

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 9, inclusive, answered orally.

Questions Nos. 10 to 28 resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 29 to 39, inclusive, answered orally.

Public Transport Provision

40. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which his Department can continue to facilitate efficient commuter transport by the use of co-ordination between the road and rail network in such a way as to provide the highest possible degree of transport cost effectiveness and efficiency for commuters located convenient to such services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6041/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): With regard to co-ordination between road and rail, the National Transport Authority (NTA) is the statutory body with responsibility for the integration of public transport nationally. The remit of the NTA is to regulate and develop the provision of public transport services (bus, rail, light rail and taxi) by public and private operators in the State, to secure the development and implementation of an integrated transport system within the Greater Dublin Area, and to contribute to the effective integration of transport and land use planning across the state.

As part of its statutory role, the NTA has prepared a transport strategy for the GDA which establishes a framework to guide transport provision in the region. The Authority is in the process of finalising an Integrated Implementation Plan which will outline the measures to be implemented in the short term in pursuance of the Transport Strategy.

In terms of achieving cost effectiveness and efficiency for commuters, the Authority is working to simplify the fares structure for bus and rail services and to offer integrated fare products across the State. The introduction of the Leap card has greatly facilitated such integration. The Authority is striving to achieve a further simplified, better value fares offer for public transport customers. I understand that it is currently examining what the next generation of smart ticketing might be for Ireland in this regard.

I would also highlight the Authority's multi-modal journey planner which has been in operation for 4 years. This allows anyone to plan their journeys to and from any location in Ireland by public transport. Furthermore, real time passenger information has greatly enhanced the experience of the public transport customer and is a key integration tool.

Smarter Transport

41. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason his Department's combined spend on the smarter travel sustainable transport measures-grants and the regional cities programmes decreased by 21% in 2016 and is projected to be reduced by 18% in 2017 (details supplied) in view of the fact that these programmes constitute a large portion of his Department's spend on walking and cycling infrastructure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6093/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The overarching goals contained in Smarter Travel Policy continue to be the cornerstone of our transport policy. This is recognised and reflected in the Programme for Partnership Government where we commit to ensuring that the €3.6bn investment in the public transport system provided for in the Capital Plan will uphold the principles of *Smarter Travel*. The Capital Plan also specifically commits €100m in funding measures to support smarter travel and carbon reduction.

While it is recognised that there has been some decrease in the combined spend on the programmes outlined for the years in question, it should be noted that in 2017 €2.5m has been allocated specifically to support carbon reduction in transport, a sum that would have previously been included under the Smarter Travel programme. In addition a sum of €10m allocated for Smarter Travel in 2014/2015 was a once-off allocation under the Government Stimulus Programme and this also impacts the figures the Deputy is quoting.

It is recognised that with renewed economic growth, particular challenges for the transport sector with regard to congestion and climate change are re-emerging. While cost effective investment in walking, cycling and public transport infrastructure is clearly a priority, which is consistent with the goal of ensuring a more sustainable transport system, funding challenges remain, with many competing demands for the limited amounts of funding available. In terms of overall funding of public transport, I was able to secure an increase in funding of €54m for public transport infrastructure and services in Budget 2017. In 2017, €355m is being invested in public transport and sustainable transport infrastructure and €276m is being allocated to fund the operation of public transport services. The capital funding allocation includes funding for the LUAS Cross City project which, when completed, will increase the capacity and efficiency of the public transport network in the GDA.

Progress has been made and continues to be made in encouraging people to use public transport and more sustainable forms of transport. We have seen a significant increase in cycling in Dublin with steady year on year growth with an increase of more than 125% between 2006 and 2015. There was also an increase of an additional 10 million passenger journeys on Public Transport in 2016, a 4.4% increase on 2015.

Bus Éireann

42. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason the Bus Éireann report submitted to his Department in January 2016 on the way to resolve the financial difficulties at the company was rejected by his Department, even though it was essentially the same analysis as was presented in the latest report by a company (details supplied); and his views on whether due to the decision to suppress this report a year has been lost to address Bus Éireann's financial problems and the company is now in more difficulties than this time last year. [6095/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I refer the Deputy to

my oral reply today to Priority PQ No. 29.

Bus Services

43. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if, in conjunction with the National Transport Authority (NTA), he will carry out and publish a full review of loss-making routes on which private bus carriers currently operate, including the number of private licences issued on these routes, when these licences were issued and when these routes ceased to make a profit due to over-saturation; if he will provide for the NTA to review the renewal of such licences that are making a loss; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6102/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy will be aware, the National Transport Authority (NTA) is the regulator of the bus market in Ireland. Responsibility for the licensing of public bus passenger services was transferred from my Department to the NTA in 2010, under the provisions of the Public Transport Regulation Act 2009. I would like to refer to the Deputy's inference that loss making routes arise from an over-supply of licences in the commercial bus market. This is simply not the case. Over the period 2011 to 2016, the NTA have issued 8 licenses and refused 11 applications. The changes to the regulation of the bus market has had, without question, a positive effect on the experience of the travelling public. They have benefitted from more services, better frequencies and lower prices.

This is not hearsay. People have chosen to use these improved services in increasing numbers - in 2015 almost 23 million people used commercial bus services which was a 9.5% increase on the previous year. More people using public transport is a good thing.

The NTA is responsible, under statute, for making decisions about licensing and have been very effective in the execution of functions under the relevant legislation. The benefits of the current regulated competition model are continuing to accrue benefits for public transport customers. While I have no plans to change the underlying policy in relation to the current regime, the Programme for Government does contain a commitment to conduct an overall review of public transport policy to ensure that services are sustainable into the future and capable of fully meeting the needs of a modern economy, and work on this be carried out this year.

Tourism Policy

44. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the way the development of unique tourism projects such as the Taste Leitrim can help attract visitors to rural counties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4068/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): My Department's primary role in relation to tourism lies in the area of national tourism policy. It is not directly involved in the management or development of individual tourism projects, which are operational matters for the Board and Management of Fáilte Ireland.

In this regard, Fáilte Ireland is delivering its Food Tourism Activity Plan which has as its vision that "Ireland will be recognised by visitors for memorable food experiences which evoke a unique sense of place, culture and hospitality". To achieve that vision, Fáilte Ireland increasingly plays a collaborative, curator-type role, whereby it sets the overall framework and direction for enhancing food experiences and then guides and enables the efforts of those delivering it.

Fáilte Ireland will continue to implement its vision for food tourism in 2017, through the support of food festivals, the development of food trails and the work of Fáilte Ireland's network of food tourism champions who encourage businesses to co-operate to produce high quality food products, events and experiences.

Taste Leitrim is an online guide to places to eat, food experiences, and drink and food producers in Co. Leitrim. The website allows hotels, restaurants, cafes, pubs and food and drink producers to advertise their businesses and products through short videos, photographs, descriptions and maps. It also advertises six "Taste Trails".

Although Taste Leitrim did not avail of Fáilte Ireland sector supports in 2016, initiatives such as this are very much in line with the Agency's food tourism policy in their promotion of local food and drink establishments and products, development of food trails, and support and utilisation of existing tourism brands such as the Wild Atlantic Way and Blueways.

Taxi Regulations

45. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has met the Taxi Advisory Committee since coming to office to discuss the main issues in need of reform in the taxi industry. [6098/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy will be aware, the regulation of the small public service vehicle (SPSV) industry is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the provisions of the Taxi Regulation Act 2013.

The Advisory Committee on Small Public Service Vehicles, commonly referred to as the Taxi Advisory Committee (TAC), was established under the Taxi Regulation Act 2003 and continues in being under Section 72(1) of the Taxi Regulation Act 2013 to perform the functions assigned to it under the 2013 Act.

Among the functions of the Taxi Advisory Committee are to advise the National Transport Authority (NTA) in relation to issues relevant to small public service vehicles (SPSVs) and their drivers and to advise me, as Minister, on policy relevant to SPSVs and their drivers. As I previously advised the Deputy in reply to his Question No. 333 on 2nd February 2017, I have not met with the Taxi Advisory Committee and nor has the Committee requested a meeting with me since my appointment. However, it is my intention to meet with the Committee and my office is in the process of making the necessary arrangements with the Chair of the Committee.

Tourism Industry

46. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which he expects to be in a position to encourage further growth and development in the tourism sector, with particular reference to the need to ensure maximum utilisation of employment potential throughout the industry; the extent to which air and sea travel can be utilised in this context; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6042/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Tourism continues to contribute significantly to Ireland's economic recovery. The Central Statistics Office (CSO) figures for 2016 show that there were over 9.584 million overseas visits to Ireland, an increase of 10.9% on 2015. With regard to revenue, the most recent CSO Quarterly Tourism and Travel publication shows that spending in Ireland by overseas visitors (excluding carrier

receipts) in the first nine months of 2016 amounted to over €3.647 billion, an increase of 9.4% compared to the same 9-month period in 2015. I am delighted that Irish tourism has had a record breaking year in 2016. This has been achieved largely due to the hard work of the tourism industry with the assistance of the tourism agencies. Both Tourism Ireland and Fáilte Ireland will continue to ensure Ireland is highly attractive for tourists and the agencies anticipate another good year for tourism in 2017.

The longer-term tourism goals, as outlined in the Government's Tourism Policy Statement are that by 2025: revenue from overseas visitors would increase to €5 billion, net of inflation; we would have 10 million visits to Ireland in that year; and employment in the tourism sector would reach 250,000 compared to around 220,000 at present. In the event that these targets are achieved ahead of schedule, my Department, in collaboration with the tourism agencies, would work to ensure that Ireland's tourism sector would continue to grow in a manner that would be economically, socially and environmentally sustainable.

In terms of access, as an island destination, direct, convenient and competitive access services are critical to achieving tourism growth. There is a direct correlation between access and growth in visitor numbers. Tourism Ireland works with airports, airlines and ferry operators to identify opportunities and 'case-make' for new or extended air and sea services from key markets. Supportive Government policies on Air Travel Tax and the 9% VAT rate have helped to foster continuing expansion in air services to Ireland and increase our overall competitiveness.

A specific allocation of €1m was provided to Tourism Ireland in 2016, with a similar allocation in 2017 for additional focused co-operative marketing activity to be undertaken, to encourage visits to the Wild Atlantic Way and Ireland's Ancient East via points of entry outside of Dublin.

Rail Services

47. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the role of heavy and light rail transport in Ireland's efforts to meet the EU 2030 emissions targets; the steps his Department is taking to ensure rail transport plays a key role into the future of transport policy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6104/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Ireland faces a significant challenge to meet its international greenhouse gas reduction commitments. Currently, Ireland's transport demand and emissions are increasing, with approximately three quarters of all journeys made by private cars accounting for over 55% of our transport emissions. Increasing modal shift away from cars and towards public transport and active travel will play a vital role in our national mitigation effort. Accordingly, I welcome the fact that passenger growth on public transport has risen in 2016 for the fourth consecutive year with an increase of almost 10m trips.

Rail plays an important role in meeting increased passenger demand and also providing an energy-efficient mode of transport. Electrified rail use, in particular, is capable of achieving low emissions through utilising renewable sources of energy. Considerable progress has been achieved in increasing capacity on the light and heavy rail networks. For instance, the Luas Cross City project is scheduled for completion before the end of the year and it is estimated that the new line will add an extra 8 to 10 million journeys per annum on the Luas network. Also, in 2017 we will see an increase in Dart frequency and additional commuter services through the newly-opened Phoenix Park Tunnel.

Rail operators are also playing an active role in emission reductions on existing services, introducing a range of technical measures including automatic engine shutdown, configuring train length to match passenger demand and installing traction control software.

Furthermore, I am committed to the further development of electric fuelled public transport, particularly along high demand routes in the GDA where capacity requirements make such investment cost-effective. We are progressing plans on the New Metro North project which is due to commence construction in 2021; while €82 million has been allocated to the DART Expansion Programme between 2019 and 2022 to begin the extension of the DART line to Balbriggan, and the design and planning of DART services to Maynooth in the west and Hazelhatch in the southwest.

Road Projects

48. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the recent announcement of a €7.5 million funding allocation to the Sallins bypass road project in County Kildare is accurate; the way in which the money will be spent in terms of the tasks included; if further funding will follow in 2017 for the same project, in view of the fact the cost for the three related projects, namely, the Sallins bypass, the Osberstown interchange and the M7 lane widening has been estimated at €110 million; the status of each project; when ground will be broken on each project; the estimated completion date for each project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5762/17]

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

As regards regional and local roads, responsibility for implementation of improvement projects rests with the relevant local authority which is Kildare County Council in this instance.

It has been agreed that, in the interest of economies of scale and delivery efficiency, the main design and construction elements of the Naas Bypass widening Scheme, Osberstown Interchange and Sallins Bypass Schemes are to be progressed as one construction contract. This contract is at tender at present and Kildare County Council is the contracting authority.

Subject to the satisfactory conclusion of the tender process, it is anticipated that construction will start later this year and that the three projects will be concluded on a phased basis over 2019/2020.

As regards financing, both TII and my Department will be making funding available over the construction programme period to meet the State's commitments in relation to these Schemes. In this context my Department has allocated €7.5 million for the Sallins Bypass this year while TII has allocated €13.61 million for the Naas Bypass widening.

Bus Services

49. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has any contact with the NTA on the issuing of bus licences on intercity routes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6034/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy will be aware, the National Transport Authority (NTA) is the regulator of the bus market in Ireland. Responsibility for the licensing of public bus passenger services was transferred from my Department to the NTA in 2010, under the provisions of the Public Transport Regulation Act 2009. Accordingly, all licensing decisions fully rest with the NTA.

As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have no role in relation to the issuing of bus licenses on any routes, including inter city routes. I have had no contact with the Authority in relation to the issuing of bus licences; I believe it would be inappropriate for me to do so.

On a wider but generally related matter, the Deputy may be aware that the NTA has recently submitted a review of Part 2 of the Public Transport Regulation Act 2009 to my Department. Part 2 of that Act relates to the operation of the bus licensing regime. The findings of the NTA's review are currently being considered by my Department. The NTA's review is primarily concerned with procedural and compliance issues related to the licensing system and makes recommendations for certain legislative changes that would enable the NTA to deal more efficiently with its bus licensing functions.

Finally, the Deputy may recall that I was recently briefed by the NTA about the overall issue of its statutory powers to ensure continued public transport connectivity regardless of decisions taken by any individual operator. Indeed the NTA has offered Deputies the opportunity for similar briefing; some have availed of that opportunity and I would encourage others to do so. The NTA has given assurances that it can intervene to assess the requirements of public transport services in any rural area, in consultation with local communities, and to establish the best means of providing such services. It has done this in the past and will do so in the future. Accordingly, the NTA will ensure continued public transport connectivity for rural communities.

Rail Network Expansion

50. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the Navan railway will be proposed and advanced by his Department, in view of the capital expenditure review. [6001/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Navan Rail Link Project was included under the Transport 21 Initiative and was to be developed in two phases. Phase 1 comprised the Dunboyne Rail Line project and involved the reopening of 7.5 km of a railway line running off the Maynooth line, at Clonsilla, to the M3 interchange at Pace, near Dunboyne. This line opened in September 2010 and Phase 1 of the project was completed in 2013 with the opening of Hansfield Station. Phase 2 was to provide for the extension of the Dunboyne line onwards to north Navan. This development together with a number of other transport projects was postponed in 2011 due to the economic and fiscal crisis.

The National Transport Authority (NTA) now has statutory responsibility for the development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA). The NTA published its Transport Strategy for the GDA for the period 2016-2035 last year following its approval by my predecessor. All the main transport corridors in the GDA were examined in the Strategy including the Navan to City Centre Corridor. The NTA concluded that based on current population and employment forecasts, the level of travel demand between Navan, Dunshaughlin and various stations to the city centre is insufficient to justify the development of a high-capacity rail link at this time. Instead it is proposed that an enhanced bus service will be provided along the corridor in conjunction with the development of a bus hub in Navan. This review of the Capital Plan does not change this position.

The NTA has indicated that the position will be reassessed as part of the next review of the GDA Transport Strategy and this will take account of the level of development in the catchment area over the next six years. The NTA has indicated that the corridor identified for a rail link to Navan should be protected from development intrusion in the meantime. If the review of the Transport Strategy concludes that a rail link is justified at that point, funding can be pursued in the context of the development of future Capital Investment Plans.

Road Projects

51. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the results of the review of the Tower Road-Piltown Junction on the N24 conducted by Transport Infrastructure Ireland, TII, will be published; when funding will be provided to TII to commence works on the safety measures recommended in the review results; if his Department is in direct contact with Kilkenny County Council to ensure the process of appointing consultants to undertake a review of the Tower Road-Piltown Junction on the N24 is concluded as efficiently as possible and that all necessary funding is made available to it to complete the process as efficiently as possible; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6003/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As I outlined to the Deputy in my reply to PQ 3667/17 of 26 January also regarding the N24, as Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Within the budget available to it, it is for TII to decide on allocations to individual projects.

TII has advised that consultants have been appointed by Kilkenny County Council, which is the road authority for the area, to undertake a review of road safety at this location. As part of this review, traffic count data and speed surveys have recently been carried out and I understand that consultations are taking place between the consultants and representatives of Kilkenny County Council and An Garda Síochána to review the collision history and identify any appropriate measures to improve safety at the junction.

I understand that the provision of funding for improvement works at this location will be considered by TII following receipt of any proposals by the Council when the review process is completed.

Rail Network Expansion

52. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on whether the decision to allow the DART underground railway order to lapse was a mistake that could ultimately waste millions of euro; the progress being made on redesigning a lower cost solution to the tunnel portion; and whether this solution involves the removal of the proposed station at Pearse Street. [6096/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I refer the Deputy to my reply to Priority Question number 3, Dail Question no. 31, on this matter which I answered earlier today.

Tourism Policy

53. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the progress being made to develop the Ireland's lakelands brand, with specific reference to the Ballina and Killaloe area as a separate proposition to sit alongside the Wild Atlantic Way and Ireland's Ancient East; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5760/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): My Department's role in relation to tourism lies primarily in the area of national tourism policy. Even though the department is not directly involved in the management or development of individual tourism projects, such as the development of a potential Lakelands brand I have met with Fáilte Ireland officials to be updated on the progress of the Lakelands brand and I am expecting a further update in the near future. This is an operational matter for the Board and Management of Fáilte Ireland.

I have also 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.

Public Service Obligation Services

54. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the measures he is taking to increase PSO levels to Bus Éireann; the engagement he has had with management and unions since the motion in Dáil Éireann on 31 January 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5889/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As I clearly stated in last week's Dáil debates, I am committed toward increasing PSO funding as Budgetary resources allow. That commitment is evidenced by the 11% increase I secured in Budget 2017 for PSO funding generally and the 21% increase in PSO funding allocated specifically to Bus Éireann last year when compared with 2015.

The Deputy can be assured that I will continue to advocate increased PSO funding during this year's Budgetary process and my Department will work closely with the National Transport Authority (NTA) during the year in determining what are the likely funding requirements in respect of public transport services in 2018.

Of course as the Deputy will agree, any taxpayer funding advanced should seek to achieve value for money. In that respect the NTA has an important statutory role in allocating funding to individual operators and monitoring and reporting upon compliance with the performance targets as entered into with those operators under the relevant public service contracts.

During our debate in the Dáil last week and indeed my appearance the following day before the Joint Oireachtas Committee, I called upon both management and unions to enter into immediate discussions without any pre-conditions. I am clear that the difficult issues Bus Éireann faces 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. The State is ready to assist through either the Workplace Relations Commission or the Labour Court and I again urge both parties to seize the opportunity to begin those discussions.

Airport Promotion

55. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to reverse Dublin Airport's monopoly and ensure the national planning framework's target of having three quarters of population growth outside Dublin between now and 2040 is deliverable (details supplied). [5749/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Airports are strategically vital to Ireland. We depend on our aviation links with the rest of the world both socially and economically. The National Aviation Policy for Ireland (NAP) acknowledges this position and supports the development of our State and regional airports - Dublin Airport as a secondary hub, Cork and Shannon Airports as key business and tourism gateways for their regions, with the regional airports enabling international access directly into their respective areas.

To ensure that our airports are prepared for the longer term, in September last, I announced a Review of the Capacity Needs of Ireland's State Airports. The review will examine the capacity requirements to meet forecasted passenger throughput at the three airports to 2050 and identify priorities for infrastructure provision. The Review will also take account of the wider Government objectives and policies for enterprise, tourism and balanced regional development in Ireland, including the goals and objectives set out in the National Planning Framework, Ireland 2040, launched recently by my colleague, the Minister for Housing, Planning Community and Local Government.

Tenders from consultants for this review have been received and are currently being assessed within by Department. I expect that the contract to undertake the review will be awarded to the preferred bidder shortly and that it will be completed by mid year.

Local Improvement Scheme

56. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when he will make the reintroduction of the local improvement scheme a priority for the Government. [5759/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of the local authority, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from the local authority'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.

Maintenance of private laneways/roads not taken in charge by local authorities is the responsibility of the landowners concerned. Due to the major cutbacks in roads funding it was necessary for the Department to cease making separate allocations to local authorities in respect of LIS. The approved scheme remains intact and local authorities can use a proportion of State grant funding for LIS should they wish to do so.

While there is a modest increase in funding for roads this year, it will take some years yet under the Capital Plan to restore "steady state" funding levels for regional and local roads. The primary focus has to continue to be on the maintenance and renewal of public roads. Local authorities can continue to use a proportion of their Discretionary Grant for the Local Improvement Scheme in 2017.

In light of the provision in the Programme for Government indicating that, as the economy recovers, the Government will promote increased funding for Community Involvement and Local Improvement Schemes, I will review the scope for making a separate grant allocation once the planned Review of the Capital Plan is completed.

Public Transport Review

57. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his Department's and the National Transport Authority's plans regarding a review of public transport policy, as mentioned in Realising Our Rural Potential: Action Plan for Public Transport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6103/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy may be aware, this proposal originates in the Programme for Government which commits to reviewing public transport policy so as to ensure services are sustainable into the future and are meeting the needs of a modern economy. It has subsequently been restated as an action in Realising our Rural Potential - Action Plan for Rural Development and includes reference to the rural transport dimension, to ensure that it meets the needs of rural communities.

I would also refer the Deputy to my Department's Statement of Strategy 2016-2019 which lists the publication of a new Public Transport Policy Statement as a key indicator of progress.

My Department plans to undertake this work this year. Development of the policy statement will take cognisance of relevant initiatives in several other areas of public policy on which Government is deeply engaged including the preparation of a new National Planning Framework, a National Mitigation Plan and a Climate Adaption Plan for the transport sector, in addition to the Action Plan for Rural Development.

Brexit Issues

58. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the research commissioned by Tourism Ireland predicting that the hospitality sector will struggle to maintain revenue and visitor numbers from Britain in 2017 as a result of Brexit; and the status of the plans his Department has in place to buffer the sector from Brexit. [6097/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): In common with the rest of Government, there has been considerable analysis of the challenges which tourism faces because of the outcome of the UK Referendum. In this context, on 23 January 2017, Minister of State Patrick O'Donovan T.D. and I hosted an All-Island Dialogue on the impact of Brexit on the tourism and hospitality sector. At that event Tourism Ireland presented on the research they had commissioned to assess the propensity of consumers living in Britain to travel overseas in a post Brexit world. The research shows that 7% of people living in Britain say they are less likely to holiday overseas in 2017. The research also indicates that spending patterns are likely to change, e.g. 50% of people expect that they will spend less while on holiday abroad.

Tourism Ireland also presented research which estimated that outbound travel from Britain will decline by 2.5% in 2017. Given Ireland's reliance on Britain, from where 41% of our overseas visitors came in 2016, tourism to Ireland is likely to be more impacted than to any other destination.

Tourism Ireland's strategy for responding to Brexit will involve various strands, including defending key segments of the British market, very focussed competition in existing markets in Europe and North America, and pursuing new, potentially lucrative, markets further afield.

In terms of markets further afield, a commitment is given in the Government's Tourism Policy Statement "*People, Place and Policy – Growing Tourism to 2025*" to prioritising tourism marketing efforts towards those markets providing higher revenue returns. The Programme for Government commits to implementing the policy objectives in the policy statement and achieving the targets for Irish tourism contained therein. The UK vote does not change this.

As regards competing more vigorously in existing markets, a key element of Tourism Ireland's strategy since 2014 has been market diversification which has seen Mainland Europe become the largest contributor of overseas tourism revenue and will see the United States overtake Britain as the number two contributor to tourism revenue over the next few years. In 2017, Tourism Ireland will continue to implement its market diversification strategy and intends to maximise holiday revenue through investment in Mainland Europe and North America.

In addition, the depreciation of the pound against the euro since the UK referendum means that value for money will be a key message for Tourism Ireland in Britain this year. A strong focus on the "culturally curious", who tend to stay longer and spend more, will assist Tourism Ireland in their defence of their British market. Looking to the medium term, Tourism Ireland is currently finalising its corporate plan for the period from 2017-2019. This plan will, *inter alia*, include the agency's response to marketing Ireland in Britain in the new situation that has developed following the referendum.

Road Traffic Legislation

59. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason provided to him by the National Transport Authority regarding the decision it took not to adopt legislation passed in Dáil Éireann in December 2016, that is, an amendment to the Road Traffic Act 2016 allowing for the regulation of rickshaws; if he plans to sign the amendment into law; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6101/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Dáil Éireann voted to provide for the regulation of rickshaws, by way of an Amendment proposed by the Deputy, during its consideration of the Road Traffic Bill 2016, now the Road Traffic Act 2016.

I subsequently explained to the Seanad during that House's consideration of the Dáil amendments to the Bill that I would need to take further legal advice on the implications of the amendment, especially given that the amendment was not drafted by the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel or approved by the Office of the Attorney General.

During the debate on the Bill in the Dáil, I advised the House that the National Transport Authority (NTA) was working on a proposed policy and potential framework for the future regulation of rickshaws. I have just this week received the NTA's proposals which my Department and I will now urgently consider.

I share your concerns about the need for regulation of rickshaws. However, as I indicated to the Seanad, I am seeking legal advice on the implications of the Deputy's amendment - now Section 30 of the Road Traffic Act 2016 - and it is not my intention to commence that provision before the legal position is clarified and I have considered the NTA's proposals on an appropriate and robust regulatory framework for rickshaws.

Military Aircraft Landings

60. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason an aircraft (details supplied) that passed through Shannon Airport on 17 January 2017 and again on 18 January 2017 changed its call sign from civilian to military; if it was contracted to the US military; if there were troops on board on either occasion; the reason the plane switched call sign on the next leg of its journey after Shannon, from Athens to Qatar; his views on this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6031/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The airline operating the two flights referred to by the Deputy applied for an exemption under the Air Navigation (Carriage of Munitions of War, Weapons and Dangerous Goods) Order 1973. My Department carried out the standard consultation procedure in relation to the applications and exemptions were granted for both flights. These exemptions were for the personal weapons of the troops on board.

Call signs are a matter for the airline concerned.

Airport Development Projects

61. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if consideration will be given to representatives of an organisation (details supplied) being included in the collaborative group that will be developing the noise management regime for Dublin Airport in accordance with EU Directive 598/2014 and the requirement for consultation with local residents. [6030/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): It is proposed that the legislation currently in preparation in my Department, in consultation with the Attorney General's Office, will outline requirements concerning the collaborative working arrangements to apply between the Competent Authority and the various statutory bodies that have roles and expertise in relation to noise management, in particular An Bord Pleanála, Fingal County Council and the Environmental Protection Agency. Insofar as public consultation arrangements are concerned, the Competent Authority will also be required to organise consultation processes to secure the views of all concerned stakeholders, including from local residents and businesses. The detailed public consultation requirements and mechanisms will be defined legislatively for the Competent Authority in order that all concerned parties have full clarity of the regime and can provide the necessary inputs and advices at clearly defined stages of the overall regulatory process.

Greenways Funding

62. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will consider the inclusion in Estimates of funds for the introduction of a dedicated funding stream similar to the sports capital fund for the sole purpose of constructing walkways and greenways across the country. [3269/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Programme for Partnership Government commits to providing additional capital funding in the order of €100m for various tourism projects, including greenways. I will be seeking to deliver this additional funding in the context of the mid-term review of the Capital Plan this year.

Greenways or cycleways, of course, are relevant to many different policy areas and can contribute to the delivery of many different policy objectives across Government particularly within my Department's sphere of responsibility. Cycling infrastructure generally can help to promote modal shift to more sustainable forms of transport, and greenways in particular can also promote rural tourism, sport and recreation. My Department is planning to develop a new Strategy for the future development and funding of greenways. The proposed Strategy will include the approach to be taken by authorities and agencies tasked with delivering greenway infrastructure. My Department will undertake a public consultation process in the near future to inform the development of the new Strategy and all interested parties will have the opportunity

to submit their views as part of this public consultation process.

My Department works closely with other relevant Departments and agencies in the delivery of greenways/cycleways. The public consultation on the development of a future Strategy on Greenways will provide an opportunity to consider issues such as that proposed by the Deputy.

Rail Network Maintenance

63. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will consider investing money in the Dublin to Rosslare harbour rail line in view of the fact that over €700 million has been spent on two upgrades to the M11 from 2012 to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6105/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The role of heavy rail in Ireland's Transport sector is currently under review. Last November, the National Transport Authority (NTA) and Iarnród Éireann launched a public consultation process on the Rail Review Report. The public consultation concluded on 18th January and the NTA is preparing a report about the process which I intend to bring to Government. No decisions on any changes to the rail network will be made until the public consultation process has been evaluated.

The main emphasis of funding for the rail network under the Government's current Capital Plan has been on the maintenance of the existing network to ensure it remains safe and fit for purpose. Present funding allocations should see steady-state levels of maintenance achieved by 2020. The Government is embarking on a Mid-Term Review of the Capital Plan, which will take stock of progress and provide the Government with an opportunity to consider the scope for increased levels of investment, including in the transport sector, taking economic growth and fiscal progress into account.

As the Deputy has pointed out, considerable capital funding has been made available to provide upgrades to the M11, providing safer and more efficient travel for both public transport passengers and those travelling by private car on this route.

Road Safety

64. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to improve the N2 from a safety point of view and in addition from the perspective of the effectiveness of the road as a national route. [6002/17]

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

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

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

Rail Network Expansion

65. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans for commuter rail development in Galway in view of major traffic congestion issues in Galway and our commitments under the Paris Agreement to reduce carbon emissions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6107/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Rail Review was published in November 2016 and a public consultation on the report concluded on 18 January. The purpose of the consultation was to open up a public discussion on the current and future role of rail in Ireland as well as the funding of the rail network and services. No decisions will be taken on the future of the rail network or rail services until the public consultation process has been evaluated.

As the Deputy will be aware, the National Transport Authority (NTA) collaborated closely with Galway City Council and Galway County Council on the development of the Galway Transport Strategy which was adopted in 2016. I am advised that the Strategy indicates that demand would be insufficient to warrant a high-capacity rail-based system in Galway. Rail services would have to operate at low frequencies in order to meet demand and this would be less attractive to passengers than a higher frequency bus-based service. Buses provide greater flexibility within transport systems, catering for high volumes of demand in the city centre as well as diverging out to less-dense suburban areas.

Funding is provided by my Department, through the NTA, for the provision of public transport and sustainable transport infrastructure in the Regional Cities, including Galway, in order to encourage people to use public transport or more active travel modes including cycling and walking in order to reduce congestion and tackle emissions from transport. The Regional Cities Programme funds the development of bus lanes, green routes, other bus priority measures and safety measures for pedestrians and cyclists.

In line with the Paris Agreement and the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015, the National Mitigation Plan, is currently being developed. The draft mitigation plan will be available for extensive public consultation before being submitted for approval to Government. Transport will, of course, have to play a significant role on the national mitigation effort and the investment being made in public transport and sustainable transport measures in order to promote modal shift will be critical in this regard.

Immigration Controls

66. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has contacted the relevant departments in the United States administration regarding the ongoing matter of the recently introduced travel ban, especially its implementation in Irish airports through preclearance facilities, in order to discuss the matter and its effect on persons who travel from Irish airports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6100/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Firstly, I would like to state that I strongly disagree with the policy recently announced by President Trump to temporarily ban travel to the US by nationals of certain countries. As you know, there is currently a suspension in place for this Executive Order, which is the subject of an appeal at a US Federal Appeals Court and we await the outcome of that appeal.

Notwithstanding this, my officials have already been in contact with the US authorities and

have conveyed our concerns about President Trump's Executive Order and its implications for US Preclearance Services at Shannon and Dublin Airports.

A meeting of the Preclearance Consultative Group had been arranged for 1 March 2017. However in light of recent events, my officials have requested that this meeting be brought forward. This is a mechanism outlined in the Preclearance Agreement which allows for representatives from both parties to meet and review any operational issues arising related to the Agreement. This meeting has now been set for Thursday 23 February.

As you will also be aware that An Taoiseach has requested that a review of US Preclearance in Ireland be undertaken by the relevant Departments:- Justice and Equality, Foreign Affairs and Trade and my own Department. I anticipate that a report will be made to An Taoiseach this week.

