewed as a set of principles to which Government has committed, and which will inform policies that affect older people on an indefinite basis into the future, rather than concrete objectives that can be delivered in the short term.

The Department has therefore formulated new arrangements to implement and monitor the

implementation of the National Positive Ageing Strategy. The new proposals will see mechanisms established that will give stakeholder groups effective and on-going access to Government Departments and State Agencies relevant to older people. An Annual Forum for stakeholders will be established which will seek to identify what stakeholders consider to be their key priorities for Government for the coming year and the next three years. Issues will be considered on a thematic basis and will include Health, Social Protection, Transport, Security, Community Housing and Local Government etc. Clear channels of communications will be established with relevant Government Departments assigning a named senior official to engage with stakeholder representatives on issues relevant to their remit.

The revised arrangements were approved by the Cabinet Committee on Social Policy and Public Service Reform on 27 October, 2016. These new arrangements will now be communicated to stakeholders and arrangements made to commence implementation.

As part of the NPAS implementation process, a Healthy and Positive Ageing Initiative has been established in collaboration with the HSE's Health and Wellbeing Programme and the Atlantic Philanthropies to measure the impact of the Strategy and establish an ongoing system for measuring and reporting on Positive Ageing. The Initiative will monitor changes in older people's health and wellbeing linked to the Goals and Objectives of the National Positive Ageing Strategy. This will be done primarily through the development of Positive Ageing indicators to be published every two years. The Initiative is intended to provide evidence of the factors contributing to positive ageing, including at local level and ultimately inform policy responses to population ageing in Ireland. The first national Positive Ageing Indicators report was published in 2016 and highlights many of the positive and negative aspects of growing old in Ireland.

The National Positive Ageing Strategy and the activities of the HaPAI are strongly embedded within the vision and actions set out for Healthy Ireland, the Government-led initiative which aims to create an Irish society where people of all ages can enjoy good physical and mental health**,** and where wellbeing **is** supported at every level of society. The Healthy Ireland Framework was launched in 2013 and seeks to provide people and communities with accurate information on how to improve their health and wellbeing and to make the healthy choices easier choices. Healthy Ireland takes a whole-of-Government and whole-of-society approach to improving health and wellbeing and the quality of people's lives and a number of new structures have been put in place to ensure that all sectors of society are given opportunities to participate.

Medical Card Eligibility

480. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health when medical card cover will be extended to recipients of the domiciliary care allowance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2967/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My Department recently received permission from Government to draft the new Bill. 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 card means test at any point in the future while in receipt of DCA. The legislation is currently being prepared and will be 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.

Hospital Admissions

481. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the number of hospital admissions as a result of consumption of illegal drugs in each of the years 2014 to 2016, in tabular form; the type of drug taken in each case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2972/17]

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 Groups

482. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health the details of the management structure of the South South-West Hospital Group; the members of that group; the specific clinical speciality of each member of the group; and their geographical location within their specific field. [3066/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to provide you with the details requested.

Prescriptions Charges

483. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Health his plans to abolish prescription charges for persons who are medical card holders and are inpatients and residents of nursing homes, in view of the fact that this charge represents an unfair burden to patients who already pay 80% of their eligible income towards their stay, which would not apply if they were inpatients in ordinary hospitals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3085/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Programme for Partnership Government contains a commitment to reduce the cost of medicines by reducing the annual co-payment on the Drugs Payment Scheme and reducing prescription charges for medical card holders.

Under Budget 2017, the prescription charge for medical card holders aged 70 and over will be reduced this year. This reduction will also apply to residents of nursing homes who are 70 or older.

I will continue to examine opportunities to address the cost of the charge to patients, having regard to the funding available.

Mental Health Services Data

484. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the number waiting for a child and adolescent mental health service appointment per CHO; the number waiting between three and six months, six and 12 months and more than 12 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3091/17]

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.

Autism Support Services

485. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health his plans to expand autism services in counties Cavan and Monaghan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3102/17]

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.

However, 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.

Question No. 486 answered with Question No. 437.

National Dementia Strategy Implementation

487. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide a level of funding of €67million as identified by an organisation (details supplied) in its pre-budget submission to provide community and home based care to support and enable persons with dementia to remain living at home for as long as possible; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3110/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): The aim of the Irish National Dementia Strategy which was published in December 2014 is to improve dementia care so that people with dementia can live well for as long as possible, can have services and supports delivered in the best way possible, and can ultimately die with dignity. The Strategy emphasises that most people with dementia live in their own communities and can continue to live well and to participate in those communities. The Strategy contains a set of priority actions capable of implementation within existing resources or by reconfiguring resources. It also contains a number of additional actions which may require resources additional to what is currently available and which will be considered as these become available in the future.

A number of priority areas for action for the National Dementia Strategy have been identified, which include the provision of integrated services, supports and care for people with dementia and their carers. To meet this priority, and to support the implementation of the strategy, The Atlantic Philanthropies, the Dept. of Health and the Health Service Executive have agreed a co-investment programme of €27.5m. This National Dementia Strategy Implementation Programme contains a number of elements which include:

- The rollout of a programme of Intensive Home Supports and Homecare Packages for people with dementia;

- The provision of additional dementia-specific resources for GPs, who are the critical and initial point of contact with the health system for those with dementia; and

- Measures to raise public awareness, address stigma, and promote the inclusion and involvement in society of those with dementia.

The overall funding for Services for Older People available to the Health Service Execu-

tive (HSE) for 2017 has increased to €765 million and the Home Help Service and Home Care Packages account for about 50% of this. The additional funding for homecare is aimed at allowing people to continue to live in their own homes and at facilitating discharge of older people from hospitals when the acute phase of their treatment has been completed. The HSE's National Service Plan for 2017 provides for a target of 10.57million Home Help Hours to support about 49,000 people, 16,750 Home Care Packages and 190 Intensive Home Care Packages for clients with complex needs including 60 clients with dementia supported with co-funding from Atlantic Philanthropies under the Irish National Dementia Strategy.

Ambulance Service

488. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the amount of additional funding he is making available to the Dublin Fire Brigade to provide ambulance services in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3111/17]

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

National Drugs Strategy

489. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the progress being made regarding the development of a new national drugs and alcohol strategy; the timeframe for its publication; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3116/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): Government is committed to putting a new National Drugs Strategy in place from 2017 onwards, when the current policy expires. A Steering Committee with an independent chair has been established to advise me on the new Strategy. This Committee has been mandated to develop an integrated public health approach to substance misuse, which is defined as the harmful or hazardous use of psychoactive substances, including alcohol and illegal drugs.

The Committee has made significant progress in developing the evidence base for the new Strategy. The main features of the process to date include:

(i) a high level review of the current Strategy by an international panel of experts;

(ii) a review of systematic evidence reviews of interventions on the drug problem;

(iii) a 10 year trends analysis of the drugs situation in Ireland; and

(iv) proposals from multi-stakeholder focus groups on measures to address gaps in the current response to the drugs problem.

In addition, a wide-ranging and comprehensive consultation process has been undertaken, which has resulted in over 2000 submissions on the matter.

It is envisaged that the new Strategy will be based on a health-led approach to the drug problem and build on progress achieved under previous drug strategies. I understand that the Steering Committee is continuing with its deliberations and is expected to submit its final report to me by the end of March. I hope to bring my proposals to Government on the new Strategy thereafter.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Applications

490. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the result of the review in respect of an application for the fair deal scheme in the case of a person (details supplied); if a reduction in fees is warranted following the review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3137/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Hospital Waiting Lists

491. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hip replacement operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3140/17]

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

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

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

Medical Card Applications

492. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) has been requested to fill out a new application due to a simple clerical error on a declaration form; if the person will be issued with a new declaration form whereby the person can clarify the error on the previous declaration form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3141/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

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

Diabetes Strategy

493. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding diabetes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3145/17]

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.

HSE Correspondence

494. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 1147 of 17 January 2017, when the newly appointed director of the HSE national women and infants health programme will meet with a person (details supplied) on the issue of foetal anomaly scanning; if contact has been made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3147/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I can confirm that a reply has issued directly to the individual concerned at that email address. I have asked the HSE to reply to you directly in relation to your query regarding a date for a meeting with the Director of the *National Women & Infants Health Programme.*

Services for People with Disabilities

495. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Health if he will issue a final response to an issue (details supplied) that was forwarded to his office in October 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3148/17]

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.

However, 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.

Accident and Emergency Departments Data

496. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health the total number of referrals to accident and emergency departments from Shannon Doc, Thurles and Nenagh respectively, in each of the years 2010 to 2016, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3155/17]

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

Respite Care Services Availability

497. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health if respite care services for a person (details supplied) in County Kerry will be reinstated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3156/17]

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 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 question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy.

Medicinal Products Availability

498. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) will be permitted to access a cannabis based medicine to potentially assist the reduction in the amount and severity of seizures they suffer from. [3172/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Cannabidiol (CBD) is derived from cannabis. However, since it does not have psychoactive properties it is not controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Acts.

While I am aware that CBD oil is sometimes marketed as a nutritional or dietary supplement, it should be noted that it is not authorised as a medicinal product in Ireland. Under European and Irish legislation, before a medicine can be placed on the Irish market, the manufacturer must seek an authorisation from the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) or, in the case of certain medicinal products, the European Medicines Agency. A determination on an application for authorisation of a medicinal product is based on a rigorous scientific assessment of the application against the criteria of safety, quality, efficacy, legal and regulatory requirements. I have no role in the process of authorising medicinal products.

No application has been received from any company for any products containing CBD. The HPRA are open to receiving such applications.

Elsewhere products containing CBD are undergoing clinical trials for the treatment of a number of medical conditions, including severe, intractable (treatment-resistant) epilepsy. There is no prohibition on an Irish registered doctor recommending CBD for a patient under his/her care if they deem that treatment option to be clinically appropriate for their patient.

National Drugs Strategy

499. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health the details of the membership of the HSE National Drugs Committee. [3183/17]

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 to the Deputy.

Health Services Funding

500. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if an application for funding for an organisation (details supplied) will be approved as a matter of urgency. [3184/17]

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.

Services for People with Disabilities

501. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if a transport solution has been put in place and agreed with the parents of a person. (details supplied). [3185/17]

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 an individual case, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Review

502. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if an appeal for review and reduction of costs under the nursing homes support scheme will be granted in the case of a person (details supplied). [3186/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Hospital Appointments Status

503. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health when an operation which was deemed necessary and urgent in 2014 will be arranged for a person (details supplied); if the chief operations officer of the Dublin midlands hospital group will be requested to provide comprehensive information on the history of this case, when the person was first diagnosed and all actions after that to date including when the person was last contacted and examined; if the person has been given a written report following a recent review of their notes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3187/17]

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.

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

Hospital Appointments Status

504. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Health if a hospital appointment will be expedited for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3190/17]

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 Research Board Funding

505. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Health if he will assist the funding of clinical trials for multiple sulfatase deficiency (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3191/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Department of Health does not provide direct funding for the conduct of clinical trials in Ireland or overseas.

However, since 2006, the Department has provided funding to the Health Research Board (HRB) to support charity-led research through a Joint Funding Scheme with the Medical Research Charities Group (MRCG), a national organization of charities active in medical research.

This innovative funding scheme allows members of the MRCG to support research of particular interest to specific patient populations, where they might otherwise not be in a position to finance the full cost of that research. The scheme has been particularly beneficial for rare diseases where research being undertaken internationally may be limited and where charities wishing to contribute to the research agenda need to fund research projects led from outside Ireland.

Further details of MRCG membership and the MRCG/HRB Joint Funding Scheme are available at *www.mrcg.ie*.

Services for People with Disabilities

506. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an assessment can be scheduled with the autism section for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3193/17]

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.

However, 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.

Primary Care Services Provision

507. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health if there will be no change in the delivery of primary care services in an area (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3196/17]

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 for direct reply.

Diabetes Strategy

508. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if information (details supplied) will be provided regarding diabetes mellitus sufferers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3198/17]

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.

Diabetes Strategy

509. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the estimated direct medical costs of managing complications of diabetes annually here; the estimated amount of money spent on diabetes prevention programs, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3199/17]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

510. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3212/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its be-

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospitals Data

511. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Health the number of patients outsourced at Beaumont Hospital for each of the years 2013 to 2016, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3215/17]

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.

Hospitals Data

512. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Health the number of emergency department attendances at Beaumont Hospital for each of the years 2013 to 2016, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3216/17]

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.

Hospitals Data

513. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Health the outpatient waiting times at Beaumont Hospital for each of the years 2011 to 2016, and by speciality and in wait time bands (details supplied), in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3217/17]

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.

Hospitals Data

514. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Health the number of patients on trolleys at Beaumont Hospital, for each of the months of 2015, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3218/17]

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.

Hospitals Data

515. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Health the number of patients on trolleys at Beaumont Hospital, for each of the months of 2016, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3219/17]

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

Hospitals Funding

516. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Health the operating budget for Beaumont Hospital, for each of the years 2009 to 2016, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3220/17]

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.

Nursing Home Accommodation Provision

517. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide assistance in securing suitable care accommodation for a person (details supplied) who has been a patient in an acute hospital for the past four months. [3237/17]

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.

GLAS Data

518. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of GLAS, green low carbon agri-environment scheme, payments due to be issued to applicants in County Monaghan before the end of 2016 which were not issued by the target date; the number of those payments that have issued in the interim; the number outstanding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3101/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Under the EU Regulations governing the Scheme and other area-based payment schemes, a comprehensive administrative check, including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System, must be completed before any payment can issue.

The following table outlines the number of farmers in Monaghan actively participating in GLAS 1 and 2 that are due a payment in respect of the 2016 scheme year and the numbers that have not received a payment in respect of 2016.

Scheme	Numbers of active applications for Monaghan	Number of applications not paid for Monaghan
GLAS 1	585	145
GLAS 2	152	38

Work on processing cases which did not pass the required pre payment checks, is on-going with a view to effecting payment as quickly as possible.

Agricultural Colleges

519. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding the green cert; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2598/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Teagasc is the main provider of further education courses in agriculture, food, horticulture, forestry and equine studies. In excess of 3,500 people participate annually in these courses. Typically, over two-thirds of learners attend the seven agricultural colleges in the Teagasc network, with the balance attending part-time courses at 12 regional education centres and at local advisory offices.

The delivery of courses is an operational matter in the first instance for Teagasc. They recognise the challenges posed for part-time farmers in attending courses and every effort is made to accommodate them, by delivering training in a flexible manner, balanced against the need to maintain education quality. It must also be appreciated that agricultural education by its nature requires a high level of hands on skills based instruction to encourage learners to develop proficiency in farm tasks and complete farm based assignment and projects.

Insofar as the Green Cert programme is concerned, it has been developed to meet the training requirements for both full-time and part-time farmers, and is provided on both a part-time and distance education basis to facilitate people who have an off farm job.

Agriculture Schemes

520. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he has met with representatives of the tillage sector; and if he envisages that direct supports will be made to the sector in view of recent volatile weather events in certain parts of the country. [2671/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): You may be aware I hosted a Tillage Stakeholders Forum last October which consisted of representatives from all sides of this Sector. As I stated in the Dáil just last week, I believe that a further stakeholders forum will help us all scope out the issues for this vital Sector providing 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.

You may also be aware that one of my chief priorities is to provide low-cost more flexible finance for the industry 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 €25million 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 by the end of this month. 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 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 is available for 2016 tax liability, and will go some way towards addressing cash flow concerns.

As an additional support to cash flow on farms, including Tillage farms, I also confirmed that advance payments would be made in 2016 in respect of the Basic Payment and Greening Payment schemes.

Advance payments commenced on the 17 October last, the earliest possible date by which payments can begin under the governing EU Regulations, with the addition of balancing payments from the 1 December. To date €1,168 billion has been paid out to more than 122,889 farmers and payments are ongoing. Payments in excess of €195 million have also been made to more than 91,000 applicants under the Areas of Natural Constraints scheme.

Also a TAMS Scheme, specifically tailored to the tillage sector, is due to open early this year. This Scheme will support grain growers in achieving further economic efficiencies and details will be made available in the near future. 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.

I fully acknowledge and accept the difficulties that have been experienced by the farming community, not least by our tillage farmers. This sector is a very important area in the agricultural economy and 2016 was a challenging year both in terms of market returns and variable weather conditions experienced during the harvest.

Laboratory Facilities

521. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he is taking to ensure that the veterinary laboratory in Dunally, County Sligo, is kept open which is vital to the agrifood sector in the north west; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2684/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department commissioned a Working Group led by Prof. Alan Reilly to undertake a comprehensive review of its Laboratory Services in order to develop a long-term strategy for the Laboratories and to build on the existing capability and expertise of the Service. The group considered both the Central Laboratory Complex at Backweston and the Regional Laboratories located in Athlone, Cork, Kilkenny, Limerick and Sligo. The Group has presented a report to the Department, which makes recommendations on:

1. Oversight and co-ordination of the laboratories activities

2. Re-organisation of Divisions and support functions within the Central Laboratory complex

3. Options for the future development of the Regional Laboratories – with a view to improving disease investigative and surveillance capability but with the over-riding imperative of

maintaining and enhancing services to farmers and

4. Human resources management within the laboratories - with a focus on grading structures, career development opportunities and workforce planning

The Department is currently consulting with its laboratory-based staff on these recommendations and will proceed to consult with other stakeholders.

A decision on any of these recommendations will await the outcome of this consultative process. In the case of the Regional Laboratories any decision will also be informed by a cost benefit analysis of the various options that have been proposed for their future development.

TAMS Applications

522. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a TAMS grant application for a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2690/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The applicant in question has submitted a claim for payment under the Dairy Equipment Scheme of TAMS II.

Following inspection it has been established that there is an internal agitation point on site. The applicant has been advised that this will have to be removed before payment will issue.

Greyhound Industry

523. **Deputy Michael D'Arcy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the frequency with which racing dogs are drug tested here; the number of winners that have been tested in the past two years after the race; if all winners could be drug tested after each race; the reason the 2015 drug test results have not been released; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2712/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The administration of greyhound races is an operational matter for Bord na gCon. However I have made enquiries with Bord Na gCon in relation to the matters raised by the deputy.

Bord na gCon inform me that in 2015 there were 5,632 samples analysed at Board approved Laboratories for the purpose of prohibited substance detection. 79 of these samples returned a positive result for an Adverse Analytical Finding. The corresponding figure for 2016 is 5,388 with 47 confirmed Adverse Analytical Findings returned (to date). A number of samples from 2016 remain to be completed. 12,681 greyhounds raced at licensed stadia in 2015 and 12,312 greyhounds raced at licensed stadia in 2016. The minimum requirement for testing at a licensed race meeting is two random samples per race meeting. More extensive sampling is undertaken by testing teams which are deployed both on a random and targeted basis. Samples are also taken at Sales Trials and at trainer's premises for greyhounds currently racing.