Sports Funding

67. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the fact that medal hauls from other countries with similar populations are misleading because they do not take into account the significant levels of funding underpinning high performance programmes in those countries; his views on whether Ireland's medal targets at major events will remain aspirational unless there is a wider conversation on the need to fund elite programmes on a level with our competitors; if the Government is engaging on such matters with the national governing bodies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5753/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): I would agree with the Deputy that it is important when assessing medal performance at the major games to compare the underpinning investment in high performance sport in each country as the data suggests a link between performance outcomes and investment levels in high performance sport.

In relation to the setting of medal targets, it should be noted that the medal targets established for Irish athletes competing at major events are not necessarily just aspirational; in fact, Ireland has generally met or exceeded its performance targets. For example, the target of achieving three podium results at the Olympic Games, which was identified after Athens 2004, was achieved in Beijing; exceeded in London; and marginally missed in Rio. From a Paralympic Games perspective, there is a history of exceeding the already ambitious targets set. In addition, insofar as the Rio Olympic Games outcome is concerned, it is pertinent to note that the number of top 10 and top 20 finishes was an improvement on London 2012.

I understand that Sport Ireland are in the process of finalising a review following the Rio Olympic and Paralympic Games. I look forward to considering any recommendations contained in that review.

Future high performance planning, its funding and the role of National Governing Bodies were amongst the questions included for consideration in the National Sports Policy consultation document issued by my Department in November 2016. In excess of 50 submissions have been received to date, including from the NGB sector, and these are now being examined with a view to completion of a new National Sports Policy Framework in mid 2017.

Departmental Strategies

68. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the need to develop a new high-performance strategy for the development of elite sport here; and his plans to develop such a strategy. [5752/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O’Donovan): It is important to highlight the success achieved by our high performance athletes in 2016. Along with two Olympic Medals, Irish Olympians achieved fourteen Top Ten and fourteen Top Twenty finishes. Additionally, our Paralympic team won eleven medals and achieved twenty two Top Eight finishes.

I understand that Sport Ireland are in the process of finalising a review following the Rio Olympic and Paralympic Games. I look forward to considering any recommendations contained in that review.

As part of the development of a new National Sports Policy Framework, which will include a high performance component, my Department is currently assessing submissions received from stakeholders as a result of a public consultation process launched last November. It is hoped to complete this new policy framework in mid 2017.

Road Projects Status

69. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the A5 in view of Brexit and his recent engagement with his Northern Ireland counterparts in relation to this; the total funding commitment made by the Government for the project; the total funding commitment made by the Northern Ireland Government; when he expects the A5 to be completed; the status of the funding which was allocated under the St. Andrew’s Agreement; if it is still available for the A5 project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5754/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As I outlined to the Deputy in my reply to PQ 32793/16 of 2 November 2016, the planning and implementation of the A5 project is the responsibility of the Northern Ireland authorities. As the Deputy is aware the Stormont House Agreement and Implementation Plan - A Fresh Start - reaffirmed the Government’s commitment to provide funding of £50 million for the A5 project and committed an additional £25 million to ensure that Phase 1 of the project (Newbuildings to north of Strabane) can commence as soon as the necessary planning issues have been resolved by the Northern Ireland authorities.

Under the Agreement it is envisaged that construction of Phase 1 of the A5 will start in 2017 with a view to completion in 2019. In keeping with the revised project timeline, the Government funding is to be provided in three tranches of £25 million in the years 2017, 2018 and 2019 respectively.

The A5 project was discussed at the North South Ministerial Council Transport Sectoral meeting on 12th December. The Council noted that the Public Inquiry into the road scheme opened on 4 October 2016 and that the Inspector’s report is expected around May 2017.

Road Improvement Schemes

70. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if specific funding will be provided to the National Roads Authority in respect of the necessary upgrading

of a road which carries a heavy volume of traffic and is inadequate at present for such a level of traffic (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5824/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The position in remains as outlined in response to PQ40916/16.

Cavan County Council was provided with over €2m in the period 2007-2014 by my Department in connection with this project under the Strategic Non National Road Grants Scheme in order to bring this 75 km route to preliminary design stage. Due to budgetary constraints it is not possible to progress the scheme further at this point.

The transport element of the Capital Plan sets investment priorities to 2022 and was framed by the conclusions reached in my Department's Strategic Investment Framework for Land Transport. Based on the findings in that report it is envisaged that maintenance and renewal of the road network will continue to be the main priority over the next period and the bulk of the roads capital budget, over €4 billion, is earmarked for such essential work with a further €600 million allocated for implementation of the PPP road programme which is already underway. In this context the East/West link was one of the schemes that it was not possible to include given the overall funding envelope available. The construction cost for a scheme of this magnitude would be in excess of €150 million.

Bus Éireann

71. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to protect and safeguard the jobs, wages and conditions of Bus Éireann workers who are being targeted to bear the brunt of the problems at the company which are not of their creation. [6032/17]

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.

In developing its plans, the Company is seeking to ensure a sustainable future for it in the years ahead; however, those plans remain under development and the company are seeking to engage with its employees on its proposals to secure the company's future.

I am firmly of the belief that difficult issues such as this can only be resolved through constructive and realistic discussions between the company and its employees and I encourage both sides to engage on the matter.

I do not doubt that those discussions will be difficult; however, it is obvious they must occur. As I clarified to the Joint Oireachtas Committee last week I believe those discussions should commence on the basis of "no pre-conditions" from both sides and if uncertainty exists as regards that basis then I would urge both parties to clarify their position.

Road Traffic Legislation

72. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 42 of 7 December 2016, the outcome of his discussions with the Minister for Justice and Equality on this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5756/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Under the Road Traffic Acts, the user of a quad bike or scrambler bike in a public place must have insurance, road tax and a driving licence, and must also wear a helmet, with severe penalties under the road traffic laws for not being in compliance with these requirements.

Under the Road Traffic Acts, a “public place” means any public road, and any street, road or other place to which the public have access with vehicles. In the case of a park under the jurisdiction of a local authority, that local authority may make bye-laws prohibiting the use of quad bikes or scramblers, and in the case of a national park, a similar prohibition may be brought in by the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.

There is comprehensive legislation in place governing the use of scrambler bikes, quad bikes and similar vehicles in a public place under the Road Traffic Acts and enforcement of such road traffic legislation is a matter for an Garda Síochána. The use of such vehicles in parks is outside the remit of this Department; it is a matter for local authority staff and an Garda Síochána to enforce bye-laws made by the the local authorities prohibiting the use of such vehicles in areas under their control.

As I have promised the Deputy, I have asked for a meeting with my colleague the Minister for Justice and Equality to discuss this issue and to see if there are any legislative amendments or other actions which could be taken to specifically deal with the issues raised.

Public Transport Provision

73. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans for capital expenditure in 2017 to increase public transport capacity; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5757/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): In 2017 we will be investing €355m in public transport and sustainable transport infrastructure.

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

Funding is also being provided for replacement and expansion of the PSO fleet with 110 buses to be purchased in 2017 for the Dublin region and 70 for the Bus Éireann PSO fleet. Funding is also being allocated for the development or upgrading of QBCs in both the GDA and in the regional cities. As the Deputy will be aware, a mid-term review of the Capital Plan has been initiated and I will be making the case for increased funding for public transport in that context to cater for increasing demand for public transport as the economy continues to improve and to encourage people to get out of their cars and onto public transport and more sustainable forms of transport.

Sports Capital Programme

74. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the time-frame for the first announcement of funds that will be allocated under the sports capital programme once the date for accepting applications closes at the end of February 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5761/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): The total number of applications under the 2017 Sports Capital Programme will not be known until after the closing date of the 24th February. I expect a large number of applications however, and am aware that almost 1,600 were received in 2015 while over 2,000 applications were received under both the 2012 and 2014 rounds of the programme.

Every application will be assessed by one official and then reviewed by another to ensure validity and consistency. As the Deputy will be aware, each application contains several supporting documents and these also have to be examined. While the assessment process will be completed as quickly as possible, based on previous timeframes, I expect that allocations would be announced in September or October of 2017.

National Roads Authority Projects

75. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the N22 Macroom bypass will be released to tender for construction. [5888/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects, including the N22 Macroom Bypass is a matter for the Transport Infrastructure Ireland under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

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

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

Transport Infrastructure Ireland

76. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the progress being made by his Department or a body under its aegis in securing funding for critical transport infrastructure under the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI); if his attention has been drawn to the fact that many other countries in the EU have secured funding for transport projects and that of the EFSI transactions approved to date, 6% are in the transport sector; and the reason Ireland, by contrast, has no funding application for critical transport projects. [6094/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Department actively encourages all transport sectors to explore all avenues of finance available including domestic banks, Trans European Network-transport (TENT), Connecting Europe Facility (CEF), European Investment Bank (EIB), Irish Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF) and the European Fund for Strategic Investment (EFSI), to secure the most suitable funding instrument at the most favourable commercial rates. In many cases, a mix of funding instruments is used for capital projects by ports, roads aviation and public transport sectors.

There are no specific transport projects that have been assisted under the EFSI but some have been co-funded and assisted through CEF, the EIB and INTERREG (a European Territorial Cooperation programme that aims to stimulate cross border and inter-regional cooperation in the European Union).

Road Projects

77. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the role his Department has to play in the review process of a submission by Kildare County Council to allow the Athy ring road project to proceed to An Bord Pleanála; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3272/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As I already stated in my response to Parliamentary Question No. 268 of 25 January 2016 to the Deputy, the improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads, such as the Athy Distributor Road, is the statutory responsibility of Kildare 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 Capital Plan 2016-2021 provides that a number of schemes, including the Athy Distributor Road, targeting bottlenecks in the road network will be progressed subject to necessary approvals. In this context the project has to meet the requirements of the Public Spending Code and my Department's Common Appraisal Framework for Transport Projects as well as obtaining planning approval. It is a matter for Kildare County Council to progress the scheme through the approval process.

In relation to the project appraisal process, the Council has submitted the project Business Case and Cost Benefit Analysis (CBA) documentation for consideration by my Department. Consideration of the project appraisal documentation involves a number of steps. As the project has an estimated cost in excess of €20 million, my Department's Economic and Financial Evaluation Unit in liaison with the Central Expenditure and Evaluation Unit (CEEU) in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform will need to review the CBA for compliance with the Public Spending Code and my Department's Common Appraisal Framework. The overall Business Case will then need approval.

The project appraisal procedure will be progressed as soon as possible taking into account available resources.

I have made €1 million available to progress this project as part of 2017 Regional and Local Roads Grants.

Immigration Controls

78. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the discussions he has had in relation to the review of US preclearance at Dublin and Shannon airports announced on 30 January 2017 in response to President Trump's Muslim travel ban; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6033/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Firstly, I would like to state that I strongly disagree with the policy recently announced by President Trump to temporarily ban travel to the US by nationals of certain countries. As you know, there is currently

a suspension in place for this Executive Order, which is the subject of an appeal at a US Federal Appeals Court and we await the outcome of that appeal.

Notwithstanding this, my officials have already been in contact with the US authorities and have conveyed our concerns about President Trump's Executive Order and its implications for US Preclearance Services at Shannon and Dublin Airports.

A meeting of the Preclearance Consultative Group had been arranged for 1 March 2017. However in light of recent events, my officials have requested that this meeting be brought forward. This is a mechanism outlined in the Preclearance Agreement which allows for representatives from both parties to meet and review any operational issues arising related to the Agreement. This meeting has now been set for Thursday 23 February.

As you will also be aware that An Taoiseach has requested that a review of US Preclearance in Ireland be undertaken by the relevant Departments:- Justice and Equality, Foreign Affairs and Trade and my own Department. I anticipate that a report will be made to An Taoiseach this week.

Road Network

79. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on whether the local and regional roads funding allocation for County Louth of €5.1 million, representing an increase on the previous year of €384,000 is adequate, in view of the serious deterioration in roads throughout the county over the past number of years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6099/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads in County 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 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.

On 24 January, I announced the 2017 regional and local road allocations to all local authorities which included a modest increase on the initial 2016 allocations to local authorities. It should be noted that the main grant programmes funded by my Department (Restoration Improvement, Restoration Maintenance and Discretionary Grant) are allocated on a "per kilometre" basis thus ensuring a fair and equitable approach for determining allocations to local authorities. The priority in 2017 continues to be the maintenance of our existing road network. I am not in a position to provide as much funding to local authorities as I would wish, as my Department has to work within the budgets available to it.

I have been emphasising to local authorities the importance of prioritising expenditure on roads when allocating own resources, including revenue from Local Property Tax receipts.

Skills Development

80. **Deputy Seán Barrett** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the recent plea by the chief executive of the Restaurants Association of Ireland to have more persons trained as chefs and skilled hospitality employees due to the crisis that has arisen regarding trained staff in this area; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[5763/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): The Department of Education and Skills has lead responsibility for skills development policy generally across all sectors, including hospitality and tourism, and oversees the bulk of the required education and training delivered nationally through the mainstream higher and further education and training sectors. This work complements Fáilte Ireland's efforts to encourage, promote and support tourism as a leading indigenous component of the Irish economy.

In line with my Department's *Tourism Action Plan 2016-2018*, Fáilte Ireland is committed to working with the tourism industry and the wider education and training sector to implement the recommendations contained in the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN) report on the hospitality sector. These recommendations are aimed at ensuring that there is an adequate supply of skilled staff in the tourism sector, including key roles such as chefs and other skilled positions.

Addressing projected skills demand requires a combination of measures, including providing appropriate direct enterprise support, entry-level training, advanced/professional training; increasing the attractiveness of employment opportunities; and improving staff retention in certain occupations. Government Departments, agencies, education and training providers, industry bodies and employers each have a role to play. In this regard, Fáilte Ireland participates in the Hospitality Skills Oversight Group, which oversees skills development and promotion in the sector, including monitoring the implementation of the EGFSN recommendations, and involves all relevant stakeholders - including the Restaurants Association of Ireland (RAI). Fáilte Ireland is also an active participant, alongside the RAI and other key industry bodies, on the consortium collaborating on the development of the culinary apprenticeship.

I believe that this collaborative approach is the most effective way to tackle the current challenges and to support the sustainable development of the Irish tourism industry, including addressing challenges concerning the supply of skilled chefs.

Sports Capital Programme

81. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the role that local sports partnerships can play in working with local sports clubs applying for sport capital grants to ensure a reduction in the number of invalid applications on this round; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6028/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): On 21 December last, I, along with Minister Ross, announced that €30m is being made available under the 2017 Sports Capital Programme. The application process opened on 23 January and will remain open until the 24 February.

For the 2017 Sports Capital Programme my Department has introduced a number of innovations to try to reduce the proportion of invalid applications submitted. These include:

- The application form has been simplified and reduced from 14 pages to 6;
- There is more online validation of application information to prompt users to provide the correct information and to prevent users from submitting incomplete or invalid applications;
- A relaxation in the requirements for applicants to provide supporting documentation espe-

cially around quotations and planning permission.

My Department has also produced a comprehensive written and video guide, both of which are available on my Department's website. The Guide details the relevant staff member in Sports Capital Division dealing with each county who can assist with any queries applicants may have. Furthermore, my Department has arranged seven regional workshops to guide organisations through the application process. These are taking place this week and next and I am aware that the Local Sports Partnerships have assisted in organising and advertising these events. All of these measures should ensure that the level of invalid applications will be reduced under this round of the programme.

Road Network

82. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to have a major programme of upgrading works carried out on specific regional routes which carry heavy volumes of traffic and are the key arterial routes for rural areas; if consideration will be given to areas such as counties Cavan and Monaghan which face particular economic challenges due to Brexit with the resultant need to improve infrastructure to assist industry and business to remain as competitive as possible; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5825/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads in Counties Cavan and Monaghan is the statutory responsibility of the relevant local authority, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from the local authorities' own resources supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is also a matter for the local authority.

The transport element of the Capital Plan sets out investment priorities to 2022 and was framed by the conclusions reached in my Department's Strategic Investment Framework for Land Transport. Based on the findings in that report it is envisaged that maintenance and renewal of the road network will continue to be the main priority over the next period and the bulk of the roads capital budget, over €4 billion, is earmarked for such essential work with a further €600 million allocated for implementation of the PPP road programme which is already underway and the balance for the limited number of road improvement projects included in the Plan.

On 24 January, I announced the 2017 regional and local road allocations to all local authorities including Counties Cavan and Monaghan. My Department has to work within the budgets available to it in the Capital Plan and all grant funding for 2017 has now been allocated.

National Driver Licensing Service

83. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to reinstate the national driving licence centre in the Carndonagh public services, Carndonagh, County Donegal in view of the fact that it is an hour's drive for many Inishowen residents to Letterkenny; if not, the reason for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5755/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The operation of the National Driver Licensing Service - including the location of its offices - is the statutory responsibility of the Road Safety Authority, and I have no role in these matters. I have therefore

forwarded the Question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response has not been received within ten days.

Bus Éireann

84. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has had any contact with the management of Bus Éireann prior to or since it announced a cost cutting plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6035/17]

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. In developing its plans, the Company is seeking to ensure a sustainable future for it in the years ahead; however, those plans remain under development and the company are seeking to engage with its employees on its proposals to secure the company's future.

Given the fact that the Company is still preparing its plan, I am unsure as regards exactly what date the Deputy is referring to in relation to any announcement; however, to clarify I have met the Chair of the Company on the following dates since my appointment as Minister:

- 12 September;
- 5 December;
- 12 January;
- 30 January.

Commissions of Investigation

85. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Taoiseach the status of the commission of investigation into IBRC. [6040/17]

86. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Taoiseach the number of commissions of inquiry or other formal investigations or inquiries being conducted in his Department; the name of these; the date they were established; the expected date the work is intended to be completed; the cost incurred to date; and the estimated final cost. [6365/17]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 85 and 86 together.

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

Name of Commission of Investigation	Date Established	Completion Date	Costs Incurred by Department of the Taoiseach to end December 2016*	Estimated Final Cost
Fennelly Commission	30 April 2014	Final Report is due by the end of March 2017.	€3.03 million	Expected to be in the region of €3.5 million.

Name of Commission of Investigation	Date Established	Completion Date	Costs Incurred by Department of the Taoiseach to end December 2016*	Estimated Final Cost
IBRC Commission	16 June 2015	Final report on the first module of the Commission's work, in relation to the Siteserv transaction, is due by the end of December 2017.	€1.52 million	The IBRC Commission indicated in its Interim Report that significant third party costs have been incurred which are likely to arise for payment in due course. It is estimated that the approximate final cost will be in excess of €10 million.
Moriarty Tribunal	1997	Final report was published in March 2011	€54.742 million	It will not be possible to ascertain the final cost of the Tribunal until all third-party costs have been settled.

* It should be noted that figures provided for 2016 are provisional and may be subject to end of year revisions, as part of the preparation of my Department's 2016 Appropriation Account.

The Fennelly and IBRC Commissions are currently conducting their inquiries. They are statutory bodies established under the Commissions of Investigation Act 2004 and are independent in the conduct of their investigations. As specified Minister in relation to the Commissions, I am responsible for overseeing administrative matters relating to their establishment, for receiving their reports and for performing any other functions given to me under the Act.

The Moriarty Tribunal completed its enquiries and published its final in March 2011. A small legal and administrative staff remains in place to deal with applications for third-party costs and with the ongoing business of wind-down. The Tribunal is also subject to a number of legal proceedings for which it uses its own legal resources as much as possible.

EU Meetings

87. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on the meeting held in Malta on 3 February 2017; and if immigration to the EU was discussed. [6367/17]

The Taoiseach: The Summit in Malta on 3 February included two sessions. In the morning, there was an informal meeting of the European Council, where we discussed the external

aspects of migration, particularly the central Mediterranean route, and agreed a formal declaration. In the afternoon, there was a meeting of the 27 EU Heads of State and Government - i.e. without the UK., where we considered the renewal and future direction of the EU.

I participated fully in both meetings, noting that the migration crisis remains one of the great humanitarian challenges facing our continent. The discussions on the future direction of the EU, which were wide ranging, were based on the Declaration and Roadmap agreed at the Bratislava Informal Summit last September: the items included commitment to the EU as the best guarantee of peace and democracy; the need for concrete initiatives on migration; internal and external security and defence; and economic and social development, including youth. I said that we need to demonstrate unity and resolve, and make it clear that the Union, with its core values, is an indispensable source of stability in this turbulent world. We need a balanced response to the many challenges we face, with a focus on delivering our priorities, particularly those in relation to jobs, growth, investment and trade, which will bring concrete improvements to the lives of our citizens.

The exchanges at Valletta will now feed into preparations for a Summit in Rome on 24 and 25 March, to mark the 60th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome. The intention is to agree a declaration after that meeting which will provide further guidance for us in the period ahead.

Refugee Data

88. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if the number of immigrants Ireland had accommodated since 2015 was outlined at the Malta meeting on 3 February 2017 and plans for more in 2017 and the details of same. [6368/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I understand that the Deputy is referring to the intake of persons under the Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP). The IRPP was established by Government Decision on 10 September 2015 as a direct response to the humanitarian crisis that developed in Southern Europe as a consequence of mass migration from areas of conflict in the Middle East and Africa. Under this programme, the Government has pledged to accept a total of 4,000 persons into the State, 2,622 through the EU relocation mechanism established by two EU Council Decisions in 2015 to assist Italy and Greece, 1,040 (519 by the end of 2016 and the remainder in 2017) under the UNHCR-led refugee resettlement programme currently focused on resettling refugees from Lebanon and the balance through a variety of mechanisms. Some elements of this intake, such as the relocation strand, come with a time limit of two years and other elements are not time bound.

In a further gesture of humanitarian assistance towards the most vulnerable caught up in the migration crisis and following a debate in the Dáil, the Government also committed to taking up to 200 unaccompanied minors from France who were previously resident in the migrant camp at Calais. These initiatives therefore leave just a small residual balance to be allocated from the Government decision to take 4,000 persons.

Taking account of the situation in the Middle East, and the plight of the refugees, the Tánaiste announced that Ireland would accept 520 persons for resettlement over an 18-month period to the end of 2017. This was almost double the figure proposed for Ireland by the European Commission and was delivered a year ahead of the Commission deadline. In addition, the Government recently announced that it is extending the resettlement programme to take in a further 520 refugees from Lebanon in 2017, most of whom are of Syrian origin. 260 refugees have already been selected during a selection mission to Lebanon in October 2016 and are expected

to arrive in Spring 2017. Most of these refugees are also Syrian. A further selection mission to Lebanon will be arranged in the coming months to select the remaining refugees due to come to Ireland in 2017 under the resettlement programme.

In relation to the EU Relocation Programme, Ireland has to date taken in 241 people from Greece. In November, IRPP officials travelled to Athens and interviewed a group of 84 people who once cleared for travel, are expected to arrive over the next two weeks. An IRPP mission to interview 80 people took place in Athens from 12 – 16 December. A further mission has already taken place in January which interviewed 61 people. An IRPP team are currently on the ground in Athens interviewing another group of over 90 asylum seekers. The intention thereafter is to sustain the pace of intakes throughout 2017 at the levels required to allow Ireland to meet its commitments to Greece within the time frame envisaged by the Programme.

Ireland will meet in full its commitment to Greece. However, as explained in responses to previous Parliamentary Questions, matters relating to security assessments of the asylum seeker cohort eligible for relocation from Italy to Ireland remain to be resolved. Accordingly, it has not been possible as yet for Ireland to take asylum seekers from Italy. Numerous efforts have been made and continue to be made to resolve this situation.

The topic of ‘Migration’, in the context of the ongoing crisis, remains a standing agenda item for all meetings of the Justice and Home Affairs Council and of the European Council and I expect that this will continue for the foreseeable future.

Garda Civilian Staff Data

89. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the total number of civilian staff employed in An Garda Síochána at the end of each of the years from 2010 to 2016, in tabular form; and the proportion of total personnel numbers in An Garda Síochána that this represented on each date. [6129/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I was pleased to announce on Budget day that the Government has approved my proposal that by 2021 the overall Garda workforce should comprise a total of 21,000 personnel; to include 15,000 Garda members, 2,000 Garda Reserve members and 4,000 civilians.

I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that there were 1,998 civilians undertaking administrative and technical duties within An Garda Síochána as of 31 December 2016. 4,000 civilians will effectively double this figure and represents a medium term target of 20% civilians by 2021. This will bring An Garda Síochána more into line with international norms and ensure that trained Gardaí are not engaging in administrative and technical duties which could be done by suitably qualified civilian staff. I have requested the Garda Commissioner, in conjunction with the Policing Authority, to prepare a 5 year plan to achieve this 20% target by way of a twin-track approach (i) a civilian by default policy and (ii) the redeployment of Gardaí to operational policing posts and backfilling by suitably qualified civilians where necessary.

The “civilian by default” policy refers to a policy where all new posts, other than operational policing posts, and non-operational policing posts that become vacant, are to be filled by suitably qualified civilian staff. In relation to the redeployment policy, I have requested the Commissioner, in conjunction with the Authority to identify posts suitable for redeployment having regard to the indicative figure of 1,500 posts identified by the Garda Inspectorate in its report “Changing Policing in Ireland”. These policies are designed to ensure that members of An Garda Síochána, trained police men and women, are available for and utilised in operational

areas. The Authority, in view of its statutory functions in relation to approving the number of civilian staff in An Garda Síochána and appointing or approving the appointment of such staff has an important role to play in this regard.

The recruitment and appointment of up to 500 civilians provided for in this year's budget will facilitate the Commissioner in addressing capacity and critical skills gaps across the organisation including in corporate supports, change management, human resources and financial management at the national, regional and Divisional level and also to begin the phased redeployment of Gardaí to front-line policing roles. These additional resources will make an important contribution to the delivery of the ambitious reform agenda set out in the Commissioner's Modernisation and Renewal Programme 2016-2021 and will facilitate deeper civilianisation in the coming years.

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

For the Deputy's information I have set out in the table the number of civilian staff for each of the years from December 2010 to 31 December 2016, the latest date for which figures are readily available from the Garda Commissioner.

I have requested the information sought by the Deputy from the Commissioner regarding the civilian strength in the years 2010 and 2011 and I will write to the Deputy on receipt of same.

YEAR END	CIVILIAN STRENGTH	GARDA STRENGTH	TOTAL STRENGTH	PERCENTAGE CIVILIAN
2012	2028	13,424	15,452	13%
2013	2071	13,093	15,164	14%
2014	2054	12,799	14,853	14%
2015	2006	12,816	14,822	14%
2016	1998	12,943	14,941	13%

Refugee Data

90. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Syrian refugees the State has accepted in 2015, 2016 and to date 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6132/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Ireland is one of 27 States that participate in a refugee resettlement programme led by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The focus of the Irish resettlement programme in recent years has been on the resettlement of refugees displaced by the Syrian conflict who are living in one of the hosting countries in the region, for example those living in Lebanon. UNHCR at a local level identify the most vulnerable persons for resettlement, regardless of their

race, religion, nationality or ethnicity.

Under the resettlement strand of the Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP), 176 programme refugees arrived in this State in 2015, of which 149 were Syrian refugees. In 2016, 356 programme refugees arrived in this State, of which 335 were Syrian refugees. There have been no arrivals in 2017 to date.

In addition to those people brought to Ireland under the resettlement strand, 70 Syrian nationals brought to Ireland under the relocation strand of the IRPP have also now been granted refugee status, all in 2016. There were also 19 Syrian nationals granted refugee status (and a further three Syrian nationals granted subsidiary protection status) in 2015, and 82 Syrian nationals granted refugee status in 2016, having arrived in Ireland and applied for international protection.

Daylight Savings

91. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she will consider ending the daylight savings and biannual changing of the clock; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6133/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy is aware, Winter time begins at 1:00 a.m. Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) on the last Sunday in October every year when clocks are put back by one hour. Winter time ends at 1:00 a.m. GMT on the last Sunday in March of the following year when clocks are put forward one hour, signalling the start of summer time.

These arrangements are set out in the Winter Time Order 2001 which gives effect to European Union Directive 2000/84/EC and means that all EU member states start summer time simultaneously.

As the Deputy may be aware, the Joint Committee on Justice, Defence and Equality considered this in the context of the Brighter Evenings Bill and submitted a report to me in December 2014. The Committee recommended that this matter should be kept under review and that consideration of any trial be coordinated as a joint venture with the United Kingdom, in the event that the UK would consider a similar trial. The Committee was impressed by the benefits of introducing summer time for a longer portion of the year and recommended this position be put forward in any future review of European legislation.

Having considered the report and noted the recommendations made, my Department continues to keep the matter under review, including the question of a joint trial with the United Kingdom. However, particularly in light of the current context arising from the UK's decision to exit the European Union, I have no immediate plans to pursue this at the present time.

Human Rights

92. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons who have been denied preclearance to the United States in Dublin and Shannon Airports on grounds of their nationality since the President of the United States issued an executive order restricting travel of nationals of a number of Middle Eastern and African states. [6238/17]

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

who avail of the US preclearance facilities in the State do so voluntarily as provided for in the Aviation (Preclearance) Act 2009 and decisions taken by the US authorities at US preclearance facilities in the State on clearance to board US bound aircraft are taken solely by the US authorities.

The role of Garda immigration officers is set out in the Act. Specifically, Section 12 of the Act provides that a person who is refused preclearance to travel onwards to the United States, shall be deemed for the purpose of the Aliens Act 1935 and the Immigration Act 2004, to have arrived at the frontier of the State. In many cases, the persons are Irish citizens or EU nationals subject to Free Movement and once this is established they are not subject to any further immigration requirements. In circumstances where a person is refused leave to board a US bound flight, he or she is brought to the Garda immigration authorities and the case is considered by Garda immigration officers in the same manner as if they had presented at the frontier of the State seeking permission to enter the State. For those subject to immigration controls under the Immigration Act 2004, as is normal in these cases, each case is examined on its individual merits to determine if the person is to be given permission to enter the State. Specific details on numbers refused by the US immigration authorities are not available, and from an Irish immigration perspective are dealt with as part of the overall immigration process at the relevant airports.

These decisions are taken in accordance with Irish law and take fully into account our international obligations. For example, should a person claim international protection, their case will be fully considered under the International Protection Act 2015. US officials have no role in the matter. An Garda Síochána is also responsible for providing policing and maintaining law and order in preclearance areas, again in accordance with the provisions of the Act of 2009.

Residency Permits

93. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of stamp 4 permits issued in the past five years, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6243/17]

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 a ‘Stamp 4’ permission to stay in Ireland, for a specified period, may be granted, subject to conditions which include the following:

- Join an Irish spouse/civil partner;
- Join a minor child, who is an Irish citizen;
- Join an EU/EEA or Swiss family member using their EU Treaty Rights;
- Join a family member who is a recognised refugee or has been granted subsidiary protection;
- Parent of an Irish Born Child (pre-2005);
- Parent of an Irish Born Child where one parent is an Irish national (Zambrano conditions apply);
- Have completed 2 years registration on a Critical Skills Work Permit;
- Have been granted humanitarian/exceptional leave to remain;

- Recognised convention or programme refugee or have been granted subsidiary protection.

The table shows the number of permissions pursuant to Stamp 4 granted each year since 2012, broken down between renewals and new registrations.

Year	Renewals	New Registrations
2016	54,303	9,239
2015	39,798	7,787
2014	38,262	5,636
2013	36,612	4,390
2012	34,513	3,724

Garda Vetting Procedures

94. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to streamline Garda vetting procedures and to allow for simplified procedures for persons transferring between different types of work that require Garda vetting yet do not allow for their Garda vetting approval to transfer between different jobs or responsibilities; the number of Gardaí and public servants involved in Garda vetting; and the amount spent on vetting in the past year for which figures are available. [6251/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Deputy will appreciate that the primary purpose of the Garda National Vetting Bureau is to seek to ensure the safety of children and vulnerable adults and it is carried out by An Garda Síochána primarily in accordance with the provisions of the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012-2016.

Vetting checks are conducted by the Garda National Vetting Bureau for each new vetting application received to ensure that the most recent data available is taken into account. This is because once there has been any significant lapse of time between one employment and another, the original Vetting Disclosure must be reviewed to take account of any changes in information, such as more recent criminal convictions. Furthermore, the Data Protection Acts require that any sensitive personal data which employers use in regard to their employees must be current, accurate and up-to-date. Importantly, the general non-transferability and contemporaneous nature of the current process also helps to protect against the risk of fraud or forgery in the process.

I am pleased to inform that Deputy that at present, 80% of overall vetting applications are being processed by the National Vetting Bureau in five working days. This efficiency has been achieved by the deployment of the e-Vetting system which facilitates the on-line processing of applications for vetting from registered organisations. 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. In circumstances where there is such a sustained reduction in processing times, the issue of vetting “transferability” is very largely obviated.

There are certain limited circumstances where organisations can share a single vetting disclosure where this is agreed to by the vetting applicant. Section 12(3)(A) of the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012 (as amended) provides that two or more relevant organisations can enter into a joint written agreement in relation to the employment, contracting, permitting or placement of an person to undertake relevant work or activities thereby providing for only one of the organisations being required to conduct vetting in respect of that person.