They state that of the 79 Adverse Analytical Findings in 2015, 13 were taken from winning greyhounds at greyhound races. Of the 47 Adverse Analytical Findings in 2016, 4 were taken from winning greyhounds.

They further state that during the year 2016, 1st placed greyhounds were the most frequently tested at just under 20% of all greyhound tested. However prohibited substances can be

used to enhance or to impair performance in racing greyhounds. Testing all winners (amounting to some 16,500 samples) is not therefore the most efficient use of available resources nor an effective anti-doping & medication control strategy.

Bord na gCon state that the results of all samples taken since the 1st October 2015 are placed on the IGB Website immediately after the results are notified to IGB along with information which identifies the dog in question. Samples taken prior to that date could only be published for legal reasons where the Control Committee had found a breach of the racing regulation had occurred. The overall statistics for 2015 have been published on a regular basis.

Scéim um Roghanna Comhshaoil Talmhaíochta

524. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Talmhaíochta, Bia agus Mara cén uair a dhéanfar íocaíocht faoin Scéim um Roghanna Comhshaoil Talmhaíochta (AEOS 2) le feirmeoir i gContae na Gaillimhe (sonraí tugtha); cén fáth go bhfuil moill leis an íocaíocht seo; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [2715/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Thosaigh an duine atá ainmnithe a c(h)onradh faoi AEOS 2 an 1 Meán Fómhair 2011. Íocaíochtaí déanta le haghaidh bhlianta scéime 2011-2015.

Faoi na Rialacháin den AE lena rialaítear an Scéim agus scéimeanna eile íocaíochta atá bunaithe ar cheantar, caithfidh seiceáil chuimsitheach riaracháin a bheith déanta, lena n-áirítear cros-seiceáil leis an gCóras Aitheanta Dáileachtaí Talún. Ós rud é go mbeidh na rannpháirtithe uile de chuid AEOS 2 ag fáil a n-íocaíochtaí deiridh faoin scéim, caithfidh athsheiceáil íocaíochtaí a bheith críochnaithe le haghaidh na mblianta scéime go léir sula ndéanfar an íocaíocht deiridh. Tá oifigigh ag obair ar na comhaid seo agus déanfar an íocaíocht chomh luath agus is féidir.

(The person named commenced their AEOS 2 contract on 1 September 2011. Payments issued for 2011-2015 scheme years.

Under the EU Regulations governing the Scheme and other area-based payment schemes, a comprehensive administrative check, including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System must take place. As all AEOS 2 participants will be receiving their final payments under the scheme, re-checks on payments made for all scheme years must be completed before final payment can be processed. Officials are working through these files and payment will be made as soon as possible.)

TAMS Payments

525. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment under TAMS 2 will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Galway; the reason for the delay in issuing this payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2716/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The applicant in question was approved for payment of a grant under the Dairy Equipment Scheme of TAMS II on 16 January 2017. Payment in this case will issue shortly.

GLAS Data

526. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if all payments have been made under the green low carbon agri-environment scheme. [2803/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): At end of December 2016 there were 37,500 active participants in the GLAS scheme of which 27,400 received 85% of their 2016 payment. Payment can only issue where all the required validation checks have been successfully passed. My Department is reviewing outstanding cases and as they pass the validation checks they will be paid as quickly as possible.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments

527. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal will receive an AEOS, agri-environment options scheme payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2819/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named commenced their AEOS 2 contract on 1 September 2011. Payments issued for 2011-2015 scheme years.

Under the EU Regulations governing the Scheme and other area-based payment schemes, a comprehensive administrative check, including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System must take place. As all AEOS 2 participants will be receiving their final payments under the scheme, re-checks on payments made for all scheme years must be completed before final payment can be processed. Officials are working through these files and payment will issue as soon as possible.

GLAS Data

528. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of GLAS, green low carbon agri-environment scheme, payments that have issued as part of the most recent tranche; the number of outstanding payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2824/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): At end of December 2016 there were 37,500 active participants in the GLAS of which 27,400 received 85% of their 2016 payment. Payment can only issue where all the required validation checks have been successfully passed. Work on processing all outstanding cases is on-going with a view to effecting payment as quickly as possible.

GLAS Payments

529. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he will take to ensure that a person (details supplied) receives the GLAS, green low carbon agri-environment scheme, payment due for 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2833/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named was approved into GLAS 2 with a contract commencement date of 1 January 2016.

The first payment due to the person named is in respect of the 2016 scheme year. During the

2016 prepayment checking process, an issue was identified with the Conservation of Solitary Bees (Sand) action. Department officials are examining this issue with a view to resolving and further processing the application for payment at the earliest opportunity.

GLAS Payments

530. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he will take to expedite a GLAS, green low carbon agri-environment scheme, payment due to persons (details supplied) for 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2834/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The persons named were approved into GLAS 2 with a contract commencement date of 1 January 2016.

The first payment due to the persons named is in respect of the 2016 scheme year. During the 2016 prepayment checking process, an issue was identified with the Traditional Hay Meadow (part parcel) action. Department officials are examining this issue with a view to resolving and further processing the application for payment at the earliest opportunity.

GLAS Payments

531. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he will take to expedite an application for a GLAS, green low carbon agri-environment scheme, payment due to a person (details supplied) for 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2835/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named was approved into GLAS 2 with a contract commencement date of 1 January 2016.

The first payment due to the person named is in respect of the 2016 scheme year. During the 2016 prepayment checking process, an issue was identified with the Nitrates Derogation check. The Nitrates section in my Department are awaiting additional correspondence from the person named in order to complete the processing of the derogation. Once the issue with the derogation check has been resolved, the GLAS application of the person named will be further processed for payment with a view to issuing payment as soon as possible.

GLAS Payments

532. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he will take to ensure a person (details supplied) is paid a GLAS, green low carbon agri-environment scheme, payment for 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2837/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named was approved into GLAS 2 with a contract commencement date of 1 January 2016.

The first payment due to the person named is in respect of the 2016 scheme year. During the 2016 prepayment checking process, an issue was identified with the Low Input Permanent Pasture action. Department officials are examining this issue with a view to resolving and further processing the application for payment at the earliest opportunity.

GLAS Payments

533. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he will take to have the 2016 GLAS, green low carbon agri-environment scheme, payment made to persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2838/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The persons named were approved into GLAS 2 with a contract commencement date of 1 January 2016.

The first payment due to the persons named is in respect of the 2016 scheme year. The application has successfully completed the prepayment checking process in respect of 2016 and a first instalment of 85% will issue shortly.

GLAS Payments

534. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he will take to ensure a person (details supplied) is paid a GLAS, green low carbon agri-environment scheme, payment without further delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2839/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named was approved into GLAS 1 with a contract commencement date of 1 October 2015 and has received full entitlements in respect of the 2015 scheme year.

During the 2016 prepayment checking process an issue was identified with the cross checks on the Direct payments Scheme. Department officials are examining this issue with a view to resolving and further processing the application for 2016 payment at the earliest opportunity.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

535. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason a person (details supplied) has not received any payments in 2016 in respect of the BPS, basic payment, ANC, areas of natural constraint, and GLAS, green low carbon agri-environment scheme,; the steps he will take to ensure the person receives a payment without delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2840/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named submitted a 2016 Basic Payment/Areas of Natural Constraint schemes application on 9 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 eligibility inspection.

Processing of this inspection necessitated the verification of the position on the ground by means of a field visit. This field visit has been completed and the results are currently being processed to finalisation.

Officials in my Department are prioritising this case with the intention of issuing any payments due to the nominated bank account of the person named as soon as possible.

Fish Imports

536. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his attention has been drawn to the fact that much of the seafood stocked in supermarkets is coming from Thailand, in particular from Samut Sakhon, which is known to use practices commonly termed modern day slavery; and if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that a recent International Labour Organisation report estimated 10,000 migrant children aged 13 to 15 years of age work in the city and another UN agency study found that nearly 60% of Burmese labourers toiling in its seafood processing industry were victims of forced labour. [2850/17]

537. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will confirm that no seafood stocked in supermarkets here from Thailand has been caught or processed using practices commonly termed modern day slavery; the safeguards in place to ensure that consumers are not unwittingly purchasing seafood that was caught or processed using such practices; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2851/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 536 and 537 together.

Decisions on the sourcing of fish or fish products for the retail sector are a matter for the individual enterprises concerned, subject to compliance with the relevant legislation. Imports of fish and seafood from outside the EU are strictly regulated.

Through the EU's Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing Regulation Ireland is working to ensure that Thailand is fully compliant with all trade of marine fishery products into the EU. The EU Commission has conducted a thorough analysis of the situation and held a series of discussions with Thai authorities since 2011. Following the conclusion of this process, on 25 April 2015 the European Commission issued Thailand with a 'yellow card' warning due to its inadequate fisheries legal framework and poor monitoring, control and traceability systems. This key instrument in the fight against illegal fishing ensures that only fisheries products that have been certified as legal can access the EU market. By doing so, the European Commission has initiated a dialogue process with the Thai authorities, with the purpose of identifying the shortcomings and determining corrective measures.

The associated problems of human trafficking and slave labour in Thailand's fisheries sector are recognised. While the EU IUU Regulation does not directly address the human trafficking and working conditions on-board fishing vessels, it is intended that improvements in the fisheries control system will also improve the control of labour conditions in the seafood industry. I should also note that several Commission services continue to work on the issues of human trafficking and slave labour in Thailand. In view of the commitment of the Thai Government to address not only the IUU fishing but also to improve the labour situation, the European Commission is now holding a parallel dialogue on labour and supports the Thai Government with technical assistance programmes aiming at combatting child labour and forced labour in the fisheries and seafood sectors.

The Thai authorities have given the highest political attention to this matter. A tailored action plan to address the shortcomings in Thailand's fishing industry as well as a formal dialogue with the Thai authorities to make them take the necessary corrective measures is currently in place. Progress has been recorded, particularly on the legislative front. However, the EU Commission has reported that the dialogue is proving difficult and there remain serious concerns about the steps taken by Thailand to fight IUU fishing activities. This means that further action by the Commission cannot be ruled out.

I would like to take this opportunity to assure you that Ireland fully supports the EU approach to date.

GLAS Payments

538. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment under the GLAS, green low carbon agri-environment scheme, will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Galway; the reason for the delay in issuing this payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2863/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named was approved into GLAS 1 with a contract commencement date of 1 October 2015 and has received full entitlements in respect of the 2015 scheme year.

The application has successfully completed the prepayment checking process in respect of the 2016 scheme year and a first instalment of 85% will issue shortly.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

539. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal will receive outstanding farm payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2875/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): An application under the 2016 Basic Payment Scheme (BPS)/Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) Scheme was received in my Department from the person named on 8 May 2016.

Full payment under the ANC scheme issued in September 2016. Full payment under the BPS issued in two tranches in October and December 2016.

Agriculture Schemes

540. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the agriculture cashflow support loan scheme; when the scheme will be fully commenced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2895/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): One of my priorities has been to address the impact on farmers of the sustained period of lower commodity prices, which has caused cash flow difficulties for farmers in several sectors. The "Agriculture Cashflow Support Loan Scheme" was developed by my Department in co-operation with the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI). It will provide farmers with a low cost, flexible source of working capital and will allow them to pay down more expensive forms of short-term debt, ensuring the ongoing financial sustainability of viable farming enterprises.

This innovative loan Scheme will make €150 million available to farmers throughout Ireland at low-cost interest rates of 2.95%. This is supported by €25 million being provided by my Department, including €11 million in EU exceptional adjustment aid. The SBCI is aiming to bring the loans to market by the end of January and I hope to make an announcement in this regard shortly.

Brexit Issues

541. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will address the concerns of farmers regarding tariffs following the British Prime Minister, Ms Theresa May's Brexit speech; his plans to meet with Ms Theresa May; the protocols being put in place to address the concerns of farmers, particularly in counties Cavan and Monaghan and the Border counties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2897/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Government is acutely aware of the potential risks and challenges for the Irish economy arising from Brexit, and particularly those that arise in the agri-food sector. While I welcome the fact that Prime Minister May has provided some clarity on the approach the UK Government propose to take in the upcoming negotiations, there is still considerable uncertainty on the future trading relationship between the EU and the UK and therefore in relation to tariffs. I will continue to seek to have these issues at the top of the EU negotiating agenda, given the potential implications for the agri-food sector.

While An Taoiseach has met Prime Minister May on a number of occasions and will meet her again shortly during her proposed visit to Ireland, I have already had meetings with Michelle McIlveen in Belfast and Andrea Leadsom in London before Christmas and I met Secretary of State Leadsom again at the Berlin Green Week over the weekend.

The most immediate impact of the Brexit vote on Irish farming has been the effect of exchange rate volatility. I am pleased to say that my Department and our agencies have ensured that measures have been put in place to help alleviate the pressures of income volatility, and these include:

- Direct payments, estimated by Teagasc at an average of over €17,000 per farm, provide a valuable source of farm income support and act as a hedge against price volatility.

- The adjustment in Budget 2017 to the income averaging scheme for tax purposes will allow farmers to avail of an opt-out in an exceptional year.

- The 'Agriculture Cashflow Support Loan Scheme', developed by my Department in cooperation with the Strategic Bank Corporation of Ireland (SBCI), will make €150 million available to farmers throughout Ireland at low-cost interest rates of 2.95%. This is supported by €25 million being provided by my Department, including €11 million in EU aid. The SBCI is aiming to make these loans available by the end of January and I hope to make an announcement in relation to this shortly.

- Bord Bia has activated a 4-pillar support strategy for Irish food companies to maintain growth in this period of volatility and over the longer term. These activities are captured under the headings of Managing Volatility, Obtaining Consumer and Market Insight, Deepening Customer Engagement and Extending Market Reach.

- Enterprise Ireland's initial, industry-wide, 5-point plan included provision of information (on improving competitiveness, reducing supply chain costs through the provision of LEAN and R&D/Innovation supports to clients, and accessing funding), market development support and UK market support. Both agencies have also been working with individual companies in order to tailor the response in accordance with the particular difficulties being faced, and have been working together on strategic marketing initiatives.

The situation will continue to be monitored on an ongoing basis and discussed with the sector, including through my Department's Consultative Committee of Stakeholders on Brexit and

the All Island Civic Dialogue.

Agriculture Scheme Appeals

542. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 415 of 6 December 2016, the status of an appeal by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2898/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named made an application for the Afforestation Grant and Premium Scheme, which was unsuccessful.

The applicant appealed this decision; however the original decision was upheld. The applicant was notified of the outcome of the appeal on 22nd December 2016. As the site is very exposed it was determined that it would not be capable of producing a commercial crop and would not, therefore, meet the requirements of the Afforestation Scheme.

Departmental Staff Data

543. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of Secretaries General in his Department; the annual pay of each Secretary General within his Department at 1 Jan 2017; the expected change in that pay as a consequence of the provisions of the Lansdowne Road agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2901/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department currently has one person with the grade of Secretary General Level II with a salary of €176,350.

Pay restoration for Secretaries General will be governed by the provisions of Section 3 of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2015. Under the Lansdowne Road Agreement, for those on annualised remuneration in excess of €110,000 restoration will be in three equal phases with the first phase due to take place in April 2017 and the two remaining phases in April 2018 and 2019.

Departmental Staff Data

544. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of assistant secretaries general in his Department; the annual pay of each assistant secretary general within his Department at 1 January 2017; the expected change in that pay as a consequence of the provisions of the Lansdowne Road agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2917/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department currently has nine staff members with the grade of Assistant Secretary or equivalent. The Payscales for Assistant Secretary grade or equivalent are as below:

Pre 6 April 1995	€119,572-€124,917-€130,706-€136,496
Post 6 April 1995	€125,761-€131,385-€137,481-€143,535

Pay restoration for Assistant Secretary and equivalents will be governed by the provisions of Section 3 of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2015. Under the Lansdowne Road Agreement, for those on annualised remuneration in excess of €110,000 restoration will be in three equal phases with the first phase due to take place in April 2017 and the two remaining phases in April 2018 and 2019.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

545. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payments will issue to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2949/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): An application under the 2016 Areas of Natural Constraints scheme was received from the person named on 8 May 2016. Processing of the application has recently been finalised and payment will issue directly to the nominated bank account of the person named shortly.

Question No. 546 withdrawn.

State Bodies

547. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the process that will be undertaken for the replacement of the CEO of the Irish National Stud whose tenure commenced in 2010 and is presumably about to expire; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2961/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Irish National Stud Company Limited is a commercial State Body. The appointment of a Chief Executive Officer is a matter for the Board of the Irish National Stud, subject to the consent of the relevant Ministers. I understand a recruitment competition is currently underway.

Horse Racing Ireland

548. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will initiate an external independent audit of racecourse attendance in order to verify the claims being made by Horse Racing Ireland in that regard. [2962/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Horse Racing Ireland (HRI) is a commercial state body established under the Horse and Greyhound Racing Act, 2001, and is responsible for the overall administration, promotion and development of the horse racing industry.

The Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General audits the turnover of HRI subsidiaries which is supported by race meeting attendance data.

Other racecourses, which are independent companies, provide their data to HRI to allow the preparation of attendance figures from a national perspective.

I have no plans to establish a separate audit mechanism for the verification of race attendance figures.

Horse Racing Ireland

549. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he has satisfied himself with the independence of two appointees which he recently nominated to Horse Racing Ireland in view of the fact that both persons had a connection with an organisation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2963/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Horse Racing Ireland (HRI) is a commercial state body established under the Horse and Greyhound Racing Act, 2001, and is responsible for the overall administration, promotion and development of the horse racing industry.

I can confirm that the recent appointments to the HRI Board were made in accordance with the Guidelines on Appointments to State Boards.

HRI have informed me that it operates strict protocols in relation to Board members absenting themselves from decision making on matters in which they have or may be considered as having any potential conflicts of interest.

Horse Racing Industry

550. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the process of regulation of drug testing in the horse racing industry; if he has satisfied himself with same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2969/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Turf Club (and INHSC) is the Regulatory Body for horseracing in Ireland and is responsible for the integrity of Irish racing.

The Turf Club has informed me that a rigorous post-race testing regime consistent with international best practice has been in operation in Ireland for decades, this has in more recent years been enhanced by intelligence-led out of competition testing and a programme of training yard inspections, both by appointment and unannounced. The Turf Club has advised that the regulatory budget for 2017 provides for the development of these programmes both in terms of breadth and depth and will allow for the enhancement of inspection systems.

The Turf Club insist that the key to success in any anti-doping/medication control programme is the communication to stakeholders of what is expected. Clear explanation of what is acceptable in terms of medication in horses in training and racing in Ireland is an on-going priority for the Turf Club.

The functions of the Turf Club as the Racing Regulatory Body are defined in the Horse Racing Industry Act 2016. I am satisfied that the integrity systems and controls operated by the Turf Club are in line with requirements under this legislation.

Agriculture Scheme Applications

551. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of an application for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2973/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person

named commenced their AEOS 3 contract on 1 May 2013. Payments due have issued in respect of the 2013-2016 Scheme years.

Issues arose in relation to the Species Rich Grassland action following an Inspection on 8 July 2016 which resulted in a payment reduction being imposed. The person named was notified of this issue by letter dated 26 October 2016. This letter gave the herdowner the option of requesting a review of the decision to the Regional Inspector before 23 November 2016. There is no record of such a request to the Regional Inspector in this case.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

552. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payments will issue to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3065/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named was approved into GLAS 1 with a contract commencement date of 1 October 2015.

During the prepayment checking process in respect of the 2015 scheme year, issues were identified with the Traditional Hay Meadow action. Officials in my Department are actively working to resolve these issues with the intention of issuing payment at the earliest opportunity.

Following the issue of payment in respect of the 2015 scheme year, the pre payment checking process will get under way in respect of 2016.

Agriculture Scheme Data

553. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of GLAS payments due to be issued to persons in County Cavan before the end of 2016 which were not issued by the target date; the number of those payments that have issued in the interim; the number outstanding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3100/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Under the EU Regulations governing the Scheme and other area-based payment schemes, a comprehensive administrative check, including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System, must be completed before any payment can issue.

The table below outlines the number of farmers in Cavan actively participating in GLAS 1 and 2 that are due a payment in respect of the 2016 scheme year and the numbers that have not received a payment in respect of 2016.

Scheme	Numbers of active applications for Cavan	Number of applications not paid for Cavan
GLAS 1	916	211
GLAS 2	448	114

Work on processing cases which did not pass the required pre payment checks, is on-going with a view to effecting payment as quickly as possible.

Agriculture Schemes

554. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the exact acreage of forestry and grassland that is on file with his Department for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3104/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): An application under the 2016 Basic Payment Scheme was received in my Department from the person named on 10 May 2016. On this application he declared 8.60 hectares of forestry for which he receives forestry premium and which is also eligible under the Basic Payment Scheme. He also declared 11.91 hectares of permanent pasture and 0.31 hectares within the forestry which, following examination by my Department, is deemed to be ESB corridors.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

555. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payments will issue to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3150/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named commenced their AEOS contract on 1 May 2013. All payments due have been made in this case.

Payment in respect of the 2016 year, which can only be made after the 15 October 2016 at the very earliest, issued in two parts as required: 85% in the amount of €3,399.99 on 13 December 2016; and the remaining 15% in the amount of €599.99 on 14 December 2016.

Agriculture Schemes

556. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the details of the agriculture cash flow loan support scheme; if all aspects of this scheme are operational at present; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3153/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): One of my priorities has been to address the impact on farmers of the sustained period of lower commodity prices, which has caused cash flow difficulties for farmers in several sectors. The "Agriculture Cashflow Support Loan Scheme" was developed by my Department in co-operation with the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI). It will provide farmers with a low cost, flexible source of working capital and will allow them to pay down more expensive forms of short-term debt, ensuring the ongoing financial sustainability of viable farming enterprises.

This innovative loan Scheme will make €150 million available to farmers throughout Ireland at low-cost interest rates of 2.95%. This is supported by €25 million being provided by my Department, including €11 million in EU exceptional adjustment aid. The SBCI is aiming to bring the loans to market by the end of January and I hope to make an announcement in this regard shortly.

Fishing Industry

557. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to encourage the fishing industry to use more environmentally sustainable products; the actions proposed to hold those accountable in the fishing industry regarding the subsequent waste gen-

erated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3170/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): An Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM) is undertaking a number of initiatives to enhance sustainability in the fishing industry through the Sustainable Fisheries Scheme and the Inshore Fisheries Conservation Scheme, both funded under my Department's European Maritime and Fisheries Fund Operational Programme 2014-2020, co-funded by the European Union.

BIM is working with the fishing industry, my Department and the Marine Institute to develop gear modifications and conservation measures that minimise unwanted catches of juvenile, depleted and choke stocks, protected species such as dolphins or seals, as well as the broader environmental impacts of fishing.

BIM has developed a Responsibly Sourced Seafood Standard which is a third party certification scheme that demonstrates that the suppliers of Irish seafood produce safe, legal products of consistent high quality, which is caught responsibly.

BIM is working with the fishing industry to improve waste management within the industry through its 'Fishing For Litter' and 'Net Recycling' initiatives. The 'Fishing for Litter' initiative, launched in 2015 as a pilot initiative, encourages fishermen to take ashore the litter they encounter or generate at sea while fishing, for safe sustainable disposal. Fishermen are provided with special heavy duty bags by BIM which are filled by the fishermen while at sea and these bags are deposited in fishery harbours for sustainable disposal. BIM are preparing waste characterisation plans for each fishery harbour as the initiative is rolled out. Under the Net Recycling initiative, end of life nets are dismantled into a number of components, enabling the material to enter a number of recycling streams thus diverting such material from landfill. Both initiatives are proving very popular with fishermen, who are actively supporting the initiatives, and this in turn contributes to their certification under the BIM responsibly sourced standard and Bord Bia's Origin Green.

Aquaculture Licences

558. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the terms of reference of the newly established aquaculture licensing review group; if the review will involve a round of public consultation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3200/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): On 20 December 2016, I announced the appointment of a 3-person Independent Review Group to carry out a review of the aquaculture licensing process and associated legal framework. The Independent Review Group includes Ms Mary Moylan, chairperson, Dr Ken Whelan and Mr Lorcan Ó Cinnéide.

The Independent Review Group is presently inviting submissions from stakeholders. The Public Consultation was advertised in the Irish Independent on Tuesday 10 January 2017. Details of the Public Consultation and the Group's terms of reference are hosted on the Fishingnet.ie website. The Public Consultation will close on the 10 February 2017.

The Objectives of the Review to identify changes required to the aquaculture licence process and its associated legal framework that will:

1. Deliver licence determinations in a timely manner, having regard to international best practice;

2. Support achievement of the actions and priorities of Food Wise 2025 and the National Strategic Plan for Sustainable Aquaculture Development;

3. Facilitate enhanced transparency in the licensing process for all stakeholders;

4. Ensure legally robust licence determinations having regard to EU and national law.

The Review is required to have regard to Government policy for the sustainable development of aquaculture, as outlined in Food Wise 2025 and my Department's 2015 National Strategic Plan for Sustainable Aquaculture Development.

The review will encompass the aquaculture licensing process from pre-application stage to the determination of a licence. It will encompass all applications for a licence under existing legislation, including an aquaculture licence, a trial licence, a review of a licence or a renewal of a licence.

I have asked the Independent Review Group to report to me within 4 months with a concise report containing recommended actions.

Departmental Staff

559. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason two staffing positions within his Department were not filled from the central transfer list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3210/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): As outlined in my previous response to this question, information held on transfer lists is dated and in many cases obsolete. The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform is in the process of carrying out an extensive review of the transfer system and expects to have a dedicated system in place by mid-year that will hold up to date and relevant information for use by Departments in filling positions at all levels.

My Department is currently working through transfer lists for our extensive range of locations and is also assisting other Departments in updating their lists. As I have already advised, this is a resource intensive process and in view of the fact that a new up to date system will be in place by mid-year, my Department is awaiting the activation of this new system. Pending the implementation of the new system, my Department will continue to seek to ensure that sufficient resources are in place to deliver Government priorities and fill critical posts through recruitment as required.

In the case of the named person, there are a number of people ahead of this person on the relevant transfer list. My Department is working with other Government Departments with a view to establishing the current status of their applications. This is a lengthy process as Civil Servants regularly move to different Departments during their careers and may move several times. Until the status of applications is established, my Department cannot offer any transfers based on the current available information.

Food Waste

560. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the estimated amount of food waste generated here with a breakdown by sectors; the steps he is taking to promote the reduction of such waste; and the targets and timelines he

is working to. [2876/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): In terms of available data, Ireland generates approximately 1.1 million tonnes of food waste per year. Around 40% of this, or 450,000 tonnes, comes from food production; 34%, which equates to 380,000 tonnes, comes from the commercial sector; and, 26%, or 300,000 tonnes, comes from households. The European Union (Household Food Waste and Bio-waste) Regulations 2015 and the commercial Waste Management (Food Waste) Regulations 2009 both aim to maximise the resource potential and minimise the disposal of food waste. These two sets of regulations place clear obligations on waste collectors, businesses and households to promote the segregation and recovery of food waste for the purposes of producing energy, compost and digestate, thereby supporting job creation in the waste and bio-energy sectors.

Through preventing food waste, and becoming more efficient in using what we have, Ireland can reduce the environmental impacts associated with food waste, improve the financial performance of businesses and householders alike, and help those who struggle to put food on the table. Reuse is the next favourable waste management option of the waste hierarchy and donation of surplus food has a role to play in the reduction of food waste. It is also important to communicate a clear and consistent message, promoting the food waste management hierarchy as an integrated solution rather than promoting a single option over another. Ireland is already making significant strides in this area and through the EPA-led National Waste Prevention Programme (NWPP), has been working on food waste prevention in partnership with many stakeholders since 2009. A national Forum on Food Waste is scheduled for March, 2017 to bring together stakeholders from across the food cycle with the specific focus of exploring a collaborative approach to reducing waste food.

"Stop Food Waste" is a national food waste prevention programme, whose aim is to raise awareness and enable initiatives to promote changes in behaviour, through a combination of education, training, local champions, peer example and easy to use information. The programme is aimed at householders and individuals, and small businesses such as cafés, pubs serving food and small local supermarkets.

Inland Fisheries

561. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to reopen the trout hatchery at Mallow, County Cork. [3128/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Seán Kyne): The former South Western Regional Fisheries Board, a predecessor of Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI), operated a very small-scale enhancement hatchery in Mallow which ceased operation some 20 years ago. Similar small-scale hatcheries in other parts of the country also ceased operation. These small-scale hatcheries would not meet current environmental standards and it is not intended to reinstate any of these facilities including the former limited hatchery operation at Mallow.

Existing hatchery operations are being reviewed by IFI

IFI generally follows best international practice in maximising the protection and improvement of habitats to enhance the natural reproductive cycle of wild fish and in minimising other interventions.

EU Directives

562. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if the European Commission has commenced enforcement proceedings against Ireland for not implementing Directive 2014/53/EU on the harmonisation of the laws of the member states relating to the making available on the market of radio equipment and repealing Directive 1999/5/EC; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the failure to implement the directive is placing Irish industry at a disadvantage; when it will be implemented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2596/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The European Commission has not commenced enforcement proceedings against Ireland in respect of the Directive referred to in the Question. Regulations to transpose the Directive are currently under preparation and discussions are on-going between my Department and the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel (OPC) with a view to finalising these regulations as soon as possible.

I am aware that the non-transposition of the Directive is impacting bodies to be notified for the purpose of carrying out conformity assessment tasks under the Directive and I have directed my officials to finalise the transposing regulations, in consultation with the OPC, as quickly as possible.

National Broadband Plan

563. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the date on and year in which the national broadband plan will begin. [2665/17]

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

Currently, approximately 1.4m premises in Ireland can get high speed broadband from commercial service providers and investment by the telecoms sector is continuing to expand this footprint.

The High Speed Broadband Map, which is available at *www.broadband.gov.ie* shows the current 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.

The Department is actively monitoring the commercial deployment plans 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 in these areas cannot access high speed broadband services, I would encourage them to contact my Department directly at *broadband@dccae.gov.ie* , quoting their address and Eircode and giving details of providers they have contacted with a view to obtaining services.

A formal procurement process is now in train to select a company or companies who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network within the State Intervention Area. The Department will also shortly update the High Speed Broadband map and finalise this Intervention Area for bidders, taking into account any industry investments that have not materialised and potential other new investments.

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. Intensive dialogue with bidders is continuing and the three bidders have indicated that they are proposing a predominantly fibre-to-the-home solution. This provides for a future proofed solution for the 25 years of the contract and beyond. A fibre-to-the-home solution means that householders and businesses may get speeds not just of 30 Megabits per second but much higher, potentially up to 1000 Megabits per second.

The timeframe for 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. 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.

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. The Taskforce report is available at the following link: *http://www.dccae.gov.ie/communications/en-ie/Pages/Publication/Report-of-the-Mobile-Phone-and-Broadband-Taskforce.aspx*

I have 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 commercial deployment of telecommunications networks.

These investments should assist in significantly improving the coverage and quality of broadband and mobile voice and data services throughout the country.

Energy Conservation

564. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if grants for window replacements will be introduced to compliment the energy saving grant aid already available to homeowners from Sustainable Energy Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2799/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) operates a number of schemes on behalf of my Department to support energy efficiency improvements to homes. The Better Energy Homes scheme makes a range of grants available to householders who wish to improve the energy efficiency of their home, the Better Energy Warmer Homes scheme offers free energy efficiency upgrades to those in energy poverty and the Better Energy Communities scheme funds community activity on energy efficiency. The measures currently supported are those that can deliver the most energy savings at the lowest cost. The upgrade of windows is not currently supported under the Better Energy Programme due to the need to balance the budgetary resources available with the demand for the programme. While window insulation does improve the energy efficiency of a home, the cost of such a measure is high in relation to the energy efficiency gains made.

I have asked SEAI to conduct a review of the technologies that are currently supported through the Better Energy Homes scheme and to consider whether grant support should be offered for a wider range of energy upgrades. I expect SEAI to report back to me later this year. Any changes to the scheme that are warranted will be operational in 2018.

Information on the grant support available under the Better Energy Programme is available on the SEAI website at *www.seai.ie*.

Natural Gas Grid

565. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the provision of a gas line extension to cater for Longford town. [2801/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The development and expansion of the natural gas network is in the first instance a commercial and operational matter for Gas Networks Ireland (GNI), which is a commercial State-sponsored Body under the aegis of the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government. GNI is mandated under Section 8 of the Gas Act 1976, as amended, to develop and maintain a national system for the supply of natural gas that is both economical and efficient. GNI's published "Connections Policy", which was most recently revised in 2015, sets out its policy for new connections to the transmission and distribution gas networks. Under this policy, GNI conducts studies to assess towns for connections to the gas network. In order for any town to be so connected certain economic criteria need to be satisfied. These criteria provide that the construction and operating costs of connecting a town, or group of towns, to the

network must be recovered through the consumption of gas and the associated network charges. In this regard, the 2015 Energy White Paper underlined that new infrastructure proposals will continue to be assessed through robust analysis.

The Commission for Energy Regulation (CER) is statutorily responsible for assessing and approving the GNI Connections Policy, and it concluded its last such approval process in October 2015 following the usual public consultation. I have no statutory role in relation to this matter.

Electricity Transmission Network

566. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if, in the context of situations whereby the Electricity Supply Board has access to farmers' lands to erect transmission poles thereon, he will take steps to ensure that if a pole is accidentally damaged thereon the farmer should not be levied with the cost of repairing same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2836/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): ESB is a commercial State company established under the Electricity (Supply) Act 1927. The matter raised by the Deputy is operational in nature and not one in which I, as Minister, have any function.

Rural Broadband Scheme

567. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the rural broadband scheme in Foxford, County Mayo. [2871/17]

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.

Currently, approximately 1.4m premises in Ireland can get high speed broadband from commercial service providers and investment by the telecoms sector is continuing to expand this footprint.

The High Speed Broadband Map, which is available at *www.broadband.gov.ie* shows the current 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 in-

tended 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.

The map currently indicates that 97% of the townland of Foxford will be covered by commercial operators while the remaining 3%% of the townland of Foxford will be part of the State Intervention. The Department is actively monitoring the commercial deployment plans 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 in these areas cannot access high speed broadband services, I would encourage them to contact my Department directly at *broadband@dccae.gov.ie,* quoting their address and Eircode and giving details of providers they have contacted with a view to obtaining services. The Department will also shortly update the High Speed Broadband map and finalise the Intervention Area for bidders, taking into account any industry investments that have not materialised and potential other new investments.

A formal procurement process is now in train to select a company or companies who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network within the State Intervention Area. 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. Intensive dialogue with bidders is continuing and the three bidders have indicated that they are proposing a predominantly fibre-to-the-home solution. This provides for a future proofed solution for the 25 years of the contract and beyond. A fibre-to-the-home solution means that householders and businesses may get speeds not just of 30 Megabits per second but much higher, potentially up to 1000 Megabits per second.

The timeframe for 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. 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.

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. The Taskforce report which was published in December, is available at the following link: forchttp*://www.dccae.gov.ie/communications/en-ie/Pages/Publication/Report-of-the-Mobile-Phone-and-Broadband-Taske.aspx*

I recently signed Regulations allowing ComReg to proceed with the allocation of spectrum in the 3.6GHz band, in early 2017. 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 commercial deployment of telecommunications net-

works.

These investments should assist in significantly improving the coverage and quality of broadband and mobile voice and data services throughout the country, including Co Mayo.

Air Quality

568. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the current systems for monitoring NOx emissions from diesel fuelled vehicles in Dublin, Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford; the current levels of those emissions in each city; the international health standards which apply; if his Department or the Environmental Protection Agency made any submissions to the preparations for the Finance Bill 2016 on any move to equalise excise duty rates on petrol and diesel fuels; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2877/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Air quality monitoring in Ireland is carried out by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to meet the requirements of EU Directive 2008/50/EC on ambient air quality and cleaner air for Europe, known as the CAFÉ Directive. The Directive requires that certain minimum levels of monitoring are carried out for the purposes of assessment and management of air quality. The EPA monitors a range of atmospheric pollutants, based on data obtained from its monitoring stations that form the national ambient air quality network. The Agency's most recent annual air quality report was published in November 2016 and provides an assessment of air quality in Ireland for 2015. Emissions of NOx were monitored at 15 locations across Ireland for the report, and values for all these sites were below the annual limit value. The report cautions however that NOx values may increase in line with growth in economic activity in the State. City centre and urban monitoring sites in Ireland are approaching EU limit values for NO2, and it is possible that we will see limit values exceeded in the near future unless mitigation steps are taken.

A significant contributor to the rise in NOx emissions in recent years throughout the EU has been the higher than expected emissions from the new fleet of road vehicles, particularly diesel vehicles. Over time, discrepancies have come to light between the emissions recorded from vehicles during emissions testing and 'real' driving. The European Commission approach has been to revise the test cycle to be more representative of emissions from real-world driving experience (RDE). Ireland fully supported these proposals and their early implementation. The Road Safety Authority, which is under the aegis of the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, is the agency centrally involved in this issue on behalf of Ireland.

My Department did not make a submission on the question of the equalisation of excise duty rates between petrol and diesel during the preparation of the Finance Bill, 2016. As an independent statutory body, the question of whether any such submission was made by the Environmental Protection Agency should be addressed directly to the Agency.