I have requested the detailed information on personnel and expenditure from the Garda Authorities and I will communicate it to the Deputy when the information is to hand.

Residency Permits

95. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in determination of eligibility for stamp 4 permission to remain in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6298/17]

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 referred to is the subject of a Deportation Order and therefore has no entitlement to residency in the State.

Representations were received from the person's legal representative pursuant to Section 3(11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), to revoke the Deportation Order. The Deputy may wish to note that any such decision will be to 'affirm' or to 'revoke' the existing Deportation Order. This application is under consideration at present. In the meantime, the Deportation Order remains in place.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to the 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 e-mail service except in cases where the response from the INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Military Aircraft Landings

96. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 161 of 1 February 2017, if An Garda Síochána has no role in relation to the inspection of civilian aircraft transiting through Shannon Airport that are chartered to or on contract to the US military or to aircraft that have been known to have been associated with the US intelligence agency, the CIA; and if any such aircraft have been searched or investigated by An Garda Síochána at any time since September 2001. [6300/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The position in respect of the powers of search available to An Garda Síochána is based on detailed advice received from my predecessors from the Attorney General and has been elaborated in this House on many occasions in the past. As I stated to the Deputy in response to Question No. 161 of 1 February 2017, An Garda Síochána has no role in relation to the inspection of foreign State or military aircraft which, in accordance with international law, enjoy sovereign immunity.

It bears repeating that An Garda Síochána has statutory powers of search and entry available to it under various legislative provisions and these apply to civil aircraft as much as to any other type of private property. However, these powers may only be exercised in circumstances where a member of An Garda Síochána reasonably suspects that an offence has been or is being committed. Of course these powers must be exercised in accordance with law. The mere suggestion or assertion of wrongdoing would plainly not be sufficient in this regard.

It bears repeating also that it is the case that An Garda Síochána has previously investigated

a number of allegations made to it of unlawful activity at Irish airports and the Garda Authorities remain fully committed to investigate all alleged breaches of the criminal law, including alleged offences involving the use of aircraft at Shannon Airport or other Irish airports.

Magdalen Laundries

97. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the practices and procedures of the Magdalen redress scheme, in particular the criteria used for consideration and eligibility in the process; the status of the request for a centre (details supplied) to be included in the scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6301/17]

98. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the investigation by the Ombudsman into the administration of the Magdalen redress scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6302/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 97 and 98 together.

The Ombudsman has recently notified my Department that he is undertaking an investigation into complaints regarding the administration of the Scheme by the Department of Justice and Equality. My officials' understanding is that it relates to the inclusion of an institution that is not one of the 12 covered by Scheme. The Deputy will appreciate that it would not be appropriate for me to comment at this stage as to do so might serve to prejudice the respective ongoing consideration processes.

The Magdalen Laundries Restorative Justice Ex Gratia Scheme was set up following the publication of the report in February, 2013 of an Inter-Departmental Committee set up to establish the facts of the State's involvement with the Magdalen Laundries. It was chaired by then Senator Martin McAleese and it is commonly referred to as the McAleese report. The material in the Report relates to 10 different institutions which were run by 4 different Orders of nuns over a period of 70 years. Although there was no finding in the McAleese Report which indicated that the State had any liability in the matter, following the report's publication the Taoiseach issued a State apology to the women. Mr. Justice Quirke was asked by the Government to make recommendations on an appropriate redress scheme for those who were in the 10 Magdalen laundries that were the subject of the McAleese Report. The Government also included in the scheme the laundry that was attached to Stanhope Street Training School and later also decided to include a 12th institution, the Training School in Summerhill.

The centre named in the details supplied with one of the questions above is An Grianán Training Centre. Although located on the same complex as the Magdalen Laundry in High Park, i.e. one of those 12 named institutions, An Grianán was a separate institution in its own right. Its function was to rehabilitate teenage girls and provide education to prepare them for reintegration into society. It thus served a different purpose to that of the traditional Magdalen institutions which dated back to the 19th century and which were open to women of all ages. An Grianán Training Centre, officially established in 1971, had a separate legal status as a certified place of detention and an approved residential children's home. An Grianán is among the 130 institutions listed in the Schedule to the Residential Institutions Redress Act, 2002 and was therefore covered by the Residential Institutions Redress Board Scheme operated by the Department of Education and Skills.

Aside from An Grianán's own separate legal status and its different function to that of a Magdalen laundry, it should be further noted that the terms of the Scheme specifically exclude

institutions that are covered by the Residential Institutions Redress Board Scheme. This is to prevent a situation arising where an individual could receive compensation under two separate schemes for the same period of time spent in one institution.

I will take this opportunity to give some background to the operation of the Scheme. Each application is assessed on an individual basis taking into account any available records, documents and statements including the applicant's testimony. Processing of all applications under the Scheme operates on the premise that the testimony of the applicant is correct and the officers processing the application then seek to verify the application by checking appropriate records. If there are records and they are consistent with the application, then an offer is made. If there is a discrepancy, or in cases where the religious congregations have an incomplete or no record for an applicant, my officials must carry out a thorough examination, checking whatever records are available from other departments, agencies and institutions to support the application. The records of the religious congregations are not regarded as decisive; they are just one factor that is taken into consideration.

To date, over €25 million has been paid out to 669 women under the Scheme. The Scheme remains open to new applications but it is important to note that decisions have been made on all of the 819 applications made to date. The difference between that figure and the 669 payments made is accounted for by refusals and for other reasons including probate cases, applicants still considering provisional offers, and the application of the Assisted Decision Making Act, 2015 in relation to those women who lack the necessary capacity.

The Scheme provides for lump sum payments varying from €11,500 to €100,000 depending on the length of stay in the institution concerned. Further, each woman is entitled to a top-up payment to bring her weekly income from the Irish State up to the equivalent of the Irish Contributory Pension in recognition of the fact that they were not paid for the work they did while in the laundries.

Moreover, the Redress for Women Resident in Certain Institutions Act 2015 provided for certain services to be made available by the Health Service Executive (HSE) to the women. The services, which are free of charge, include GP services, prescribed drugs, medicines, aids and appliances, dental, ophthalmic and aural services, home support, home nursing, counselling services, chiropody, podiatry and physiotherapy. The HSE has administrative arrangements in place for health and social services for women living outside Ireland.

Immigrant Investor Programme Data

99. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the investment funds for which applications under the immigrant investor programme have been approved to date; the investment funds for which such applications have been refused; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6309/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I have been informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service of my Department that currently there are three Funds approved by the Central Bank from which applications will be accepted to the Immigrant Investor Programme (IIP). The Funds are the Kylin Investment Fund, the Irish Diaspora Loan Fund and the Bartra Capital Property ICAV. All applications received from these three Funds to date have been accepted and approved by the independent evaluation committee.

The Deputy may wish to note that a minimum investment of €1.0 million in an Approved

Investment Fund is required for an application to the IIP. The money invested in the fund must be committed for a minimum of three years and must be invested in a manner consistent with the IIP Programme objectives, in other words relating to investments that would, if made by an individual applicant on their own behalf, be likely to qualify under the programme.

All funds have to be invested in Ireland and must represent equity stakes in Irish registered companies that are not quoted on any stock exchange. The funds and fund managers must be regulated by the Central Bank to conduct business in Ireland.

Direct Provision System

100. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the progress being made on her commitment in February 2015 to allow asylum seekers living in direct provision to have their complaints independently examined by the Ombudsman and the Ombudsman for Children in line with the recommendations of the 2015 working group report, Improvements to the Protection Process, including direct provision and supports to asylum seekers; her views on the lack of action on this commitment in principle and the timeline of actions for ensuring that children living in direct provision have access to the services of the Ombudsman; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6335/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): The extension of the role of the Ombudsman and the Ombudsman for Children to persons resident in State provided accommodation is currently at an advanced stage following the conclusion of consultations with the Office of the Attorney General. I expect to make a more formal announcement on this issue shortly and that both offices will begin the roll out of information programmes immediately thereafter.

Garda Resources

101. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to upgrade facilities to enable the better delivery of services by An Garda Síochána (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6338/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will appreciate, decisions in relation to the provision and allocation of Garda equipment and resources are a matter for the Garda Commissioner and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter.

I am, however, informed by the Garda authorities that there are 25 Garda Stations in the Cavan/Monaghan Division, 21 which have direct access to PULSE. The members attached to the non-networked stations have 24 hour access to the Garda Information Services Centre (GISC) which has a direct feed into the PULSE system.

The Deputy will be aware that the Commissioner launched the Garda Síochána Modernisation and Renewal Programme 2016-2021 in June 2016 and that this Programme is intended to professionalise, modernise and renew An Garda Síochána to ensure that the organisation can meet present and future challenges. As part of the Programme, the matter of enhancing rural access to the Garda network by connecting non-networked sites to the network is being examined. This includes plans to introduce mobile technology solutions to enable operational Gardaí to access core information systems, including PULSE, while on duty and away from Garda stations.

Commissions of Inquiry

102. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of commissions of inquiry or other formal investigations or inquiries being conducted in her Department; the name of these; the date they were established; the expected date the work is intended to be completed; the cost incurred to date; the estimated final cost; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6362/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I can inform the Deputy that there is currently one Commission of Investigation ongoing in my Department. The MacLochlainn Commission of Investigation was established under SI No. 346 of 2014 to investigate the fatal shooting of Mr Ronan MacLochlainn by members of the Garda Síochána in May 1998 in Ashford, Co Wicklow. The establishment of the Commission was proposed in settlement talks on a case taken by Mr MacLochlainn's partner, Ms Grainne Nic-Gibb, to the European Court of Human Rights. The Court struck out the case on foot of this proposal. Ms Mary Rose Gearty, SC, is Sole Member of the Commission and the total expenditure incurred to date is €1.153m.

On 16 May 2016 one person who is identified in the Commission's final report brought an application to the High Court seeking a direction pursuant to Section 35(1)(b) of the Commissions of Investigation Act 2004 that the report be amended before it is submitted to the Minister. The submission of the Commission's final report to the Minister must await the determination of this court application. Final costs of this Commission must await the decision on the application which is before the High Court.

Student Visas Applications

103. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if a student applying for a study visa for Ireland must prove that they have €7,000 in their own bank account or simply access to €7,000 through a sponsor's bank account; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6376/17]

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 all non-EEA students seeking to pursue a full time course of studies in Ireland are required to show that they can support their stay in Ireland without recourse to public funds.

An applicant must show evidence of having immediate access to at least €7,000 to meet living costs. Circumstances where a sponsor, such as a family member, show that they have the required money and will make it available to the student can be taken into consideration when assessing this aspect of the application. The student must also show, in each subsequent year, that the student and/or sponsor(s) have ready access to at least €7,000 in addition to course fees for each of those years.

The INIS website contains comprehensive guidelines to assist the applicant with the application process. The documentation needed for each application type can be found by choosing the appropriate visa option on the web page: <http://www.inis.gov.ie/en/INIS/Pages/Apply%20for%20a%20visa>. It should be noted however that the information contained on the website is for guidance purposes only, and does not limit the discretion of the Visa Officer in dealing with individual applications. Therefore, all information that an applicant wishes to have taken into consideration should be included when an application is submitted.

The Deputy may wish to note that queries 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 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.

In addition, members of the public may themselves e-mail queries directly to INIS (visa-mail@justice.ie).

Garda Vetting Applications

104. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality her views on a matter (details supplied) regarding Garda vetting procedures; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6380/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Deputy will appreciate that the primary purpose of the Garda National Vetting Bureau is to seek to ensure the safety of children and vulnerable adults and it is carried out by An Garda Síochána primarily in accordance with the provisions of the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012-2016.

Vetting checks are conducted by the Garda National Vetting Bureau for each new vetting application received to ensure that the most recent data available is taken into account. This is because once there has been any significant lapse of time between one employment and another, the original Vetting Disclosure must be reviewed to take account of any changes in information, such as more recent criminal convictions. Furthermore, the Data Protection Acts require that any sensitive personal data which employers use in regard to their employees must be current, accurate and up-to-date. Importantly, the general non-transferability and contemporaneous nature of the current process also helps to protect against the risk of fraud or forgery in the process.

I am pleased to inform that Deputy that at present, 80% of overall vetting applications are being processed by the National Vetting Bureau in five working days. This efficiency in vetting has been achieved by the deployment of the e-Vetting system which facilitates the on-line processing of applications for vetting from registered organisations. 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. In circumstances where has been such a sustained reduction in processing times, the issue of vetting "transferability" is very largely obviated. There are certain limited circumstances where organisations can share a single vetting disclosure where this is agreed to by the vetting applicant. Section 12(3)(A) of the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012 (as amended) provides that two or more relevant organisations can enter into a joint written agreement in relation to the employment, contracting, permitting or placement of an person to undertake relevant work or activities thereby providing for only one of the organisations being required to conduct vetting in respect of that person.

Policing Co-operation

105. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 102 of 25 January 2017, the reason the question of her seeking to have the Pitchford inquiry's terms of reference extended such that Ireland is included in that inquiry does not arise (details supplied). [6397/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I refer the Deputy to my previous answers to a number of recent Questions on this issue. As I have stated previously, the UK's Undercover Policing Inquiry was established by the UK Government in 2015 to investigate and to report on the undercover police operations conducted by English and Welsh police forces in England and Wales since 1968. It is chaired by Lord Justice Pitchford. As the Deputy will appreciate, the establishment of the inquiry and its terms of reference were and are matters solely for the UK Government in accordance with UK law. It is my understanding that representations seeking the extension of the inquiry's terms of reference outside England and Wales were made and the UK Home Secretary decided that the terms of reference of the inquiry would not be so amended.

While the issue of my requesting the extension of a UK inquiry does not arise, as I have indicated to the House previously should anything emerge from the findings of the UK's Undercover Policing Inquiry that would be relevant to policing in this jurisdiction I will consider it fully and take any action that may be required.

Universal Social Charge Application

106. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance the rationale for retired public sector workers on pre-1995 contracts having to pay USC which may see them less well off than their counterparts on post-1995 contracts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6155/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Universal Social Charge (USC) was introduced in Budget 2011 to replace the Income Levy and Health Levy. It was a necessary measure to widen the tax base, remove poverty traps and maintain revenue to reduce the budget deficit. It is a more sustainable charge than those it replaced and is applied at a low rate on a wide base. However, the base for USC does not include payments made by the Department of Social Protection, including the State pension.

As the Deputy may be aware, the USC was reviewed by my Department in 2011 and the issue of USC applying to occupational pensions of retired public service who entered the public service before April 1995 was examined as part of that review. Such individuals are (or were) liable to modified rate PRSI, which does not generate an entitlement to the State Pension. In retirement therefore they receive an occupational pension only, and do not receive a separate State Pension unless as a result of PRSI contributions made in another employment during their working life.

It was decided not to exempt the occupational pensions of these individuals from the USC charge as an exemption would be very costly and difficult to achieve, and it could involve all income earners with the equivalent income benefiting from the exemption. In addition, it would also undermine the principle of the USC being applied to income with few exceptions.

However, as a result of the review of the USC, in Budget 2012 the entry threshold to USC was increased from €4,004 to €10,036 per annum, and the threshold was subsequently increased further in Budgets 2015 and 2016, to the current threshold of €13,000. This exemption threshold equalises the position for single individuals whose sole source of income is the State Contributory Pension with Public Service pensioners whose pension is at an equivalent level. It is estimated that over 700,000 income earners will not be liable to USC from 2017.

Furthermore, the current Government has committed to continuing the process of phasing out the USC in future Budgets, with a particular focus on low and middle-income earners, sub-

ject to having the required fiscal space.

Hotel and Catering Industry

107. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance if he is satisfied regarding the amount of working capital available to the hotel and catering industry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6389/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy is aware, small and medium sized businesses, including those in the hotel and catering industry, 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 may be aware, section 3.5 (Ensuring Finance for Growth) of the Action Plan for Jobs 2017 (APJ) sets 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.

In line with Action 62 of the APJ 2017, officials from my Department will collate and examine 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.

In terms of monitoring the requirements for SMEs, my Department commissions biannual surveys to ascertain the demand for credit by SMEs. This survey series, most recently conducted by Behaviour and Attitudes on behalf of my Department, is the most comprehensive survey of SME credit demand in Ireland, covering 1,500 respondents and involving over 6,000 direct telephone calls to SMEs. SMEs of all sizes trading in all sectors, excluding property development and speculative activities, are included. The survey covers demand for credit from both bank and non-bank sources.

I would draw the Deputy's attention to the most recently published Department of Finance SME Credit Demand Survey covering the April to September 2016, which can be found at www.finance.gov.ie. The results of this survey 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 22% of SMEs in the Hotel and Restaurant sector requested bank finance in the previous six months down from 34% in September 2015.

Purchases, replacement or lease of new vehicle/equipment is now provided as the main reason for applying for bank finance with 29% stating this is why they requested bank finance. Working capital/cash flow requirements were provided as the second highest reason for applying for bank finance with 27% of respondents stating that they required finance for this purpose. When asked about sources of finance for working capital, internal funds/retained earnings were

the main finance source of working capital with 73% of working capital coming from this source (up 6%). The survey also showed continued positive trends in terms of trading performance, profitability and employment.

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 participants in the SME sector to reach their full potential in terms of growth and employment generation.

Illicit Trade in Fuel and Tobacco Products

108. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Finance the reason the number of seizures of illicit cigarettes and tobacco has dropped 16% from 7,154 seizures in 2015 to 6,024 in 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6147/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am assured by Revenue that action against illegal activity involving tobacco products is a central element of their work and that significant successes continue to be made in tackling this illegal trade. They have advised me that, in 2016, 6,100[1] tobacco seizures were made which resulted in approximately 44.5m cigarettes and 1,500kgs of tobacco being seized by Revenue. The quantities of cigarettes and other tobacco products seized and data on the number of tobacco seizures made by Revenue in the years 2012 2016 are shown in Table below.

Year	Quantity of seized cigarettes	Quantity of other tobacco KGs	Number of Tobacco seizures
2012	95,604,730	5,277	9,503
2013	40,844,800	4,203	6,888
2014	53,445,350	9,824	6,866
2015	67,917,500	2,364	7,154
2016	44,563,810	1,526	6,100

The table demonstrates that while Revenue continues to prioritise enforcement action in this area and has maintained the level of resources allocated to this activity, the volumes seized and the number of seizures can vary significantly. This occurs because smugglers are constantly looking for new ways to avoid detection, and adapt their operations in response to seizures by Revenue and other law enforcement agencies internationally. Seizure statistics are also very variable because of the effect of individual very large seizures on annual data. Revenue continually reviews the ways in which it acts against this illegal activity, to ensure detection and seizure of illicit cigarettes and to carefully monitor trends and patterns in the illicit trade so that the response can be adjusted accordingly.

Revenue advise me that the same factors that impact seizure quantities also affect the number of seizures and that there has been no reduction in the level of checking undertaken at ports and airports. There has been a reduction in the number of detections made at Irish airports in 2016, but this mirrors a similar pattern experienced in a number of other airports in other jurisdictions including the United Kingdom and reflects a shift in the pattern of tobacco smuggling of the kind referred to above as smugglers react to high levels of seizures in airports in particular.

In terms of assessing the overall performance in tackling illegal tobacco, a reliable measure is the IPSOS/MRBI surveys of illicit tobacco conducted for Revenue and the National Tobacco Control Office. The surveys indicate that in 2015 12% of cigarette consumption was illicit, up from 11% in 2014 but down on 2011 and 2012 levels, of 15% and 13% respectively.

[1] Headline figures published in January 2017 noted 6,024 seizures in 2016. This information was provided before year end and has since been revised to reflect the total number of seizures for 2016.

Ministerial Meetings

109. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Finance if he had any meetings with private or third party investors that have proposals to invest in social or affordable housing; the date of the meetings; and the details of the proposals discussed. [6173/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): In an effort to provide the Deputy with a thorough reply, this question has been considered more widely than just meetings which I attended, to also include those meetings attended by officials from my Department.

Every effort has been made to identify meetings relevant to the Deputy's question, and the timeframe used as the basis for identifying these meetings is 1 March 2016 to 31 January 2017.

Please see the below list retrieved from our records of identified relevant meetings that occurred during the aforementioned timeframe. The Deputy should note that the Regulation of Lobbying Act 2015 requires firms to record all lobbying approaches made by them to Government Departments and Agencies and may provide details of approaches by firms which were not recorded by sections within the Department.

Date	Department Attendees	Stakeholder	Purpose
07/04/2016	Officials from Shareholder Management Unit	Irish League of Credit Unions	A Proposal for Irish credit unions to fund the provision of social housing
08/04/2016	Officials from Shareholder Management Unit	Credit Union Development Association (CUDA)	Review of progress of CUDA Social Housing Finance Initiative
13/04/2016	Officials from Shareholder Management Unit	Irish League of Credit Unions	A Proposal for Irish credit unions to fund the provision of social housing
29/06/2016	Officials from Banking Division.	Allsop Ireland	Presentation on social/affordable housing proposal.
11/08/2016	Officials from Shareholder Management Unit	WK Nowlan Real Estate Advisors	Discussions re social and affordable housing
05/09/2016	Officials from Shareholder Management Unit	WK Nowlan Real Estate Advisors	Discussions re. social and affordable housing

Date	Department Attendees	Stakeholder	Purpose
28/09/2016	Minister. Officials from Shareholder Management Unit	Cairn Homes	Discussion on measures to promote affordable house building
18/10/2016	Minister of State Officials from Banking Division.	Cairn Homes	Discussion on measures to promote affordable house building
01/12/2016	Officials from Shareholder Management Unit	WK Nowlan Real Estate Advisors	Discussions re. social and affordable housing
Throughout 2016	During 2016 officials from the Shareholder Management Unit met an entity called Arizun to hear their ideas around leasing units to LA's for social housing purposes	ARIZUN	Discussions re. social and affordable housing

NAMA Operations

110. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance when NAMA began to use section 110 status with regard to the tax payment of €158 million by NAMA to the Revenue Commissioners and in view of the prohibition of section 110 status in relation to mortgages related to Irish property; the rationale for using this status; if the organisation used this status in joint enterprise with any private entities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6245/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): NAMA's tax affairs, and the legal structures it utilises to carry out its mandate, are a matter for NAMA to determine within the perimeter of its mandate and applicable law, including tax law. As we know the establishment of Section 110 companies is completely legal as it is permitted under Irish law and tax codes. As we also know, this House recently moved to change legislation governing the tax treatment of certain activities carried out within Section 110 companies.

In 2009, prior to passing the NAMA Act and prior to the establishment of NAMA, as part of the efforts of the Government of the time in planning for NAMA, Section 110 company structures were evaluated, considered and adopted as being central to ensuring tax neutrality and respecting the tax equivalent treatment of NAMA as a commercial body.

In 2010, resulting from this planning, NAMA established its Group structure which included a number of Section 110 companies. I am advised that the proposed structure was first presented to the NAMA Board in February 2010 and was formally approved by the Board in June 2010. The Revenue Commissioners were informed of the proposed structure in 2010 and raised no objection to it.

It is important to note that NAMA's use of Section 110 structures is not new information. NAMA has repeatedly and publicly disclosed its utilisation of SPVs, which include Section 110 structures, in its Annual Reports. The C and AG has also been aware of NAMA's use of Section 110 company structures since NAMA's inception. In October 2010, the C and AG published its Special Report entitled "National Asset Management Agency - Acquisition of Bank Assets."

Appendix E within this report outlines in detail NAMA's Group Structure and its use of Section 110 Companies. It also contains a detailed description of the principal tax benefits that accrue to a qualifying Section 110 company. This report is publically available at : https://www.nama.ie/fileadmin/user_upload/SpecialReportNAMAAcquisitionOfBankAssetsOct2010.pdf.

NAMA's accounts have been audited, since inception, by the C and AG and filed with Revenue and reflect activity by NAMA that is, and has been, operating in full compliance with the tax code. Following the change that we, as a legislature, made to the tax law governing Section 110 companies last year, NAMA paid €158 million to the Revenue Commissioners as a preliminary tax payment to reflect its expected tax obligations under this new tax regime. Thus, NAMA has always and continues to act in accordance with tax law. Through this payment, NAMA is now simply moving, as would be expected, to operate in line with the recent change to tax legislation.

Under Section 214 of the NAMA Act, NAMA, the Agency - which owns 49% of the NAMA Group companies, is exempt from income tax, corporation tax and capital gains tax. NAMA Group companies, which contain all of the assets, liabilities and activities of NAMA, do not benefit from such an exemption and are tax-equivalent to any other market operator.

The tax exemption of the NAMA Agency does not adversely affect the Exchequer given that any surplus generated by the NAMA Group companies will accrue to the NAMA Agency and will vest in the State on a tax neutral basis.

The purpose of utilising Section 110 companies was to ensure that there was no unnecessary cash leakage from within the NAMA Group. This is no different to any other market operator. In NAMA's case, this was particularly important given the need to redeem guaranteed senior debt expeditiously and also the need to apply available cashflow to fund development projects ultimately intended to preserve and enhance the State's return from acquired assets, as required by Section 10 of the NAMA Act. Under an alternative tax regime, the amounts applied by NAMA towards debt redemption and development funding may well have been different.

I would also point out to the Deputy that all NAMA proceeds, whether through tax payments or a dividend surplus at dissolution, are ultimately destined to be transferred to the State.

I am advised that some NAMA entities are minority shareholders in a limited number of investments. NAMA is a passive investor and has no active management role or controlling interest in these structures. The corporate structures relating to NAMA's minority interests are ultimately a matter for the investment vehicle managers and/or directors. I am further advised that, in any event, the investment vehicles in which NAMA has an interest have not, to NAMA's knowledge, availed of the Section 110 tax exemptions.

Departmental Meetings

111. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 335 of 17 January 2017, when a response will issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6246/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The information requested has now been compiled and I expect that a response will issue this week.

Ministerial Meetings

112. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Finance if he has met with financial institutions or other third parties to discuss proposals for long-term leasing arrangements between local authorities and financial institutions as a means of providing social or affordable housing; and the names of the institutions he has met, the date of the meetings and type of the proposals under discussion. [6276/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy will be aware, responsibility for housing policy generally, and the Government's housing action plan, "Rebuilding Ireland", is under the remit of my colleague the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government. It is within that context that discussions on proposals for leasing arrangements would take place. On this basis I advise the Deputy that this question may be more appropriately addressed by the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government.

Tax Reliefs Application

113. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Finance if he will consider extending a specific tax concession as announced in the recent budget (details supplied) to sporting organisations. [6305/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I assume the Deputy is referring to the tax relief available on certain income from the long term leasing of agricultural land under Section 664 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997, which was amended and extended in Budget 2015. The relief is available, subject to a maximum limit, where farm land is leased to a qualifying lessee for a period of 5 years or more.

The 2014 Agri-Taxation Review found that long-term leasing has a number of advantages over the more traditional conacre system and it recommended the continuation and enhancement of measures to assist in rebalancing the market in its favour, including the amendments brought forward to this tax incentive. This tax relief has a very specific policy aim of accelerating land mobility and productivity through making additional agricultural land available to farmers on a medium to long term basis for husbandry purposes.

There are a number of specific criteria that must be met in order to qualify for this relief, including the use of the land itself, that the lease must be completed in writing, it must run for a minimum of 5 years, and that it cannot be made between connected parties. The incentive is targeted and designed to achieve a specific policy objective in terms of making more land available for husbandry and therefore increased agricultural production. Extending the relief such that it was available for the leasing of agricultural land to sporting organisations, would have no impact on the achievement of the socio-economic objectives for which the exemption was designed, and could potentially, lead to circumvention of the original policy intention.

Customs and Excise Controls

114. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the number of visits by Customs and Excise officers to Casement Aerodrome in each of the years 2013 to 2016 and to date in 2017; the number of those visits that were not notified in advance to the owners, officials and staff of the location; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6306/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by Revenue that a decision on whether to undertake a visit to or an intervention at an aerodrome is dictated by Revenue's

assessment of risk, having regard to a range of factors, including intelligence. Where visits or interventions are undertaken, there is no prior notification of same.

The necessity for and frequency of compliance visits to any particular aerodrome is kept under ongoing review. Having regard to the risk assessment undertaken by Revenue, no such visits were undertaken by Revenue for the years concerned or to date in 2017.

Commissions of Inquiry

115. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Finance the number of commissions of inquiries or other formal investigations or inquiries being conducted in his Department; the name of these; the date they were established; the expected date the work is intended to be completed; the cost incurred to date; the estimated final cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6358/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): There are no Commissions of Investigation for which I am the responsible Minister pursuant to the Commissions of Investigation Act 2004 or other equivalent formal investigations or inquiries being conducted in the Department of Finance at present.

Brexit Issues

116. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Finance if issues referred to by a person (details supplied) at a Westminster committee in relation to border controls and the imposition of same should Britain leave the EU have been discussed at the EU Council of Finance Ministers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6374/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Since the referendum outcome, I have met with my EU counterparts at the ECOFIN and Eurogroup meetings on a regular basis. In line with the agreement at EU level that there will be no negotiations until the UK has triggered Article 50, the matter was not discussed at these meetings. On the margins of these meetings however, while fully respecting the principle of no negotiations, I have taken the opportunity in exchanges with partners (as have other Government Ministers) to underline Ireland's unique relationship with the UK and our specific concerns in relation to Northern Ireland, North-South relations, the Common Travel Area and the interconnectedness of our trade.

The Government's position is very clear in that we want the closest possible trading relationship with the UK. As articulated by the Taoiseach, any manifestation of a hard border would have very negative consequences. In that regard a key priority is to ensure the continued free flow of trade on the island and the need to avoid a hard border.

Education and Training Provision

117. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of tourism and hospitality skills training positions allocated to counties Meath and Westmeath in 2015 and 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6278/17]

118. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the agency or Government body which has oversight and responsibility for hospitality and tourism skills development policy here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6281/17]

129. **Deputy Regina Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of tourism and hospitality skills training positions that were allocated to the Meath East constituency in 2015 and 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6210/17]

130. **Deputy Regina Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount of funding that was allocated to the Meath East constituency for tourism and hospitality skills training in 2015 and 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6211/17]

142. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount of funding allocated to counties Meath and Westmeath for tourism and hospitality skills training by his Department in 2015 and 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6280/17]

145. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of training positions in respect of hospitality skills allocated to Kildare North since 2015 to date in 2017; the amount of funding allocated to this area in respect of training; the body with which responsibility lies for hospitality and tourism skills development policy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6286/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 117, 118, 129, 130, 142 and 145 together.

My Department has overall responsibility for policy development for education and training provision across the economy including the hospitality and tourism sector. There are no plans to re-establish a dedicated training organisation for the sector, but rather to deliver the required education and training through the mainstream higher and further education and training sectors, in line with provision for other sectors.

The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGSFN) carried out a study on the future skills needs of the sector and the report of the study was published in November 2015. The objective was to assess demand arising within the sector in Ireland including hotels, restaurants, bars, canteens and catering over the period to 2020. The aim was to ensure that there will be the right supply of skills to help drive domestic hospitality sector business and employment growth. The report provides a clear and coherent framework for the development of talent in the hospitality sector in the years ahead to help drive both hospitality business and employment growth which is one of the key goals of the Government's Tourism Policy Statement – People, Place and Policy-Growing Tourism to 2025.

The Study assesses skills demand at all NFQ levels, with a particular focus on career progression opportunities for those at lower skilled levels to help fill anticipated job openings. The report provides a set of recommendations designed to address the skills requirements of the sector over the period to 2020. A key recommendation in the report was the need to set up of a National Oversight and Advisory Group comprising all the key hospitality stakeholders.

Following on this recommendation, the Hospitality Skills Oversight Group was established early last year, chaired by SOLAS for the first year. To date the group has held seven meetings.

Membership of the Group includes the Restaurant Association of Ireland, the Irish Hotel Federation, Irish Hospitality Institute, Licensed Vintners Association, Vintners Federation of Ireland, Fáilte Ireland, Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, Department of Education and Skills, Department of Social Protection, Higher Education Authority, Skillnets, SOLAS, ETBs, IoTs, DIT and Quality and Qualifications Ireland.

The role of the Group is to monitor progress on the implementation of the recommendations of the EGSFN and to provide a forum for on-going collaboration in addressing the skills needs of the sector and to identify and progress actions to overcome barriers on its implementation.

The Group plan to publish a progress report later this year. To date work has been undertaken on careers promotion via a range of fora, the launch of the *Tourism Insight* online programme – aimed at promoting careers in tourism and hospitality with particular reference to transition year and Youthreach participants. Audits of both higher and further education facilities and courses are underway as well as the establishment of a Restaurant and Hospitality Skillnet which aims to address key skills requirements of restaurants and catering companies to help drive the domestic hospitality sector, employment growth, talent attraction and retention.

Funded through the National Training Fund by my Department, the network plans to design tailored programmes covering all aspects of the restaurant, food and beverage industry to SMEs nationally, with a particular focus on career progression for those at lower skilled levels to help fill anticipated job openings and increase retention levels within the sector and is well placed to address key recommendations of the EGFSN 2015 Report on the Future Skills.

Last week, I launched the 2016-2020 Action Plan to expand Apprenticeship and Traineeship in Ireland, setting out how state agencies, education and training providers and employers will work together to deliver on the Programme for Government commitments on the expansion of apprenticeship and traineeship in the period to 2020. The Plan sets out how we will manage the pipeline of new apprenticeships already established through the first call for proposals in 2015 and also commits to a new call for apprenticeship proposals later this year, to provide for the needs of all sectors, including hospitality and tourism.

Over the lifetime of the Action Plan, 50,000 people will be registered on apprenticeship and traineeship programmes representing a doubling of current activity.

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 later this year. The Apprenticeship Council also recently approved development funding for a separate proposal to develop a Chef de Partie Apprenticeship. The Apprenticeship Council will continue to work with the proposers of these new programmes to develop them into sustainable apprenticeships that can be delivered on a nationwide basis. The funding for planned and forecast expansion in 2017 will see an additional €20 million provided.

In 2015 a new Career Traineeship initiative was begun by SOLAS in collaboration with ETBs and enterprise to develop a more effective model of work-based learning, primarily at NFQ levels 4 and 5, incorporating best national and international research and practice. Networks of Employers have been created to facilitate partnerships between ETBs and employers in identifying training needs, designing the training programmes, recruitment of learners and delivery of the training on and off the job. The Career Traineeship model of work-based learning is currently being piloted with the Hospitality and Engineering sectors, with the involvement of seven ETBs.

Given the breadth and range of programmes within the Further Education and Training (FET) sector, it is not possible to provide details of funding and places on a county by county basis across specific sectoral provision. However, one way in which Solas classify FET provision is by the career areas which it serves. The following table on provision in the FET sector shows the total number of beneficiaries in the career areas of Food and Beverage and Tourism in each of the sixteen Education and Training Boards for 2015 along with that planned for 2016. As yet, final 2016 figures are not available.

While it is not possible to give details of expenditure at the level of career areas, the scale of total investment in FET and the numbers served on both a full and part time basis are also included in the table.

In relation to the number of tourism and hospitality skills training positions within the higher education sector in 2015 and 2016 and the amount of funding allocated for tourism and hospitality skills training in the same years, it is not possible to give a breakdown by county as students can apply for courses throughout the country, through the CAO application process. However, the following table on provision in the higher education sector gives a breakdown outlining the number of training positions and the total estimated funding allocated which is categorised by each individual Institute.

In 2015 the total number of student in higher education courses in this sector was 8,220 with estimated funding allocated of approx. €47.4 million and in 2016 the total number of student for the sector was 8,033 with estimated funding allocated of approx. €48.4m. The funding detailed in this response includes an estimation of grants allocated to these courses, student contribution and free fees. The student numbers are calculated as full time equivalents (FTE) which includes part time and full time student counts.

This analysis of the higher education sector includes all courses within the following categories:

- Tourism/Hotel/Leisure/Event
- Hospitality and Culinary
- Heritage and Cultural

I also understand that a limited amount of complementary tourism-related business development and training supports are provided by Fáilte Ireland, the agency responsible for encouraging, promoting and supporting tourism as a leading indigenous component of the Irish economy. However, I have no role or responsibility in relation to Fáilte Ireland. Matters relating to that agency and its training and business supports are matters for my colleague, the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport.

Summary of 2015-2016 Tourism and Hospitality Courses Higher Education Sector

Institute	2015		2016			Total
	Student No's	Amount €	Student No's	Amount €	Student No's	Total Amount €
AIT	427	2,538,000	384	2,477,000	811	5,015,000
ITB	231	1,541,000	223	1,541,000	454	3,082,000
ITC	109	730,000	143	910,000	252	1,640,000
CIT	896	5,161,000	885	5,261,000	1781	10,422,000
DKIT	450	2,272,000	462	2,521,000	912	4,793,000
DIT	2482	14,143,000	2471	14,085,000	4953	28,228,000
DLIADT	21	10,000	56	21,000	77	31,000
GMIT	1130	6,051,000	1065	5,934,000	2195	11,985,000
LYIT	219	1,475,000	203	1,455,000	422	2,930,000
LIT (incl LIT Tipp)	447	2,657,000	438	3,015,000	885	5,672,000
ITS	331	1,746,000	301	1,696,000	632	3,442,000
ITTD	241	1,573,000	270	1,861,000	511	3,434,000
ITTR	649	3,844,000	596	4,129,000	1245	7,973,000
WIT	587	3,667,000	536	3,560,000	1123	7,227,000

Questions - Written Answers

Institute	2015		2016			Total
Total	8220	47,408,000	8033	48,468,000	16,253	95,874,000

Summary of 2015-2016 Tourism and Hospitality Courses FET Sector

-	-	-	2015		2016
					Inputs
ETB	Skill Cluster	Provision type	Total Actuals		Total Pro-jected
CAVAN AND MONAGHAN ETB	Food and Beverage	Total FULL TIME PRO-VISION	94		114
		Total PART TIME PRO-VISION	222		162
		Total COM-MUNITY EDUCA-TION	33		0
		Total PRO-VISION	349		276
	Tourism	Total FULL TIME PRO-VISION	90		127
		Total PART TIME PRO-VISION	9		0
		Total COM-MUNITY EDUCA-TION	0		0
		Total PRO-VISION	99		127
CITY OF DUBLIN ETB	Food and Beverage	Total FULL TIME PRO-VISION	244		368
		Total PART TIME PRO-VISION	47		50
		Total COM-MUNITY EDUCA-TION	0		0
		Total PRO-VISION	291		418
	Tourism	Total FULL TIME PRO-VISION	1269		685

-	-	-	2015		2016
		Total PART TIME PROVISION	0		3
		Total COMMUNITY EDUCATION	0		0
		Total PROVISION	1269		688
CORK ETB	Food and Beverage	Total FULL TIME PROVISION	366		422
		Total PART TIME PROVISION	43		36
		Total COMMUNITY EDUCATION	24		0
		Total PROVISION	433		458
	Tourism	Total FULL TIME PROVISION	763		524
		Total PART TIME PROVISION	0		40
		Total COMMUNITY EDUCATION	0		0
		Total PROVISION	763		564
DONEGAL ETB	Food and Beverage	Total FULL TIME PROVISION	0		0
		Total PART TIME PROVISION	0		0
		Total COMMUNITY EDUCATION	32		8
		Total PROVISION	32		8
	Tourism	Total FULL TIME PROVISION	95		0

Questions - Written Answers

-	-	-	2015		2016
		Total PART TIME PROVISION	0		0
		Total COMMUNITY EDUCATION	0		0
		Total PROVISION	95		0
DUBLIN AND DUNLAOGHAIRE ETB	Food and Beverage	Total FULL TIME PROVISION	3		46
		Total PART TIME PROVISION	56		28
		Total COMMUNITY EDUCATION	0		0
		Total PROVISION	59		74
	Tourism	Total FULL TIME PROVISION	119		269
		Total PART TIME PROVISION	0		65
		Total COMMUNITY EDUCATION	22		0
		Total PROVISION	141		334
GALWAY AND ROSCOMMON ETB	Food and Beverage	Total FULL TIME PROVISION	0		21
		Total PART TIME PROVISION	65		176
		Total COMMUNITY EDUCATION	0		0
		Total PROVISION	65		197

-	-	-	2015		2016
	Tourism	Total FULL TIME PROVISION	0		74
		Total PART TIME PROVISION	30		73
		Total COMMUNITY EDUCATION	0		
		Total PROVISION	30		147
KERRY ETB	Food and Beverage	Total FULL TIME PROVISION	56		94
		Total PART TIME PROVISION	20		20
		Total COMMUNITY EDUCATION	0		0
		Total PROVISION	76		114
	Tourism	Total FULL TIME PROVISION	31		164
		Total PART TIME PROVISION	0		0
		Total COMMUNITY EDUCATION	0		80
		Total PROVISION	31		244
KILDARE AND WICKLOW ETB	Food and Beverage	Total FULL TIME PROVISION	27		144
		Total PART TIME PROVISION	42		105
		Total COMMUNITY EDUCATION	10		8
		Total PROVISION	79		257

Questions - Written Answers

-	-	-	2015		2016
	Tourism	Total FULL TIME PROVISION	93		122
		Total PART TIME PROVISION	29		54
		Total COMMUNITY EDUCATION	0		0
		Total PROVISION	122		176
KILKENNY AND CARLOW ETB	Food and Beverage	Total FULL TIME PROVISION			0
		Total PART TIME PROVISION	42		54
		Total COMMUNITY EDUCATION	192		111
		Total PROVISION	234		165
	Tourism	Total FULL TIME PROVISION	0		47
		Total PART TIME PROVISION	9		0
		Total COMMUNITY EDUCATION	0		0
		Total PROVISION	9		47
LAOIS AND OFFALY ETB	Food and Beverage	Total FULL TIME PROVISION			23
		Total PART TIME PROVISION	17		121
		Total COMMUNITY EDUCATION	182		25

-	-	-	2015		2016
		Total PRO- VISION	199		169
	Tourism	Total FULL TIME PRO- VISION	0		0
		Total PART TIME PRO- VISION	13		36
		Total COM- MUNITY EDUCA- TION	0		0
		Total PRO- VISION	13		36
LIMERICK AND CLARE ETB	Food and Beverage	Total FULL TIME PRO- VISION	127		186
		Total PART TIME PRO- VISION	178		158
		Total COM- MUNITY EDUCA- TION	0		0
		Total PRO- VISION	305		344
	Tourism	Total FULL TIME PRO- VISION	151		147
		Total PART TIME PRO- VISION	0		0
		Total COM- MUNITY EDUCA- TION	0		0
		Total PRO- VISION	151		147
LONGFORD AND WEST- MEATH ETB	Food and Beverage	Total FULL TIME PRO- VISION	18		44
		Total PART TIME PRO- VISION	45		0

Questions - Written Answers

-	-	-	2015		2016
		Total COM- MUNITY EDUCA- TION	0		0
		Total PRO- VISION	63		44
	Tourism	Total FULL TIME PRO- VISION	40		147
		Total PART TIME PRO- VISION	0		0
		Total COM- MUNITY EDUCA- TION	0		0
		Total PRO- VISION	40		147
LOUTH AND MEATH ETB	Food and Beverage	Total FULL TIME PRO- VISION	58		155
		Total PART TIME PRO- VISION	0		0
		Total COM- MUNITY EDUCA- TION	0		0
		Total PRO- VISION	58		155
	Tourism	Total FULL TIME PRO- VISION	93		40
		Total PART TIME PRO- VISION	0		48
		Total COM- MUNITY EDUCA- TION	0		0
		Total PRO- VISION	93		88
MAYO, SLIGO AND LEITRIM ETB	Food and Beverage	Total FULL TIME PRO- VISION	110		127

-	-	-	2015		2016
		Total PART TIME PROVISION	76		172
		Total COMMUNITY EDUCATION	86		0
		Total PROVISION	272		299
	Tourism	Total FULL TIME PROVISION	168		197
		Total PART TIME PROVISION	0		15
		Total COMMUNITY EDUCATION	0		0
		Total PROVISION	168		212
TIPPERARY ETB	Food and Beverage	Total FULL TIME PROVISION	10		13
		Total PART TIME PROVISION	56		50
		Total COMMUNITY EDUCATION	0		0
		Total PROVISION	66		63
	Tourism	Total FULL TIME PROVISION	67		49
		Total PART TIME PROVISION	0		0
		Total COMMUNITY EDUCATION	0		0
		Total PROVISION	67		49

Questions - Written Answers

-	-	-	2015		2016
WATERFORD AND WEXFORD ETB	Food and Beverage	Total FULL TIME PROVISION	55		70
		Total PART TIME PROVISION	55		94
		Total COMMUNITY EDUCATION	75		64
		Total PROVISION	185		228
	Tourism	Total FULL TIME PROVISION	160		286
		Total PART TIME PROVISION	16		75
		Total COMMUNITY EDUCATION	0		0
		Total PROVISION	176		361
Total ETB Provision	Food and Beverage	Total FULL TIME PROVISION	1168		1827
		Total PART TIME PROVISION	964		1226
		Total COMMUNITY EDUCATION	634		216
		Total PROVISION	2766		3269
	Tourism	Total FULL TIME PROVISION	3139		2878
		Total PART TIME PROVISION	106		409

-	-	-	2015		2016
		Total COM- MUNITY EDUCA- TION	22		80
		Total ETB PROVISION	3267		3367
		Total FULL TIME PRO- VISION	4307		4705
		Total PART TIME PRO- VISION	1070		1635
Total ETB Provision	Food and Beverage & Tourism	Total COM- MUNITY EDUCA- TION	656		296
		Total ETB PROVISION	6033		6636
Momentum	Food and Beverage & Tourism	Total FULL TIME PRO- VISION	1144		134
		Total FULL TIME PRO- VISION	5451		4839
		Total PART TIME PRO- VISION	1070		1635
Total FET Provision	Food and Beverage & Tourism	Total COM- MUNITY EDUCA- TION	656		296
		Total FET PROVISION	7177		6770
					Inputs
ETB	Skill Cluster	Provision type	Total Actuals		Total Pro- jected
			2015		2016

Table etg.

-	-	2015
	Beneficiaries Actual	Actual Expenditure
Total FULL TIME PROVI- SION	126,567	€405,919,922
Total PART TIME PROVI- SION	152,212	€65,033,976

-	-	2015
Total COMMUNITY EDUCATION	66,616	€10,914,066
	2016	
	Beneficiaries Planned	Planned Expenditure
Total FULL TIME PROVISION	126,153	€400,622,733
Total PART TIME PROVISION	134,839	€65,373,528
Total COMMUNITY EDUCATION	51,999	€10,727,731

School Accommodation Provision

119. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the cost of long-term renting or purchase of prefabs for schools here over the past eight years to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6158/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that information in relation to the cost in the case of schools with purchased prefabs is not readily available. However, information requested by the Deputy in relation to the cost of rented accommodation is contained in the table.

The Deputy should be aware that prior to 2013, separate information on the rental of prefabs, buildings and land was not compiled by my Department so that the information provided for the years, 2009 to 2012 inclusive, relates to expenditure on all types of rented accommodation. The information provided for the years 2013 and onwards relates to the rental of prefab accommodation only.

2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
€38,903,960	€29,309,300	€28,963,380	€24,672,145	€24,463,515	€15,130,375	€16,874,955	€23,354,175	€3,222,715

State Bodies

120. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress of the review into the operations of Caranua. [6169/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm to the Deputy that I have recently approved the terms of reference for the review of eligibility for services which are supported by Caranua. The draft terms of reference will be published shortly and the views of interested parties sought. Once the terms are finalised, it would be my intention to proceed quickly thereafter to select suitably qualified persons, through an appropriate procurement process, to undertake the review.

State Bodies

121. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the role his Department plays in monitoring the operations of Caranua; and if he satisfied himself that the organisation is meeting its objective. [6170/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware, Caranua is an independent statutory body established under the Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Act 2012. That legislation sets out the respective responsibilities of the Board and executive of Caranua and of the Minister for Education and Skills. In summary, the key statutory responsibilities assigned to me, as Minister for Education and Skills, under the 2012 Act, that are directly relevant to Caranua are:

- the approval of contracts and consultancies (section 7(7));
- approving additional classes of services (section 8);
- the appointment of Board members (section 11);
- approving the appointment of a Chief Executive (section 13);
- approving the number of staff, their terms and conditions and remuneration, etc. (all with the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform) (section 17);
- the receipt of annual reports and laying them before the Houses of the Oireachtas (section 19);
- matters relating to the independent appeals officer (sections 21 and 22); and
- the receipt of annual accounts and laying them before the Houses of the Oireachtas (section 31).

I am satisfied that the arrangements that are in place for the monitoring and oversight of Caranua by my Department are appropriate and operate effectively while respecting the statutory independence of that organisation and complying with the provisions of the 2012 Act and other requirements including the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies.

The Deputy will wish to be aware that up to the end of December 2016 Caranua had received over 5,600 applications and had spent over €56 million on supports to or on behalf of almost 4,200 applicants. Thus a significant level of funding has been provided to a large number of former residents, a fact which is to be particularly welcomed. I believe that the lives of many former residents will have been improved as a result of this support.

Broadband Service Provision

122. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if fibre broadband is rolled out nationwide, if schools will have access to this technology under the present filtered system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6190/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Through the Schools Broadband Access Programme, the Department provides for the supply of internet connectivity for all recognised primary, post-primary and special schools. The overall policy of my Department is to offer the best quality connectivity to all schools in line with technical solutions available in the market and within required financial parameters.

A framework involving 14 providers was put in place in 2012 which has ensured improved solutions are available to primary schools. The most recent draw down off that framework saw approximately 90% of school connections retendered, with over 1,100 schools awarded connections of 30Mbit/s or greater.

The Department has upgraded more than 1,000 school connections to fibre broadband in fibre broadband enabled areas. Under the current programme, the Department continually reviews the availability of services and upgrades schools where the opportunity arises, within the parameters of the programme and in compliance with procurement and contractual obligations. Connecting schools to fibre broadband where and when available will be considered in that context.

The recently announced ICT Infrastructure Grant represents the first tranche of funding committed to under the Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020 Enhancing Teaching, Learning and Assessment, launched in October 2015. This outlines the Department's vision to further embed technology and digital learning in primary and post-primary schools, through detailed actions in areas including curriculum, digital content, teacher education and CPD, and advice and support. The circular announcing details of the scheme can be referenced at (http://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0001_2017.pdf).

Oideachas Gaeltachta

123. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna an bhfuil sé i gceist aige a chinntiú go mbeidh múinteoir breise ex quota ag na scoileanna Gaeltachta ó Mheán Fómhair ar aghaidh mar a gealladh i mBeartas na Roinne ar Oideachas Gaeltachta; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [6191/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Maidir leis an ngníomh sa Pholasáí don Oideachas Gaeltachta 2017-2022 a bhaineann le socrúcháin scoile bliana i mbunscoileanna agus iar-bhunscoileanna aitheanta Gaeltachta, do chéimithe ó na cláir nua um oiliúint tosaigh múinteoirí (ITE) bunscoile agus iar-bhunscoile, is gníomh amháin é sin de roinnt gníomhartha a dhéanfar. Cuirfear gníomhartha an pholasáí i bhfeidhm ar bhonn céimnithe ó Meán Fómhair 2017. Ní thosóidh an gníomh seo i Meán Fómhair 2017, ach ag céim níos déanaí sa chur i bhfeidhm.

Foirne Scoile

124. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna an bhfuil sé i gceist an leithroinnt múinteoirí do scoileanna ar oileáin a mhéadú ó aon mhúinteoir amháin go 2.5 mhúinteoir ag pointe scála bunúsach; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [6193/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Tar éis athbhreithniú a bheith déanta ar leithdháileadh foirne i gcomhair Bunscoileanna Beaga, forálann ceann de na bearta a fógraíodh i gCáinainéis 2017 do bhunscoileanna aon oide ar oileáin. Sa chás gurb í an scoil an t-aon bhunscoil ar an oileán, is féidir an dara hoide a cheapadh sa scoil. Beidh éifeacht leis seo ó mhí Mheán Fómhair 2017 agus leagfar amach é sa chiorclán maidir le sceideal foirne don scoilbhliain 2017/18 a bheidh ar fáil ar shuíomh gréasáin mo Roinne sna seachtainí seo amach romhainn.

Maidir leis an ngníomh sa Pholasáí don Oideachas Gaeltachta 2017-2022 a bhaineann le socrúcháin scoile bliana i mbunscoileanna agus iar-bhunscoileanna aitheanta Gaeltachta, do chéimithe ó na cláir nua um oiliúint tosaigh múinteoirí (ITE) bunscoile agus iar-bhunscoile, is gníomh amháin é sin de roinnt gníomhartha a dhéanfar. Ní thosóidh an gníomh seo i Meán Fómhair 2017, ach ag céim níos déanaí sa chur i bhfeidhm.

Scoileanna Oileáin

125. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna an bhfuil sé i gceist aige an liúntas oileán €1,658 a thabhairt ar ais do gach múinteoir i scoil oileáin, ag cur san áireamh an costas breise a bhaineann le cónaí ar oileán agus an fhadhb atá ann múinteoirí oilte a mhealladh go dtí na hoileáin; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [6194/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Cheadaigh an Rialtas roinnt beart a bhaineann le liúntais seirbhíse poiblí tar éis don Aire Caiteachais Phoiblí agus Athchóirithe athbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar liúntais agus ar íocaíochtaí préimheanna ar fud na seirbhíse poiblí. Mar thoradh ar an gcinneadh ón Rialtas, rinneadh an liúntas Oileáin a tharraingt siar do thairbhíthe nua le héifeacht ón 1 Feabhra 2012. Is é sin an seasamh go fóill.

Aon duine a bhí ag fáil an liúntais an 31 Eanáir 2012, leanfaidh sé/sí leis an liúntas le é a fháil ach amháin i gcás gur scoir an múinteoir dá ról nó gur athraigh sé/sí scoil nó fostóir an 1 Feabhra 2012 nó ina dhiaidh. Má dhéantar múinteoir a ath-imscaradh faoin scéim chomhaontaithe ath-imscartha, ní mheasfar gur scoir an múinteoir dá ról.

Tar éis athbhreithniú a bheith déanta ar leithdháileadh foirne i gcomhair Bunscoileanna Beaga, forálann ceann de na bearta a fógraíodh i gCáinainéis 2017 do bhunscoileanna aon oide ar oileáin. Sa chás gurb í an scoil an t-aon bhunscoil ar an oileán, is féidir an dara hoide a cheapadh sa scoil. Beidh éifeacht leis seo ó mhí Mheán Fómhair 2017 agus leagfar amach é sa chiorclán maidir le sceideal foirne don scoilbhliain 2017/18 a bheidh ar fáil ar shuíomh gréasáin mo Roinne sna seachtainí seo amach romhainn.

Is é an aidhm atá leis an bPolasaí don Oideachas Gaeltachta 2017-2022 ón Roinn, a seoladh an 28 Deireadh Fómhair 2016, ná a chinntiú go bhfuil eispéireas oideachais ardchaighdeán agus ábhartha trí mheán na Gaeilge ar fáil i scoileanna Gaeltachta agus, ar an mbealach seo, tacú le húsáid na Gaeilge mar phríomhtheanga na dteaghlach agus na bpobal Gaeltachta. Faoi théarmaí an Pholasaí, déanfar acmhainní teagaisc agus/nó acmhainní eile breise, lena n-áirítear forbairt ghairmiúil leanúnach (FGL) thiomnaithe, a chur ar fáil do scoileanna a gceadaítear a n-iarraitais chun páirt a ghlacadh sa phróiseas aitheantais Scoileanna Gaeltachta. Samhlaítear go leithdháilfear acmhainní ar bhonn incriminteach thar thréimhse cúig bliana de réir na gcritéar teanga atá leagtha amach sa Pholasaí don Oideachas Gaeltachta 2017-2022. Bunaíodh Aonad Oideachas Gaeltachta tiomnaithe sa Roinn chun maoirseacht a dhéanamh ar chur chun feidhme an Pholasaí agus chun tacú leis an obair sin. Soláthraíodh cistiú €1m faoi Bhuiséad 2017 chun gur féidir tosú ar an bPolasaí a chur chun feidhme ar bhonn céimnithe.

Scoileanna Oileáin

126. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna an bhfuil sé i gceist aige liúntas breise neamh-phá €10,000 a chur ar fáil do na meánscoileanna ar na hoileáin de bharr na gcostas breise a bhaineann le scoil a réachtáil ar oileán; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [6195/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Is san earnáil Bord Oideachais agus Oiliúna atá gach ceann de na hiar-bhunscoileanna atá suite ar na hoileáin. Tá gach ceann díobh lonnaithe i limistéir Ghaeltachta freisin.

Is trí bhlocdheontas a sholáthraítear cistiú deontais le haghaidh costais réachtála laethúla do gach Bord Oideachais agus Oiliúna, lena n-áirítear dá scoileanna agus dá lárionaid. Dá bhrí sin, soláthraítear ardleibhéal neamhspleáchais do gach Bord Oideachais agus Oiliúna maidir leis an

dóigh a leithdháilfidh siad an cistiú deontais chun freastal ar na riachtanais atá ag scoileanna aonair.

Is é an aidhm atá leis an bPolasaí don Oideachas Gaeltachta 2017-2022 ón Roinn, a seoladh an 28 Deireadh Fómhair 2016, ná a chinntiú go bhfuil eispéireas oideachais ardchaighdeán agus ábhartha trí mheán na Gaeilge ar fáil do na daoine óga uile atá ina gcónaí i limistéir Ghaeltachta agus, ar an mbealach seo, tacú le húsáid na Gaeilge mar phríomhtheanga na dteaghlach agus na bpobal Gaeltachta. Faoi théarmaí an Pholasaí, déanfar acmhainní teagaisc agus/nó acmhainní eile breise, lena n-áirítear forbairt ghairmiúil leanúnach (FGL) thiomnaithe, a chur ar fáil do scoileanna a gceadaítear a n-iarratais chun páirt a ghlacadh sa phróiseas aitheantais Scoileanna Gaeltachta. Samhlaítear go leithdháilfear acmhainní ar bhonn incriminteach thar thréimhse cúig bliana agus go dtabharfar aird le linn na hoibre sin ar na hacmhainní atá leithdháilte cheana féin ar gach scoil nua-aitheanta Ghaeltachta de réir na gcritéar teanga atá leagtha amach sa Pholasaí don Oideachas Gaeltachta 2017-2022.

Aitheantas Scoileanna

127. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna an bhfuil iarratas faighte ag a Roinn ó Bhord Oideachais agus Oiliúna na Gaillimhe agus Ros Comáin ar aitheantas do Choláiste Naomh Eoin, Inis Meáin mar scoil neamhspleách; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [6196/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Is mian liom a chur in iúl don Teachta nach bhfuil aon taifead ag mo Roinn d'iarratas mar ar tagraíodh dó ó Bhord Oideachais agus Oiliúna na Gaillimhe agus Ros Comáin maidir le Coláiste Naomh Eoin, Inis Meáin.

School Accommodation

128. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will ensure that an application for additional accommodation from a school (details supplied) in County Kildare is reviewed as soon as possible in view of the urgent need for additional space at the school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6209/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to confirm to the Deputy that the school in question has submitted an application to my Department for capital funding for additional accommodation. The application will be considered and a decision conveyed to the school authority when this process has been completed.

Questions Nos. 129 and 130 answered with Question No. 117.

School Transport Eligibility

131. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if children who are to move from an Irish-speaking national school to a secondary school taught through Irish are entitled to school transport when their nearest secondary school is an English language school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6234/17]

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 Depart-

ment.

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

In general, under the terms of my Department's Post Primary School Transport Scheme, children are eligible for school transport where they reside not less than 4.8 kilometres from and are attending their nearest Gaelcholáiste.

Families wishing to avail of school transport should apply on Bus Éireann's website at www.buseireann.ie.

Student Data

132. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of students over 18 years of age and under 21 years of age who were in full-time secondary education in the past year for which figures are available. [6250/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): There were 345,544 students in full time post primary education in the 2015/2016 academic year. Of these 1,441 were over 18 and under 21. Further information is available on the Department's statistical reports available on the website at www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/Statistical-Reports/.

National Educational Psychological Service Data

133. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of schools in Dublin which do not have direct access to a National Educational Psychological Service psychologist for the purposes of carrying out an educational assessment, by school, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6256/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy may be aware my Department's National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) provides an educational psychological service to schools through the direct assignment of a NEPS psychologist and in some cases through by providing schools access to the Scheme for Commissioning Psychological Assessments (SCPA) where schools can have an assessment carried out by a member of the panel of private psychologists approved by NEPS, and NEPS will pay the psychologist the fees for this assessment directly. SCPA is utilised, in the main, where as yet unfilled vacancies exist in NEPS staffing provision locally or where staffing resource is lost through extended leave (maternity, sick or carer's leave).

Included for the Deputy's information is a list of schools that do not currently have access to a NEPS Psychologist for the purposes of carrying out an assessment in Dublin and which currently derive this service through the abovementioned SCPA scheme. In respect of NEPS staffing, NEPs psychologists are recruited via regional panels formed from national recruitment competitions administered by the Public Appointments service.

In the case of some schools, NEPs psychologists may no longer be assigned to those schools as a result of retirement, resignation or transfer to another NEPs region, and while every effort was made to fill the resulting vacancy during 2016 from the existing PAS panels this was not successful and the panel was closed.

A new national recruitment competition has been put in place by the Public Appointments Service (PAS) to fill vacancies within all NEPS Regions. The resulting interview process associated with this competition was completed last week and recruitment panels for each NEPS region, including Dublin, will now be formed. PAS will finalise the processing of the candidates, including Garda vetting, and propose each candidate in series to my Department Human Resources Section for contract negotiations and formal job offer.

It is envisaged that the process will produce new NEPS psychologists for assignment to schools, including that to which the Deputy refers in his question, by the end of the current academic year.

In addition a number of the assigned NEPS psychologists to schools, included in the attached count, are currently absent due to maternity leave, long-term sick leave or carer's leave necessitating a temporary hiatus in NEPS coverage. This situation will change as individual staff return to work.

However it is important to point out that in cases where NEPS service is not available through staffing vacancy or temporary absence of staff, as described above, the schools affected continue to have access to a psychologist through the Scheme for Commissioning Psychological Assessments to undertake pupil assessment work.

I would also confirm that all schools are able to access full NEP supports in the event of a critical incident irrespective of their having ongoing access to an assigned NEPS psychologist or not.

County by County of schools that do not currently have access to a NEPS Psychologist for the purposes of carrying out an educational assessment (ref: 2/2/17)

County	Number of Schools
Dublin	131

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

134. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the efforts being made to ensure the establishment of special ASD classes in mainstream schools in towns throughout the country in which there are insufficient class spaces available; if the circular governing the establishment of special classes which gives mainstream schools the authority to refuse to set up special classes will be amended to ensure such schools can no longer refuse the establishment of special classes when a need has been identified for them; if the Education (Admission to Schools) Bill 2016 will remove the ability for schools to refuse a unit in which a need is identified; the status of this Bill; if he will ensure that mainstream schools that establish such units and special classes will be sufficiently funded to allow for the establishment and running of the units; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6257/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): 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.

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.

As such my Department does not consider the lower number of Post Primary Special classes for students with ASD currently constitutes a shortage of placements.

Notwithstanding this, my Department acknowledges that there are challenges in opening special classes in some Post primary schools. The NCSE is working with these schools to address this.

My Department continues to consider all options to improve the situation, including whether there is a need for legislation. However, my Department is of the view that the legislation option carries significant risks and would clearly prefer that all schools would open classes where needs arise voluntarily. My Department believes that, in the light of recent improvements in Special Class numbers in Post Primary schools, there are some grounds for optimism that schools are becoming more positively disposed to requests to open such classes.

The attached NCSE guidelines for Boards of Management and Principals of Primary and Post Primary schools contain 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 guidelines are available to download from www.ncse.ie.

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. reconfigure 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.

[Guidelines]

Teachers' Remuneration

135. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a person (details supplied) can be put on the pay rates that were in existence in 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6260/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The teacher the Deputy refers to is employed in the Education and Training Board (ETB) sector. As the details of her pay and service are held by the ETB, the question should be referred to the ETB which will be able to address the specifics of the case.

Teacher Exchange Scheme

136. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if current members or spokespersons of the teacher exchange programme can form part of the discussion group and action of the voluntary transfer scheme for permanent teachers currently being drafted to bring proposals to his Department management and patrons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6262/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Proposals, such as a Voluntary Redeployment Scheme for permanent primary teachers, are normally dealt with through negotiations conducted under the auspices of the Teacher Conciliation Council.

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

The Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) represents primary teachers on the Council.

School Funding

137. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount of funding that was allocated to the secondary education committee in 2015 and 2016; if his Department has any input on the administrating of these funds from the committee; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6266/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The amount of funding provided to the Secondary Education Committee by my Department was €6.75 million in each of the years 2015 and 2016.

The Secondary Education Committee then disburses funds to the Protestant fee-charging schools on behalf of pupils who would otherwise have difficulty with the cost of fees and who, in the absence of such financial support, would be unable to attend a second level school of a reformed church or Protestant ethos. This fund ensures that necessitous Protestant children can attend a school of their choice.

These arrangements are underpinned by way of a Memorandum of Understanding. The

Memorandum of Understanding is agreed between my Department and the Secondary Education Committee.