Broadband Service Provision

569. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the name of the service provider tasked with delivering broadband in the Granard area of County Longford; if there are plans by this company to improve the service in this area and in particular the service provided to a business (details supplied); and if his Department will contact this business, as outlined in a previous parliamentary reply, in order to provide as-

sistance in this regard. [2886/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I refer to the reply to Question No. 1481 of 17 January, 2017 in which I advised that the business referred to falls within the AMBER area, which is the target area for the State Intervention and will, therefore, be included in the State Intervention procurement process which is now underway.

Wind Energy Generation

570. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the rationale used to determine each of the 12 exclusions listed at 4.3.1 of the report on wind turbine noise modelling commissioned by his Department through the SEAI and published in draft format in March 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2889/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The objective of the report referred to in the Question was to inform a decision on the impact of potential noise limits on the available wind energy capacity in Ireland. The objective was not to establish the criteria for determining spatial feasibility as it was solely an acoustic exercise. The acoustic models produced in the study were based on the identification of potentially viable areas for wind turbine placement and a number of assumptions were made in compiling the report. Proposals for individual wind farm developments are subject to the statutory requirements of planning law, in the same manner as other proposed developments. Aside from exclusion zones around dwellings, exclusion zones were applied in the report around environmental, cultural heritage and archaeological zones. It is important to reiterate the limited scope of this report, which did not include an environmental study.

The 12 exclusion zones constitute areas protected under national and EU law such as the Habitats Directive. By their nature, any development proposed within those areas, would be subject to specific environment assessment. Under each of the listed exclusion zones, further environmental constraints impact the likelihood of a project receiving planning approval. Therefore, in order to assess the implications of acoustic parameters, it was reasonable to apply the 12 exclusion zones in question, which were agreed by the Steering Group, membership of which included the then Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, the National Parks and Wildlife Service, the SEAI and Local Authority representation, prior to the commencement of this modelling exercise.

Departmental Staff Data

571. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of Secretaries General in his Department; the annual pay of each Secretary General within his Department at 1 Jan 2017; the expected change in that pay as a consequence of the provisions of the Lansdowne Road agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2904/17]

572. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of assistant secretaries general in his Department; the annual pay of each assistant secretary general within his Department at 1 January 2017; the expected change in that pay as a consequence of the provisions of the Lansdowne Road agreement; and if he will

make a statement on the matter. [2920/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 571 and 572 together.

The current gross salary of the secretary general of my Department is €176,350 per annum.

There are currently four assistant secretaries employed in my Department (there is currently one vacancy at this level). Two are earning a gross annual salary of €119,572 each, one earns €125,761 and the remaining assistant secretary earns €136,496.

Under the provisions of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2015 (FEMPI Act 2015), for those on salaries in excess of €110,000 the salary reductions imposed under the FEMPI Act 2013 will be restored in three equal phases on 1 April 2017, 1 April 2018 and 1 April 2019. A circular setting out the revised salary rates applicable from 1 April 2017 to general Civil Service grades, including Secretaries General and Assistant Secretaries General, is currently in preparation and will be issued by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in due course.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

573. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the progress Eir has made on meeting commercial milestones specifically in relation to commitments to the blue areas of the national broadband plan map. [3123/17]

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 in Broadband 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.

Currently, approximately 1.4m premises in the Blue area in Ireland can get high speed broadband from commercial service providers including eir and investment by the telecoms sector is continuing to expand this footprint. The breakdown of planned coverage of premises per townland is available on the High Speed Broadband Map at *www.broadband.gov.ie.*

The rollout of High Speed Broadband services in the Blue area by commercial operators including eir is being kept under ongoing review by my Department to ensure that all premises can get access to services, either through commercial investment or the State intervention. In this regard my Department continues to liaise closely with industry and relevant other Departments and Agencies to assist in the commercial deployment of telecommunications networks. The Department will also shortly update the High Speed Broadband map and finalise the intervention area for bidders, taking into account any industry investments that have not materialized and potential other new investments.

A formal procurement process is now in train to select a company or companies who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network within the State Intervention Area. The procure-

ment 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. Intensive dialogue with bidders is continuing and the three bidders have indicated that they are proposing a predominantly fibre-to-the-home solution. This provides for a future proofed solution for the 25 years of the contract and beyond. A fibre-to-the-home solution means that householders and businesses may get speeds not just of 30 Megabits per second but much higher, potentially up to 1000 Megabits per second.

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.

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. The Taskforce report is available at the following link:*http://www.dccae.gov.ie/communications/en-ie/Pages/Publication/Report-of-the-Mobile-Phone-and-Broadband-Taskforce.aspx*

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.

These investments should assist in significantly improving the coverage and quality of broadband and mobile voice and data services throughout the country.

Communications Market Regulation

574. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he has been communicated to by Eir on whether it is endeavouring to have the universal service obligations softened particularly in respect to the true cost of phone line installation at a nominal cost. [3124/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): My Department is in ongoing dialogue with operators on a variety of policy and regulatory issues. The provision of fixed line electronic communications networks connections and broadband services to users is undertaken on a commercial basis by electronic communications networks and services providers.

The Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg), the independent market regulator which is statutorily independent in the exercise of its functions, has imposed a universal service obligation on Eir, which, among other things, obliges it to provide landline connections at a standard connection charge across the country unless the costs incurred in any individual case exceeds a certain amount.

In light of the statutory independence of Comreg as the independent market regulator, it would not be appropriate for me to make any further comment on this matter.

Bord na Móna

575. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the details of his discussion with Bord na Móna with regard to its new acquisition in Liverpool; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3159/17]

576. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he sought any assurances from Bord na Móna with reference to job security for workers in its Kilberry plant, Athy, County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3160/17]

577. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the assurances he will provide that the existing jobs in the Bord na Móna Kilberry Plant, Athy, County Kildare will not be impacted by the new acquisition; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3161/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 575 to 577, inclusive, together.

Bord na Móna is a commercial State company operating under the Turf Development Acts 1946 to 1998. While the matter raised by the Deputy, regarding assurances of existing jobs, is an operational one for the management team at Bord na Móna and not one in which I, as Minister, have any direct function, it is a matter of concern for me.

Consent to this acquisition followed thorough analysis by Bord na Móna in the first instance, NewERA, as Ministerial commercial and financial advisors, and my Departmental officials. The acquisition in question forms part of the Bord na Móna strategy to secure its long-term future by moving away from peat production for energy use. It also allows the company to continue to support the horticulture business here in Ireland and to maintain a strong presence in the UK market. As part of the consent process on my part, and on the part of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform , Bord na Móna provided assurances with regard to staff engagement and the minimisation of potential redundancies within the company.

Air Quality

578. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the plans and initiatives being put in place to measure and monitor air emissions and pollutants as required under a forthcoming EU directive (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3175/17]

579. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the details of any additional funding being provided to the Environmental Protection Agency to enable it to measure and monitor air emissions and pollutants in order to ensure Ireland meets commitments set out in the revised Gothenburg protocol which a new directive (details supplied) incorporates; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3176/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 578 and 579 together.

The final transposition date for the recently introduced National Emissions Ceiling Directive (Directive EU 2016/2284) is 1 July 2018. The Directive is a key element of the EU's Clean Air Package, which aims to reduce air pollution and improve air quality across Europe.

My Department is undertaking a number of policy initiatives in anticipation of the Directive coming into force and to address concerns about the impacts of air pollution on human health and the environment.

I expect to launch a consultation paper on Ireland's first ever National Clean Air Strategy in the coming weeks, with a view to having the strategy in place by the end of the year. The strategy will set a progressive vision for managing and improving Ireland's air quality and will seek to integrate a range of considerations into future policy on air quality. The development of the strategy is especially timely, in the context of the EU's Clean Air Package, as it will act as a policy framework for the implementation of the provisions of the package in Ireland. It will also complement and add value to it, by having a particular focus on national priority areas not addressed by EU legislation. This process necessarily involves discussion and consultation with a wide number of stakeholders, including the European Commission, relevant Departments and agencies of Government, the residential fuel industry, and the general public. Discussions on issues that may arise in connection with the strategy have already commenced with some of these stakeholders.

In addition, the EPA has commenced preparation of a draft national ambient air monitoring programme under section 65 of the Environmental Protection Agency Act, 1992 (as amended), which will provide the basis and options for the continued development and expansion of the national ambient air monitoring network, including providing the data necessary to inform funding decisions. The development of the national ambient air monitoring programme will include a review of the adequacy of the current network for both determining compliance with European and national standards for air quality and for the provision of information to the public about local air quality. A stakeholder consultation on this process was recently completed, and my officials look forward to further engagement with the agency on this important initiative over the coming year.

Air Quality

580. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will request a baseline air quality study to be carried out in Dublin city before the Poolbeg incinerator is fully operational in view of the fact the initial study was completed in 2005 and therefore may not be an accurate baseline measure for future air quality monitoring; if the operators of the incinerator will be required to use the initial baseline measurement when measuring emissions as set out in the EPA licence for the operation of the incinerator in the event that an up to date study is not completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3177/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I understand that the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Dublin Waste to Energy plant, which included an air quality baseline survey, accompanied the Planning Application to An Bord Pleanala and the Waste Licence Application to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Under the relevant legislation, matters pertaining to planning do not fall under the remit of the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and the Environment.

Furthermore, conditions and enforcement of conditions attached to the Dublin Waste to Energy licence are a matter for the licensing authority, the Environmental Protection Agency. As Minister, I am precluded by legislation from exercising powers in relation to the performance in particular circumstances by the Agency of a function conferred on the Agency under legislation and I have no role in this regard.

Accordingly, questions regarding the Environmental Impact Statement for the Dublin Waste to Energy plant should be directed to the appropriate authority.

National Digital Strategy

581. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will report on the operation of the e-benefit programme; the total funding provided each year since 2008 by county; the sum allocated to each group per year; the new selection criteria for the 2017 digital skills for citizens grant scheme; the number of successful and unsuccessful applications, by county, in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3195/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): My Department's Bene*f*IT Programme, which operated between 2008 and mid-2016, comprised of four consecutive schemes designed to address the basic digital literacy needs of citizens, thereby removing a key barrier to citizen engagement with the internet. Under the Bene*f*IT Programme, over 160,000 training places were provided to citizens in more than 600 locations nationwide, at a cost of €8.4m. The most recent programme, Bene*f*IT 4, funded 22 community, voluntary and not-for-profit organisations to provide skills training, along with 23 pilot community-based projects with various objectives.

Financial information relating to the Bene*f*IT Programme is held by the Department in respect of each organisation grant aided, and is not readily available at a County level. Relevant figures in respect of the years 2013 – 2016 are set out in the following Table, while details in relation to the years 2008 – 2012 are being compiled and will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as possible.

BenefIT Grantee	2013	2014	2015	2016
Age Action Ireland Ltd	€241,260	€215,400	€107,700	€107,700
An Cosan The Shanty Educational Project		€14,680	€7,340	
Applied Behaviour Analysis in Local Education	€29,832	€13,560		
Bailieborough Development Association		€5,450		
Ballybrown Clarina Community Resource Centre		€4,500	€4,500	
Ballyfermot IT Centre Social Economy	€107,346	€56,026	€95,906	
Ballyhaunis Family Resource Centre		€5,725	€5,725	
Ballyhoura Development Ltd			€32,500	€8,125
Bishop Birch Community Centre		€2,750		
Bray Area Partnership (BAP)		€8,650		
Camara		€11,778		
Carlow Community Enterprise Centre	€26,196	€13,098	€13,098	
Carlow County Development Partnership Ltd		€29,254		
Carlow Rural Information Services Project		€14,990	€14,990	
Claremorris Family Resource Centre		€5,000	€5,000	
County Sligo Leader Partnership Co. Ltd.	€35,228	€15,997	€15,997	€15,997
Digital Hub Development Agency		€12,250	€12,250	
Dublin City Council		€4,900		

BenefIT Grantee	2013	2014	2015	2016
ECDL Ireland Ltd T/A ICS Skills	€174,240	€158,400	€158,400	
Family Carers Ireland	€25,623	€29,846	€14,922	
Family Support & Community Well Being		€4,000	€4,000	
Fast Track INTO Information Technology Ltd (FIT)	€415,800	€210,116	€313,366	€189,000
Friends Galway		€12,500	€12,500	
Irish Community Empowerment Group		€3,022		
Irish Congress of Trade Unions	€94,481	€42,950	€128,851	
Irish Internet Association	€74,800	€68,000	€17,000	€34,000
Irish Rural Link Co-operative Society	€108,900	€49,500	€74,250	€49,500.30
Irish Wheelchair Association	€25,766			
Irish Work Study Institute Ltd T/A industrial Eng.	€28,110	€25,500		
Kerry Flyer		€14,295	€14,295	
Laois Partnership Company		€10,000		
Louth and Meath Education and Training Board	€56,250	€28,125	€56,280	
Meath Community Dev. Ltd T/A Meath Partnership	€15,758	€31,516		
Muintir na Tíre		€13,500	€6,210	
Ozanam House Resource Centre		€4,440	€4,440	
South East Cork Area Development	€12,385			
School Street Family Resource Centre		€1,251	€1,251	
The Life Centre		€2,400	€1,200	
The Woodland League		€8,000		
Threshold Training Network		€7,120	€7,120	
Walkinstown Assoc. T/A Walk With You	€31,680		€15,840	
Waterford & Wexford Education & Training	€32,874	€29,864	€14,931	€10,717
Total Grants Paid	€1,536,528	€1,188,353	€1,159,862	€415,039.30

On 18 November 2016, I issued an invitation to community, voluntary and not-for-profit organisations to apply for grant assistance under the Digital Skills for Citizens Grant Scheme which replaced the Bene*f*IT Programme. The scheme's *Statement of Requirements* specified the relevant qualification and award criteria, and is available on my Department's website at *www.dccae.gov.ie*. In terms of eligibility, organisations had to meet the following minimum requirements:

- a minimum annual turnover of €100,000

- experience of having satisfactorily managed a project of a similar scale within the past 5 years.

Eligible organisations were assessed in terms of a published marking scheme in respect of the following headings:

- numbers of citizens to be trained, with a minimum threshold of 1,000

- detailed training proposal, and

- cost per trainee.

Overall, 29 applications were received in response to the competitive call for proposals, of which 22 organisations were eligible to be evaluated. The eligible applications comprised proposals to train a total of 68,108 citizens, at a cost of €5.87m per annum. The financial allocation available to fund the scheme in 2017 amounted to some €2.2m.

Following the evaluation process carried out by my officials, 15 organisations were offered grant funding to provide classroom training, free of charge, to 25,761 citizens, with a geographic spread of training, across every County in the country. Initial payments made in 2016 to the 15 successful organisations, in accordance with the funding arrangements and provisions of the respective grant agreements, are outlined in the following Table. Details of the training classes which are being made available under this tranche of grant funding will be published on my Department's website as soon as schedules have been finalised. Financial records relating to the scheme will be held at both an organisation and county level.

Digital Skills for Citizens Scheme Grantee	Grant Amount paid in 2016
Age Action Ireland Ltd	€59,490
Ballyhoura Development Company Ltd	€27,000
County Sligo Leader Partnership Company Ltd	€27,600
ECDL Ireland Ltd	€27,000
Family Carers Ireland Ltd	€27,600
Fast Track INTO Information Technology Ltd (FIT)	€56,000
IE Domain Registry Ltd	€30,000
Irish Rural Link Co-Operative Society Ltd	€31,679.70
Meath Community Rural & Social Development Partnership Ltd	€25,500
(NCBI) National Council for the Blind Group	€30,000
Roscommon Integrated Development Company Ltd	€59,500
South East Community Training & Education Centre Ltd	€25,500
St Catherine's Community Services Centre Ltd	€25,500
The Cork Academy of Music Ltd	€24,000
Third Age Foundation Co. Ltd	€24,000

Road Projects

582. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if funding will be made available to Cork City Council in 2017 to construct a pedestrian crossing and associated traffic calming measures at a location (details supplied); and if so, the timeframe for same. [2592/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads in Cork City (including Stoneridge est, Blarney Road) is the statutory responsibility of Cork City Council, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from the Council's own resources supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is also a matter for the local authority.

An application for grant assistance was received from Cork City Council. Today I announced the overall 2017 Regional and Local Road grant allocations and funding for this project is included in those allocations.

Bus Éireann Staff

583. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of senior anagement and executives of Bus Éireann that received severance packages from the company in each of the years 2008 to 2016; the total cost to Bus Éireann; and if he will

make a statement on the matter. [2647/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issue raised is a matter for Bus 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.

Irish Coast Guard Issues

584. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will enact statutory instrument legislation in order that the Irish Coast Guard can become a stand-alone primary response agency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2720/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I have discussed calls to legislate for the Irish Coast Guard in the House on previous occasions. The IRCG was established by Government Decision in 1990, initially as the Irish Marine Emergency Service, the name was later changed to the Irish Coast Guard (IRCG) in 2000, and the division was subsequently transferred from the Department of the Marine to the Department of Transport in 2006.

I am satisfied that the IRCG has sufficient powers as a division of my Department, to carry out its functions which are augmented by the various Merchant Shipping and Sea Pollution legislation which I have previously outlined in my response to PQ No. 677 on 15th November 2016. These Government Decisions, the Irish Maritime Search and Rescue Framework and legislative provisions are aligned with the accepted provisions of international law (International Convention of the Safety of Life at Sea, International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue and the UN Convention of the Law of the Sea). This administrative and legal framework establishes the Search and Rescue function as a State function with the Irish Coast Guard designated as responsible for maritime Search and Rescue. It further defines the jurisdiction and legal authority of the Rescue Co-ordination Centres with relevant standards of the International Civlil Aviation Organisation and the International Maritime Organisation.

In light of the context set out above, it is my view that there is no need to place the IRCG on any additional statutory footing.

Dublin Bus Fleet

585. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the percentage of the Dublin Bus fleet now accessible by wheelchair users; the planned timeline to have 100% accessibility; the funding set aside for this; the routes that currently do not have 100% accessibility; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2583/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Accessibility improvements to public transport services are being advanced in the context of my Department's Sectoral Plan under the Disability Act 2005, *Transport Access for All*. The plan sets out a series of policy objectives and targets for accessible public transport across all modes and significant progress has been achieved in recent years.

Measures to provide for full accessibility are built into all new public transport infrastructure projects and vehicles from the design stage. In this context my Department provides funding to the National Transport Authority (NTA) for a rolling programme of bus replacement and refurbishment of the Dublin Bus fleet. This has enabled 100% of the Dublin Bus fleet to be wheelchair accessible. In addition all Dublin Bus stops are fully accessible as they can be

served by a wheelchair ramp with kneeling suspension on the bus. i.e. adjustable suspension that enables the bus to be lowered to the kerb.

Sports Facilities Provision

586. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide a progress report on a boxing centre (details supplied). [2593/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): I understand that Cork County Boxing Board is interested in developing a boxing headquarters and centre of excellence in Knocknaheeny. It should be noted however, that there is currently no allocation towards this project. Any proposal from the Cork County Boxing Board needs to consider issues such as ownership of the proposed site, funding required, planning permission etc. Once these issues are resolved, my officials can advise on how best to advance the proposal.

In relation to sports capital projects generally, as the Deputy will be aware, on 21 December last, Minister Ross and I announced that €30m is being made available under the 2017 Sports Capital Programme to develop sports infrastructure around the country.

Applications are being accepted on my Department's dedicated online applications site (*www.sportscapitalprogramme.ie*) from yesterday the 23 January 2017 to the 24 February, 2017. The guide to making an application is also available on *www.sportscapitalprogramme.ie*.

Tourism Project Funding

587. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide support to a project (details supplied). [2626/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): My Department's role in relation to tourism is concerned primarily with national policy, and it is not involved in the funding of individual events, or the administration of tourism-related funding programmes. These matters fall within the day-to-day responsibilities of Fáilte Ireland, which provides support for festivals, business tourism and cultural and sporting events, based upon applications received and the return to the econmy and tourism industry from those events.

Accordingly, I have referred the Deputy's question to Fáilte Ireland for direct reply. Please contact my private office if you have not received a reply within ten working days.

Departmental Contracts

588. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 562 of 25 October 2016, the details of the discussions and the clear position his Department has taken with regard to this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2627/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): These questions relate to the tax affairs of an individual person. The Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport would regard such details as confidential.

The position was outlined to the individual in a letter dated September 2013, at a meeting in October 2013, and then again in letters dated 8 December 2015, 15 December 2015, 18 December 2015 and 22 December 2015. These letters stated that the Department always acted fairly and in good faith in dealing with the individual, that the position is clear and concluded.

Taxi Licences Renewals

589. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to difficulties taxi drivers are experiencing in renewing their licences in certain circumstances (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2651/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The regulation of the small public service vehicle industry, including issues relating to licensing, is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the provisions of the Taxi Regulation Act 2013.

I have referred your question to the NTA for direct reply to you. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

Sport and Recreational Development

590. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will legislate to make it mandatory for all sports clubs to have a code of conduct for youth coaches; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2661/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The public consultation paper issued by my Department last November, in the context of the preparation of a new National Sports Policy, contained a specific section on coaching. Amongst the key questions highlighted for consideration was the means of how best to ensure that sports coaching is as effective as possible at all levels and that coaches are given the necessary support to work with a variety of people, including children, older people and people with disabilities.

I consider that the particular question of whether legislation should be introduced to make it mandatory for all sports clubs to have a code of conduct for youth coaches can best be considered as part of the overall process of concluding the new National Sports Policy. I would welcome the view of Sport Ireland, the Government's agency with responsibility for overseeing sporting National Governing Bodies (NGBs), on the suggestion.

I should also highlight that the Child and Family Agency (TUSLA), under the aegis of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, is the dedicated State agency responsible for improving wellbeing and outcomes for children, and provides valuable guidelines in matters relating to child protection. Sport Ireland liaises closely with TUSLA and the NGBs on child protection matters.

Infrastructure and Capital Investment Programme

591. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the potential investment projects his Department put forward to the Department of Finance task force report for the European Fund for Strategic Investment. [2675/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I set out in the fol-

lowing table a list of projects put forward in 2014 as potential projects for EFSI funding by my Department.

The Department agreed the submission of the list to the Department of Finance. In doing so, it recognised that this was a technical list of potential projects and that inclusion on the list did not imply any commitment to State funding.

Project name	Implementing agency	Description
Ringaskiddy Development	Port of Cork Company	Port Quay Infrastructure, Cruise Terminal,
Alexander Basin Redevlopment	Dublin Port Company	Redevelopment/reconfiguration of Alexandra Basin to accommodate larger ships and to provide for a substantial increase in port capacity.
Improvement of the access and hinterland connection of Foynes Port	Shannon Foynes Port Company	Reinstatement of the existing rail line to the port, improvement works to existing quay and jetty infrastructure and removal of internal transport bottlenecks within the port.
Port improvement works	Port of Waterford	New training walls and pilot facilities
Regional Port Development	Galway Port	reclaim and develop a new port adjacent to existing port. Port Quay Infrastructure, Cruise Terminal,
Regional Port Development	Drogheada	New training walls
Regional Port Development	Dun Laoire	Quay Infrastructure, Cruise Terminal
M7 Naas to New bridge Bypass Widening	NRA	Bottleneck on the N7 with 6 lanes at northern end & 8 lanes at southern end feeding into 4 lanes on Core Corridor
Sallins Bypass & Osberstown Interchange	Kildare County Council	New Interchange and bypass needed to address congestion and facilitate access to public transport at Sallins
N8/N25 Dunkettle Interchange	NRA	New Interchange to address congestion on Core Corridor
Coonagh/Knockalisheen	Limerick Council	Road Link needed for urban regeneration
N22 Ballyvorney to Macroom	NRA	Road upgrade to main road link between Cork and Kerry
Moycullen Bypass	NRA	Bypass to address congestion on tourist route and business access to Galway
N5 Westport to Turlough	NRA	Road upgrade to link between Castlebar and Westport
N4 Collooney to Castlebaldwin	NRA	Road upgrade to link with high accident record between Collooney and Castlebalwin
N59 Mulranny to Westport	NRA	Road upgrade needed on tourist route
N56 Dungloe to Glenties	NRA	Road upgrade needed on tourist route
Sligo East Garvogue link	Sligo Council	Road link needed for urban regeneration
N28 Cork to Ringaskiddy	NRA	Road Link on a core corridor to connect with a Tier 1 Port
N6 Galway City Outer By-Pass	NRA	Bypass to address congestion on tourist route and business access to Galway
A5 Derry to the Border	Transport Northern Ireland	Upgrade the A5 from Derry to the Border to dual carriageway standard
Project Hangar	Shannon Group plc	Construction of a c.6,751 square metre wide body hangar to facilitate the creation of jobs and development of the aviation cluster in Shannon, County Clare, Ireland.
Project Runway	Shannon Group plc	Full renewal of the Shannon Airport runway to maintain the airport's operating status and its position on the comprehensive Trans-European Transport Network.
Project Corporate	Shannon Group plc	Development of corporate-aviation and cargo terminal infrastructure in Shannon, County Clare, Ireland, as well as establishment of corporate aircraft register. Project is designed to leverage Free Zone status increase total EU MRO activity for corporate aircraft with associated benefits for employment, as well as facilitating cargo transhipment through EU and associated export processing.
Project Hangar II	Shannon Group plc	Construction of a second c.6,751 square metre wide body hangar to facilitate the creation of jobs and development of the aviation cluster in Shannon, County Clare, Ireland.

Project name	Implementing agency	Description
Project Office	Shannon Group plc	Construction of a number of fourth generation office blocks in the Shannon Free Zone, County Clare, Ireland. The blocks will be constructed to provide comparable office space to current non-EU offerings such as Dubai and to ensure Europe remains a leading player in global aviation.
Project Airport	Shannon Group plc	Refurbishment of Shannon Airport terminal building to safeguard the airport's ability to continue to operate as a part of the Trans-European Transport Network, implement the highest levels of energy efficiency and ensure a positive customer experience.
Project Hangar III	Shannon Group plc	Construction of a third c.6,751 square metre wide body hangar to facilitate the creation of jobs and development of the aviation cluster in Shannon, County Clare, Ireland.
New Parallel Runway at Dublin Airport	daa plc	New parallel runway (10/28) to the north of the existing 10/28 runway.
Swiftway BRT on Swords Airport Corridor	National Transport Authority	Scheme to meet short-medium term needs of Swords, Dublin Airport to City Centre corridor with 24 stops identified at key locations.
DART Underground	National Transport Authority	This project is made up of 2 elements – 1. The development of an underground tunnel (the DU project) between Docklands and Inchicore which will serve a number of key locations in the city centre with underground stations (previously known as the "Interconnector" tunnel) 2. A series of associated/related works including the City Centre Resignalling project (underway), Resignalling and electrification of the Maynooth line, Electrification to Drogheda, a new Centralised Traffic Control Centre (CTC), Elimination of level-crossings, the Kildare Route Project Phase 2, and the expansion of the DART fleet and associated depot facilities.
North Dublin Swords Airport Corridor Rail Link	National Transport Authority	Rail project on Swords/Airport corridor to meet long term needs of one of the fastest growing regions
Swiftway (BRT) Blanchardstown to UCD	National Transport Authority	Scheme will serve corridor between Blanchardstown and UCD including the City Centre with 34 stops identified at key locations.
Swiftway BRT Clongriffin to Tallaght	National Transport Authority	Scheme will serve the corridor linking Clongriffin, the City Centre and Tallaght, no. of stops to be finalised.
SUB -SET of DART U --DART Extension to Balbriggan	National Transport Authority	Part of the DART Underground Programme, which will contribute towards the removal of the bottleneck at Connolly station, including for the Enterprise cross-border train service.
SUB -SET of DART U -DART Extension to Maynooth	National Transport Authority	Part of the DART Underground Programme, involving the removal of Level-Crossings, Re-signalling & Electrification, it will have capacity & frequency benefits in and of itself.
SUB -SET of DART U -Central Traffic Control Centre	National Transport Authority	Part of DART U Programme -New Central Traffic Control Centre required to increase capacity and improve safety
LUAS extensions	National Transport Authority	To be decided. Possible routes include Lucan & Bray extensions.

Road Projects Status

592. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the funding, provision and commencement date for the port access northern cross route, in view of the daily gridlock and congestion in Drogheda currently and to cater for the projected increase of an additional population of 20,000 under the northern environs plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2743/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The improvement

and maintenance of regional and local roads in Co. Louth is the statutory responsibility of Louth County Council, 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. My Department has no grant application on hand in relation to the proposed Drogheda Northern Cross Port Access road.

Given the cutbacks in State funding for regional and local roads since the financial crisis, it has been necessary to curtail the grant programme for major new regional and local road schemes and for major realignment schemes in order to protect the funding available for the maintenance of the existing network. The bulk of the funding allocated under the Capital Plan published in 2015 is, therefore, earmarked for the maintenance and renewal of the road network with some limited investment in the new projects.

The Drogheda Port Access Northern Cross Route is not provided for in the Capital Plan.

Road Projects

593. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when funding will be made available to local authorities in County Louth for the provision of road safety measures, including the provision of a mini roundabout and-or staggered junction at Leonard's Cross, Upper Mell, Drogheda; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2747/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads in Co. Louth is the statutory responsibility of Louth County Council, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from the Council's own resources supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is also a matter for the Council.

I understand from the Council that Leonard's Cross junction is located on a section of the R168 and its intersection with two local roads (Cement Road/Slane Road). My Department contacted all local authorities (RW 12 of 2016) on 27 September 2016 inviting funding applications for Safety Improvement Works on regional and local roads in 2017 and Councils were asked to list proposed schemes in order of priority. While Louth County Council submitted a funding application under the Programme, the Leonards Cross junction was not among the priority projects listed.

It is a matter for the local authority to select, agree and prioritise the regional and local road works to be funded under its work programme. The purpose of Exchequer grants is to supplement the own resources of local authorities, not to meet the full costs of schemes.

Traffic Management

594. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the circumstances under which a zebra crossing may be constructed; the requirements that must be adhered to in such cases; the number of such pedestrian crossings constructed in 2015 and 2016; the circumstances under which a pedestrian crossing made up of a yellow box may be constructed (details supplied); if such yellow box crossings require a person employed as a crossing guard when built near schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2804/17]

595. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a

zebra crossing (details supplied) is in compliance with statutory guidelines on the construction of pedestrian crossings; the circumstances under which the crossing is permissible at this site; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2805/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 594 and 595 together.

The installation of pedestrian crossings on regional and local roads is a matter for local authorities, and on national roads, in consultation with Transport Infrastructure Ireland.

While guidance on their use is set out in both the Traffic Management Guidelines (TMG) and the Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets (DMURS), the legal requirements for pedestrian crossings are set out in the Traffic Signs Manual, all of which are accessible on my Department's website at *www.dttas.ie*.

The Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport does not maintain records on the number of zebra crossings constructed by local authorities.

Under Section 96 of the Road Traffic Act 1961 Local Authorities may, with the consent of the Commissioner of An Garda Síochána, make arrangements for the employment of crossing guards (school wardens) near schools but they are not obliged to do so.

Road Safety Authority Reports

596. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide the full Road Safety Authority report on disqualified drivers which it produced based on a survey of the national vehicle and driver file in August 2016; the full figures revealed from this survey; the main figures which led to the finding that banned drivers are responsible for the deaths of between 11 and 14 persons yearly; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2808/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I am aware of the Road Safety Authority (RSA) research indicating that there may be as many as 8,000 disqualified drivers on our roads, and that a number of them have been responsible for fatal or major collisions in recent years. My Department has been advised by the RSA that this research was not the subject of a formal report, and the RSA research included the use of data provided by the National Vehicle and Driver File to the RSA.

I would point out that under new powers provided to the Gardaí under the Road Traffic Act 2014, the Gardaí (since June 2015) can now arrest drivers who are detected driving while disqualified. Such drivers, following conviction in court, face a maximum fine of €5,000 and/or six months' imprisonment. The Gardaí can also detain, remove and store the vehicle used by such a driver under section 41 of the Road Traffic Act 1994. Furthermore, non-surrendering of a licence is an offence.

I intend to introduce legislation to allow for the publication of the names of drivers who are disqualified following a conviction in court as this has the potential to be an effective tool in dealing with the issue of drivers continuing to drive following a disqualification.

As regards enforcement of road traffic laws, I very much welcome the assurance provided by An Garda Siochana at a Special meeting of the Ministerial Committee on road safety, which I held on 12th January, that there will be an increase of 10% in the traffic corps during 2017 resulting in more check points and greater enforcement of traffic law and that road safety en-

forcement is a priority in the Garda Policing Plan for 2017.

Transport Infrastructure Ireland

597. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when he will next meet the CEO of Transport Infrastructure Ireland; the issues that will be discussed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2879/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): My last formal meeting with the CEO of Transport Infrastructure Ireland, Mr. Michael Nolan, was on Monday the 8th of August 2016. A further meeting with the CEO is not planned at this time. My Department is in regular contact with Transport Infrastructure Ireland and will continue to be so.

Departmental Staff Data

598. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of Secretaries General in his Department; the annual pay of each Secretary General within his Department at 1 January 2017; the expected change in that pay as a consequence of the provisions of the Lansdowne Road agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2916/17]

599. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of assistant secretary generals in his Department; the annual pay of each assistant secretary general within his Department at 1 January 2017; the expected change in that pay as a consequence of the provisions of the Lansdowne Road agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2932/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 598 and 599 together.

There is one Secretary General and five Assistant Secretaries General in my Department. The relevant pay scales for these Officers are as follows:

Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport

Grade	Pay-scale	-	-	-
□Secretary General level II (PPC)	□€ 185,350	□	□	□
□	□	□	□	□
□Assistant Secretary	□€ 119,572	€ 124,917	□€ 130,706	□€ 136,496
□Assistant Secretary (PPC)	□€ 125,761	□€ 131,385	□€ 137,481	□€ 143,535

The determination of salary rates for public servants, including any changes arising from the Lansdowne Road Agreement or any National Agreement is a matter in the first instance for my colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. In this regard I understand a circular setting out the revised salary rates applicable from 1st April 2017 to general Civil Service grades, including Secretaries General and Assistant Secretaries General, is currently in preparation and will be issued by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in due course.

Driver Licences

600. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport

the process required by the Road Safety Authority, RSA, for An Garda Síochána to establish the validity of a driving licence number; the number of inquiries received by the RSA from the Garda on driving licence numbers in each of the years 2013 to 2016 and to date in 2017; the average amount of time it takes the RSA to respond to the Garda with the required information in each of these years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2975/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The processing of requests by An Garda Síochána to the Road Safety Authority is a matter for that organisation. Therefore, I have referred the Deputy's questions to the Road Safety Authority for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Driver Licences

601. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of persons per annum that have informed the Road Safety Authority, RSA, of a change of address or other change of details to their ten-year driving licence since the RSA took over responsibility for driving licences in 2013 administered through the National Driver Licence Service; the process involved, including the length of time it takes for the replacement licence to be provided by the RSA to the person; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2976/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The processing of driving licence replacement requests following a change of address or other change of details is a matter for the Road Safety Authority. Therefore, I have referred the Deputy's questions to the Road Safety Authority for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Driver Licences

602. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of times each year that the Road Safety Authority, RSA, has successfully undertaken a matching exercise to match a conviction with a specific driving licence whereby the licence number was not recorded in court on conviction since the RSA took over responsibility for driving licences in 2013 administered through the National Driver Licence Service (NDLS); the number of times each year that the RSA has not been able to match a conviction with a specific driving licence whereby the licence number was not recorded in court on conviction; the follow up that occurred in these instances; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2977/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): These questions are a matter for the Road Safety Authority. Therefore I have referred the Deputy's questions to the Road Safety Authority for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Bus Éireann

603. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of press requests he has received since 1 December 2016 to discuss ongoing financial difficulties at Bus Éireann. [3064/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Press requests arise in a variety of forms (calls, texts, emails) to a number of different staff e.g. Press Officer and Press

Office staff as well as the Minister and his advisers. The Press Office of the Department does not quantify the requests received across these various communications channels.

Road Safety Data

604. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if an analysis as to the causes in road fatalities in 2016 has been carried out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3112/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The main causes of road deaths in Ireland are considered to be alcohol, excessive speed, distracted driving and failure to wear seat belts. A provisional review of the road fatal collisions in 2016 was carried out by the Road Safety Authority (RSA) based on a statistical analysis of such fatalities across a range of variables and causes. It shows for example that of the 2016 fatal collisions, 18% of drivers and 32% of passengers were confirmed as not wearing a seat belt, while 41% of drivers and 34% of passengers were confirmed as wearing a seatbelt, with the remainder not known at this time.

Detailed reports by the RSA on Fatal Collisions, which were published last year, indicates excessive speed was a contributory factor in 32% of fatal collisions and alcohol in 38% of collisions for which files were available for analysis by the RSA for the period 2008 - 2012.

While 2015 (together with 2012) had the joint lowest number of road deaths at 162 persons since records began in Ireland there was an increase in 2016 to 187. I am determined that we will reverse this trend in road deaths we saw last year. I held a Special meeting of the Ministerial Committee on road safety earlier this month, and I very much welcome the assurance by An Garda Síochána at that meeting that there will be an increase of 10% in the traffic corps during the course of 2017 with more check points and greater enforcement of traffic law and that road safety enforcement is a priority in the 2017 Garda Policing Plan.

Bus Éireann

605. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the action he plans to take to deal with the ongoing financial difficulties at Bus Éireann; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3113/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware, Bus Éireann is developing plans to address its financial position. The Company is currently loss-making and these losses are not sustainable. The Company's difficulties stem from its commercial Expressway services which are not subsidised by the taxpayer and operate in competition with other non-subsidised operators. Recently I met with the Chair of the Company who briefed me on the very serious situation the Company faces and how the Board is resolved to address the situation and to restore the company to a sustainable position. Last week the Company issued an invitation to trade unions to commence discussions on the available options. Bus Éireann faces a difficult situation and the discussions which the Company has invited trade unions to commence will require consideration of a range of difficult issues.