Psychological Assessments

138. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of children awaiting psychological assessment in the Fingal area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6268/17]

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

NEPS does not maintain waiting lists but, in common with many other psychological services and best international practice, NEPS has adopted a consultative model of service. The focus is on empowering teachers to intervene effectively with pupils whose needs range from mild to severe and transient to enduring. Psychologists use a problem solving and solution oriented consultative approach to maximize positive outcomes for these pupils. NEPS encourages schools to use a continuum based assessment and intervention process whereby each school takes responsibility for initial assessment, educational planning and remedial intervention for pupils with learning, emotional or behavioural difficulties. Teachers may consult with the NEPS service should they need to at this stage in the process. Only in the event of a failure to make reasonable progress, in spite of the school's best efforts in consultation with NEPS, will a psychologist become involved with an individual child for intensive intervention or assessment.

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

I would advise if there are concerns in relation to the educational development of any student that these should be raised, in the first instance, with the Principal of the school he/she is attending, with a view to the Principal raising the situation with NEPS.

Autism Incidence

139. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder in Fingal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6269/17]

141. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of children availing of autism spectrum specific services in Fingal, by type of service, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6271/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 139 and 141 together.

The Deputy will be aware that this Government is committed to ensuring that all children with Special Educational Needs, including those with autism, can have access to an education

appropriate to their needs, preferably in school settings through the primary and post primary school network.

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

In respect of children with ASD who are unable to learn effectively in a mainstream class for most or all of the school day even with appropriate supports, they may be enrolled in special classes within mainstream schools or in special schools where more intensive and supportive interventions are provided.

As the Deputy's questions relate to the prevalence of children with a diagnosis of ASD and those availing of ASD services in a specific area, I have referred the questions to the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) for their consideration and direct reply.

The NCSE's Autism Policy Advice on Supporting Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Schools noted that there were almost 14,000 students diagnosed with autism in schools. This indicates a national ASD prevalence rate of 1.55% or 1 in every 65 students.

My Department invests over €300m annually in providing additional resources specifically to support students with autism in schools enabling:

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

My Department provides a range of supports for schools which have enrolled pupils with special educational needs in order to ensure that, wherever a child is enrolled, they will have access to an appropriate education.

The range of supports and services which are made available include additional learning and resource teaching support, Special Needs Assistant (S) support, funding for the purchase of specialised equipment, services of the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), enhanced levels of capitation in Special schools and Special Classes and additional teacher training.

The NCSE is responsible, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENO), for allocating resource teachers and Special Needs Assistants (S) to schools to support students with special educational needs, including autism. The NCSE operates within the Department's criteria in allocating such support.

The NCSE also provides information for Parents of Children with Special Education Needs through its website (www.ncse.ie) and Pamphlet Series which inform parents and guardians of supports and services available for children and young people with ASD and their families.

Also, for children with autism, the school year is extended to include the month of July. This is commonly referred to as 'the July Provision Programme'. This is typically delivered in the child's school, but where the school is not in a position to deliver this, it can be provided as home tuition.

My Department supports the professional development of staff working with children with special educational needs, including those with Autism, through the Special Education Support Service (SESS).

Further support is provided to children and their families by the Middletown Centre for Autism in Co. Armagh. This centre is jointly funded by my Department and the Department of Education in Northern Ireland. The Centre provides a comprehensive nationwide training service for parents and educational professionals. Parents can view the range of courses which the Centre has available through the website www.middletownautism.com.

The availability and provision of health-related therapy services, including speech and language, occupational therapy and sensory therapy support, is the responsibility of the Health Service Executive (HSE), and matters in relation to the provision of such services should be directed to the Minister for Health through the Health Service Executive. My Department has no responsibility or mandate for such services.

Home Tuition Scheme Provision

140. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of children in receipt of home tuition in Fingal; the total number of hours provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6270/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The purpose of the Special Education Home Tuition 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 provides a compensatory educational service for children with special educational needs seeking an educational placement and provision is made for early educational intervention for children with autism.

In terms of the number of children in receipt of home tuition for 2016/17 school year, my Department does not maintain statistics for specific areas within counties. Statistics available show that there are:

- 30 children with a diagnosis of ASD, aged between 2.5yrs and 3yrs of age
- 259 children with a diagnosis of ASD aged over 3 years and
- 85 children with a significant medical condition currently availing of home tuition in City and County Dublin.

Children aged 2.5 years with a diagnosis of ASD are not eligible for enrolment in an early intervention class and qualify for 10 hours tuition per week under the terms of the Home Tuition Grant Scheme should the parent wish to avail of it. Home Tuition continues from their 3rd birthday if no placement in a school based autism early intervention class is available for them. The number of hours tuition per week will then increase to 20 for eligible children.

When a child with an autism diagnosis reaches 4 years of age they may be accommodated in a number of settings. In such circumstances, a school placement can be a place in a mainstream class in a mainstream school, a place in a special class attached to a mainstream school, a place in an early intervention class for children with ASD (where the child will not reach the age of 6 during the school year), or a place in a special school. Where there is no educational placement available, my Department will consider applications under the Home Tuition Grant Scheme, where the child can receive 20 hours home tuition per week and until a placement is available.

The Home Tuition Grant Scheme is an interim measure to provide for education until an educational placement becomes available. When a school placement becomes available the Home Tuition Grant will be discontinued.

My Department also operates a Home Tuition Grant Scheme for children, other than those with special education needs, who do not have a school place, are without the offer of a school place and for whom a school place is being actively sought. The purpose of this Grant Scheme is to provide funding towards provision of a compensatory educational service for children who do not have a school place. Application forms for this Home Tuition Grant Scheme are available from the local Educational Welfare Officer of the Child and Family Agency.

In addition, my Department operates a Maternity Related Absences Home Tuition scheme. The purpose of the Maternity Related Home Tuition scheme is to provide funding towards the provision of a compensatory education service for girls who are unable to attend school due to pregnancy. Statistics for these schemes are held on a county basis only. Currently in County Dublin there are 16 children who have been granted 9 hours per week under these two schemes.

Question No. 141 answered with Question No. 139.

Question No. 142 answered with Question No. 117.

Schools Building Projects Status

143. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress of a school (details supplied) in regard to the capital grants scheme for 2019. [6284/17]

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 (2019/21). My Department is in contact with the school authority in the context of formulating the project brief, including the determination of the long term projected enrolment.

Schools Building Projects

144. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress of a school (details supplied) in regard to the capital grants scheme for 2019. [6285/17]

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 (2019/21). My Department is in contact with the school authority in the context of formulating the project brief, including the determination of the long term projected enrolment.

Question No. 145 answered with Question No. 117.

Third Level Staff

146. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the rate of progress in the seven universities of the implementation of the Cush report; the reason there are delays in the operation of the report in the universities; if parity of esteem for other workers employed in universities with two years service will be established; and if he will make

a statement on the matter. [6312/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Report of the Chair of the Expert Group on Fixed Term and Part-Time issues in Lecturing in Ireland was published in May 2016 and the Report contains a number of recommendations that will assist in addressing concerns raised about the level of part-time and fixed-term employment in lecturing in the third level sector. My Department issued directions to the sector on 4 July 2016 to implement the recommendations contained in the report in accordance with the terms of the Lansdowne Road Agreement and my understanding is that the Institutions are taking steps to do so. If a union representing lecturing grades believes that a university is not implementing the recommendations contained within the Report of the Chair of the Expert Group, that union can seek to have the matter addressed using the dispute resolution procedures provided for in the Public Service Agreement.

The above-mentioned Report is specific to concerns raised about part-time and fixed-term employment in lecturing and its recommendations are not applicable to non-lecturing grades. My Department is not aware of any issues regarding non-lecturing grades.

Stádas Thionscadail Tógála Scoileanna

147. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Catherine Connolly** den Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna an dtabharfaidh sé soiléiriú maidir le stádas an iarrtais atá déanta ag an scoil seo (sonraí leis seo); go háirithe maidir leo seo a leanas: 1. costais foirgneamh réamhdhéanta, 2. costais athlonnaithe, 3. an obair tógála atá beartaithe; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [6313/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Cheadaigh mo Roinn tionscadal tógála suntasach don scoil dá dtagraíonn an Teachta. Is éard atá i gceist leis an tionscadal seo síneadh a chur le foirgneamh reatha na scoile agus é a athleagan amach chun cóiríocht bhreise a chur ar fáil le haghaidh seomraí ranga agus gach seomra réamhdhéanta a bhaint amach as an láithreán reatha. Ní féidir méid an deontais cheadaithe a nochtadh mar chuirfeadh sin isteach ar an bpróiseas tairisceana.

Cuireadh togra athbhreithnithe ar aghaidh chuig mo Roinn le déanaí maidir le hoibreacha breise, ina measc togra athlonnaithe. Níor cuireadh mionsonraí faoi chostas an mhéid sin ar aghaidh ag an tráth seo. Tá an togra athbhreithnithe á bhreithniú faoi láthair agus cuirfear cinneadh ina thaobh in iúl d'údarás na scoile chomh luath agus is féidir.

Commissions of Inquiry

148. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of commissions of inquiry or other formal investigations or inquiries being conducted in his Department; the name of these; the date they were established; the expected date the work is intended to be completed; the cost incurred to date; the estimated final cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6355/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm to the Deputy that there are no Commissions of Inquiry or other formal investigations under way in my Department.

Schools Building Projects Applications

149. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if consideration will be given to a request to provide additional funding in respect of a building project (details supplied) in view of the detailed submissions by the board of management and representations made by this Deputy in relation to the urgency of providing this new facility for the 2017-2018 school year and considering that the school authorities have reduced the costs to the minimum; if he will ensure that this application is approved at the earliest possible date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6372/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm to the Deputy that the application for additional funding from the school to which he refers has been examined by Officials in my Department. A funding uplift has been approved and my Department is satisfied that the total grant now being made available is sufficient to deliver the approved works. The school has been informed of this decision.

Garda Vetting of Personnel

150. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding Garda vetting procedures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6381/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Arrangements for the Garda vetting of teaching and non-teaching staff were introduced on a non-statutory basis in September 2006.

In April 2016, the Minister for Justice and Equality commenced the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Acts 2012 to 2016 (the Vetting Act) which put in place statutory requirements for the Garda vetting of persons involved in working with children and vulnerable persons. The Vetting Act applies not just to schools but to any relevant organisation that employs, contracts, permits or places a person in relevant work with children or vulnerable persons. The vetting legislation and the vetting procedures operated by the National Vetting Bureau fall within the remit of the Minister for Justice and Equality.

When the vetting requirements were commenced last April, my Department issued circular 0031/2016 which set out the statutory vetting requirements applicable to schools along with the practical arrangements in place to support the vetting procedures.

The Vetting Act provides that a relevant organisation must, other than in certain limited circumstances, obtain a vetting disclosure from the National Vetting Bureau prior to commencing the employment of an employee to undertake relevant work with children or vulnerable adults. The Vetting Act allows for some limited exemptions to this requirement, including certain exemptions that are applicable in the case of recurring substitute employment such as a recurring substitute S employment. The Act's exemptions in respect of substitute employment are set out in section 5.3 of my Department's circular.

Under the new statutory vetting procedures, the vetting of Ss and other non-teaching staff continues to be conducted via the relevant diocesan office or school management body as the relevant conduit organisation for the vetting of Ss and other non-teaching staff employed by schools. In the case of ETB schools the relevant ETB is the relevant organisation for such vetting. My Department understands that the majority of these bodies are now using the National Vetting Bureau's electronic vetting facility.

Appointment of Receivers

151. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the measures he is taking with the Minister for Finance to determine receivers' responsibilities to tenants in situ when a property is being taken into receivership; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6220/17]

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 four key areas: security, standards, supply and services. The measures under these four headings will be implemented through the 29 actions contained in the Strategy. The appointment of a receiver to a dwelling can cause confusion and distress to tenants and in circumstances where a receiver is appointed to a rented dwelling, it is essential that the rights of tenants are protected.

Under the Strategy for the Rental Sector, my Department is currently establishing a working group with the participation of the Departments of Justice and Equality, Finance, and Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, to explore the scope for landlord obligations to be transferred to receivers in such cases. The Working Group will report by the end of March this year.

Commercial Rates Valuation Process

152. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will consider introducing a reduction in commercial rates for rural pubs and shops in view of the decline in business over the past ten years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6293/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Local authorities are under a statutory obligation to levy rates on any property used for commercial purposes in accordance with the details entered in the valuation lists prepared by the independent Commissioner of Valuation pursuant to the Valuation Acts 2001 to 2015. The levying and collection of rates are matters for each individual local authority. The annual rate on valuation (ARV), which is applied to the valuation of each property determined by the Valuation Office, to obtain the amount payable in rates, is decided by the elected members of each local authority in the annual budget and its determination is a reserved function.

Under Part 5 of the Valuation Acts 2001 to 2015, the Commissioner of Valuation is conducting a revaluation of all commercial and industrial properties throughout the State. The Valuation Acts come under the aegis of my colleague, the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality. In a revaluation all rateable property within a rating authority area is revalued so as to reflect changes in value due to economic factors, differential movements in property values or other external factors such as infrastructural changes in the vicinity of a property and changes in the local business environment. Following revaluation there is a much closer and uniform relationship between contemporary rental values of property and their commercial rates liability. In essence, the exercise aims to ensure that each ratepayer bears a fair share of the rates burden relative to the modern rental value of the property that they occupy.

To date, revaluations have been completed in South Dublin County Council, Fingal County Council, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council, Dublin City Council, Waterford City and County Council and Limerick City and County Council. I understand that revaluations in ten local authorities, including Carlow, Kildare, Kilkenny, Leitrim, Longford, Offaly, Roscommon,

Sligo, South Dublin and Westmeath County Councils are due to be completed this year with valuations to take effect for rates purposes from 2018.

Commercial rates form an important element of the funding of all local authorities. However, the legislative basis for the levying of rates is spread over a number of enactments, some dating back to the 19th century. Many of the provisions are outdated and not suitable for business trends in the modern era. I have asked my Department to develop proposals for the preparation of a consolidated Rates Bill to modernise and consolidate the legislation in this area. Among the measures being considered for the General Scheme of the Bill are provisions to allow a local authority to introduce rates alleviation schemes to support, inter alia, urban regeneration and rural development.

Local and Community Development Programme Staff

153. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 305 of 29 November 2016, if the comprehensive legal advice referred to has been fully analysed; if a decision has been made in the matter of providing ex gratia payments to former employees of LCDP companies, made redundant and whereby no moneys were available to fund payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6168/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The matter concerned, including the associated legal advice, remains under consideration in my Department, including through discussions with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. My Department will be endeavouring to complete its consideration of the matter as soon as possible.

Ministerial Meetings

154. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he has had any meetings with private or third party investors that have proposals to invest in social or affordable housing; the date of the meetings; and the details of the proposals discussed. [6171/17]

155. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he has had any meetings with private investors that have proposals to become involved as third party investors in the mortgage to rent scheme or an alternative variant of this scheme; the date of the meetings; and the details of the proposals discussed. [6172/17]

168. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he has met with financial institutions or other third parties to discuss proposals for long term leasing arrangements between local authorities and financial institutions as a means of providing social or affordable housing; and the names of the institutions he has met, the date of the meetings and type of the proposals under discussion. [6277/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 154, 155 and 168 together.

The Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness acknowledges the role of private sector funding in addressing the significant housing need that currently exists in Ireland. Since taking up office as Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Govern-

ment, I have been open to ideas and proposals from private sector bodies to assist the delivery of social housing and affordable private housing. I have met with a range of organisations, including representative bodies, private companies and Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs).

On 14 June 2016, I met with Irish Residential Properties REIT plc where the matters of housing and building regulations were addressed. On 23 June 2016, I attended a meeting of Property Industry Ireland, an organisation representing the property industry, during which interest was expressed by participants in private investment in social housing provision. Meetings were held involving WK Nowlan Property Ltd. on 7 September 2016 and 25 January 2017, which I attended, where proposals to improve the delivery of affordable housing were raised. On 22 September and 6 October 2016, I attended meetings involving the Construction Industry Federation where housing development issues were addressed. On 29 September 2016, I attended a meeting with Atelier Capital LLP, a private body interested in investing in student accommodation provision. On the same date I participated at an event hosted by the Cork Chapter of the Irish League of Credit Unions at which the potential for credit union investment in social housing was addressed. On 19 October 2016 I met with a representative of the European Investment Bank, during which the potential for investment in social housing was discussed.

A number of private equity firms have expressed an interest in purchasing mortgage debt portfolios from commercial banks with a view to exploring the potential for them to access the Mortgage to Rent Scheme model for the borrowers in occupation of the mortgaged property. They are seeking an alternative arrangement that would see the mortgaged property staying in the funding firm's ownership and the property itself leased back to the local authority in circumstances where the borrower is eligible for Mortgage to Rent and the borrower would therefore remain in their own home. In this regard, Minister of State English met with Beacon Social Housing on 1 July and 21 September 2016, Kohlberg Kravis Roberts (KKR) on 21 September 2016, Bartra Capital on 1 December 2016 and the Arizun Group on 15 December 2016.

Currently, the mortgage to rent scheme relies on Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) purchasing from lenders properties that have been voluntarily surrendered by eligible borrowers. One of the outcomes of the Review of the Mortgage to Rent Scheme is that in order to test the operability of alternative funding models for the scheme, the Housing Agency will work with a number of financial entities who have come forward with an interest in working with the MTR scheme to progress a minimum of 200 units based on alternative lease arrangements. The objective is to explore what is available within the current market and to determine if this alternative model will benefit a greater number of households.

I routinely meet with Approved Housing Bodies in the course of my work, where issues relating to investment by the voluntary housing sector in social housing are raised. In the development of Rebuilding Ireland, and subsequently, I have been actively engaged with stakeholder bodies, including those involved in the delivery and financing of social housing.

The Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme provides a means whereby properties can be built or bought by AHBs with the combined use of State and private funding, and, leased by AHBs and Local Authorities from private providers, for the provision of social housing. This scheme is underpinned by a lease and other legal agreements. These provide that rental payments are made by the State over an agreed long-term time period, typically 20 years. In return the housing unit is made available for social housing.

Changes are now being proposed to this scheme in order to facilitate larger institutional private investors to become involved in the financing of social housing. The National Development Finance Agency (NDFA) is acting as financial advisor to my Department in this work and is undertaking market engagement in the development of the scheme. Work on the scheme is

well advanced, with details expected to be announced in the coming months.

Housing Assistance Payments Data

156. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of housing assistance payment, HAP, tenancies currently in operation in each county; the number of those tenancies paying a top up to the landlord; the average of such top up per county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6213/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Data relating to the number of households supported by HAP within each local authority area at end of Q4 2016 are available on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision>.

Under the HAP scheme, a tenant sources their own accommodation, the tenancy agreement is between the tenant and the landlord and is covered by the Residential Tenancy Act 2004 (as amended). Recognising the pressures in the rental market, the Government increased the maximum rent limits available under the HAP scheme across the country with effect from 1 July 2016. Furthermore, additional flexibility above the existing HAP rent limits was made available to all HAP local authorities from the same date.

My Department is aware that some HAP recipients are making payments directly to their landlords, beyond the amount of HAP being paid on their behalf. While my Department does monitor such trends, the data requested by the Deputy is not available. Ultimately, the level of support made available to individual households is a matter for the local authority concerned. The increased flexibility provided to local authorities offers them, as housing authorities, more capacity to assist households in securing rented accommodation that meets their needs. Since the introduction of the increased HAP rent limits in July 2016 more than 2,500 pre-existing HAP households have received an increase in their level of support.

My Department continues to keep the operation of the scheme under review. In general, I am satisfied with the operation of HAP scheme and I consider it to be a key vehicle for meeting housing need and fulfilling the ambitious programme under the Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness.

Housing Assistance Payments Administration

157. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the protection measures in place for housing assistance payment, HAP, tenants should a landlord end their tenancy along the lines of the previous RAS scheme where local authorities were responsible to re-house tenants should a RAS landlord exit the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6214/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): A key principle of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme is that eligible households source their own accommodation in the private rented sector, which best suits their needs in their area of choice. This is distinct from the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) which is a different type of social housing support where the tenant may not always find their own accommodation and instead are allocated a dwelling in accordance with Section 22 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009. Similarly, the local authority is not party to the

tenancy agreement underpinning a HAP arrangement, but is a party to the three-part contract underpinning a RAS arrangement.

A HAP tenancy arrangement is governed by the terms of the Residential Tenancies Act 2004 (as amended) and is afforded the same protections available to all private rental tenancies, which were recently enhanced. The Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) was established as an independent statutory body under the Act to operate a national tenancy registration system and to resolve disputes between landlords and tenants.

There are more than 17,000 households supported by HAP currently and the scheme is working well for the households who are benefitting from the security of the long-term housing support that it offers.

Homelessness Strategy

158. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the measures he is putting in place with local authorities to begin homelessness prevention with families when a valid notice to quit has been received giving the family the requisite notice for the end of a tenancy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6215/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department's role in relation to homelessness involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of housing authorities in addressing homelessness at local level. Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of accommodation and related services for homeless persons rests with individual housing authorities.

Where a tenant finds that their tenancy is coming to an end and they are entitled to social housing support, they should contact their housing authority in order to access the supports available to them. Should the tenant wish to try to sustain their existing tenancy, there are tenancy sustainment initiatives in place. These include: the National Tenancy Sustainment Framework operated by the Department of Social Protection for Rent Supplement clients; the Tenancy Sustainment Protocol operated by Threshold in conjunction with the relevant housing authority and the Department of Social Protection; and the Family Support Service operated by Focus Ireland, which has tenancy sustainment as its specific aim.

Homeless Accommodation Provision

159. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans for homeless families after July 2017 when the practice of accommodating them in commercial hotels will be ended; the places they will be accommodated; if the 783 families and 2,505 children will be permanently housed by that deadline; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6217/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness provides for early and longer-term solutions to address the high levels of homelessness, especially the unacceptable number of families in emergency accommodation in hotels. The plan's commitments are that, by mid-2017, hotels should only be used in limited circumstances as emergency accommodation for families. Full details and timeframes in relation to the range of actions to address

family homelessness are set out in Rebuilding Ireland, which is available on the www.rebuildingireland.ie website.

The increases in Rent Supplement and Housing Assistance Payment levels from 1 July 2016 is playing an important role in the achievement of this overall objective, in terms of supporting families to remain in rented accommodation. However, where families do find themselves in homelessness situations, there are a range of solutions in place and being progressed. These include the Housing Agency programme to acquire 1,600 units and the expanded HAP Homeless Pilot Scheme in Dublin, where some 800 homeless HAP tenancies were entered into by end-2016 and a further 1,200 tenancies are targeted for 2017 across the Dublin Region. A rapid-build programme is also in place, with over 350 rapid-build homes advancing at end-2016. My Department engages with the Dublin Region local authorities on a regular and ongoing basis in relation to the delivery of these and other relevant initiatives.

Housing Assistance Payments Administration

160. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will allow regeneration zones to accept housing assistance payment, HAP, tenancies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6218/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): As the Deputy will be aware, one of the key functions of housing authorities is to provide or manage the provision of social housing support in a way that counteracts undue segregation between persons of different social backgrounds and ensures the provision of an appropriate mix of dwelling types and tenure classes.

Once a household has been deemed eligible for social housing support, it is a matter for the local authority to examine the suite of social housing supports available, including the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme, to determine the most appropriate form of social housing support for that household in the administrative area of that local authority.

The operation of the HAP scheme is underpinned by Part 4 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014. Under the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme, one of the key principles is that eligible households source their own accommodation in the private rented sector, which best suits their needs in their area of choice. Part 4 of the 2014 Act sets out restrictions (not in operation at present) on paying housing assistance in regeneration areas and areas where there is a need to counteract undue social segregation. My Department is currently examining this provision.

My Department continues to keep the operation of the HAP scheme under review. In general, I am satisfied with the operation of HAP scheme and I consider it to be a key vehicle for meeting housing need and fulfilling the ambitious programme under the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness.

Vacant Properties

161. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if consideration is being given to introducing compulsory leasing orders for appropriate vacant properties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6221/17]

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

Coveney): The use of Compulsory Leasing Orders as a possible means of re-utilising vacant properties was proposed at a presentation to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government last week by the Peter McVerry Trust in the context of discussions on addressing the issue of vacant housing, derelict sites and underused spaces. The Trust indicated that it supported the use of such Orders, where ownership of vacant properties would not change but local authorities would be empowered to take over the management of a property for a specified period and under certain strict criteria for the common good, including the provision of social housing. Under the proposal, the property owner would receive rent for the period of the Order, minus the costs of upgrading and managing the building.

As the Deputy is aware, Pillar 5 of the Government's Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness – Rebuilding Ireland is specifically focused on Utilising Existing Housing Stock, with a key objective of ensuring that the existing vacant housing stock throughout the country and across all forms of tenure, in both the public and private sectors, is used to the optimum degree possible. In this regard, Action 5.1 of Rebuilding Ireland commits to developing a National Vacant Housing Re-Use Strategy by the first quarter of 2017, informed by Census 2016 data, to

- inform the compilation of a register of vacant units across the country,
- identify the number, location and reasons for longer-term vacancies (i.e. over 6 months) in high demand areas, and
- set out a range of actions to bring vacant units back into reuse.

The Housing Agency, which has lead responsibility for co-ordinating the development of the Strategy, established a working group in September 2016 comprising senior representatives from my Department, local authorities, the Irish Council for Social Housing and from the Housing Agency itself to inform the Strategy. The proposal to use Compulsory Leasing Orders as possible means of re-utilising vacant properties will be considered by the Working Group in the context of finalising the Strategy.

Vacant Properties

162. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the progress that has been made on a vacant property register; the work his Department is progressing with regards to vacant properties, including those vacant due to the fair deal scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6222/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Pillar 5 of the Government's Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness - Rebuilding Ireland is specifically focused on Utilising Existing Housing Stock, with a key objective of ensuring that the existing vacant housing stock throughout the country and across all forms of tenure, in both the public and private sectors, is used to the optimum degree possible. In this regard, Action 5.1 of Rebuilding Ireland commits to the development of a National Vacant Housing Re-Use Strategy by the first quarter of 2017, informed by Census 2016 data, to

- inform the compilation of a register of vacant units across the country,
- identify the number, location and reasons for longer-term vacancies (i.e. over 6 months) in high demand areas, and
- set out a range of actions to bring vacant units back into reuse

To this end, the Housing Agency, which has lead responsibility for co-ordinating the de-

velopment of the Strategy, has established a working group, comprising senior representatives from my Department, local authorities and from the Housing Agency itself to inform the Strategy.

In addition, Action 17 of the Strategy for the Rental Sector commits my Department to examining ‘the treatment under the Nursing Homes Support Scheme (NHSS) financial assessment of income from the rental of a person’s principal private residence where they move into long-term residential care’. My Department has been in contact with the Department of Health in the context of implementation of the review of the NHSS and is considering whether potential options can be put forward to adjust the treatment of rental income from properties in the Fair Deal scheme in order to make their letting a more attractive option, rather than leaving them empty.

With regard to the establishment of registers of vacant sites, the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015, enacted in July 2015, introduced the vacant site levy, which is aimed at incentivising the development of vacant, under-utilised sites in urban areas. Under the Act, planning authorities are required to establish a vacant site register 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 year 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.

Planning authorities are presently engaging in the necessary preparatory work prior to the application of the levy, commencing with the establishment of their local vacant site registers and the identification of sites for possible inclusion in their registers.

Local Authority Housing Data

163. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will report on the turnaround of Dublin local authority voids, by local authority, taking into consideration the length of time from when one family moves out and another moves in, excluding and including refurbishments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6225/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Statistics on the average re-letting times for local authority social housing are gathered by the National Oversight and Audit Commission and are set out by local authority in their report on Performance Indicators in Local Authorities. These statistics are available for both 2014 and 2015 at the following links: <http://noac.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/NOAC-Performance-Indicators-Report-2014.pdf> and <http://noac.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/2015-PI-Report.pdf>.

The statistics as gathered by the National Oversight and Audit Commission illustrate the average time from date of vacation of a social house to the date when a new tenancy has commenced. This includes the time taken to re-let a house and does not, therefore, separately capture the time from a house being vacated to when necessary repairs are complete.

Feedback from local authorities is that the time taken by them to turn around vacant social houses can vary significantly from property to property, depending on the level of refurbishment required in each individual case. Additionally, the funding that my Department provides to local authorities to remediate certain social housing includes support for the energy retrofitting of

the property. While this may add to the work required to remediate a house, it is an important upgrade to the property which brings notable fuel efficiency advantages to the incoming tenant.

It is a matter for individual housing authorities to manage the allocation and re-lettings of dwellings within the terms of their approved Scheme of Letting Priorities. The routine turnaround of vacant social housing stock is carried out under their ongoing maintenance programme. In addition to this activity on routine re-lettings, my Department also supports local authorities to tackle stock that is vacant and in need of remediation to allow it to be re-let.

The current voids programme, supporting local authorities in returning vacant social housing units to productive use, commenced in 2014 and is a target driven and cost effective voids retrofitting programme.

It should be noted that there will always be a level of vacant social houses at any given point in time owing to the fact that the numbers of vacant properties nationally changes on a daily basis due to local authorities having social units handed back and as units are re-let. The number of vacant units will therefore fluctuate constantly, as would be expected in the management of the thousands of homes owned by local authorities, where tenancies change on a regular basis.

The low rates of vacant units of 1-2% reported by some authorities in 2016 is a strong indication that the local authorities, through the additional provision of funding provided by my Department, have substantially addressed the backlog of vacant units that had accumulated pre-2014.

Urban Renewal Schemes

164. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if there are any grant aid programmes currently within his Department or due to come online shortly which provide funding for assisting persons in the refurbishment of buildings in town centres for residential or commercial purposes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6230/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Programme for a Partnership Government, published in May 2016, sets out the ambitious priority attached to urban regeneration by the Government, incorporating a series of specific actions aimed at facilitating the regeneration of our urban centres, many of which have been adversely impacted by our recent economic difficulties. The Government's Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness – Rebuilding Ireland, published in July 2016, further reinforces the Government's commitment to the area of urban regeneration.

In this context, the Government launched the Town and Village Renewal Scheme last August with an allocation of €10 million in funding for the year. A sum of €380,000 was made available to each of the 26 counties for 2016 under this initial phase of the scheme. Local Authorities, in conjunction with local communities and businesses, were each invited to submit up to eight proposals by the end of September for approval. Following an assessment of the proposals received, my colleague, the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs announced (on 4 November) details of 172 towns and villages which will benefit from the funding available under this year's Town and Village Renewal Scheme. The full list of towns benefitting under the scheme is available on the website of the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (www.ahrrga.gov.ie). Increased funding of €12 million has been provided in Budget 2017 to enhance this scheme with a view to increasing the attractiveness and sustainability of our towns and villages as places in which to live and work.

The Programme for Government also commits to examining a series of further initiatives, such as:

- the introduction of a similar scheme to the ‘Living City Initiative’ to regenerate urban centres and villages throughout Ireland,
- examining the scope to reform the Derelict Sites Act to tackle the under-use and hoarding of derelict land by the State, semi-State and private sectors,
- the establishment of a National Register of Derelict Sites, in addition to the new vacant site levy, to bring vacant and under-utilised sites into beneficial use for housing and urban regeneration purposes,
- the mandating of local authorities with better land management powers, including the possibility of additional CPO capabilities, and
- various other measures, which were further developed under the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, and especially those under Pillar 5 aimed at re-using vacant housing stock and which have already been launched, such as –
 - the Repair and Lease Initiative, providing funding to the owners of vacant properties for their refurbishment and subsequent long-term leasing to local authorities for social housing purposes (€140m funding over 5 years),
 - the Buy and Renew Initiative, facilitating local authorities to purchase and renew housing units in need of remediation and make them available for social housing use (€25m funding for 2017),
 - the purchase by the Housing Agency of vacant buy-to-let properties on the portfolios of financial institutions and investors for social housing use (€70m funding in 2016).

To drive forward these and other considerations, a Working Group, chaired by my colleague, the Minister for Housing and Urban Renewal and comprising senior representatives from my Department, local authorities and other relevant bodies, has been established to bring forward proposals for new urban regeneration measures as early as possible. It is intended that the new measures will complement the existing regeneration programme under my Department’s Social Housing Capital Programme, as well as other social regeneration initiatives already under way. Having held its inaugural meeting in mid-June 2016, the Working Group has met on three occasions and is due to meet again in the coming weeks to consider issues and emerging proposals, including the scope for further grant aid and incentive programmes to facilitate urban regeneration generally.

National Oversight and Audit Commission

165. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he is satisfied that the performance indicators in local authorities, as compiled by the National Oversight and Audit Commission in regard to the measure concerning transport, only measures the quality of road surface and amount of road grants and does not measure any metric relating to sustainable transport and travel, such as funding or mode share for walking, cycling or public transport; and if he plans to make any changes to the indicators measured. [6252/17]

166. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Lo-

cal Government if he is satisfied that the performance indicators in local authorities, as compiled by the National Oversight and Audit Commission concerning the related measure, do not examine the issue of carbon emissions; and if he plans to make any changes to the indicators measured. [6253/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 165 and 166 together.