I am however 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 encourage both sides to engage constructively on the matter.

Dublin Bus Fleet

606. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to budget 2017 which provided for 110 new buses for the PSO fleet for the Dublin region, when these new buses will come into operation; the number of the 110 buses that will be replacement buses; the number that will be additional buses to increase the Dublin Bus fleet size; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3114/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area and for securing the provision of Public Service Obligation (PSO) public transport services. As part of the public transport investment programme, my Department provides funding to the NTA for a rolling programme of bus replacement and refurbishment of the PSO fleet. As the Deputy is aware, funding was provided in Budget 2017 to facilitate the purchase of 110 new buses for the PSO bus fleet for the Dublin region.

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

Road Safety Strategy

607. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the action he plans to take to deal with an issue (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3115/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I am aware of the Road Safety Authority research indicating that there may be as many as 8,000 disqualified drivers on our roads, and that a number of them have been responsible for fatal or major collisions in recent years. Under new powers provided to the Garda under the Road Traffic Act 2014, the Garda (since June 2015) can now arrest drivers who are detected driving while disqualified. Such drivers, following conviction in court, face a maximum fine of €5,000 and/or six months' imprisonment. The Garda can also detain, remove and store the vehicle used by such a driver under section 41 of the Road Traffic Act 1994. Furthermore, non-surrendering of a licence is an offence.

Enforcement of road traffic laws are a matter for An Garda Síochána, and I very much welcome the assurance by An Garda Síochána at a Special meeting of the Ministerial Committee on road safety, which I held on 12th January, that there will be an increase of 10% in the traffic corps during 2017 resulting in more check points and greater enforcement of traffic law and that road safety enforcement is a priority in the Garda Policing Plan for 2017.

During the passage of the Road Traffic Act 2016 through the Houses of the Oireachtas, the Road Safety Authority submitted proposals for "naming and shaming disqualified" drivers. This is considered to be an effective tool in dealing with the issue of drivers continuing to drive following a disqualification. While it was not possible to accommodate the necessary provisions in that Act, I hope to bring proposals on this in the forthcoming Road Safety Authority Bill, which is currently being developed by my Departmental officials.

Roads Maintenance

608. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to address the traffic bottleneck at Thurles, County Tipperary as part of the Capital Plan 2016-2021 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3139/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads (such as the Thurles Inner Relief Road) in Co. Tipperary is the statutory responsibility of Tipperary County Council, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from the Council's own resources supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is also a matter for the local authority. While I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme, the construction, improvement and maintenance of individual national roads (such as the Thurles Bypass), is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Given the cutbacks in State funding for regional and local roads since the financial crisis, it has been necessary to curtail the grant programme for major new regional and local road schemes and for major realignment schemes in order to protect the funding available for the maintenance of the existing network. The bulk of the funding allocated under the Capital Plan published in 2016 is, therefore, earmarked for the maintenance and renewal of the road network with some limited investment in the new projects.

Neither the Thurles Bypass nor the Thurles Inner Relief Road are provided for in the Capital Plan.

Transport Infrastructure Ireland Funding

609. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the budgets allocated to Donegal County Council from Transport Infrastructure Ireland in each of the years 2012 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3201/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Details of the national road grant allocations from 2012-2017 to County Councils including Donegal County Council are available in the Dáil Library. However, details of the actual drawdown of funding for these roads is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII).Noting the above position, I have referred the Deputy's question to TII for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

Bus Services

610. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the bus rapid transport in Dublin north. [3209/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I refer the Deputy to my reply of the 19th January 2017 to Dáil Question No. 289 regarding the development of a bus rapid transit scheme on the Swords/Airport/City Centre corridor.

Ticket Touting

611. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to develop protections for buyers of tickets for sporting, cultural and musical events from so-called ticket touting (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3189/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): On Friday 20 January, I launched a public consultation on the resale of tickets for entertainment and sporting events in conjunction with the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport. The consultation is being undertaken in response to public concern at the resale of tickets for major entertainment and sporting events at a price often well in excess of their face value. Though ticket resale has been the subject of considerable comment, there is a lack of reliable information about important aspects of the practice, including its incidence, the sources of tickets put up for resale, and the prices achieved, as opposed to advertised, on the secondary ticket market. The aim of the consultation is to provide us with a better understanding of the issue and to help us identify the practical measures that might be taken to give consumers fairer access to tickets in the future.

The consultation paper sets out, and seeks views, on a number of possible measures that might be taken by the parties involved in the organisation of entertainment and sporting events and in the primary and secondary ticket markets, and by Government, to ensure that fans who wish to attend major entertainment or sporting events do not have to pay inflated prices to do so. I would encourage all interested parties - consumers, performers and their representatives, promoters, sporting bodies, primary ticketing services providers, secondary ticket marketplaces and others - to respond to the consultation. Following the consultation process, the possible options for future action will be fully assessed. While legislation to regulate ticket resale is among the measures that will be considered, it is imperative that any such legislation will be effective and targeted and will not give rise to unwelcome unintended consequences such as driving ticket resale underground or diverting it to other countries.

EU Directives

612. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to amend the Organisation of Working Time Act 1997 to give effect to the Court of Justice of the European Union decision (details supplied) in order to give clarity on the issue of payment for travelling time for employers and employees; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2630/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): I assume the Deputy is referring to the judgement of the Court of Justice of the European Union in Case 266/14 Federación de Servicios Privados del sindicato Comisiones obreras (CC.OO.) v Tyco Integrated Security SL, Tyco Integrated Fire & Security Corporation Servicios SA. In that case the CJEU held that Article 2 of Directive 2003/88/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 4 November 2003 concerning certain aspects of the organisation of working time (the Working Time Directive) must be interpreted as meaning that, in circumstances such as those at issue in the Tyco case, in which workers do not have a fixed or habitual place of work, the time spent by those workers travelling each day between their homes and the premises of the first and last customers designated by their employer constitutes 'working time', within the meaning of that provision.

There is no action required by me as Minister to enforce the ruling of the CJEU in the Tyco case, as the judgement relates to the interpretation of the existing provisions. The Working Time Directive is given effect in Irish law by the Organisation of Working Time Act 1997. Sec-

tion 2 of that Act defines "working time" as follows:

"… any time that the employee is-

(a) at his or her place of work or at his or her employer's disposal, and

(b) carrying on or performing the activities or duties of his or her work,

and "work" shall be construed accordingly."

An individual who considers that their rights under the Organisation of Working Time Act have been infringed can seek redress by making a complaint to the Director General of the Workplace Relations Commission.

Any persons with questions or complaints regarding their rights under employment law should contact Workplace Relations Customer Service on lo-call 1890 80 80 90 or at *www.workplacerelations.ie*

Company Law

613. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation her views on whether there is enough awareness in the business community about the implementations of the Companies Act 2014 (details supplied). [2636/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The Companies Act 2014, a seminal piece of legislative consolidation and reform, was commenced on 1 June 2015. The timely commencement of this Act was complemented by the issuing of a number of statutory instruments to facilitate, among other things, orderly registration, court procedures, electronic filing, etc. An Explanatory Memorandum to the Act was published alongside Tables of Destination and Origins to assist company law users with understanding and navigation of the Act. Both are available free of charge on my Department's website (www.djei.ie).

Prior to and at the time of commencement, the Companies Registration Office (CRO) ran a number of information campaigns in the national newspapers; urban radio and digital media. In addition, a number of articles were published in the Chamber of Commerce's Business Editorial Quarterly, a publication which is circulated to all of its members. The Registrar of Companies wrote directly to every company director in April 2015 and updated the CRO website to comprehensively address issues arising from the implementation of the Act.

The Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement (ODCE) also issued a number of information booklets (available free of charge at *www.odce.ie* on issues ranging from the principal duties of directors and company secretaries to those of companies' members and shareholders.

In addition, my Department provided a number of presentations to various stakeholders in a number of locations across Ireland; participated in seminars and workshops and engaged directly with representative organisations on issues that may have arisen during the transition period and implementation of the Act.

I am satisfied that there is good awareness concerning the implementation of the Companies Act 2014 in the business community. This is evidenced by the fact, for example, that by 30 November 2016 (the date when the transition period from the 'old' company law to the 'new' company law came to an end and any private limited company that required an objects clause had to actively re-register with the CRO) over 45,000 Designated Activity Companies (dacs)

have formally re-registered with the Companies Registration Office pursuant to the Act.

Research and Development Funding

614. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the funding allocated for research in each of the third level institutions for each of the years from 2006 to 2016, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2680/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): Science Foundation Ireland, an agency of my Department, is the national foundation for investment in scientific and engineering research and is the principal agency through which my Department funds research in third level institutions.

Enterprise Ireland, also an agency of my Department is the government organisation responsible for the development and growth of Irish enterprises in world markets. Enterprise Ireland also provides funding for research to third level institutions, principally through its Commercialisation Fund; Innovation Partnerships and the Technology Centres.

Science Foundation Ireland invests in academic researchers and research teams who are most likely to generate new knowledge, leading edge technologies and competitive enterprises in the fields of science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM). Science Foundation Ireland funds a balanced portfolio of programmes, many involving national and international collaborations with both small and large companies, charities and international funders as well as national funders such as the Marine Institute, Health Research Board, Teagasc, etc.

Science Foundation Ireland funds across the career spectrum from early and mid-stage researchers to emerging research stars and established highly-esteemed research leaders, through individual researcher funding and collaborative awards.

SFI awards all funding through a competitive process. Third level institutions may apply for funding through open calls. Research proposals submitted under such calls are evaluated via international peer review and in line with Science Foundations Ireland's remit.

The following Table A provides the funding awarded by Science Foundation Ireland to Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) from 2006 to 2016.

Table A.

Science Foundation Ireland - Schedule of gross Committments to Research Bodies from 2006 to 2016

Research Body	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Athlone Institute of Technology		462,727				259,575.4
Cork Institute of Technology	237,248	95,697	110,175	155,051		1,351,758
Dublin City University	6,590,746	33,173,684	22,468,373	9,149,831	24,804,321	2,513,366
Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies	353,650	1,021,557	722,008	155,492	1,229,347	276,334
Dublin Institute of Technology	658,095	4,954,609	407,910	1,071,628	764,862	2,036,305
Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design & Technology						
Dundalk Institute of Technology	68,900	783,275		638,006		192,649
Institute of Technology Carlow	7,670					122,579
Institute of Technology Sligo	178,965	562,779				

Research Body	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Institute of Technology Tallaght	117,273	568,036			203,200	360,750
Limerick Institute of Technology						
National College of Ireland	67,227					
National University of Ireland, Galway	10,166,800	31,055,975	49,807,480	9,202,192	15,658,643	4,767,619
National University of Ireland, Maynooth	4,259,636	19,562,514	9,947,084	1,815,051	2,523,435	4,855,202
Queen's University Belfast				1,196,132		
Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland	2,713,968	5,279,371	10,581,789	3,086,886	2,202,313	1,453,415
Tralee Institute of Technology		193,453				131,030
Trinity College Dublin	33,817,039	73,578,183	52,106,429	18,642,023	22,982,497	36,700,882
Tyndall National Institute	23,988,144	51,084,927	7,981,204	3,932,509	12,094,721	3,805,660
University College Cork	18,441,016	46,079,078	36,271,523	7,778,633	10,428,927	5,452,825
University College Dublin	30,174,726	75,207,413	41,886,463	45,119,438	25,331,877	17,137,357
University of Limerick	7,459,691	14,674,943	1,112,602	1,932,276	4,649,464	19,846,659
University of Ulster				2,194,205		
Waterford Institute of Technology			7,469,065	742,224	14,000	302,842
Total	139,300,794	358,338,222	240,872,105	106,811,579	122,887,606	101,566,806

Research Body	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Grand Total
Athlone Institute of Technology			464,092			1186394.4
Cork Institute of Technology	1,074,590	331,058	78,100	467,153	493,527	4,394,357
Dublin City University	3,761,280	4,664,964	9,344,686	5,818,412	15,586,671	137,876,332
Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies	563,974	278,209	1,187,603	2,970,657	2,766,313	11,525,144
Dublin Institute of Technology	345,521	594,094	240,759	1,321,534	1,754,232	14,149,549
Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design & Technology					16,000	16,000
Dundalk Institute of Technology	5,980					1,688,810
Institute of Technology Carlow		118,625				248,875
Institute of Technology Sligo		514,102		15,000	17,125	1,287,971
Institute of Technology Tallaght		673,999		3,500	118,406	2,045,164
Limerick Institute of Technology					34,294	34,294
National College of Ireland					22,450	89,677
National University of Ireland, Galway	10,063,643	65,236,032	50,062,414	8,243,299	31,166,037	285,430,134
National University of Ireland, Maynooth	3,242,857	5,235,417	4,590,685	873,766	6,611,088	63,516,734
Queen's University Belfast	119,312					1,315,444
Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland	598,887	2,282,614	7,742,075	2,470,714	2,597,367	41,009,399
Tralee Institute of Technology					31,750	356,233
Trinity College Dublin	28,261,299	69,465,188	84,232,576	31,911,835	39,755,277	491,453,228
Tyndall National Institute	6,225,265	25,329,241	8,643,469	2,656,992	23,485,063	169,227,195
University College Cork	4,090,789	67,221,312	16,418,200	26,537,752	10,750,524	249,470,580

Research Body	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Grand Total
University College Dublin	6,962,405	15,290,267	47,156,384	25,351,462	39,408,355	369,026,147
University of Limerick	5,843,440	38,334,329	41,601,304	15,415,417	12,969,386	163,839,510
University of Ulster						2,194,205
Waterford Institute of Technology	3,753,781	546,933	30,000	122,865	1,238,275	14,219,985
Total	74,913,023	296,116,383	271,792,346	124,180,357	188,822,140	2,025,601,362

Table B.
Third Level Approvals 2006-2016

	Sum of Master Approval	Year					
	Programme1 College	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Commercialisation Fund Programme	Dublin City University [DCU]	2,870,518	3,516,900	3,409,232	1,782,830	627,370	2,722,815
	Dublin Institute of Technology	1,726,841	1,531,753	547,549	831,847	485,666	651,935
	Dundalk Institute of Technology		85,000	206,915	609,652		435,378
	Heartbeat Trust						
	I.T. - Blanchardstown			89,423		279,999	
	Institute of Art Design 8, Technology						156,856
	Institute of Technology Athlone		89,725	376,453	99,697		187,703
	Institute of Technology Carlow						
	Institute of Technology Cork	486,600	401,930	105,536	209,719	177,703	438,967
	Institute of Technology Galway-Mayo			76,568			
	Institute of Technology Limerick		90,000	369,977		91,669	275,592
	Institute of Technology Sligo			272,873			
	Institute of Technology Tallaght	50,750		98,712	68,594		248,349
	Institute of Technology Tralee						
	Institute of Technology Waterford	1,938,158	3,220,795	260,176	1,462,905	365,863	1,839,383
	Letterkenny Institute of Technology						118,431
	Marine Institute	113,383					
	National College of Art and Design						
	National College of Ireland			90,286			
	National Institute of Bioprocessing Research and Training (NIBRT)			102,499			
	Royal College of Surgeons Ireland	861,170	1,318,481	477,539	1,519,683		417,415

	Sum of Master Approval	Year					
	Programme1 College	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
	Teagasc		800,759		70,703		
	The National University of Ireland, Galway [NUIG]	3,690,795	2,367,576	3,107,123	1,223,731	1,311,676	1,688,141
	The National University of Ireland, Maynooth [Maynooth University]	1,084,474	798,365	2,257,179	709,949	918,906	561,187
	The University of Dublin, Trinity College [TCD]	4,426,238	4,288,502	2,633,801	847,926	1,443,868	2,243,648
	Tyndall National Institute	1,231,331	959,407	2,694,478	372,338	95,275	908,670
	University College Cork [UCC]	3,527,782	2,283,238	1,512,065	747,502	897,425	2,048,211
	University College Dublin [UCD]	2,674,491	2,452,807	2,059,260	2,114,881	882,488	2,361,889
Commercialisation Fund Programme Total	University of Limerick	4,275,494 28,958,024	3,329,366 27,534,604	880,450 21,628,093	589,274 13,261,232	140,779 7,718,687	819,133 18,123,702
	Innovation Partnerships Bord Iascaigh Mhara						
	Dublin City University [DCU]	140,552	320,373	848,698	600,346	567,533	1,614,312
	Dublin Dental Hospital				177,281		
	Dublin Institute of Technology	158,050	160,575	48,000	536,571	284,525	169,206
	Dundalk Institute of Technology	79,200	86,670		93,635		166,819
	Georgia Tech Ireland			9,000			
	I.T. - Blanchardstown				225,584		
	Institute of Art Design 8, Technology	9,000					
	Institute of Technology Athlone	565,045	294,575	638,059	36,000	193,591	432,706
	Institute of Technology Carlow						
	Institute of Technology Cork		34,680	96,017	314,707	298,646	337,104
	Institute of Technology Galway-Mayo	18,000	366,963	9,000	91,210		
	Institute of Technology Limerick	9,000		178,926	40,700	173,436	
	Institute of Technology Sligo	174,600	82,910		126,477		
	Institute of Technology Tallaght		142,000	53,500	99,669	67,473	107,962
	Institute of Technology Tralee	90,836	85,776	322,431	27,000	225,368	201,414
	Institute of Technology Waterford	165,980	683,295	427,545	337,004	574,556	483,964
	Irish Manufacturing Research Limited						

	Sum of Master Approval	Year					
	Programme1 College	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
	Letterkenny Institute of Technology	66,700	168,252		4,907		59,580
	National College of Ireland						
	National Institute of Bioprocessing Research and Training (NIBRT)						
	Royal College of Surgeons Ireland		12,000		24,904		
	St. Angelas - Food Technology Centre	9,000	18,000	9,000			
	Teagasc	179,000	257,203			210,819	330,394
	The National University of Ireland, Galway [NUIG]	778,241	752,978	1,250,467	1,178,101	253,719	647,333
	The National University of Ireland, Maynooth [Maynooth University]	287,496	235,869	92,472	152,825	63,776	172,913
	The University of Dublin, Trinity College [TCD]	947,711	945,269	360,750	534,339	400,096	130,188
	Tyndall National Institute	48,790	119,376	720,329	594,011	6,200	167,418
	University College Cork [UCC]	592,092	1,017,951	523,246	852,479	382,773	453,504
	University College Dublin [UCD]	1,669,053	532,248	1,962,290	340,527	380,694	502,398
	University of Limerick Innovation Partnerships Total	1,392,746 7,381,093	697,626 7,014,588	1,459,333 9,009,063	490,300 6,878,576	457,455 4,540,660	1,071,664 7,048,878
Technology Centres	Dublin City University [DCU]			162,589		315,281	523,789
	Dublin Institute of Technology			71,769			318,056
	Institute of Technology Athlone						118,175
	Institute of Technology Cork						307,827
	Institute of Technology Limerick						
	Institute of Technology Tallaght						
	Institute of Technology Waterford					199,190	
	Irish Manufacturing Research Limited						
	Molecular Medicine Ireland			153,846			150,000
	Royal College of Surgeons Ireland					690,368	
	Teagasc						
	The National University of Ireland, Galway [NUIG]		1,750,274	144,406	4,303,269	411,298	363,019

	Sum of Master Approval	Year					
	Programme1 College	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
	The National University of Ireland, Maynooth [Maynooth University]			310,732	4,576,557	324,615	492,229
	The University of Dublin, Trinity College [TCD]			460,039	152,914	616,381	4,043,857
	Tyndall National Institute			832,985	8,057,260	384,615	1,117,057
	University College Cork [UCC]		14,561,286	247,251		231,057	1,219,136
	University College Dublin [UCD]			1,467,408	241,524	80,322	135,107
	University of Limerick			1,398,207	4,582,311	616,893	
Technology Centres Total	University of Ulster		16,311,560	5,249,232	21,913,836	**3,870,020**	**8,788,252**
	Grand Total	**36,339,117**	**50,860,752**	**35,886,388**	**42,053,644**	**16,129,366**	**33,960,831**

Table B.