The National Oversight and Audit Commission (NOAC) was established under the Local Government Reform Act 2014 to provide oversight of the local government sector and it is statutorily independent of my Department. The specific functions assigned to NOAC include scrutiny of the performance of any local government body against relevant indicators to which NOAC considers it appropriate to refer. Determination of the indicators for inclusion in its annual performance indicators reports is, within the existing legislative framework, a matter for NOAC itself.

The work being led by my colleague, the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and the Environment, to develop further the national climate mitigation and adaptation policy frameworks will likely involve the further development of mechanisms for the measurement of carbon emissions. According as that work progresses, I will keep under review the role that my Department and associated agencies may be able to play in measuring and reporting on carbon emissions associated with relevant areas of activity.

Planning Issues

167. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if consideration will be given to allowing members of the public to make observations on subsequent planning applications on the same site in a five-year period without paying the €20 fee, where the member of the public has previously made an observation, given that the cost of commenting on repeat applications can be significant to the public. [6255/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I have no plans to reduce the €20 fee payable by members of the public for making submissions or observations on planning applications, including successive applications for development on the same site in respect of which other planning applications have been made in the previous 5 years. The amount of the fee for this purpose is relatively low having regard to the administrative and other technical costs of processing each individual planning application and is intended to prevent frivolous or vexatious submissions, without deterring anyone with genuine concerns or an interest in relation to a proposed development from making submissions.

Question No. 168 answered with Question No. 154.

Planning Issues

169. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to change the existing planning laws which restrict planning permission in rural areas to couples and persons with direct links to the specific area in which planning is being sought; his views on whether such a policy is counter productive in view of the fact that there is little or no housing available in urban centres or available sites on which to construct a house; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6303/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The 2005 Planning Guidelines on Sustainable Rural Housing, issued by my Department, set out the national policy framework for planning authorities in drawing up their statutory development plans in relation to rural housing, taking into account local circumstances and the type of area involved, including areas near large cities and towns which need careful management of development pressures and other rural areas experiencing population decline.

Under the Guidelines, planning authorities are required to frame their planning policies in a balanced and measured way that ensures that the housing needs of rural communities are met, while avoiding excessive urban-generated housing and haphazard development in areas near cities and towns. The Guidelines also aim to ensure that sites being developed for rural housing are suitable with regard to access and wastewater disposal, and also from landscape and design perspectives.

It is a matter for individual planning authorities to prepare their development plans and the policies contained within such plans, taking account of local and varying geographical and landscape circumstances, as well as the approaches set out under the Guidelines in relation to rural-generated housing. It is also a matter for planning authorities, as well as An Bord Pleanála, to implement the Guidelines and local planning policies in assessing and deciding on individual planning applications and appeals under the development management consent process.

I intend to keep the 2005 Guidelines under review, particularly in view of the commitment in the Government's Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness – Rebuilding Ireland to accelerate the delivery of housing in order to address the current housing supply shortage and projected housing needs over the coming years, contributing to wider objectives, including the need to support sustainable urban and rural development and communities. In this connection, my Department is consulting planning authorities about modifying the Guidelines to ensure 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 engage 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.

National Planning Framework

170. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the consultations to date with the Northern Ireland authorities on the new national planning framework; his plans to have further consultations to enable the planning and provision of services on a cross-Border basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6337/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The new National Planning Framework (NPF), Ireland 2040 – Our Plan, will provide the strategic 20 year-plus framework for the development of Ireland to 2040.

Cross-border co-operation between Ireland and Northern Ireland on planning matters has been ongoing for many years as evidenced by the publication of a Framework for Co-operation: Spatial Strategies of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland in 2013. Officials from my Department meet on a quarterly basis with their equivalents in Northern Ireland in the new Department for Infrastructure, who are in turn members of my Department's National Planning Framework Advisory Group.

The NPF detailed ‘issues and choices’ consultation paper, which I launched on 2 February 2017, addresses a range of issues, including Ireland in an island context, and can be found on the website mentioned below. I am determined that the NPF will be an outward looking document, recognising in particular the opportunities for working within a wider Island context with Northern Ireland and in an east-west context with the wider UK area.

As the NPF process moves into the framework development stage in the coming months, my Department will be engaging with relevant Departments in Northern Ireland and through the British-Ireland Council Spatial Planning Workstream on a range of technical areas including forecasting, policy option development and evaluation and environmental assessments in a trans-boundary context. I anticipate a draft NPF will be finalised for submission to Government in Q2 2017, after which it will be published for consultation, with a view to its conclusion by end Autumn 2017.

All of the relevant documentation is available on the dedicated NPF website, *www.ireland2040.ie*, which will act as the portal for general public and stakeholder interaction throughout all phases of the NPF preparation process.

Commissions of Inquiry

171. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of commissions of inquiry or other formal investigations or inquiries being conducted in his Department; the name of these; the date they were established; the expected date the work is intended to be completed; the cost incurred to date; the estimated final cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6357/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): There are no formal investigations or inquiries currently being conducted in my Department.

Local Authority Housing Applications Data

172. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the most recent figures for persons on the housing waiting list for all county and city councils, in tabular form; and the figures for homelessness in the State. [6371/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The results of the statutory Summary of Social Housing Assessments carried out in 2016 provide updated figures on the number of households qualified for social housing support across each housing authority. The 2016 summary recorded 91,600 such households as at 21 September, 2016. The full results of the 2016 Summary are available on my Department’s website at the following link: *www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/summary_of_social_housing_assessments_2016.pdf*.

Official homeless reports are published on my Department’s website on a monthly basis and can be accessed using the following link:

www.housing.gov.ie/housing/homelessness/other/homelessness-data.

These reports are based on data provided by housing authorities and produced through the Pathway Accommodation and Support System (PASS). These reports capture details of individuals utilising State-funded emergency accommodation arrangements that are overseen by

housing authorities.

One-Parent Family Payment Eligibility

173. **Deputy Josepha Madigan** asked the Minister for Social Protection his plans to reinstate the lone parent allowance for both parents who live alone and are separated. [6130/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The One-Parent Family Payment is a means-tested payment which is made to men or women who are caring for a child or children without the support of a partner.

This scheme was introduced on 2 January 1997, and replaced the Lone Parent's Allowance and the Deserted Wife's Benefit.

The One-Parent Family Payment has never been split between parents – it has always been paid to the parent who has main care and charge of the child or children.

In order to qualify for the One-Parent Family Payment, a person must be either -

- widowed (includes a person divorced from spouse prior to spouse's death and not remarried or person whose civil partnership has been dissolved prior to civil partner's death and who has not remarried);

- separated (or divorced);

- unmarried (including one whose marriage has been annulled or civil partnership has been dissolved); or

- a prisoner's spouse/civil partner.

The person must be a qualified parent. This means that the person is the parent, step-parent, adoptive parent or legal guardian of at least one relevant child. The term relevant child means a person who

(a) is ordinarily resident in the State,

(b) is not detained in a children detention school,

and

(c) has not attained the relevant age. The One-Parent Family Payment is payable until a person's youngest child reaches the age of 7. Special provisions exist for those caring and on half rate Carer's Allowance and those in receipt of Blind Pension that extend the age of the youngest child to 16 years.

The person must be under the age of 66 and also have the main care and charge of at least one child who is residing with them. This means that a person making an application for the One-Parent Family Payment must show that the child spends the greater amount of time during the week with them.

The One-Parent Family Payment is not payable in cases where a couple have joint equal custody of a child. However, when an application is made for the One-Parent Family Payment, the actual circumstances of the case are taken into account when a Deciding Officer makes a decision on a payment. If the Deciding Officer is satisfied that the circumstances warrant a payment based on Social Welfare legislation, then that is the payment that is made, and the

presence of a Court Order is one, but not necessarily the only, issue to be taken into account. However, if the actual circumstances were at variance with the Court Order, then the actual circumstances would prevail. For example, parents may have joint equal custody by law, but in reality one parent may have main care and charge and the One-Parent Family Payment may therefore be payable to that parent.

It is not possible to split the One-Parent Family Payment between the couple proportionate to the amount of time that their child resides with them during the week and this has always been the case.

The purpose of the One-Parent Family Payment scheme is to support the parent who has main care and charge of the child or children.

Disability Allowance Payments

174. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Social Protection when payment will issue to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6154/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): On 4 February 2017, full payment of disability allowance arrears issued to this gentleman by cheque.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Exceptional Needs Payments

175. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will make a ministerial order that exceptional needs payments be granted to families in emergency accommodation to assist with transport costs; the number of exceptional needs payments that were made to homeless families in 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6216/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Under the supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) scheme, the can make a single exceptional needs payment (ENP) to help meet essential, once-off expenditure, which a person could not reasonably be expected to meet out of their weekly income. Where the need is of a recurring nature, a weekly or monthly supplement under the SWA scheme may be awarded. The Government has provided some €31.5 million for this scheme in 2017.

Families living in emergency accommodation may incur additional costs, including travel to school costs for children. Financial support can be provided under the SWA scheme to meet identified needs. These are discretionary payments that are made following an assessment of the actual needs in each case. Statistics are not maintained of the number of ENPs or supplements for travel costs that are made to homeless families. However, staff in my Department's Homeless Persons Unit are supporting over 100 homeless families in Dublin with additional costs. Families in these circumstances who are experiencing difficulties meeting additional costs should contact the Department's Community Welfare Service who may be able to offer assistance.

The Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness – Rebuilding Ireland – commits to providing access to free public transport for family travel and for school journeys for homeless families in emergency accommodation and this action is being progressed by the Department

of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government.

I am satisfied with the range of discretionary supports available under the SWA schemes, and do not plan to introduce specific payments for the additional costs for families in emergency accommodation.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Applications

176. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an application for a disability allowance in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6265/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Disability allowance is a means tested scheme and the way means are assessed is laid down in social welfare legislation. In summary, any income, with some exceptions, belonging to the person and his spouse/partner/ co-habitant is assessable as means for disability allowance purposes. This claim was referred to a social welfare investigative officer (SWI) for a report on the person's means and circumstances. Following a comprehensive home visit the SWI established to his satisfaction that the claimant and his companion are co-habiting. The means assessed against this gentleman are derived from his partner's UK pensions, but they are halved because she is in receipt of social welfare in her own right.

On 10 January 2017, this man was notified of this decision and was given the right to appeal this decision to the Social Welfare Appeals Office. To date no appeal has been received.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Appointments to State Boards

177. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Social Protection his plans to fill vacancies on the boards of statutory bodies which operate under the aegis of his Department (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6292/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The statutory bodies operating under the aegis of my Department are the Citizens Information Board, the Pensions Authority, the Pensions Council, the Pensions Ombudsman (which does not have a Board) and the Social Welfare Tribunal.

There are no vacancies on the boards of the Pensions Authority, the Pensions Council or the Social Welfare Tribunal. There is currently one vacancy on the board of the Citizens Information Board which will be filled in accordance with the Guidelines on Appointments to State Boards, published in November 2014.

Carer's Allowance Applications

178. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an application for a carer's allowance in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6340/17]

8 February 2017

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The application for carer's allowance (CA) in respect of the person concerned was awarded on 6 February 2017 in respect of two care recipients.

The first payment of CA is due to issue to her nominated bank account on 9 February 2017.

Arrears of allowance due from 22 September 2016 to 8 February 2017 have issued to the bank.

The person concerned was notified of these details on 6 February 2017.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Commissions of Inquiry

179. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of commissions of inquiry or other formal investigations or inquiries being conducted in his Department; the name of these; the date they were established; the expected date the work is intended to be completed; the cost incurred to date; the estimated final cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6364/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Commissions of investigation can investigate matters of significant public concern and are set up by Government order. Such commissions are currently provided for by the Commissions of Investigation Act 2004.

No such commissions of investigation, inquiry or other formal investigations are currently ongoing in my Department.

Brexit Issues

180. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will clarify reports in the media on comments made by the former head of the European Commission's customs procedures unit (details supplied) with regard to a hard border in counties Cavan and Monaghan, that the Government will be obliged to enforce strict border controls to avoid steep penalties from the European Union; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6137/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Two of the four headline priorities for the Government in managing Brexit are our economic and trading arrangements and Northern Ireland and the peace process, including border issues. In this regard, the Government's clearly stated preference is to maintain the closest possible trading relationship between the UK and the EU, including Ireland. When the EU-UK negotiations start, the Government will pursue, together with our EU partners, an outcome that protects Ireland's fundamental interests and an one that can be accepted by all. We are not under any illusions about the challenge and complexity of these negotiations and are engaged in detailed planning to prepare for them. As part of our preparations, I have met with all of my EU counterparts in order to make them aware of the need for specific arrangements which protect the key gains of the peace process on this island – a process to which the EU has already made a key contribution. Our concerns in relation to Northern Ireland are understood and appreciated and there is a general desire to assist in addressing them satisfactorily. In this regard, Commissioner Barnier's clear statement in December that Irish issues would be a negotiating priority was very positive.

However, the negotiations have not even begun yet.

The Taoiseach discussed the imperative of the open border on the island of Ireland with Prime Minister May in Dublin on 30 January. I have also discussed these issues with the Secretary of State for Exiting the EU, David Davis, and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, James Brokenshire.

The Government is preparing for and will be ready for all eventualities. Contingency planning began before the referendum last June and the necessary analysis has deepened across Government since then.

The Government will continue to comprehensively and proactively prepare for all dimensions of the EU-UK negotiations in pursuit of our priority concerns. In this regard, we will continue to engage with all of our EU partners and with the EU institutions, including the European Commission, to highlight the unique circumstances of Northern Ireland, and the consequences for North-South cooperation on the island as a whole, which must be factored into any new EU relationship with the UK.

EU Issues

181. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to a decree that was passed by the Romanian Parliament that could free dozens of officials jailed for corruption (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6239/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am aware of the events that the Deputy has described. The Emergency Decree, introduced on 31 January, would have undermined the work of the anti-corruption agencies in Romania. Following the position taken by the President of Romania and the public protests over a number of nights, these proposals have now been withdrawn by the Government. Romania has been subject to the EU Cooperation and Verification Mechanism (CVM) since it joined the European Union in 2007. One of the key aims of the CVM is to combat against corruption. It is important that regressive steps are not taken, and that progress already made is continued.

Human Rights

182. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has read a report from the Cairo Institute of Human Rights Studies (CIHRS) which states that a person (details supplied) and thousands of other peaceful protesters are being illegally imprisoned under the colonial era Assembly Law (Law 10/1914), that CIHRS has discovered was repealed on 30 January 1928; his views on the fact that this law is being illegally implemented 89 years after its formal repeal to the imprisoned person; and if he will formally raise this issue with his Egyptian counterpart and demand the immediate release of the person. [6240/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): This long-running and complex consular case continues to be a top priority for the Irish Government and I and my officials are doing everything possible to achieve this citizen's return to Ireland at the earliest possible time. I am aware of the research and report by the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS) to which the Deputy refers. The position is that the Institute has filed a petition on 31 January 2017 with the Egyptian State Council seeking an injunction against Law 10/1914, known as the "Assembly Law", and arguing that the Law should be annulled because it was effectively repealed in 1928. The State Council is a superior branch of the judiciary in Egypt.

The Irish Embassy in Cairo will be monitoring closely developments in this case and keeping me informed. I know that this citizen's legal representatives will also be keeping themselves informed of developments and assessing any possible implications for his citizen's court case.

The court case in which this citizen is a defendant is back in court on 14 February and the Irish Embassy will again be present on that occasion to observe proceedings.

Brexit Issues

183. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the outcome of discussions he has had with the British Foreign Secretary in relation to the need for any post-Article 50 agreement between Britain and the European Union to provide for a human rights Act, which is a central element of the Good Friday Agreement. [5547/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The protection of human rights in Northern Ireland law, including through the incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights, is one of the key principles underpinning the Good Friday Agreement. It should be noted that the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) is separate and distinct to the European Union. The UK's decision to leave the EU has no impact on its obligations under the ECHR. Even after the UK leaves the EU, there will be a continuing obligation on the British Government to incorporate the European Convention on Human Rights into Northern Ireland law, as provided for in the Good Friday Agreement.

The Irish and British Governments have a clear and continuing obligation to uphold all of the provisions of the Good Friday Agreement. In the crucial area of human rights it is important that both Governments do all they can to engender confidence by demonstrating their commitment to both the letter and spirit of the Agreement.

The Government has underlined this obligation in the context of British Government proposals, not connected with Brexit, to repeal the UK Human Rights Act, which incorporates the ECHR into domestic law, and to introduce a domestic Bill of Rights. The Government has stressed to the British Government the importance of fully meeting its human rights obligations under the Good Friday Agreement and will continue to monitor the situation closely.

I raised the matter directly with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, James Brokenshire, at a meeting in September. He confirmed the British Government position that any changes to the UK Human Rights Act would be made in a way which would be fully consistent with the British Government's obligations under the Good Friday Agreement. In this context, I would note that while a domestic Bill of Rights can complement incorporation of the Convention, it does not replace it.

As co-guarantor of the Good Friday Agreement, the Government takes very seriously its responsibility to safeguard its institutions and principles including in the area of human rights. In this regard, as part of the All-Island Civic Dialogue, I have convened a sectoral civic dialogue on Human Rights under the Good Friday Agreement on 13 February, to hear from those directly involved in work that relies on the human rights frameworks and protections of the Agreement.

Human rights are central to the peace process and must be protected and sustained, regardless of the UK's status in the EU. The Government will continue to work closely with the British Government and the Northern Ireland Executive to ensure that the protection of human rights remains at the heart of civic life, politics and ongoing societal change in Northern Ireland. This includes the continued incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights in Northern Ireland law as provided for in the Good Friday Agreement.

Brexit Issues

184. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the outcome of discussions he has had with the British Foreign Secretary in relation to access to the Court of Justice of the European Union and other guarantees of fundamental rights that underpin the Good Friday Agreement in any post-Article 50 agreement between Britain and the EU. [5548/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The UK's decision to leave the European Union did not change the status of the Good Friday Agreement nor did it alter the existing legal and political obligations of both the Irish and British Governments under the Agreement as they relate to human rights. Specifically, the continuing obligation of the British Government to incorporate the European Convention on Human Rights into Northern Ireland law was unaffected by the outcome of the UK referendum.

The EU-UK negotiations have not yet begun. When these negotiations start, the Government will pursue, together with our EU partners, an outcome that protects our headline priorities and Ireland's fundamental interests, including in relation to Northern Ireland and the peace process. We are not under any illusions about the challenge and complexity of these negotiations and are engaged in detailed planning to prepare for them.

The Irish and British Governments are agreed that the Good Friday Agreement is and will remain the foundation for cooperation between both Governments on Northern Ireland. This was re-affirmed in the Taoiseach's meeting with Prime Minister May on 30 January. The two Governments are agreed that all aspects of the Agreement will need to be upheld throughout the UK's exit process, and in the final arrangements between the United Kingdom and the EU. As a co-guarantor of the Good Friday Agreement, the Government is determined that all aspects of the Agreement – including its provisions on Rights, Safeguards and Equality of Opportunity – are fully protected under any new relationship between the EU and the UK.

As co-guarantor of the Good Friday Agreement, the Government takes very seriously its responsibility to safeguard its institutions and principles. In this regard, as part of the All-Island Civic Dialogue, I have convened a sectoral civic dialogue on Human Rights under the Good Friday Agreement on 13 February, to hear from those directly involved in work that relies on the human rights frameworks and protections of the Agreement.

Commissions of Inquiry

185. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of commissions of inquiry or other formal investigations or inquiries being conducted in his Department; the name of these; the date they were established; the expected date the work is intended to be completed; the cost incurred to date; the estimated final cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6359/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): There are currently no tribunals of inquiry, commissions of inquiry or investigations under way in my Department.

Northern Ireland

186. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he or his Department has been in touch with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland or the British

Foreign Office in relation to the recent disclosure of papers pertaining to torture by the British army of a number of persons in Northern Ireland in the early 1970s; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6378/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): First, I wish to restate that the Government condemns in the strongest terms all forms of torture and ill-treatment. The Government strongly believes that the absolute prohibition of torture is one of the cornerstones of the international human rights framework, and all countries are obligated to comply with this unconditional prohibition. No exceptional circumstances may be invoked as a justification for torture or any other form of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

The Government takes the allegations made in the recent television report very seriously and is looking very carefully at the issues. I raised this in discussion with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on Thursday, 2 February, and we agreed that the matter would be followed up by our respective officials. Secretary of State Brokenshire stated that the British Government was clear that it rejected the use of any methods of torture.

The allegations are another deeply concerning example of the suffering that was inflicted on people from all communities during the Troubles, and further underscore the central role of human rights protections in Northern Ireland in ensuring confidence in the evolving peace process.

Ireland is fully committed to the prevention and eradication of torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, including through our work in the EU and in international fora such as the United Nations, the International Criminal Court, the Council of Europe and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Office of Public Works Properties

187. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of car parking spaces that are controlled by the Office of Public Works in Dublin's inner city; the Department or other body which leases them; the number of spaces available for free use; the locations of same; and the number rented and the price paid to the State for same. [6249/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán Canney): Tables A, B and C set out the details of stand-alone car parking facilities held under lease by the Commissioners of Public Works, car parking that is included in leases held by the Commissioners for the purpose of providing office accommodation for the various Government Departments and car parking facilities at State-owned office accommodation in Dublin's inner city (Dublin 1 and 2). The information in the tables schedules location, number of car spaces, the Department(s) that avail of these facilities and in the case of stand-alone car parking facilities includes the rent per annum,

No monies are recouped from any Department by the Commissioners for the purpose of providing car parking facilities.

The Commissioners can only provide information on facilities controlled by the Office of Public Works. In this regard the Commissioners cannot provide details of arrangements that other Departments may have in place for the provision of car parking facilities.

If further details are required, the Deputy might contact my office directly and I will arrange for the Commissioners of Public Works to assemble the data.

Table A: Stand-alone Car Parking

LOCATION	PROPERTY	No OF CAR SPACES	DEPT	RENT PA
DUBLIN 01	Marlborough St Car Park	98	Education, Revenue, Social Protection & Garda Síochána	€138,916.96
DUBLIN 01	Parnell St Parnell Centre Car Park	24	Revenue Commissioners	€22,680.00
DUBLIN 01	Talbot Street 37 Car Park	20	Justice	€40,000.00
DUBLIN 01	Parnell St Parnell Centre Car Park	28	Social Protection	€26,460.00
DUBLIN 01	Parnell St Parnell Centre Car Park	15	FÁS	€14,175.00
DUBLIN 02	Townsend St College House Car Park	26	Health	€97,500.00
DUBLIN 02	Drury Street Car Park	40	Revenue Commissioners	€80,000.00
DUBLIN 02	Townsend St College House Car Park	17	Justice	€34,000.00
DUBLIN 02	Revenue Castleview Georges st	30	Revenue Commissioners	€105,000.00
DUBLIN 02	City Quay Car Park	12	FÁS	€10,800.00
DUBLIN 02	Drury Street Car Park	34	Attorney General, Social Protection, Justice & National Museum	€68,000.00
DUBLIN 02	Mount St Lr 73-79 Ballaugh House	4	Revenue Commissioners	€4,000.00
DUBLIN 02	Statoil Building	3	Oireachtas	€9,000.00
DUBLIN 02	Mount St Lr 67-72 Grattan House	10	Foras na Gaeilge	€32,750.00
DUBLIN 02	Oireachtas Car Parking	13	Oireachtas	€38,462.84

Table B: Car Parking included in 'Office' Leases

LOCATION	BUILDING NAME	No OF CAR SPACES	DEPARTMENT
DUBLIN 01	Abbey Street Upper 26 - 30	9	Civil Service Commission
DUBLIN 01	Abbey Street Upper 26 - 30	14	Civil Service Commission, Justice
DUBLIN 01	Abbey Street Upper 26 - 30	12	Justice
DUBLIN 01	Capel Street 89 -94	1	HSE Crisis Pregnancy Program, Garda Síochána
DUBLIN 01	Frederick St North Frederick Crt	25	Education
DUBLIN 01	Amiens Street (Gandon House)	19	Social Protection
DUBLIN 01	Amiens Street (Gandon House)	8	Social Protection
DUBLIN 01	Irish Life Centre Block D E & F	17	Telecom Regulator
DUBLIN 01	Parnell Sq 13-15 Parnell House	66	Jobs Enterprise & Innovation
DUBLIN 01	Parnell Sq 16	55	National Consumer Agency, Social Protection, Garda Welfare, National Council for Special Education, NESDO, Director of Corporate Enforcement, Taoiseach
DUBLIN 01	Abbey Street Upper 26 - 30	4	Civil Service Commission
DUBLIN 01	Great Strand St Millennium Hse	7	Ombudsman for Children
DUBLIN 01	Kings Inn House SWO & ESO	9	Social Protection
DUBLIN 01	Irish Life Centre Block 2	60	Valuation Office, Land Registry
DUBLIN 01	Spencer Dock	18	C & AGs Office, Office of Government Procurement, Public Expenditure & Reform
DUBLIN 01	Bloom House	26	National Consumer Agency, Companies Registration Office
DUBLIN 02	Bishops Square	13	Revenue Commissioners
DUBLIN 02	Bishops Square	13	Justice
DUBLIN 02	Bishops Square	10	Social Protection
DUBLIN 02	Clare Street 12	4	Public Expenditure & Reform
DUBLIN 02	Clonmel Street [Clonmel Place]	30	Foreign Affairs, Defence

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LOCATION	BUILDING NAME	No OF CAR SPACES	DEPARTMENT
DUBLIN 02	Adelaide Rd 65A (Davitt House)	25	Jobs Enterprise & Innovation
DUBLIN 02	Earlsfort Terrace Earl Ctr Blk C	18	Jobs Enterprise & Innovation, Social Protection
DUBLIN 02	Ely Place 7-8 Ely Court	28	Arts Heritage & Gaeltacht
DUBLIN 02	Wilton Place Fitzwilton House	4	Revenue Commissioners
DUBLIN 02	Frederick St South Frederick Hse	6	Oireachtas
DUBLIN 02	Harcourt Street 75-78	24	Foreign Affairs
DUBLIN 02	Hatch Street 13-15	12	Irish Aid, Defence Ombudsman
DUBLIN 02	Holles Street Holbrook House	10	Valuation Tribunal
DUBLIN 02	Harcourt Road Dun Sceine	14	National Transport Authority
DUBLIN 02	Lombard St East 8 - 11 Joyce Hse	9	Health, Coru, East Regional Health Authority
DUBLIN 02	Mespil Road 43-49	19	Arts Heritage & Gaeltacht, Dept of Children & Youth Affairs
DUBLIN 02	Mount St Lr 73-79 Bal-laugh House	45	Revenue Commissioners
DUBLIN 02	Mount Street Lower 85 - 93	25	Revenue Commissioners
DUBLIN 02	Mount St Upr 36	10	Social Protection
DUBLIN 02	Leeson Street Lower Ossory House	21	Office of the Ombudsman
DUBLIN 02	Earlsfort Tce St Steph Gr Hse	23	Taoiseach, Arts Heritage & Gaeltacht, Public Expenditure and Reform, Civil Service Credit Union, Justice, Residential Institute Redress Unit, La Foy Commission
DUBLIN 02	Mount St Lr 79-83 Timberlay Hse	28	Justice
DUBLIN 02	Longphort House	4	Office of the Ombudsman
DUBLIN 02	Earlsfort Tce St Steph Gr Hse	15	Finance, Public Expenditure & Reform
DUBLIN 02	Adelaide Road 29-31	80	Communications, Energy & Natural Resources
DUBLIN 02	Revenue Castlevew Georges st	35	Revenue Commissioners
DUBLIN 02	St Stephen's Gr 94	20	Justice
DUBLIN 02	Corn Exchange CWS	2	Community Welfare Service
DUBLIN 02	Statoil Building	9	Oireachtas

Table C: Car Parking at State-owned Office

LOCATION	PROPERTY NAME	No OF CAR SPACES	DEPARTMENT
DUBLIN 01	Custom House	50	Environment
DUBLIN 01	Henrietta St Registry of Deeds	30	Registry of Deeds
DUBLIN 01	O'Connell Street Upper 14 - 15	18	Revenue
DUBLIN 01	O'Connell Street Upper 9 - 10	10	Revenue
DUBLIN 02	Dawson Street 59	7	Arts, Heritage & Gaeltacht
DUBLIN 02	Dublin Castle	43	Revenue Commissioners, Revenue, Music Network (Arts Council), Garda Síochána, Education, Customs & Excise
DUBLIN 02	Hanover Street East 6/7	48	Justice, Refugee Appeals Tribunal, Refugees Applications Commission
DUBLIN 02	Knockmaun House	15	Foreign Affairs, Revenue
DUBLIN 02	Hawkins Street Hawkins House	90	Health
DUBLIN 02	Kildare House	38	Oireachtas
DUBLIN 02	Kildare Street 23-28	21	Jobs, Enterprise & Innovation
DUBLIN 02	Kildare Street Ag House	184	Agriculture, Comptroller & Auditor General
DUBLIN 02	Merrion Square 44 - 45	22	Jobs, Enterprise & Innovation
DUBLIN 02	Merrion Square 73	3	Irish Architectural Archive, Irish Manuscripts Commission
DUBLIN 02	St Stephen's Green 52	48	Justice, Office of Public Works
DUBLIN 02	St Stephen's Gr78-81IveaghHse	70	Foreign Affairs

Referendum Data

188. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the full cost to the State of holding the referenda on the 34th and 35th amendments to the Constitution in 2015. [6254/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The referendums on 34th Amendment to the Constitution (Marriage Equality) Bill 2015 and 35th Amendment to the Constitution (Age of Eligibility for Election to the Office of President) Bill 2015 were held together on the 22 May, 2015.

The final cost of the above referendums is €14.9m.

Post Office Network

189. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the status of a report (details supplied) regarding the rural post office network; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6146/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Michael Ring): The report in question was prepared by an independent person on behalf of An Post. The report was submitted to An Post towards the end of December 2016 and it is now a matter for the management and Board of An Post to consider the report.

The postal sector has been undergoing significant change both nationally and internationally in recent years, with the increased use of electronic communications leading to a decline in core mail volume for An Post. Nonetheless, the Government is committed to working with all stakeholders to find solutions to the sustainability of the post office network in this changing business environment. The Programme for a Partnership Government includes a number of commitments in this regard.

For my own part, I established the Post Office Hub Working Group last year to identify potential models under which the post offices could act as community hubs, especially in rural areas. I chaired the meetings of this Working Group, which included representatives from An Post, the Irish Postmasters Union and rural representatives, and my officials are currently finalising the Group's report.

In addition, my officials have been examining the potential for the post offices to deliver other services, including the renewal of motor tax. A number of options for the delivery of this service have been identified and proposals are currently being finalised in consultation with the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government.

Scéim na bhFoghlaimeoirí Gaeilge

190. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den an Aire Ealaíon, Oidhreachta, Gnóthaí Réigiúnacha, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta an bhfuil sé i gceist 30 scoláireacht bhreise a thabhairt le haghaidh scoilbhliain 2017-2018 faoi scéim na bhfoghlaimeoirí Gaeilge do scoileanna ar na hoileáin; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [6192/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Seán Kyne): Tá scoláireachtaí á gcur ar fáil ag an Roinn ó 2007 i leith chun daltaí meánscoile ó cheantair taobh amuigh den Ghaeltacht a choinneáil ar iostas i dtithe atá aitheanta faoi Scéim na bhFoghlaimeoirí Gaeilge ar na hoileáin Ghaeltachta. Ar na hOileáin Árann, is iad Coláiste Ghobnait in Inis Oírr, Coláiste Naomh Eoin in Inis Meáin agus Gairm Scoil Éinne in Árann na scoileanna atá páirteach sa scéim. Íoctar deontas laethúil de €27 le teaghlaigh aitheanta faoin scéim a choinníonn daltaí ar iostas fad a bhíonn siad ag freastal ar mheánscoil an oileáin.

Tá dhá theaghlach déag ag cur lóistín ar fáil in Árann do na daltaí atá páirteach sa scéim. Is iad na scoileanna féin a dhéanann earcaíocht ar na daltaí, a roghnaíonn na tithe lóistín agus atá freagrach as na daltaí, fad a bhíonn siad ar na hoileáin.

Déantar athbhreithniú ar an scéim go rialta. Cuirtear nithe éagsúla san áireamh mar chuid de na hathbhreithnithe sin, lena n-áirítear an t-éileamh ó na meánscoileanna ar na hoileáin agus an tionchar a d'fheadfadh líon mór daltaí ó cheantair taobh amuigh den Ghaeltacht a imirt ar theanga phobail na meánscoileanna agus ar theanga phobal na n-oileán féin.

Ag eascairt as an athbhreithniú deiridh a déanadh ar an scéim, tógadh cinneadh go leanfaí leis ar feadh tréimhse trí bliana eile - sé sin go dtí deireadh na scoilbhliana 2018/2019 agus gur uasmhéid de 30 scoláire a bheadh i gceist ar Oileáin Árann.

Sílim gur scéim mhaith í seo a fheidhmíonn go héifeachtach ar scála beag mar go gcaithfear bheith cúramach nach n-athróidh líon mór daltaí nach cainteoirí dhúchais Gaeilge iad nósanna teanga na scoileanna ar a mbíonn siad ag freastal. É sin ráite, tá an cás le haghaidh méadaithe bhig ar líon na scoláireachtaí atá ar fáil faoin scéim don scoilbhliain 2017/2018 á bhreithniú agam ar bhonn eisceachtúil faoi láthair.

Departmental Funding

191. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if there are any grant aid programmes currently in operation within her Department or due to come online shortly which provide funding for assisting persons in the refurbishment of buildings in town centres for residential or commercial purposes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6229/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Government's Action Plan for Rural Development, which was launched on 23rd January, contains a number of measures which have the objective of rejuvenating Ireland's rural towns and villages to make them more attractive places in which to live and work, and to increase their tourism potential.

I will shortly be launching an enhanced Town and Village Renewal Scheme for 2017, and towns and villages to be included in this scheme will be selected through an application and assessment process. The scheme will be funded by my Department and administered by the Local Authorities.

As part of the Town and Village Renewal scheme, I intend to launch a pilot project to encourage residential occupancy in rural towns and villages. This pilot will be launched separately in the second half of the year, when details of the scheme have been finalised in consultation with relevant Departments. The pilot will examine ways in which properties that are currently not in use in town centres can be renovated to allow them to be used for residential purposes. The refurbishment of premises for commercial purposes will not be part of this scheme.

Departmental Expenditure

192. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if Roinn na Gaeltachta had any unspent funding in 2015 and 2016; if so, the headings under which that funding came; if the funding was returned to the Exchequer; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6235/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Total Programme expenditure, excluding administration subheads, for the Irish Language, Gaeltacht and Island programme area in 2015 amounted to 100% of the 2015 allocation as per the Revised Estimates 2015. Provisional figures indicate that the total programme expenditure, excluding administration subheads, for the Irish Language, Gaeltacht and Island programme area in 2016 amounted to 106% of the 2016 allocation as per the Revised Estimates 2016 as additional funding was made available on foot of savings elsewhere in the Department's Vote.

In accordance with Public Financial Procedures, the surplus of the amount provided in a Department's Vote, over the net amount applied in that Vote is liable for surrender to the Exchequer, with the exception of unspent appropriations for capital supply services up to a maximum of 10% of the capital envelope of the Vote, which may be carried over for spending on capital priority programmes in the following year.

The surplus of the amount provided in my Department's Vote over the net amount applied amounted to €8,895,773 in 2015. Of this, an amount of €6,158,000 was carried forward to 2016 by way of deferred surrender leaving a surplus to surrender to the Exchequer of €2,737,773. Full details of these figures and all associated expenditure are available in the 2015 Annual Appropriation Account for my Department which is published on the website of the Comptroller and Auditor General at: [www.audgen.gov.ie/viewdoc.asp?fn=/documents/annualreports/2015/AppAcc/En/Vote 33.pdf](http://www.audgen.gov.ie/viewdoc.asp?fn=/documents/annualreports/2015/AppAcc/En/Vote%2033.pdf)

Work is continuing on finalising the 2016 expenditure figures for my Department and adjustments continue to be made in relation to individual financial transactions to ensure that expenditure is accounted for in accordance with Government accounting policies, principles and procedures. However, I can advise that provisional figures indicate that the surplus of the amount provided in my Department's Vote over the net amount applied will be in excess of €16 million in 2016. An amount of €13,548,000 has been carried forward to 2017 by means of deferred surrender leaving a net surplus to surrender of over €3 million. When account is taken of expenditure which could not be incurred under Programme E of my Department's Vote because of the non-receipt of corresponding Appropriations-in-Aid and surplus Appropriations-in-Aid in other programme areas which must be surrendered to the Exchequer, the remaining balance will amount to some €425,000 in administration budget efficiencies and some €600,000 in programme savings. The programme savings largely relate to capital savings on commemoration projects that did not proceed as promptly as anticipated. As I have already indicated, these figures are provisional and are subject to finalisation by my Department and audit by the Comptroller and Auditor in General.

Details of the actual outturn for my Department at subhead level for 2016, including details of any surplus, together with explanations for any variances between allocations and expenditure, will be published in the Annual Appropriation Account for 2016 and be made available on the website of the Comptroller and Auditor General later this year, as was the case for previous years.

Commissions of Inquiry

193. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the number of commissions of inquiry or other formal investigations or inquiries being conducted in her Department; the name of these; the date they were established; the expected date the work is intended to be completed; the cost incurred to date; the estimated final cost; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6349/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs was established under that title on 7th July 2016. It has responsibility for all the matters that previously came within the remit of the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, which was itself established on 2nd June 2011, and in addition is also responsible for certain functions transferred from the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government and from the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources.

No Commissions of Inquiry or other investigations as described by the Deputy have been conducted by my Department or by its predecessor Department.

Rural Development Plan

194. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the tax incentives and reliefs that will be available to owners of properties in rural towns and villages following on from the Government launch of its rural development action plan. [6377/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Action Plan for Rural Development, which was launched on 23rd January, contains a number of measures which have the objective of rejuvenating Ireland’s rural towns and villages to make them more attractive places in which to live and work, and to increase their tourism potential.

Under my own Department’s remit, these measures include the Town and Village Renewal Scheme, the CLÁR programme, the Built Heritage Investment Scheme and the Structures at Risk Fund.

The Town and Village Renewal scheme will be launched shortly. However, as part of this scheme, I intend to launch a pilot project to encourage residential occupancy in rural towns and villages. This pilot will be launched separately in the second half of the year when details of the scheme have been finalised in consultation with relevant Departments. The pilot will examine ways in which properties that are currently not in use in town centres can be renovated to allow them to be used for residential purposes. I do not, at this stage, envisage that this scheme will involve tax reliefs or incentives.

Questions in relation to the availability of tax incentives and reliefs for property owners more generally are a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Finance.

Medical Card Eligibility

195. **Deputy Josepha Madigan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to restore the medical cards to persons over 70 years of age in households earning over €900 per week after the lowering of this band in recent budgets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6258/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health (Alteration of Criteria for Eligibility) (No. 2) Act 2013 sets out that, when a person attains the age of 70, the medical card income limits are €500 gross income per week for a single person and €900 gross income per week for a couple.

The Deputy will be aware that persons aged 70 or older, who are assessed as ineligible under the gross income thresholds, may also have their eligibility assessed under the means tested

medical card scheme in the event that they face particularly high expenses, e.g. nursing home or medication costs. This scheme is open to all persons, irrespective of their age and assessment is based on net income and assessable outgoing expenses. The qualifying income thresholds under this scheme are lower than over 70s gross income thresholds.

Furthermore, persons, including those aged over 70 years, may be eligible for a medical card where discretion is exercised where they face undue hardship in arranging medical services as a result of medical or social circumstances.

The Deputy will be fully aware that, from August 2015, the Government ensured that all persons aged 70 or older can access a GP service without charges regardless of income under the second phase of universal GP care.

The gross income limits are reviewed annually and considered in the context of the budget.

Hospital Waiting Lists

196. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Clare will have gallstone surgery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6128/17]

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.

Home Help Service Provision

197. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite the provision of home help for a person (details supplied); the timeframe this person is expected to be on a waiting list; if additional funding will be provided for home help hours in County Roscommon in view of the fact that the budget has been exhausted to provide home help care for existing clients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6131/17]

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.

Home Help Service Provision

198. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the amount of funding provided in 2016 for the provision of home help hours in counties Roscommon and Galway; the amount of funding for home help allocated to both counties for 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6134/17]

199. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the specific number of home help hours which funding allowed for in County Roscommon in 2016; the specific number of hours which funding will allow for in County Roscommon in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6135/17]

200. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if additional funding for home help hours will be made available to County Roscommon for 2017 in view of the fact that funding is being exhausted to cater for existing clients while new clients are being left on long waiting lists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6136/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): I propose to take Questions Nos. 198 to 200, inclusive, together.

As these are service matters they have been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Mental Health Services Report

201. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 12 of 12 July 2016 and 109 of 18 October 2016, the status of the review of *A Vision for Change*; when the review will be published; the composition of the review body; the terms of reference of that review; the steps that have been taken to reinstate the implementation body; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6139/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): *'A Vision for Change'* has guided national mental health policy for the past 10 years and its term came to an end in 2016. The Department of Health, following a recent request for tender, awarded a contract for an expert evidence review and analysis of national and international best practice in the development and delivery of mental health services. The review aims to identify sites of best practice, outlining how these models can apply to the Irish context. The review will also assess the current delivery of Mental Health Services in Ireland having regard to the international evidence and the implementation of *'A Vision for Change'*, and will have regard to both human rights and Health and Well-being objectives. It is expected that this review will be completed by end-February 2017.

This evidence review will inform the parameters of a review of *'A Vision for Change'*. Consideration is also being given to establishing the appropriate oversight structure for the policy review process.

Home Care Packages Administration

202. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be allocated a social worker to assess the person's case to be discharged and allocated with a home care package;; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6145/17]

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

203. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Health the names of the hospitals where 24-7 liaison psychiatry is available in emergency departments nationwide; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6160/17]

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.

Hospital Staff Data

204. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Health the number of clinical nurse specialists in posts as part of the clinical self-harm programme, including their location and their hours of operation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6161/17]

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.

Primary Care Services Provision

205. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Health the services that are up and running in dual diagnosis in primary care; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6163/17]

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.

Disabled Drivers Grant

206. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Health the assistance that will be provided to a person (details supplied) in respect of their application for a primary medical certificate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6189/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Drivers and Passengers with Disabilities Tax Relief Scheme, which is operated by the Revenue Commissioners, is the responsibility of my colleague, the Minister for Finance. To qualify for the scheme, an applicant must be permanently and severely disabled within the terms of the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Regulations Act 1994 and satisfy a range of conditions. The medical criteria for the scheme are set out by the Department of Finance. While applications for primary medical certificates are processed through the Health Service Executive (HSE) Local Health Offices, HSE personnel have no role in setting or amending the criteria. The Disabled Drivers Medical Board of Appeal, is also under the auspices of the Minister for Finance. This Board is independent in the exercise of its functions, to ensure the integrity of its clinical determinations. On that basis, I have no role to play in the exercise of these functions.

With regard to the individual case referenced by the Deputy and his query regarding other help which may be available to the family, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy.

State Claims Agency

207. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 45 of 1 February 2017, if he will provide the actuarial predictions made regarding maternity damages cases by the State Claims Agency, including the yearly number of damages cases predicted and-or the year on year increases predicted. [6205/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The actuaries to the Clinical Indemnity Scheme provide annual actuarial estimates/predictions of the likely cost of the Scheme for the following year(s). The actuarial estimates/predictions do not separately break out the estimated/predicted costs of maternity cases as a subset of total costs, but rather, they refer to the overall estimated/predicted cost of the Scheme, to include all clinical negligence cases across the range of clinical specialties.

The actuarially estimated cost of the Scheme, for each of the past three years was as follows:

Year	Actuarial estimate for CIS €m
2014	202
2015	230
2016	231
Total	663

Occupational Therapy

208. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Health the reason the waiting lists in County Louth for occupational therapy are increasing; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that there are children on the waiting list for more than 20 months because of staff shortages; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6206/17]

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.

Advanced Healthcare Directives

209. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health the timeframe for the completion of the work of the multidisciplinary working group under section 91 of the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 and the submission of its recommendations to the director of the decision support service, DSS; and the timeframe provided to the director of the DSS to publish the code of practice. [6208/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Deputy will be aware, I have established a multidisciplinary Working Group to assist in the development and preparation of the Code of Practice for the advance healthcare directive (AHD) provisions of the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015. The role of the Working Group is to prepare a detailed series of recommendations for the Director of the Decision Support Service, in relation to the interpretation and operation of the AHD provisions contained in the Act.

It is envisaged that this multidisciplinary Working Group will have completed the recommendations for the Code of Practice for the AHD provisions by January 2018. Those recommendations will then be presented to the Director of the Decision Support Service. In ac-

cordance with section 91(3), the Director will prepare and publish a Code of Practice, based (whether in whole or in part) on the recommendations provided by the Working Group.

The timeframe for publishing this Code of Practice will be determined by the Director of the Decision Support Service, subject to obtaining the consent of the Minister for Health to publish the Code of Practice.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Data

210. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons placed in nursing homes through the fair deal scheme in 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6223/17]

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

211. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the average waiting times for endocrinology appointments; and the proposals his Department is undertaking to improve the lists going forward; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6226/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Reducing waiting times for the longest waiting patients is one of this Government's key priorities. Consequently, Budget 2017 allocated €20 million to the NTPF, rising to €55 million in 2018.

In December 2016, I granted approval to the NTPF to dedicate €5m to a daycase waiting list initiative with the aim of ensuring that no patient will be waiting more than 18 months for a daycase procedure by 30 June 2017. In excess of 2000 daycases will be managed through this process and outsourcing of treatment will commence shortly.

The HSE has committed to submit to me by 17 February Waiting List Action Plans for 2017 to ensure that no patient is waiting more than 15 months for an inpatient, daycase procedure or outpatient appointment by the end of October 2017. The Plans are being developed in conjunction with, and supported by, the NTPF's proposal for utilisation of the remaining €10m of 2017 funding for patient treatment, which I expect to receive by 24 February.

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

Organ Donation

212. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health the status and timeframe for the proposed organ transplant opt-out scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6227/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Work on scoping the parameters of the legislation which will provide for an opt-out system of consent for organ donation, is currently being undertaken in my Department. This is a priority for me in 2017 and this work will be progressed as quickly as possible.

Psychological Services

213. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 44 of 19 January 2017, 98 of 24 January 2017, 110 of 25 January 2017 and 115 of 31 January 2017, if he will initiate discussions with the Minister for Justice and Equality in regard to the possibility of her making orders on non-statutory accrediting bodies for psychologists or psychotherapists under sections 40(6)(b) and 40(7)(b) of the Civil Liability and Courts Act 2004, such that those accrediting bodies for psychologists and psychotherapists may be empowered under those sections to investigate complaints regarding the conduct of the professionals under their aegis in compiling section 47 reports, at least until such time as these two professions are regulated by CORU. [6233/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005 provides for the determination of complaints relating to the fitness to practice of practitioners qualified to register and to use the titles of the professions designated under the Act. The Health and Social Care Professionals Council, the registration boards for the professions which it oversees and the various disciplinary committees are all established under the Act and are known under the umbrella name of CORU.

The profession of psychologist is one of the fourteen professions currently designated under the Act and I have recently undertaken a public consultation on the proposal to regulate psychotherapists under the Act. I expect to be in a position to establish the Psychologists Registration Board and appoint its members in the coming months. I am currently considering the submissions received on the proposed regulation of psychotherapists and I will decide shortly on how best to proceed with this proposal.

Some professional bodies undertake investigations of complaints about their members. These are not statutory investigations and I have no function in them. It would be a matter for the professional bodies themselves, in the first instance, to decide whether they wish to seek access to documents, information or evidence prepared for, or given in, family law proceedings.

Medical Card Reviews

214. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if a second review will be re-opened in the case of a person (details supplied) to facilitate assessment of further information; if medical cards will be reinstated pending full review with particular reference to the hardship caused to the family in the interim; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6241/17]

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

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

response. Contact information was issued to Oireachtas members.

Hospital Waiting Lists

215. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health the specific factors involved in determining priority for patient waiting lists for organ transplants. [6242/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I am advised by the Health Service Executive that the specific factors involved in determining priority for patients on an organ transplant waiting list is a clinical decision made by the transplant clinicians in each of the national transplant centres.

Allocation policies for kidney, heart, lung and liver are available on the website of HSE's Organ Donation and Transplant Ireland, *www.odti.ie*. When an organ becomes available for transplant the decision on allocation is made by the relevant national transplant centre in accordance with these policies.

Hospital Staff Recruitment

216. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health when a replacement consultant will be appointed in the eye clinic in Portlaoise hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6244/17]

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

Hospital Transfers

217. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the transport service that is available to those persons that require transport from their homes to their hospital appointments when public transport is not available or not suitable; the option available to them when they cannot get their GP to refer them to the transfer services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6259/17]

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 Waiting Lists

218. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the details of waiting lists for orthopaedic surgery in each hospital group area for outpatient appointments, inpatient procedures and other lists, that have been waiting for six months, 12 months, one year, two years and more than two years, by specialty and hospital, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6261/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The NTPF publishes waiting list data by speciality and hospital each month. This data can be viewed on its website at *NTPF.ie*.

Long-Term Illness Scheme Eligibility

219. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health when fibromyalgia will be included on the lifelong limiting illness list (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6263/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The LTI Scheme was established under Section 59(3) of the Health Act 1970 (as amended). The conditions covered by the LTI are: acute leukaemia; mental handicap; cerebral palsy; mental illness (in a person under 16); cystic fibrosis; multiple sclerosis; diabetes insipidus; muscular dystrophies; diabetes mellitus; parkinsonism; epilepsy; phenylketonuria; haemophilia; spina bifida; hydrocephalus; and conditions arising from the use of Thalidomide. Under the LTI Scheme, patients receive drugs, medicines, and medical and surgical appliances directly related to the treatment of their illness, free of charge.

There are no plans to extend the list of conditions covered by the Scheme.

Health Services Provision

220. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6264/17]

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 Staff Recruitment

221. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health further to parliamentary question No. 238 of 25 January 2017, when the national Health Service Executive office will approve the post (details supplied); the reason for the delay in approving this position; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6267/17]

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.

Community Care Provision

222. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the population of each community health care organisation with a breakdown by age categories (details supplied). [6275/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the Deputy directly.

Electronic Cigarettes

223. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if his Department will acknowledge the impact that vaping products are having for those that are looking for a viable alternative to smoking in the context of the recently published Healthy Ireland survey in October 2016; his plans for quit.ie to provide adult smokers with information regarding vaping; if

evidence suggests an increase in vaping corresponds to a reduction in smoking; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6283/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): Vaping is a relatively new occurrence. While the market share for electronic cigarettes and refill containers is growing, the long-term effects of vaping on public health are not yet known. Electronic cigarettes are regulated by the European Union (Manufacture, Presentation and Sale of Tobacco and Related Products) Regulations 2016. These Regulations transposed the European Tobacco Products Directive and came into effect on 20 May 2016.

The Department, in pursuing the recommendations of Tobacco Free Ireland requested the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) to carry out a health technology assessment (HTA) of the clinical and cost-effectiveness of pharmaceutical and non-pharmaceutical smoking cessation products and services. By conducting this HTA, HIQA will be in a position to provide impartial, expert advice on the value (clinical and economic) of a range of smoking cessation therapies to ensure the best outcome for the public and a prudent use of resources. Interested parties were invited to submit feedback via a public consultation on a draft HIQA report before it is finalised and submitted as advice to Minister Harris and the HSE.

The results of the health technology assessment will inform health policy decisions about potential improvements to the provision of smoking cessation services within Ireland's public health service.

Medical Products

224. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health the status of a meeting which was scheduled to take place between the manufacturer and the HSE (details supplied) following the HSE's assessment of the drug Respreeza; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6291/17]

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.

Dental Services

225. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if he is satisfied that there is sufficient oral and dental hygiene programmes available in schools and the broader community; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6295/17]

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

Dental Services

226. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if his Department will be undertaking health promotion campaigns in relation to oral and dental hygiene aimed at children; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6296/17]

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

227. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the status of his plans to further expand early supported discharge services for stroke patients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6297/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): The most recent National Stroke Audit reported that patients who suffer a stroke in Ireland now have a better chance of surviving and with less disability; and that the health service has made significant cost savings in terms of saved bed days, people returning to work and reduced costs of residential care.

There are already 3 Early Supported Discharge (ESD) pilot sites for stroke at the Mater Misericordiae University Hospital and HSE North Dublin, Galway University Hospitals and Tal-laght Hospital. Good clinical outcomes and high patient and care satisfaction rates are reported across all three sites.

There is a business case available to the HSE for the expansion of the HSE's National Stroke Programme and the Irish Heart Foundation submitted a business case for the expansion of ESD services. Funding of such service developments are a function of the annual Estimates process; and it is in this context that the expansion concerned will be pursued this year.

Respite Care Services Provision

228. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if respite care services have ceased and are no longer being offered to service users at a facility (details supplied) in County Donegal; if so, the reason this decision was taken; the alternative arrangements in place for service users; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6311/17]

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 for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Services

229. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be transferred to the National Rehabilitation Hospital, Dún Laoghaire for rehabilitation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6339/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): As the Dep-

uty'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.

Commissions of Inquiry

230. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health the number of commissions of inquiries or other formal investigations or inquiries being conducted in his Department; the name of these; the date they were established; the expected date the work is intended to be completed; the cost incurred to date; the estimated final cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6360/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): There are no Commissions of Investigation under the terms of the Commission of Investigation Act, 2004 or formal investigations or inquiries being conducted in the Department.

In the main, bodies such as the Health Service Executive or the Health Information and Quality Authority carry out investigations or inquiries into health related issues.

Home Help Service Provision

231. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Health if he will allocate additional funding for the provision of home help hours through the community service organisations in counties Carlow and Kilkenny to alleviate the exorbitant waiting lists and to improve access to the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6369/17]

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

232. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the status of the case of a person (details supplied) including when the person can expect an appointment with the neurology department, Temple Street Hospital, Dublin. [6370/17]

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.

Occupational Therapy

233. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the current waiting time for an

appointment with an occupational therapist with the occupational therapy services in Dublin south central; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6373/17]

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.

Occupational Therapy

234. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number of children under 18 years of age on the waiting list for occupational therapy in Dublin south central, in tabular form; the number of children who have been waiting zero to three months, three to six months, six to nine months, nine to 18 months and more than 18 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6375/17]

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.

Aquaculture Licences

235. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 182 of 14 April 2016, when An Bord Iascaigh Mhara and the Marine Institute will issue a response. [6138/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Due to an administrative error within my Department, I regret that Bord Iascaigh Mhara and the Marine Institute were not made aware of the original PQ request. The request has now been forwarded to the State bodies and I am advised that both State bodies will respond directly to the Deputy within 7 days. The delay in response is sincerely regretted.

GLAS Payments

236. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason there are continuing delays in payments under the GLAS scheme; when a person (details supplied) will receive payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6142/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named was approved into GLAS 1 with a contract commencement date of the 1 October 2015 and has received an 85% first instalment payment in respect of the 2015 scheme year.

During the 2015 balancing prepayment checking process an issue was identified with Low Input Permanent Pasture action. Department officials are actively working to resolve this issue with a view to issuing the 2015 balancing payment as soon as possible.

Following the issue of payment in respect of the 2015 scheme year, the prepayment checking process will get under way in respect of 2016.

TAMS Applications

237. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a farm payment in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6156/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The application from the person named under the Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme (TAMS II) was subject to a prepayment inspection. There were issues identified with the payment claim as a result. These issues will be finalised in a matter of weeks.

Food Imports

238. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide an update on the continued exclusion from supplying live brown crab from Ireland to China which has been ongoing for 14 months; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that this length of time is significantly longer than similar bans in France and the UK which were excluded for shorter periods; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6207/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The implementation of food regulations for imports to China is a matter for the Chinese authorities. Ireland applies stringent European standards and follows procedures which include monitoring the safety of Irish seafood so that consumers can continue to have high confidence in the quality of Irish seafood. The Sea Fisheries Protection Authority is the competent authority under food safety law for this matter.

The Authority continues to work with Chinese import control officials on this market access issue, supported by officials from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. A visit to Irish Crab production and State Laboratory facilities by Chinese import control officials was hosted in May 2016. Following this, there has been continuing communications between the Authority and Chinese officials on this issue. The issue was further discussed between Irish and Chinese experts in the course of Ireland's trade mission to China in September 2016. The Authority is continuing strenuous efforts to secure agreement with Chinese officials for resumption of this trade at the earliest possible date.

Basic Payment Scheme Payments

239. **Deputy Michael D'Arcy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a 2015 BPS payment will issue to a person (details supplied) who has had entitlements transferred to them and land leased; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6273/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named submitted a 2015 Private Contract Clause application to my Department seeking the transfer of land and entitlements by lease as transferee. The land parcels that were the subject of this transfer application had been declared by a third party on their 2013 Single Payment Scheme Application. As a result the transferor held no allocation right on these parcels and the Private Contract Clause application was deemed to be unsuccessful. The person named was notified in writing of this decision and was subsequently advised of the documentation to submit in order to resolve the case.

The person named subsequently submitted a separate 2015 Private Contract Clause application to my Department seeking the transfer of land and entitlements from the transferor who holds the allocation rights on the parcels that are the subject of the transfer.

An official from my Department has spoken to the transferor to discuss issues in relation to the transfer application. The transferor has also been notified of this matter in writing and my Department is awaiting a reply to this correspondence from the transferor in order to proceed with the Transfer application concerned.

Farm Inspections

240. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a ground inspection will be organised for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6274/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department will make arrangements to prioritise a ground inspection of the parcel mentioned so that it can take place as soon as it is practically possible.

Teagasc Courses

241. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the progress being made to meet the demand for courses (details supplied); if additional personnel will be recruited to enable demand to be met and to eliminate the delays that occur for farmers wishing to participate on such courses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6282/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department has been working closely with Teagasc to resolve staffing issues in relation to the adult Green Cert arising from the introduction of the Young Farmers Scheme and National Reserve in 2015, which required successful applicants to complete a FETAC level 6 (Green Cert) or its equivalent in order to qualify for payment.

As Teagasc did not have sufficient capacity to deal with the surge in applications for the Green Cert, it was agreed that additional temporary resources would be provided to rapidly expand the number of Green Cert places. In conjunction with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, Teagasc was approved to appoint 70 temporary education officers in the period 2014 to 2016 on two year contracts of employment; 7 temporary administrators were also approved in 2015 for a two year period to address the huge volume of course administration that arose from the unprecedented demand. The additional resources helped Teagasc to enrol 4,000 adult learners since late 2014.

As Teagasc continue to experience strong demand for the Green Cert, I understand that they are actively considering a range of resource options to address projected demand on a phased basis from 2017 to 2019. I am pleased to confirm that Teagasc's request for 15 new temporary posts to meet acute demand pressure points in some geographical locations was recently approved by my Department. Assignment of those posts to particular locations is an operational matter for Teagasc.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Payments

242. **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. [6287/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): An application under the 2016 Areas of Natural Constraint (ANC) Scheme was received in my Department from the person named on 3 May 2016.

Under the 2016 ANC Scheme, eligible applicants are required to have met a minimum stocking density of 0.15 livestock units for a retention period of seven consecutive months and to maintain an annual average of 0.15 livestock units calculated over the twelve months of the scheme year. Payment under the ANC scheme has not issued at this stage, as the holding concerned has not satisfied the scheme's minimum stocking density requirements and is registered as dormant of stock.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

243. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to improve financial supports in respect of the bovine viral diarrhoea eradication programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6294/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I announced increased financial supports for the early removal of PI (persistently infected) calves under the national Bovine Viral Diarrhoea (BVD) Eradication Programme last month. These improved supports provide for the following:

Beef Herds

€185 if the calf is removed within 21 days (3 weeks) of the first positive or inconclusive test.

€60 if the calf is removed between day 22 and 35 (4th and 5th week of the first positive or inconclusive test).

Dairy Herds

€150 if the female dairy and dairy cross calves are removed within 21 days (3 weeks) of the first positive or inconclusive test.

€35 if the female dairy and dairy cross calves are removed between day 22 and 35 (the 4th and 5th week) of the first positive or inconclusive test.

I have also provided a payment for the first time in respect of the disposal of PI dairy bulls. Under the new arrangements, farmers will receive a payment of €30 towards the disposal of the PI dairy bull through the abattoir or knackery within 21 days of the first positive or inconclusive test. In addition, confirmatory testing will be by blood sampling only carried out by the farmers private veterinary practitioner with the costs of this test to be covered by my Department.

Agriculture Scheme Eligibility

244. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the effect on a commonage if one of the shareholders does not abide by the rules and restrictions of the SAC; and if the GLAS payments for the other persons (details supplied) will be affected if they are doing things correctly and abiding by the rules of the SAC. [6310/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) are the competent authority for the designation of and set-

ting of compliance criteria for SAC and SPA areas. Compliance with these requirements is an element of the Cross Compliance requirements and all applicants under the various EU funded area-based schemes, e.g. BPS, ANC, GLAS, must comply with them. Under EU regulations governing these schemes my Department is obliged to undertake inspections on an annual basis to check compliance with the requirements. Where it is determined, as part of a Department inspection process, that an applicant is non-compliant with such requirements, a penalty may be applied. A penalty will apply where the non-compliance determined is found to be directly attributable to the beneficiary who submitted the scheme application. In the case of commonages a penalty would be applied to all of the shareholders where the non-compliance determined can be directly attributed to each of the shareholders.

In addition, the NPWS may cross report cases of non-compliance to my Department for appropriate attention and application of penalties, on the basis set out above.

Young Farmer Capital Investment Scheme Applications

245. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a file (details supplied) for the young farmers scheme and national reserve will be sent to the agricultural appeals office for consideration; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6330/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named submitted applications under the 'young farmer' category of the 2015 National Reserve and the Young Farmers Scheme. The Terms and Conditions governing the operation of these schemes state that in order to qualify as a 'young farmer', a person must be setting up an agricultural holding for the first time in his/her name or have set up such a holding during the five years preceding the first submission of the BPS application. The applications were not successful as the applicant was not the registered owner of the herd number at the time of the application. The applicant was notified of this decision and was offered the opportunity to submit an appeal.

My Department subsequently received an appeal from the person named in relation to the National Reserve and Young Farmers Scheme applications. This appeal was considered based on the information set out by the applicant and the original decision was upheld. The person named was notified of the outcome of the appeal and offered the opportunity to submit further appeals. The person named has submitted these further appeals. The Agricultural Appeals Office has recently finalised arrangements to manage such appeals and in this regard the relevant papers were submitted to the Agricultural Appeals Office on 30th January 2017. The Agricultural Appeals Office will be in direct contact with the person named with regard to her appeals.

GLAS Applications

246. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a GLAS application for a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6336/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named has been approved into GLAS 3 with a contract commencement date of 1 January 2017. The approval letters for successful applications are due to commence issuing shortly.

It is not possible to confirm payment amounts for 2017 at this stage as the information con-

tained in the GLAS application will have to be verified against land details in the 2017 Basic Payment Scheme application before GLAS payment can be calculated. The processing of 2017 GLAS 3 payments will be carried out in the final quarter of 2017 in accordance with the EU regulations governing the Scheme.

National Mitigation Plan

247. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the national mitigation plan; the timeline for the publication of the plan; the resources being made available for the implementation of the plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6141/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Work is well under way on the development of the first statutory National Mitigation Plan (NMP), required under Section 4 of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act, 2015. The primary objective of the first NMP is to track implementation of measures already under way, identify additional measures in the longer term to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, and progress the overall national low carbon transition agenda to 2050. The first iteration will focus on putting the necessary measures in place to address the challenge to 2020, but also in terms of planning ahead to ensure that appropriate policies and measures can be put in place beyond 2020 and out to 2030.

I recently published a briefing document outlining the development of the NMP to date. It covers the four sectors concerned of electricity generation, the built environment, transport and agriculture, and highlights some key questions to be considered in terms of how best we should position Ireland in taking this important step towards achieving the national transition objective by 2050. The briefing document is available to download from my Department's website. A public consultation is planned for mid-March before a final plan is submitted to Government in early June.

A key part of developing the NMP has been the preparation of appropriate technical, environmental and economic analysis to inform the decision-making process as to what should be included in the plan. These analyses are still ongoing as part of the iterative approach to the development of the plan, and will be an important input into resource allocation as part of future expenditure planning, including as part of the Capital Review.

It should be noted that funding climate action to the required level presents an enormous challenge for Ireland. Early action is imperative to find the most cost-efficient and cost-effective solutions. However, finding the appropriate and most equitable manner to address this issue is not going to be easy, particularly given the economic circumstances of recent years and where finances are still continuing to stabilise and recover. A whole-of-Government approach is essential to identify the optimal mix of measures and policy tools to enable an effective transition. Consideration must be given to the role of regulations, standards, education initiatives and targeted information campaigns, in addition to public and private sector investment. Some initiatives in these areas are outlined in the briefing document which I recently published.

Warmer Homes Scheme Funding

248. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the amount of money set aside by the Government for the warmer homes scheme for 2016 and 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6144/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Better Energy Warmer Homes (BEWH) Scheme funds energy efficiency improvements in the homes of the elderly and vulnerable, making their homes more comfortable, healthier and more cost effective to run. In 2016, 6,839 homes were upgraded under the scheme and the level of funding provided was just over €20m.

Across these three strands of the Better Energy Programme, I anticipate investing more than €60m in 2017. This funding will clearly demonstrate the continuing potential of the scheme to deliver energy efficiency gains and related benefits, such as reduced energy costs and better health outcomes.

As I announced in October 2016 around €100m will be dedicated to energy efficiency and renewable energy projects in 2017, which in addition to the Better Energy Programme will also provide for a number of other programmes, including the Warmth and Wellbeing programme, SME and Industrial engagement with energy efficiency, Public Sector Energy Efficiency and Electric Vehicles.