Third Level Approvals 2006-2016 (contd.)

	Sum of Master Approval	Year					
	Programme1 College	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Grand Total
Commercialisation Fund Programme	Dublin City University [DCU]	3,627,642	3,896,109	4,523,918	1,528,522	1,040,602	29,546,458
	Dublin Institute of Technology	534,020	921,832	489,792	222,711	625,237	8,569,182
	Dundalk Institute of Technology	1,677,849	34,046	265,629	105,147		3,419,616
	Heartbeat Trust	37,301					37,301
	I.T. - Blanchardstown			13,807	228,349		611,577
	Institute of Art Design 8, Technology	113,498					270,354
	Institute of Technology Athlone	636,712	429,465	263,181	496,229	59,793	2,638,957
	Institute of Technology Carlow	22,402		13,132	155,169	37,518	228,221
	Institute of Technology Cork	1,525,094	764,683	2,219,467	1,381,775	796,332	8,507,806
	Institute of Technology Galway-Mayo		13,500	41,100	210,930	27,015	369,113

	Institute of Technology Limerick	149,902		250,150		27,785	1,255,075
	Institute of Technology Sligo	15,090				15,000	302,963
	Institute of Technology Tallaght	40,009	236,730	133,296	14,400	29,950	920,790
	Institute of Technology Tralee			14,200	336,414	42,950	393,564
	Institute of Technology Waterford	979,887	2,106,079	4,020,890	1,262,342	637,280	18,093,759
	Letterkenny Institute of Technology	457,679		107,296		15,000	698,406
	Marine Institute						113,383
	National College of Art and Design	214,580	73,096	112,310	44,095	44,431	488,512
	National College of Ireland						90,286
	National Institute of Bioprocessing Research and Training (NIBRT)				109,478	15,000	226,977
	Royal College of Surgeons Ireland	164,897	29,700	1,700,453	285,907	230,718	7,005,963
	Teagasc	219,932	310,366	273,716	56,487	218,757	1,950,720
	The National University of Ireland, Galway [NUIG]	3,239,535	2,395,652	4,425,848	3,013,828	2,723,235	29,187,138
	The National University of Ireland, Maynooth [Maynooth University]	1,523,747	1,293,356	390,594	40,450	55,965	9,634,172
	The University of Dublin, Trinity College [TCD]	2,351,069	1,970,910	3,303,807	2,699,281	1,990,135	28,199,186
	Tyndall National Institute	1,379,694	540,272	833,141	935,628	867,623	10,817,857
	University College Cork [UCC]	783,899	204,903	1,460,029	749,139	225,242	14,439,435
	University College Dublin [UCD]	2,874,019	1,959,330	2,572,132	1,278,773	2,297,456	23,527,527

Commercial-isation Fund Programme Total	University of Limerick	2,014,127 24,582,583	1,815,050 18,995,079	3,291,786 30,719,675	801,808 15,956,861	1,611,859 13,634,883	19,569,126 221,113,423
	Innovation Partnerships Bord Ias-caigh Mhara	18,000					18,000
	Dublin City University [DCU]	595,993	675,067	865,041	1,240,446	1,541,563	9,009,925
	Dublin Den-tal Hospital						177,281
	Dublin Institute of Technology	154,605	379,715	61,550	214,919	157,382	2,325,098
	Dundalk Institute of Technology	8,600		105,069		8,995	548,988
	Georgia Tech Ireland						9,000
	I.T. - Blanchard-stown						225,584
	Institute of Art Design 8, Technology						9,000
	Institute of Technology Athlone	80,675	374,221	171,633	447,703	383,367	3,617,575
	Institute of Technology Carlow				55,222		55,222
	Institute of Technology Cork	88,139	258,851	24,702	176,196	229,851	1,858,893
	Institute of Technol-ogy Galway-Mayo		98,486		74,822	284,593	943,074
	Institute of Technology Limerick	98,287	428,372	380,161	380,832	152,384	1,842,098
	Institute of Technology Sligo	9,000			9,000	9,000	410,987
	Institute of Technology Tallaght	182,753	18,000	155,258	56,728	36,000	919,343
	Institute of Technology Tralee	249,277	236,104	423,221	73,262	230,411	2,165,099
	Institute of Technology Waterford	84,800	973,061	1,144,618	507,333	446,690	5,828,846
	Irish Manu-facturing Research Limited				81,897	724,849	806,746
	Letterkenny Institute of Technology	93,011	7,954	37,815	84,410	48,918	571,547

	National College of Ireland			166,440			166,440
	National Institute of Bioprocessing Research and Training (NIBRT)			485,342		8,979	494,321
	Royal College of Surgeons Ireland	196,574	8,640	23,715	570,066		835,899
	St. Angelas - Food Technology Centre						36,000
	Teagasc	102,800	9,000	85,213	199,992	364,735	1,739,156
	The National University of Ireland, Galway [NUIG]	438,211	753,938	588,134	534,685	269,889	7,445,697
	The National University of Ireland, Maynooth [Maynooth University]	163,722	99,875	537,547		38,373	1,844,868
	The University of Dublin, Trinity College [TCD]	624,894	399,580	1,029,920	712,525	1,055,173	7,140,444
	Tyndall National Institute	495,877	721,600	861,467	741,757	518,297	4,995,122
	University College Cork [UCC]	454,059	615,559	443,682	149,787	79,066	5,564,197
	University College Dublin [UCD]	298,558	713,918	1,028,038	1,819,363	1,231,677	10,478,765
	University of Limerick Innovation Partnerships Total	391,352 4,829,187	1,428,418 8,200,359	2,551,032 11,169,598	1,335,311 9,466,255	1,587,795 9,407,988	12,863,032 84,946,245
Technology Centres	Dublin City University [DCU]	3,903,325					4,904,984
	Dublin Institute of Technology	268,932					658,757
	Institute of Technology Athlone						118,175
	Institute of Technology Cork	522,240					830,067
	Institute of Technology Limerick	602,527					602,527

	Institute of Technology Tallaght	62,956					62,956
	Institute of Technology Waterford	62,956					262,146
	Irish Manufacturing Research Limited			15,000,000			15,000,000
	Molecular Medicine Ireland	150,000			630,769		1,084,615
	Royal College of Surgeons Ireland						690,368
	Teagasc					4,672,570	4,672,570
	The National University of Ireland, Galway [NUIG]	98,770	585,000	1,120,734			8,776,770
	The National University of Ireland, Maynooth [Maynooth University]			5,773,269			11,477,402
	The University of Dublin, Trinity College [TCD]					6,365,385	11,638,577
	Tyndall National Institute	1,675,478	10,100,035		5,245,769		27,413,198
	University College Cork [UCC]	4,407,992	641,802		3,852,333		25,160,857
	University College Dublin [UCD]	1,723,385	16,237,831	3,852,333			23,737,911
	University of Limerick	444,075	3,854,000	18,030,714			28,926,200
Technology Centres Total	University of Ulster	620,136 14,542,771	31,418,668	43,777,050	9,728,871	11,037,955	620,136 166,638,213
	Grand Total	43,954,541	58,614,106	85,666,323	35,151,988	34,080,826	472,697,882

Note: During 2010 the new Commercialisation Fund Programme was launched. Commercialisation pre-2010 is comprised of Proof of Concept, Technology Development and Commercialisation Plus the pre-cursor programmes.

Company Law

615. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the reason Ireland is one of only four countries, including Belgium, Portugal and China, with audit firms registered with the Public Company Accounting Oversight Board, PCAOB, that does not allow PCAOB inspectors examine registered firms; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2710/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The

Irish Auditing and Accounting Supervisory Authority (IAASA) is the competent authority for the purposes of oversight of statutory audit in the State. The EU Audit Directive 2006/43/EC, as amended by Directive 2014/56/EU, sets out the working arrangements that must be put in place between IAASA and other third country competent authorities in order to facilitate inspections by those authorities of audits by Irish audit firms of companies which have issued securities in that third country or which form part of a group issuing statutory consolidated financial statements in that third country. These requirements are currently set out in national legislation in S.I. 312 of 2016 and previously in S.I. 220 of 2010.

I am informed that IAASA has been actively engaged with the US audit oversight body, the Public Company Accounting Oversight Board (PCAOB) for some time with a view to agreeing the Memorandum of Understanding that is part of the necessary working arrangements to facilitate inspections by the PCAOB of audit firms in Ireland. My Department is also finalising Regulations with the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel to give effect to the two most recent EU Commission Implementing Decisions on equivalence and adequacy of US audit oversight which provide the basis for continued cooperation between EU and US competent authorities.

The Memorandum of Understanding is of necessity a detailed document and, once it is in place, it is anticipated that a joint inspection with the PCAOB will take place shortly afterwards.

IDA Supports

616. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the progress that has been made recently in relation to securing alternative industry for Mullingar in the context of the major loss of jobs at a company (details supplied) in Mullingar in recent months; if the IDA Ireland enterprise park at Marlinstown, Mullingar is being actively marketed in order to attract much needed and vital employment opportunities to Mullingar; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2841/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): I very much regret the decision by the company in question to close its facility in Mullingar. I understand the need to find new employment for the wider area and I have directed IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland (EI) to explore what potential opportunities there may be for new investment there.

IDA Ireland is already engaging with both current and prospective clients to invest further in Westmeath and the wider region. It is also actively marketing its business park at Marlinstown to all relevant potential investors. EI, for its part, aims to create new jobs in the Midlands by providing support to entrepreneurs who may set up start-up companies there and by working with its existing established client companies in the region to assist in their future growth.

Departmental Staff Data

617. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of Secretaries General in her Department; the annual pay of each Secretary General within her Department at 1 Jan 2017; the expected change in that pay as a consequence of the provisions of the Lansdowne Road agreement; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2911/17]

618. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of assistant secretaries in her Department; the annual pay of each assistant secretary

within her Department at 1 January 2017; the expected change in that pay as a consequence of the provisions of the Lansdowne Road Agreement; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2927/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): I propose to take Questions Nos. 617 and 618 together.

My Department is staffed at senior management level as set out in the table.

Grade	No.	Remuneration level (Non-Personal Pension Contribution Scale and Personal Contribution Scale)
Secretary General	1	Non PPC €176,350.00
Assistant Secretary	6	Non PPC €119,572.00 - €136,496.00PPC €125,761.00 - €143,535.00

In addition, other top management posts within my Department are in the following table:

Grade	No.	Remunerated level
Director General, Workplace Relations Commission	1	Deputy Secretary General, PPC €161,552
Chief Operations Officer, Workplace Relations Commission	1	Assistant Secretary, Non PPC
Chairperson Labour Court	1	Chairperson Labour Court Non PPC €156,380.00
Deputy Chairperson Labour Court	3*	Deputy Chairperson Labour Court PPC €125,761.00 - €143,535.00
Director of Corporate Enforcement, Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement	1	Principal Officer with Allowance to Assistant Secretary level, Non PPC
Director Construction Contracts Unit	1	Director post, Non PPC

**plus one vacancy which is in the process of being filled*

Remuneration within my Department is governed by instructions from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, and is managed from within my Department's pay allocation. Under the provisions of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2015 (FEMPI Act 2015), for those on salaries in excess of €110,000 the salary reductions imposed under the FEMPI Act 2013 will be restored in three equal phases on 1 April 2017, 1 April 2018 and 1 April 2019. A circular setting out the revised salary rates applicable from 1 April 2017 to general Civil Service grades, including Secretaries General and Assistant Secretaries General, is currently in preparation and will be issued by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in due course.

Workplace Relations Services Provision

619. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation further to Parliamentary Question No. 502 of 8 November 2016, if there has been any progress in relation to the need to have hearings before the Workplace Relations Commission held at local level in Cavan and Monaghan instead of imposing undue costs on persons travelling to Sligo and elsewhere for such hearings; if she will ensure that this issue is addressed as a matter of urgency; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3063/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen): The Deputy should note that the Workplace Relations Commission is an independent statutory body and I have no direct involvement in its day to day operations.

However, I am informed that the position remains that the WRC is working in conjunction with the Office of Public Works to identify offices/venues for possible use for hearing venues. As already outlined, financial investment has been made in a hearing room the WRC Offices in Sligo and currently it continues to be the most appropriate venue for hearings in the region.

This of course may change in the context of developments in other venues on a regional structure and having regard to other related factors such as case volume in different regions, development costs, adjudicator location, and transport links. It must be recalled that the rationalization of hearing venues across the country was an important part of the overall reform agenda.

It must also be borne in mind that the WRC is still in the bedding-down phase. I am informed that a review of venues for regional hearing will take place during 2017 and decisions in relation to this matter going forward will be made based on experience gleaned over the first phase of operation taking into account the volume of claims in different locations, costs, availability of adjudicators in proximity to hearing venues etc.

IDA Data

620. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the general location, that is the nearest town, of the IDA Ireland sponsored site visits to County Tipperary in each of the years from 2012 to 2016 (details supplied), in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3138/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): IDA Ireland collates its data on site visits on a countywide basis only. The Agency cannot provide, for both reasons of client confidentiality and commercial sensitivity, more specific details on the particular locations visited in each respective county, including for those cited in Tipperary from 2012 to 2016.

Foreign Direct Investment

621. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of persons employed in foreign direct investment companies here, by sector, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3149/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The following table provides a breakdown of the total number of jobs, by sector, in IDA Ireland client companies in 2016.

Last year saw the highest ever level of employment in IDA Ireland client companies, with 199,877 people now employed in companies supported by the Agency. A total of 18,627 new jobs were created, across a range of sectors, with every region of Ireland posting net employment gains.

IDA Ireland Employment by Sector 2016

Sector	2016
Manufacturing	
Basic and Fabricated Metal Products	1,834
Chemicals & Food Ingredients	26,880
Computer, Electronic and Optical Equipment	20,213
Electrical Equipment	2,149
Machinery and Equipment	4,651
Medical and dental instruments and supplies	28,911
Miscellaneous Manufacturing	1,917
Non-Metallic Minerals	931
Paper and Printing	634
Rubber and Plastics	3,586
Transport Equipment	3,201
Manufacturing Total	94,907
Services	
Business Services	3,229
Computer consultancy activities	19,434
Computer facilities management activities	12,896
Computer programming activities	30,022
Financial Services	24,667
Other Information and Communication	2,158
Other information technology and computer service activities	10,303
Other Services	2,261
Total Services	104,970
Total	199,877

Research and Development Supports

622. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if specific research and development programmes will be introduced to assist companies to develop new products with specific reference to companies that are at present heavily reliant on the British market; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3174/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): Companies that invest in innovation have been shown to be higher performers in terms of employment and export sales and more sustainable through recessionary and other economic shocks such as those posed by Brexit.

Ireland's economic sustainability requires our companies to make products and services that are more novel than their competitors, better performing, more efficiently delivered, and cost effective for their customers. In this way Irish exports to global markets can be maintained and increased despite challenges in any one individual market.

One of the key implications of the Brexit vote is that Irish firms will need to find new international markets. Research Development and Innovation (RDI) capabilities and activity will create the greatest competitive advantage for Irish firms and Enterprise Ireland is ready to work with companies commencing RDI activities for the first time or increasing their existing levels of innovation or ready to collaborate with others to achieve step changes in capabilities that could never be achieved alone.

Enterprise Ireland currently helps companies to innovate and develop new products and services in two main ways:

1. In-Company Research, Development & Innovation Support

This comprises of direct supports for R&D activity within Irish firms, and supports for companies to build R&D capability and acquire new technology through licensing. This activity is an important element in supporting companies to bring new products to market and to drive down costs through product and process innovation. This funding supports projects which have the potential to develop novel products and services with a clear competitive advantage in their target market thus enabling companies to increase employment through sustainable and substantially increased sales.

In light of the need for SMEs to engage in more RDI and to make increasingly nimble strategic shifts Enterprise Ireland's in-company RDI supports are being refined so as to be even more responsive to company needs. For example, Enterprise Ireland recently started supporting 'Business Innovation' projects which allow for the development & implementation of new services delivery, production methods and substantive changes to the business model of a company.

2. Collaboration with the Higher Education Sector & with International Partners

In order for Irish businesses to remain sustainable and competitive, they need to be constantly reviewing their levels of innovation to ensure that their products and processes are leading edge. The barriers to this happening include:

the potential high costs of R&D

the associated risk of undertaking R&D

low capability in businesses to undertake R&D in-house

access to, and affordability of capital equipment

Enterprise Ireland operates a range of collaboration supports to help companies mitigate these issues by supporting them to engage with higher level researchers to undertake collaborative research for the benefit of the company. In this way Enterprise Ireland helps to unlock the skills and expertise of higher level research so that companies can access solutions to their challenges that are beyond their current capabilities and thus improve their economic competitiveness. Enterprise Ireland also helps companies to identify leading edge international partners and researchers and to secure valuable sources of non-exchequer RDI funding such as Horizon 2020 (over €150M secured for Irish companies and academic each year) and the European Space Agency (around €10M in RDI related contracts to Irish companies each year).

On January 9th of this year, Enterprise Ireland published its 2017-2020 Strategy – Build Scale, Expand Reach. The strategy builds on the success of recent years and sets new, ambitious targets for export growth and jobs.

In terms of research, development and innovation, key priorities for Enterprise Ireland over this period will include:

Driving innovation in Irish enterprise to unprecedented levels through new supports to reach the target of €1.25bn in R&D expenditure per annum by 2020.

Increasing connections between its client companies and the international innovation ecosystem

Increasing access to Irish public sector procurement opportunities through the Small Business Research Innovation Fund (SBIR) as a means of validating innovative products/services with international application potential

Implementing a new Innovation Toolkit to support identification of innovation opportunities by its client companies

Driving greater connectivity between investment and technology networks to transfer knowledge, skills and Intellectual Property (IP)

Showcasing client innovation capabilities to inspire more innovation investment.

Garda Vetting of Personnel

623. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to the delay in the processing of Garda vetting for early childhood professionals, which can take in excess of ten weeks; if she has raised this with the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality; if priority will be given in view of the importance of vetting in this sector; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2555/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I am aware that there have been difficulties in relation to obtaining vetting disclosures for early years staff. I understand that these difficulties do not relate to the National Vetting Bureau, but to administrative procedures associated with processing applications. My Department provides funding to two organisations, Early Childhood Ireland and Barnardos, to process vetting applications for the early years sector. I have provided additional funding to both organisations to assist the clearance of the backlog of vetting applications that built up during the changeover from paper to e-vetting. In addition, officials from my Department will be meeting with both organisations this week to discuss the administration of vetting applications, with the objective of endeavouring to ensure that the process works as efficiently as possible in the interest of early years services and the children attending those services.

Children's Rights

624. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of concerns regarding children lodged by sports clubs to Tusla, in the past five years. [2658/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I have been informed by Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, that data on the number of concerns regarding children lodged by sports clubs is not presently collected. As required under Section 8 of the Child Care Act 1991, my Department also receives the annual 'Review of Adequacy' report compiled and published by Tusla, which reviews the adequacy of the child and family services provided by the Agency. This Report includes a breakdown of the source of referral which was first included in 2013. Figures are available by source of referral for 2013, 2014 and 2015 as set out in the following table. Figures for 2016 are not yet available.

Table 1: Combined Total of Child Protection (Abuse) and Child Welfare Referrals 2013 - 2015 By Source

Combined Total of Child Protection (Abuse) and Child Welfare Referrals	2013	2014	2015
An Garda Síochána	7,714	8,645	10,282
Tulsa/HSE: Non-Designated Officers	6,106	6,223	6,471
School	4,456	5,114	4,999
Parent/Guardian	3,828	4,330	4,039
Tulsa/HSE: Designated Officers	3,492	3,976	4,004
Voluntary Agency	2,660	3,154	3,544
Other Sources	2,212	2,626	2,113
Anonymous	2,101	2,163	2,108
Other Family Member	1,487	1,627	1,544
Member of the Public	1,191	1,297	1,180
General Practitioner	1,064	1,276	1,200
Government Agency/Dept.	590	968	749
Local Authority	505	491	463
Self-Referral	290	433	301
Courts Section 20	292	294	344
Probation Service	133	153	135
Foreign National Services	107	101	101
Total Referrals	38,249	42,914	43,596

Sports Organisations

625. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will legislate to make it mandatory for all sports clubs to have a child welfare officer; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2659/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): As the Deputy will be aware, the Children First Act 2015 was signed into law on 19 November 2015, in accordance with a key commitment in the Programme for Government, and provides for, inter alia-

- mandatory reporting by key professionals,

- mandated assisting,

- comprehensive risk assessment and preparation of Child Safeguarding Statements by services for children, and

- the establishment of the Children First Interdepartmental Implementation Group on a statutory basis.

The Act imposes obligations on certain individuals working with children and on relevant service providers as follows-

- Certain persons, who are mandated persons under the Act, will be required by the legislation to report child welfare and protection concerns to the Child and Family Agency and to assist the Agency, on request, in the assessment of such reports. Mandated persons will also be required to report to the Agency any disclosures of harm made to the mandated person by a child.

- Providers of relevant services to children will be required to develop a Child Safeguarding Statement which involves undertaking a risk assessment of any potential harm to a child while availing of the service and the measures that will be take to ensure, as far as is practicable, that

a child is safe from harm while availing of the service.

These provisions will apply to any organisation, including sporting organisations, where any work or activity consists of the provision of recreational, leisure, social or physical activities to children.

- My focus has been on the introduction of these measures under the Children First Act 2015 and I believe that these two significant legislative obligations will put in place a robust system to protect children while they are availing of the relevant services.

The Act will operate side-by-side with the *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2011* which provides in Section 3.3. that organisations providing services to children should identify a designated liaison person to act as a liaison with outside agencies and a resource person to any staff member or volunteer who has child protection concerns.

Given the protections outlined above, I do not consider it necessary to legislate to require organisations to have child welfare officers.

Departmental Staff Data

626. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of Secretaries General in her Department; the annual pay of each Secretary General within her Department at 1 Jan 2017; the expected change in that pay as a consequence of the provisions of the Lansdowne Road agreement; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2903/17]

627. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of assistant secretaries general in her Department; the annual pay of each assistant secretary general in her Department at 1 January 2017; the expected change in that pay as a consequence of the provisions of the Lansdowne Road agreement; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [2919/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 626 and 627 together.

There is one Secretary General and three Assistant Secretaries General in my Department.

The details in respect of their annual salaries are in the following table:

Annual Salary at 1st January 2017	
Secretary General	€167,300
Assistant Secretary General	€130,706
Assistant Secretary General	€124,917
Assistant Secretary General	€119,572

Under the provisions of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2015 (FEMPI Act 2015), for those on salaries in excess of €110,000 the salary reductions imposed under the FEMPI Act 2013 will be restored in three equal phases on 1 April 2017, 1 April 2018 and 1 April 2019. A circular setting out the revised salary rates applicable from 1 April 2017 to general Civil Service grades, including Secretaries General and Assistant Secretaries General, is currently in preparation and will be issued by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in due course.

Child Care Services Data

628. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of childminders in the home that are registered with Tusla; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3197/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Officials from my Department have made enquiries with Tusla on this matter. I can confirm that there are 119 childminders registered with Tusla.

Area Based Childhood Programme

629. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the funding status for a project (details supplied). [3208/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Area Based Childhood (ABC) Programme is a joint prevention and early intervention initiative led by my Department and The Atlantic Philanthropies. It is a time bound co-funding arrangement with resources of €29.7m from 2013 to 2017. The aim of the ABC Programme is to test and evaluate prevention and early intervention approaches to improve outcomes for children and families living in poverty in 13 areas of disadvantage.

The ABC Programme was preceded by the Prevention and Early Intervention Programme (PEIP) (2007-2013) in which three sites participated: Preparing for Life Programme, Youngballymun, and the Childhood Development Initiative Tallaght. Youngballymun received €15m as a participant in the Prevention and Early Intervention programme. The total original funding for Youngballymun under the ABC programme was €5m bringing the total funding received by Youngballymun under both programmes to €20m.

Owing to their earlier transition into the ABC programme, Youngballymun and the other two sites were contracted to deliver services in their areas until mid-2016. In July of 2016, my Department and co-funder The Atlantic Philanthropies furnished additional funding to Youngballymun of €500,000 to enable the organisation to extend its service provision for a further year, to end July 2017 bringing their total budget under the ABC Programme to €5.5m.

My Department is currently working with ABC programme managers to identify the full running costs for each site to end December 2017 with a view to ensuring all sites are extended to end 2017. My Department also anticipate seeking additional funding in the 2017 estimates process to meet the Programme for Government commitments and ensure findings from the ABC Programme Evaluation can be fully considered in meeting those commitments.

I look forward to the continued engagement of Youngballymun, and all other ABC sites with my Department as we work towards the implementation of quality prevention and early intervention initiatives in order to achieve our shared goal of improving the lives of children and families throughout the country.

Defence Forces Personnel Data

630. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of days leave that have been surrendered to the State on foot of paragraph of 16 Defence Force Regulation A11, which limits an annual carry over to 19 days regardless of whether members

of the Defence Forces can actually avail of their leave entitlement due to tours of duty, leave cancellation and post tour rest and recuperation; if he will have the regulations altered to ensure members of the Defence Forces can avail of their full leave entitlements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2610/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Unfortunately it has not proved possible to compile the information requested regarding the number of annual leave days lost on foot of paragraph 16 of Defence Force Regulations A.11 in the time available. My officials are working with the military authorities to obtain the information and I will forward it to the Deputy as soon as it is available. Defence Force Regulations A.11 which governs the granting of leave, other than sick leave, in the Permanent Defence Force, provides that leave is an entitlement, the granting of which is a privilege and that unless otherwise provided for within the regulation, all leave other than statutory leave is subject to the exigencies of the service. Paragraph 16 of this regulation provides for the carry-forward of annual leave, not granted or availed of in the leave year concerned and provides that officers may be allowed to carry forward a maximum of 24 days, non-commissioned officers and privates in the Army and Air Corps, a maximum of 19 days and non-commissioned officers and ordinary or able seamen of the Naval Service, a maximum of 24 days.

My Department received a claim under the Conciliation and Arbitration scheme from the Permanent Defence Forces Representative Association (PDFORRA) representing enlisted members of the Permanent Defence Force, to remove the provisions limiting the carry forward of annual leave of 19 days for their members. Following consideration, my officials were not in a position to accede to their claim on the basis of the case made.

I have been advised by my officials that legal proceedings have been commenced in relation to this matter and as it is currently before the courts, it would not be appropriate for me to comment further.

Defence Forces Pensions

631. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he will effect the necessary changes to Defence Forces regulations to allow post 1994 and pre-2004 entrants to the Defence Forces extend their service beyond 21 years in order that they may accumulate 21 years pensionable service if their initial 21 years service was broken by a career break, unpaid maternity leave or term time leave; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2611/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The issue referred to by the Deputy primarily impacts upon female participation and retention in the Defence Forces. I have always taken an active interest in recruitment and retention matters. Under the heading of Gender, the White Paper commits to equal opportunity for men and women throughout the Defence Forces and to the development of initiatives in this regard.

Officials in my Department are currently considering the matter with a view to ensuring that there is no unnecessary disadvantage to those members of the Defence Forces who were unable to accumulate 21 years pensionable service due to periods of unpaid maternity leave, term time leave and career breaks. I will make the necessary decision upon receipt of such considerations.

Defence Forces

632. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his views on rep-

resentations that have been made to his Department and-or the Irish Prison Service by representatives from the Defence Forces regarding the substandard conditions of work they have to endure at Portlaoise Prison; the steps that are being taken to address these grievances; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2612/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Defence Forces continue to provide a 365 day armed guard at Portlaoise Prison by Government direction using accommodation which is provided and maintained by the Irish Prison Service. Officials from my Department have on a number of occasions recently met with officials from the Irish Prison Service regarding the military accommodation in Portlaoise. The Irish Prison Service have today confirmed that they will be going to tender shortly for a major refurbishment of the military compound. Discussions are ongoing regarding the logistics around accommodating the military personnel while the refurbishment is taking place and responsibilities regarding the ongoing maintenance of the facility.

Civil Defence

633. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the reason members of the Civil Defence did not receive the 1916 Commemoration medal; if he will reconsider and present these medals to them in view of the invaluable service that they carry out on a voluntary basis for the State (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2629/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Programme for Government provided for the award of a commemorative medal to all Defence Forces personnel, Permanent and Reserve, who were recorded as being in service in the course of 2016. This was a special acknowledgement from the Government to the members of Óglaigh na hÉireann, both Permanent and Reserve, who served during the centenary year of 2016. I am fully aware of the excellent service given by the volunteer members of Civil Defence right across the country, both in emergency and non-emergency situations. Civil Defence played a full part in contributing to the success of many of the events which were held across the country last year to commemorate the centenary of the 1916 Rising. The type of support Civil Defence provided ranged from a marching element in the State ceremony held in Dublin on Easter Sunday to the provision of first aid at local community events.

In recognition of the efforts of Civil Defence volunteers I recently approved the commissioning of a special 1916 commemorative medal be awarded to all members of Civil Defence who were active in 2016. Arrangements for the presentation of the medals will be made in due course.

Irish Red Cross Funding

634. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the engagement he has had with the Irish Red Cross in terms of funding operations domestically. [2670/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Department of Defence provides an annual grant-in-aid to the Irish Red Cross Society. The grant in 2017 will be €869,000 of which €130,000 represents the Government's annual contribution to the International Committee of the Red Cross. The balance goes towards the salary and administration costs of running the headquarters of the Irish Red Cross Society. The grant does not contribute towards the funding of operational activity.

The annual grant is paid in quarterly instalments and by agreement , as a condition of payment, the Department of Defence receives a report from the Irish Red Cross providing full details of how the grant was utilised in the previous year and details of how it is to be used in the current year.

Defence Forces Museums

635. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to further develop the military museum on the Curragh, County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2693/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The current Defence Forces infrastructure plan does not include plans to further develop the Curragh Visitor Centre (known locally as the Military Museum). As part of the White Paper implementation process, which is currently being rolled out across the Defence Organisation, assessments of infrastructure requirements within each military installation including the Curragh Camp are being completed. These assessments will assist in the completion of a rolling 5 year programme for infrastructure development across the military organisation. The programme will set out projects prioritised in line with Defence Forces capability requirements and having regard to the available resource envelope.

Defence Forces Reserve

636. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if the single force concept for the reorganisation of the Reserve Defence Forces has achieved its stated goals of 4,069 persons. [2695/17]

637. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the figures for recruitment to the Reserve Defence Forces for each of the years 2013 to 2016. [2696/17]

638. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the numbers in service and the number of discharges of the Reserve Defence Forces for each of the years 2013 to 2016. [2697/17]

639. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he plans to stand down the Reserve Defence Forces. [2698/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 636 to 639, inclusive, together.

The major re-organisation of the Army Reserve (AR) and Naval Service Reserve (NSR) was implemented in 2013 and the RDF is now organised alongside the Permanent Defence Force (PDF) within a more efficient single force structure. In practice, this provided for the retention of 4,069 personnel spread countrywide based in barracks and 16 other locations. As part of the subsequent re-organisation, all RDF units have been disestablished and amalgamated within PDF units. The re-organisation has provided significant advantages in terms of training and development with PDF units having Reserve components rather than the previous parallel structure. Reserve units are supported by their parent PDF unit and the 16 units outside of PDF installations are supported by dedicated full time PDF personnel.

There are, therefore, no plans to stand down the Reserve. On the contrary, in the White Paper on Defence 2015, the Government recognises the important role that the Reserve Defence

Force has played in contributing to Ireland's defence capability, and in particular, to the spirit of voluntary service which has been the hallmark of the Reserve. The Government appreciates the service of the members of the Reserve and the White Paper on Defence is clear that there is a continued requirement to retain and develop the Reserve. In that regard, the White Paper also sets out a developmental path for the RDF. It provides that the overarching establishment of the Army Reserve (AR) and Naval Service Reserve (NSR) is to be set at 4,169 personnel, consisting of 3,869 Army Reservists and the expansion of the establishment of the four NSR Units from currently 200 personnel to 300.

Initiatives for the Reserve outlined in the White Paper include the following:

- The potential to utilise the Reserve in a voluntary unpaid capacity will be progressed in consultation with the Representative Associations.

- Consideration will be given to activating Reserve Sub-Units for short periods of training with PDF Units or other support tasks.

- Specialist members of the RDF will be placed on a panel, to be known as the Specialist Reserve and, subject to their availability, they will be considered as an option to meet specialist skills shortages.

- The terms and conditions of membership of the First Line Reserve will be revised to include capping the length of service of members, reactivating annual paid training and introducing criteria for retention as an effective member. The case for the current gratuity will also be examined.

- Consideration will be given to establishing a database of former members of the Army Reserve, Naval Service Reserve, First Line Reserve and Permanent Defence Force who could be called upon to volunteer in a crisis situation, by listing these as an "Inactive Reserve".

The strength of the Reserve Defence Force (RDF) at the end of December, 2016 (the latest date for which figures are available) was 2,049 effective personnel. As the Deputy will be aware, a key challenge is to recruit, train and retain sufficient personnel to meet the reserve establishment provided for in the White Paper. It is necessary to strike an appropriate balance in terms of both PDF and RDF recruitment so as to deliver the desired effects in terms of maintaining the capacity of the Defence Forces to undertake all roles assigned by Government and to advance the single-force concept. However, within that framework and having regard to the training capacity of the Defence Forces, I am anxious to accelerate the rate of recruitment to the RDF.

For administrative reasons, the military authorities were unable to provide the data sought. Figures relating to RDF recruitment, the numbers in service and discharges for the years 2013 to 2016 will be provided to the Deputy within the allowed timeframe.

Defence Forces

640. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the reason one unit in Cork City, 1 Brigade Artillery Regiment, BAR, Collins Barracks, was selected to be decommissioned. [2699/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Following a comprehensive review of expenditure carried out in 2011, the strength ceiling of the Permanent Defence Force was established at 9,500 personnel and, as a result, a major re-organisation of

the Defence Forces took place. As part of the re-organisation, 1 Brigade Artillery Regiment (BAR), Collins Barracks, was established in 2013 and I can confirm that there are no plans to disestablish this unit.

Departmental Staff Data

641. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of Secretaries General in his Department; the annual pay of each Secretary General within his Department at 1 January 2017; the expected change in that pay as a consequence of the provisions of the Lansdowne Road agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2905/17]

642. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of assistant secretary generals in his department; the annual pay of each assistant secretary general within his department at 1 January 2017; the expected change in that pay as a consequence of the provisions of the Lansdowne Road Agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2921/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 641 and 642 together.

There is one Secretary General in my Department whose annual pay at 1 January 2017 is €167,300.

There are two Assistant Secretaries in my Department. The Assistant Secretary pay scale as at 1 January 2017 is €119,572, €124,917, €130,706, €136,496.

Under the provisions of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2015 (FEMPI Act 2015), for those on salaries in excess of €110,000 the salary reductions imposed under the FEMPI Act 2013 will be restored in three equal phases on 1 April 2017, 1 April 2018 and 1 April 2019. A circular setting out the revised salary rates applicable from 1 April 2017 to general Civil Service grades, including Secretaries General and Assistant Secretaries General, is currently in preparation and will be issued by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in due course.

Defence Forces Veterans

643. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence when a meeting will be scheduled with the Veterans Association in order to discuss the awarding of commemorative 1916 medals. [2954/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I informed the Deputy in my response to Parliamentary Question No. 1737, ref 1934/17, which I answered on 17th January 2017 that the 1916 Centenary Commemorative Medal is being awarded as a commemorative medal, personal to an individual's service in the Defence Forces in the course of 2016. It serves to honour the central role of the Defence Forces across all seven strands of the Centenary Programme throughout 2016. As I outlined in my answer dated 17th January 2017, I met with the Veterans Organisations on the 15th December last, and whilst I reiterated to them that there are no plans to award the 1916 Centenary Commemorative Medal to Veterans, it was proposed that a further meeting be held between the Department and the Veterans Organisations to explore alternative means of recognition including exploring further the Department's existing proposal of issuing a commemorative plaque. The meeting between senior officials of the

Department and the Veterans Organisations will be arranged shortly.