Waste Tyre Disposal

249. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the action he has taken to dispel concerns held by the tyre industry over lost revenues and trade, among others, which it is claimed will ensue as a result of new structures and regulations being introduced for the industry, including a new compliance scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6149/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): It is my intention to introduce new regulations early this year to address Ireland's waste tyres problem. □

These regulations will enable me to put in place a full compliance scheme for tyre operators, which will be financed by a visible Environmental Management Charge (vEMC). Similar compliance schemes have operated very successfully across other waste streams, including, packaging, waste electrical and electronic goods, batteries and farm plastics.

I met with some tyre industry representatives recently. I listened to their concerns and I have done my best to address as many of them as possible, including making the issue of tyres a priority area for enforcement in 2017 for the Waste Enforcement Regional Lead Authorities (WERLAs). I have also received a lot of support during the extensive consultation that has taken place with the industry for the introduction of the scheme from other operators in the tyre market

By introducing these new structures, I am implementing the recommendations of the Review of Producer Responsibility Initiatives in Ireland which was published by my Department in 2014. I am convinced that the new structures will address the lack of regulation in this market to date and address the occurrences of stockpiles of waste tyres that could have a detrimental effect on the environment and human health.

Postal Codes

250. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the introduction of Eircode to rural Ireland; the action being taken to

encourage it to be used by households; the number of households that have been provided with an Eircode in counties Cavan and Monaghan, in tabular form; if there are strategies in place to implement the usage of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6150/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Capita Business Support Services Ireland, trading as Eircode, was awarded a 10 year contract in December 2013 to develop, implement and maintain the National Postcode System “Eircode”.

At launch 2.2m Eircode notification letters were issues to addresses across the State. Since then in excess of 24,000 new addresses have been assigned Eircodes, of which c.26% have been non-unique rural addresses. All new addresses with their Eircodes are made publically available on the free to use Eircode Finder website, which remains very popular with the public, with just under 10m searches since the finder went live at launch. In addition, Capita provides regular updates to Google who have now integrated Eircodes within Google Maps.

Capita ran a number of national advertising campaigns on television, radio and online to raise public awareness of using Eircodes for deliveries and during emergency situations. For example Eircodes helps the National Ambulance Service (NAS) provide speedier access to care and they are also being used by a number of other public and private sector bodies to help locate addresses.

My Department referred the issue raised in the question to Capita who have stated that 32,846 Eircodes have been issued for County Cavan and 24,644 issued for County Monaghan since Eircode was launched in July 2015. Capita will continue to promote the use of Eircodes through the delivery of coherent marketing campaign, taking into account the different needs of rural Ireland.

Residents who have queries relating to Eircodes can contact Eircode by phone on 0818 300 005, email hello@eircode.ie or by post to Capita Business Support Services Ireland Ltd, Block C, Maynooth Business Campus, Maynooth, Co. Kildare, W23 F854.

Better Energy Homes Scheme

251. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if there are any grant aid programmes currently within his Department or due to come online shortly which provide funding for assisting persons in the sourcing, purchasing, construction or installation of solar panels and associated technology; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6231/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Better Energy Homes scheme, which is administered by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland on behalf of my Department, offers a financial incentive to homeowners who wish to improve the energy performance of their homes. Grants are provided towards the cost of a range of measures including attic insulation, wall insulation, heating systems upgrades, solar thermal panels and accompanying Building Energy Rating (BER). The grant available for the installation of a solar thermal system is €1,200.

I have recently requested SEAI to commence a review of all measures that are supported through the energy efficiency schemes and the results of this review will inform any future measures that may be offered through the scheme.

For businesses, the Accelerated Capital Allowance is a tax incentive for companies paying

corporation tax and aims to encourage investment in energy efficient equipment. It allows companies to write off 100% of the purchase value of qualifying energy efficient equipment against their profit in the year of purchase. Eligible equipment can be chosen from the Triple E register and includes solar heating and photovoltaic technologies.

Current Building Regulations also require that a certain proportion of the energy consumption to meet the energy performance of a new dwelling is provided by renewable energy sources. Solar technologies can be used to help meet this contribution. SEAI also maintains an on-line guide to solar electricity and solar heating. This information is available on their website.

Inland Fisheries Data

252. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if Inland Fisheries Ireland has any salmon stock information for the Owenea river in County Donegal including catch figures from anglers, smolts leaving the river and salmon returning to the river for the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6236/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne): The primary index for evaluation of likely returning salmon numbers for any river is the recorded rod (harvest or catch and release) and commercial catch (if any) averaged over the previous 5 years.

I have been informed by Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) that the Owenea has remained fully open over the past 5 years and a full index based on rod catches is available for the river. The table shows the angling catch for the last available (and verified) five years.

In cases where a river is closed, IFI gathers information on juvenile abundance indices derived from electro-fishing surveys carried out annually as an indicator of stock status. The Owenea, as an open river with good adult stock indices, has not been prioritised for electrofishing surveying, which is focused on those rivers at or below their conservation limit to provide juvenile stock abundance indices where no rod catch data is available. If the juvenile stock indices are above a scientifically established threshold the relevant river may be opened to catch and release angling which will create a rod catch index.

As the Owenea does not require electrofishing, precise information on juvenile abundance is not available. However, the evidence of a good adult spawning stock over five years would indicate a healthy population of juvenile salmon which migrate to sea and return to the Owenea as adults to spawn and replenish the stock.

Year	Harvest	Catch and Release	Total Angling Catch
2015	252	47	299
2014	177	54	231
2013	286	69	355
2012	345	110	455
2011	437	120	557

National Broadband Plan

253. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if consideration will be given to appointing a number of liaison officers from

his Department to deal with different regions in taking broadband queries on behalf of members of the public submitted by elected representatives; if further consideration will be given to supplying elected representatives with the contact details of a liaison person from each of the broadband service providers within regions that elected representatives can communicate with; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6237/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): My Department welcomes queries from public representatives and members of the public in relation to the National Broadband Plan (NBP) and has a dedicated inbox, broadband@dcca.gov.ie, for this purpose. Queries received in relation to the NBP are then responded to by members of my Department's NBP team. There is also helpful information on the NBP available through my Department's website at www.broadband.gov.ie.

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

The High Speed Broadband Map, which is available at www.broadband.gov.ie shows the extent of the State Intervention area:

- The areas marked BLUE on the High Speed Broadband Map represent those areas where commercial telecommunications providers are either currently delivering or have previously indicated plans to deliver high speed broadband services.

- The areas marked AMBER on the High Speed Broadband Map represent the target areas for the State Intervention, which are the subject of the current procurement process.

The map provides information on a county by county basis with a breakdown of coverage across the townlands in every county. Individuals can check whether their premises are in a BLUE or an AMBER area by accessing the High Speed Broadband Map and entering their Eircode.

My 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@dcca.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 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 shortly update the High Speed Broadband map and finalise this Intervention Area for bidders, taking into account any industry investments that have not materialised in Blue areas, along with new industry investments and concrete commitments by industry for further new investments within the proposed 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 roll-out a network of the scale envisaged under the NBP. As part of the competitive process, the Department will engage with winning bidder(s) on the best roll out strategy, in order to target areas of particularly poor service, business needs and/or high demand. This will need to be balanced with the most efficient network roll out plan. A prioritisation programme will be put in place in this regard, in consultation with the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. A detailed roll-out plan for the network will be published once contract(s) are in place.

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

In a further positive initiative, last July, I established a Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce with my colleague Minister Humphreys to address immediate issues in relation to the quality of mobile phone and broadband coverage. The Taskforce report is available on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.dccae.gov.ie/communications/en-ie/Broadband/Pages/Mobile-Phone-and-Broadband-Taskforce.aspx>.

As part of the Taskforce recommendations, the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs is funding all local authorities to assign an officer with responsibility for broadband to act as the single point of contact for engagement with operators to assist with accelerated roll-out of the National Broadband Plan and create awareness of/stimulate demand for broadband services. 24 local authorities have now appointed dedicated Broadband Officers, to work with the telecoms industry. Each of these reports to and is being actively supported at Director level in the relevant Local Authority. My Department will be working closely with these Officers and this initiative will further enhance the availability of local information.

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. 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.

These investments should assist in significantly improving the coverage and quality of broadband and mobile voice and data services throughout the country.

Renewable Energy Incentives

254. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if, in addition to advertising scholarships for students undertaking taught MSc degrees commencing in the academic year 2017-2018 on topics of direct relevance to the devel-

opment of Ireland's petroleum resources, he will consider offering similar scholarships in the field of renewable energy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6247/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Energy White Paper published in December 2015, sets out a vision and framework to guide Irish energy policy and the actions that Government intends to take in the energy sector from now up to 2030, aimed at transforming Ireland's fossil-fuel based energy sector into a clean, low carbon system by 2050. Successive Governments have introduced a range of policy measures and schemes to incentivise the use of renewable energy and deliver energy efficiency.

There is already a vibrant energy research and development environment in Ireland. Government continues to encourage innovation and significant funds are already invested in energy research, development, demonstration and deployment across a range of third level institutions, research institutions such as the Beaufort Centre in Cork, agencies including Science Foundation Ireland, the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, Enterprise Ireland and the Environmental Protection Agency. In addition, EU research programmes such as Horizon 2020, provide opportunities for Irish public bodies and private companies to maximise funding opportunities.

Energy research plays an integral part in Ireland's energy policy and support to renewable energy research is a vast multiple of the €35,000 p.a. approx. provided to support geoscience scholarships. As regards my Department, I recently doubled the funds available to the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) for its Energy Research, Development and Demonstration (RD and D) fund in 2017 to €2 million. This fund is open to Irish researchers in industry and academia to support sustainable energy research into new market solutions which overcome various barriers in the move to a secure, clean energy future, and provides for the possibility of support to postgraduate studies. SEAI, with my Department, is currently reviewing RD and D funding to see how it could better align with the timelines of academic research, and the potential for postgraduate studies. Priority areas include energy efficiency, citizen engagement and energy storage with the programme open to a wide range of proposal types - including technology RD and D, field research, and feasibility studies. Since 2002, my Department has funded SEAI to provide €26 million through its Energy RD and D programme and details of these projects are available on the SEAI website (www.seai.ie). Furthermore, in conjunction with the Economic and Social Research Institute, SEAI funds a Research Fellowship which focuses on energy efficiency incentivisation activities.

Exchequer funding is also supporting ocean energy research with a total cumulative funding of €26.3 million provided under my Department's multi-annual ocean energy development budget for the period 2013 to 2016 and administered by SEAI.

Noting the availability and scale of Government and EU funding for energy research, while I have no plans to introduce scholarships in the field of renewable energy, I will continue to keep the matter under review.

Broadband Service Provision

255. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when the national broadband strategy will deliver broadband to an area (details supplied); if this will happen in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6328/17]

256. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will provide a map of north County Dublin indicating which areas are still without broadband; when those areas will receive a broadband supply under the national broad-

band strategy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6329/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 255 and 256 together.

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

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.

There has been significant progress in relation to broadband rollout so that today, approximately 1.4m or 61% of premises in Ireland can get high speed broadband of a minimum of 30 Megabits per second. The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector, which 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.

Most of North County Dublin falls within a BLUE area and will be provided for commercially, whereas the entire townland of Kilsallaghan falls within an AMBER area and will therefore, be included in the State Intervention procurement process under the NBP. Individuals can check whether their premises is in a BLUE or an AMBER area by accessing the High Speed Broadband Map and entering their Eircode.

My Department is actively monitoring commercial deployment plans in the BLUE areas to ensure that all households and businesses can get access to the services. My Department is also actively monitoring developments of commercial operators that might impact the Intervention Area. This is being done in accordance with procedures set out by my Department in December 2015.

I should add, however, that the provision of telecommunications services, including broadband services, is a matter for the service providers concerned who operate in a fully liberalised market, regulated by the independent regulator, the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg). I do not have a statutory authority to require commercial companies to rollout services to particular locations.

A formal procurement process is in train to select a company or companies who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network within the State Intervention Area. My Department will shortly update the High Speed Broadband map to finalise the Intervention Area for the Procure-

ment process, taking into account industry investments that have not materialised in Blue areas, together with new industry investments within the proposed State Intervention Area, along with concrete and credible commitments by industry for further new investments within the 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 on my Department's website.

I have 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.

These investments should assist in significantly improving the coverage and quality of broadband and mobile voice and data services throughout the country.

Commissions of Inquiry

257. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of commissions of inquiry or other formal investigations or inquiries being conducted in his Department; the names of these; the dates they were established; the expected dates the work is intended to be completed; the cost incurred to date; the estimated final cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6352/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): There are no ongoing investigations or Commissions of Inquiry in my Department.

Airport Security

258. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the measures being taken to ensure that unlawful discrimination is not being undertaken or facilitated in pre-clearance areas at Dublin and Shannon airports; the mechanisms in place to ensure Ireland's obligations under the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, TFEU, and the European Convention on Human Rights, ECHR, in pre-clearance areas at Dublin and Shannon airports; the procedures for withdrawal from the pre-clearance agreement; the bases upon which any withdrawal would be contemplated by the Government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6165/17]

261. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the measures being taken to ensure that unlawful discrimination is not being undertaken or facilitated in pre-clearance areas at Dublin and Shannon airports; the mechanisms in place to ensure Ireland's obligations under the TFEU and the ECHR in pre-clearance areas at Dublin and Shannon airports are met; the procedures for withdrawal from the pre-clearance agreement; the basis upon which any withdrawal would be contemplated by the Government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6151/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 258 and 261 together.

I strongly disagree with the policy recently announced by President Trump to temporarily ban travel to the US by nationals of certain countries. As you know, there is currently a suspension in place for this Executive Order, which is the subject of an appeal at a US Federal Appeals Court and the outcome of that appeal is awaited.

Notwithstanding this, my officials have already been in contact with the US authorities and have conveyed our concerns about President Trump's Executive Order and its implications for US Preclearance services at Shannon and Dublin Airports.

A meeting of the Preclearance Consultative Group had been arranged for 1 March 2017. In light of recent events, my officials requested that this meeting be brought forward and it is now set for Thursday, 23 February 2017. This is a mechanism outlined in the Preclearance Agreement which allows for representatives from both parties to meet and review any operational issues arising related to the Agreement.

Arising from the clarification issued by the US Embassy in Dublin late last week, Irish citizens travelling to the United States on Irish passports under the ban should not have encountered any difficulties in this regard, as long as they followed the relevant procedures governing the US Visa Waiver Programme.

US Preclearance in Ireland is a service whereby passengers can avail of the option to be pre-cleared (undertaking all immigration, customs and agriculture inspections) in Dublin and Shannon Airports for entry into the United States. The Preclearance service is available to all travellers on a voluntary and non-discriminatory basis. The terms and conditions of the Preclearance arrangements with the US are covered by an International Agreement and by domestic legislation, the Aviation (Preclearance) Act 2009.

The preclearance facility is within Irish jurisdiction and the laws of Ireland apply at all

times, enforced by An Garda Síochána. This is expressly confirmed at Article II(5) of the Preclearance Agreement. Given the fact that US law does not apply, provision is made at Article II(6) of the Agreement to confirm that passengers who wish to avail of preclearance do so on condition that they recognise and consent to the right of the US to grant or refuse preclearance in accordance with its laws.

If someone is refused permission to fly to the US at preclearance in either Dublin or Shannon Airports, the passenger then becomes the responsibility of An Garda Síochána who deal with them, in line with Irish law and in accordance with the full human rights protections that apply. A refusal at US Preclearance has no impact on the rights available to refugees or persons wishing to seek asylum in Ireland. If they apply for asylum they will be dealt with in the normal way or if they wish to return to their point of origin they will be facilitated. These are issues for Irish Immigration authorities and US officials have no role in relation to them. It should also be noted that my Department does not have responsibility for policy in relation to international refugees.

The operation of the Ireland-US Preclearance Agreement does not conflict with the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, nor does it give rise to any breach of obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights. The Agreement expressly provides that nothing in the Agreement diminishes the rights enjoyed by individuals under the Constitution and laws of Ireland or the US. While the right to travel is recognised under the Irish Constitution, there is no right under the Irish Constitution whereby Ireland could require another sovereign State to allow an individual entry to that State. The right of a passenger to enter the US is a matter for US law.

The Ireland-US Preclearance Agreement may be terminated at any time by either party, by giving one year's written notice to the other party. There is no provision in the Agreement for suspension. Therefore, Ireland has an obligation, under International law, to adhere to the terms of the Agreement unless it is terminated in accordance with the procedure laid down. However, it is important to point out that the US Preclearance facility is a very valuable arrangement for Ireland, as well as being of benefit to the United States, and having discussed the matter last week, the Cabinet was in favour of retaining our Preclearance facilities.

In light of recent events, An Taoiseach has requested that a review of US Preclearance in Ireland be undertaken by the relevant Departments - Justice and Equality, Foreign Affairs and Trade and my own Department. A report will be made to An Taoiseach this week.

Local Improvement Scheme Funding

259. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will reinvest in the local improvement scheme, LIS, for improvement of isolated, neglected roads and lanes not taken in charge by the local authority which are often essential in providing access routes for communities in marginal areas by allocating separate funding to local authorities specifically for works under LIS; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6232/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of the local authority, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from the local authority'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.

Maintenance of private laneways/roads not taken in charge by local authorities is the re-

sponsibility of the landowners concerned. Due to the major cutbacks in roads funding it was necessary for the Department to cease making separate allocations to local authorities in respect of LIS. The approved scheme remains intact and local authorities can use a proportion of State grant funding for LIS should they wish to do so.

While there is a modest increase in funding for roads this year, it will take some years yet under the Capital Plan to restore “steady state” funding levels for regional and local roads. The primary focus has to continue to be on the maintenance and renewal of public roads. Local authorities can continue to use a proportion of their Discretionary Grant for the Local Improvement Scheme in 2017.

In light of the provision in the Programme for Government indicating that, as the economy recovers, the Government will promote increased funding for Community Involvement and Local Improvement Schemes, I will review the scope for making a separate grant allocation once the planned Review of the Capital Plan is completed.

Driver Test Centres

260. **Deputy Fergus O’Dowd** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of driving test centres here by location; the cost of running each such centre for each of the past three years, including staff costs, full-time and part-time staff; the owners of the property used and the rent paid; the number of driver testers, by location and if full- or part-time; the total metre-squared area of the centres; the catchment area served by each such centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6143/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross) (Deputy Shane Ross): The operation of the driver testing service is the statutory responsibility of the Road Safety Authority. I have therefore referred the question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response has not been received within ten days.

Question No. 261 answered with Question No. 258.

Sport and Recreational Development

262. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the details of the Members of the Oireachtas who have made submissions to his Department on the sports policy; and the dates on which they were received. [6159/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O’Donovan): No members of the Oireachtas have, to date, made submissions to my Department on the National Sports Policy Consultation Document.

Road Safety Strategy

263. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if consideration will be given to altering the rules of the road to reflect the advice (details supplied) provided to drivers in the Netherlands. [6248/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): This is a matter for the Road Safety Authority. I have referred the question to the Authority for direct reply. I

would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response is not received within 10 days.

Tourism Funding

264. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount of funding allocated to counties Meath and Westmeath for tourism and hospitality skills training by his Department in 2015 and 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6279/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): The Department of Education and Skills has overall lead responsibility for skills development policy generally across all sectors, including hospitality and tourism, and oversees the bulk of training provided nationally, channeling funding through its agency SOLAS for further education and through the Higher Education Authority (HEA) for higher education.

A limited number of complementary tourism-related business development and training supports are provided by Fáilte Ireland, in line with its responsibility for encouraging, promoting and supporting tourism as a leading indigenous component of the Irish economy. As this is an operational matter for the Board and management of Fáilte Ireland, I have referred the Deputy's question on to Fáilte Ireland for direct reply in regard to the specific funding information sought. Please contact my private office if a response is not received within ten working days.

Bus Éireann

265. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the consequences facing many persons in rural parts of County Donegal such as Inishowen if Bus Éireann routes are reduced or taken away completely; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6026/17]

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.

During recent weeks I have met with the Chair of the Company who briefed me on the very serious situation the Company faces. I am firmly of the belief that difficult issues such as this can only be resolved through constructive and realistic engagement between the company and its employees and I encourage both sides to engage constructively on the matter.

I am of course aware of the concerns of many across rural Ireland as regards the potential reconfiguration of routes. Last month I also met with the National Transport Authority, who outlined to me their powers and responsibilities in relation to the provision of public transport services. I was assured by the NTA that it will work with local communities to maintain public transport connectivity in the event of any reconfiguration of existing services.

Road Safety

266. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will request Transport Infrastructure Ireland to review their proposals (details supplied) in view of concerns raised. [6341/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Under the Road traf-

fic Act 2004, statutory responsibility for the making of Special Speed Limit bye-laws is a matter for the Elected Members of local authorities, subject to following Department Guidelines and to the consent of Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) in the case of national roads.

A Special Speed Limit may, as in this case, include a periodic speed limit which can be designed to apply and operate outside schools at specified periods, for example when children are arriving at, or leaving a school during term time.

To assist local authorities in the application of Special Speed Limits, my Department's Guidelines for Setting and Managing Speed Limits in Ireland provide detailed guidance on the application of Special Speed Limits outside of schools and is available to all local authorities. These Guidelines also reiterate Elected Members statutory responsibilities' in relation to the making of such bye-laws.

At the time of the issuing of these Guidelines, local authorities were requested to review and update all speed limits in their administrative areas in accordance with the Guidelines and in the case of national roads, in conjunction with TII. This work is currently on-going.

With regard to the specifics of the case referred to in the Deputy's question, I understand that TII's proposal in this matter is in accord with the views of Cork County Council.

Commissions of Inquiry

267. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of commissions of Inquiry or other formal investigations or inquiries being conducted in his Department; the name of these; the date they were established; the expected date the work is intended to be completed; the cost incurred to date; the estimated final cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6366/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Moran Inquiry into ticketing issues at the Olympic Games was announced on 19 August 2016. It began its work on 19 September 2016 and is expected to complete its work on 31 March 2017. Costs incurred to the end of January 2017 is €30,312. The total estimated cost of the Inquiry is €300,000.

Capital Expenditure Programme

268. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if, following the midterm review of the capital plan, a construction project (details supplied) will be brought forward; and if so, the timeframe for same. [6379/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The parameters for the Capital Plan Review and the final decisions on allocations are matters for the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform and Government as a whole. I cannot pre-empt the outcome.

Transport Infrastructure Provision

269. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he and his Department have identified a priority list of road and bridge projects likely to be required over the next ten years; his plans to fund and activate such plans; and if he will make a

statement on the matter. [6382/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Transport investment priorities to 2022 are set out in the Capital Plan and were framed by the conclusions reached in my Department's Strategic Investment Framework for Land Transport. Based on the findings in that report it is envisaged that maintenance and renewal of the road network will continue to be the main priority over the next period and the bulk of the roads capital budget, approximately €4.4 billion, is earmarked for such essential work with a further €600 million allocated for implementation of the PPP road programme which is already underway. The balance will fund the limited number of road upgrade projects listed in the Plan.

As regards the possibility of additional funding within the Plan period, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform is now commencing the Capital Plan review. While there is a strong case for additional funding for the transport sector, the parameters for the review and the final decisions on allocations are matters for the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform and Government as a whole. As the Deputy is aware there are a multitude of possible national, regional and local road projects around the country, the cost of which far exceed available funding.

As regards bridges specifically, my Department did initiate a regional road bridge inspection programme a number of years ago to assess the condition of bridges on the network and this has been followed up with a Bridge Rehabilitation Grant programme. Under the Bridge Rehabilitation Grant scheme local authorities submit a list of bridges in order of priority for consideration for funding. Within the constraints of the overall roads budget, allocations are made to local authorities for remedial bridge works. The allocations and payments for each local authority is available in the regional and local road allocation and payment booklets in the Dáil library.

Bus Éireann

270. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which restructuring within Bus Éireann can be undertaken with a view to bringing costs into line with targets without major disruption; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6383/17]

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. In developing its plans, the Company is seeking to ensure a sustainable future for it in the years ahead; however, those plans remain under development and the company are seeking to engage with its employees on its proposals to secure the company's future. I am firmly of the belief that difficult issues such as this can only be resolved through constructive and realistic engagement between the company and its employees and I encourage both sides to engage on the matter. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has assured me that it will work with local communities to maintain an appropriate level of public transport connectivity in the event of any reconfiguration of existing services. The NTA will ensure rural communities maintain public transport connectivity even if there are any changes to Bus Éireann Expressway services.

Transport Infrastructure Ireland Projects

271. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the

extent to which his Department plans to extend the motorway network to facilitate economic development in the less developed regions throughout the country in line with the requirements likely arising from the National Plan for Ireland, Ireland 2040 – Our Plan; if he and his Department have prioritised projects in this context; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6384/17]

274. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans for investment in the road services over the next five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6387/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 271 and 274 together.

As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Within its annual budget the planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Decisions on the transport elements of the Capital Plan 2016-2021 were framed by the conclusions reached in my Department's Strategic Investment Framework for Land Transport. Based on the findings in that report it is envisaged that maintenance and renewal of the road network will continue to be the main priority over the next period and the bulk of the roads capital budget, approximately €4.4 billion, is earmarked for such essential work with a further €600 million allocated for implementation of the PPP road programme which is already underway.

As regards the possibility of additional funding within the Plan period, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform is now commencing the Capital Plan review. While there is a strong case for additional funding for the transport sector, the parameters for the review and the final decisions on allocations are matters for the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform and Government as a whole.

Tourism Industry

272. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which adequate qualified staff are available to the hotel restaurant and catering services with particular reference to the need to achieve the highest competitive standards in all areas throughout the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6385/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): Ensuring a sufficient supply of suitably qualified staff for the Irish tourism industry requires a combination of measures, including providing appropriate direct enterprise support, entry-level training and advanced/professional training; increasing the attractiveness of employment opportunities; and improving staff retention in certain occupations. Accordingly, Government Departments, agencies, education and training providers, industry bodies and employers each have a role to play.

The Department of Education and Skills has lead responsibility for skills development policy across all sectors, including hospitality and tourism. For its part, in addition to the mainstream higher and further education and training overseen by the Department of Education and Skills, Fáilte Ireland provides a limited number of complementary tourism-related business development and training supports, in line with its responsibility for encouraging, promoting and supporting tourism as a leading indigenous component of Ireland's economy. Furthermore, in line with the *Tourism Action Plan 2016-2018*, Fáilte Ireland is committed to working with

the tourism industry and the wider education and training sector to implement the recommendations contained in the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN) report on the hospitality sector, aimed at ensuring an adequate supply of skilled staff.

In this regard, Fáilte Ireland participates in the Hospitality Skills Oversight Group, which oversees skills development and promotion in the sector, including monitoring the implementation of the EGFSN recommendations, and involves key stakeholders, education and training providers and relevant Government Departments and agencies. Fáilte Ireland is also an active participant, alongside key industry bodies, on the consortium collaborating on the development of the culinary apprenticeship.

I believe that this collaborative approach is the most effective way to support the sustainable development of the Irish tourism industry and help maintain and enhance our competitive position.

Bus Éireann

273. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans for investment in rail services over the next five years, including any extension to services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6386/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The role of heavy rail in Ireland's Transport sector is currently under review. Last November, the National Transport Authority (NTA) and Iarnród Éireann launched a public consultation process on the Rail Review Report. The public consultation concluded on 18th January and the NTA is preparing a report about the process which I intend to bring to Government. No decisions on any changes to the rail network will be made until the public consultation process has been evaluated.

The main emphasis of funding for the rail network under the Government's current Capital Plan has been on the maintenance of the existing network to ensure it remains safe and fit for purpose. Present funding allocations should see steady-state levels of maintenance achieved by 2020. The Government is embarking on a Mid-Term Review of the Capital Plan, which will take stock of progress and provide the Government with an opportunity to consider the scope for increased levels of investment, including in the transport sector, taking economic growth and fiscal progress into account. That work will be progressed in the coming months.

Question No. 274 answered with Question No. 271.

Tourism Data

275. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to set down the number of tourists expected to the country in 2017; the way in which this will compare with the previous year; the extent of any extra promotional work required; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6388/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Central Statistics Office (CSO) figures for 2016 show that there were over 9.584 million overseas visits to Ireland. Tourism Ireland is forecasting growth of 0.8% in overseas visits in 2017.

Tourism Ireland is responsible for marketing the island of Ireland overseas as a holiday and business tourism destination. I have asked Tourism Ireland to provide the Deputy with further information regarding their promotion plans for 2017. Please contact my private office if you

do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Brexit Issues

276. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to outline the extent to which he and his Department are taking measures in the tourism sector to offset the negative aspects of Brexit; the extent to which he expects the sector to be equally competitive in markets inside and outside the EU, including the USA; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6390/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): In common with the rest of Government, there has been considerable analysis of the challenges which tourism faces because of the outcome of the UK Referendum. In this context, on 23 January 2017, Minister of State Patrick O'Donovan T.D. and I hosted an All-Island Dialogue on the impact of Brexit on the tourism and hospitality sector. At that event Tourism Ireland presented on the research they had commissioned to assess the propensity of consumers living in Britain to travel overseas in a post Brexit world. The research shows that 7% of people living in Britain say they are less likely to holiday overseas in 2017. The research also indicates that spending patterns are likely to change, e.g. 50% of people expect that they will spend less while on holiday abroad.

Tourism Ireland also presented research which estimated that outbound travel from Britain will decline by 2.5% in 2017. Given Ireland's reliance on Britain, from where 41% of our overseas visitors came in 2016, tourism to Ireland is likely to be more impacted than to any other destination.

Tourism Ireland's strategy for responding to Brexit will involve various strands, including defending key segments of the British market, very focussed competition in existing markets in Europe and North America, and pursuing new, potentially lucrative, markets further afield.

In terms of markets further afield, a commitment is given in the Government's Tourism Policy Statement "*People, Place and Policy – Growing Tourism to 2025*" to prioritising tourism marketing efforts towards those markets providing higher revenue returns. The Programme for Government commits to implementing the policy objectives in the policy statement and achieving the targets for Irish tourism contained therein. The UK vote does not change this.

As regards competing more vigorously in existing markets, a key element of Tourism Ireland's strategy since 2014 has been market diversification which has seen Mainland Europe become the largest contributor of overseas tourism revenue and will see the United States overtake Britain as the number two contributor to tourism revenue over the next few years. In 2017, Tourism Ireland will continue to implement its market diversification strategy and intends to maximise holiday revenue through investment in Mainland Europe and North America.

In addition, the depreciation of the pound against the euro since the UK referendum means that value for money will be a key message for Tourism Ireland in Britain this year. A strong focus on the "culturally curious", who tend to stay longer and spend more, will assist Tourism Ireland in their defence of their British market. Looking to the medium term, Tourism Ireland is currently finalising its corporate plan for the period from 2017-2019. This plan will, *inter alia*, include the agency's response to marketing Ireland in Britain in the new situation that has developed following the referendum.

Sports Capital Programme

277. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to outline the degree to which he proposes to deploy the capital sports grants throughout the country to ensure a high quality and standard of facilities in all areas within reason in keeping with demographics and the demands of a growing population; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6391/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): The Sports Capital Programme (SCP) is the Government's primary vehicle to support the development of sports facilities and the purchase of sports equipment. The Programme aims to foster an integrated and planned approach to developing sports and physical recreation facilities throughout the country. In particular, its stated objectives are to:

- Assist voluntary and community organisations, national governing bodies (NGBs) of sport, local authorities and Education and Training Boards and schools to develop high quality, accessible, well-designed facilities in appropriate locations and to provide appropriate equipment to help maximise participation in sport and physical recreation.

- Prioritise the needs of disadvantaged areas in the provision of sports facilities.

- Encourage the sharing of local, regional and national sports facilities by clubs, community organisations and national governing bodies of sport.

The 2017 round of the programme is open for applications until 24th February, 2017.

In terms of how grants are subsequently allocated, while the precise assessment criteria and scoring system for the 2017 Sports Capital Programme are currently being finalised, I do not envisage that the scoring and weighting system will change significantly from previous rounds of the Programme. In this regard, the distribution of the overall funding to each county will be considered on a per capita basis. Individual applications will first be checked to ensure eligibility and eligible applications will then be initially scored according to criteria designed to give higher scores to applications that will increase participation, that are from designated disadvantaged areas and had not received substantial funding in the past. The assessment process will not commence prior to the closing date for applications on the 24th of February and the scoring system will be finalised before then and published thereafter.

Public Transport Provision

278. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to outline the extent to which his Department monitors the rail and bus services in County Kildare with a view to ensuring the needs of commuters are met to the greatest extent possible; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6392/17]

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

Sport and Recreational Development

279. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to outline the extent he expects to be in a position to promote and assist the development of passive recreation activities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6393/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Sport Ireland, which is funded by my Department, is the statutory body with responsibility for the promotion, development and co-ordination of sport. This includes responsibility for the development of strategies for increasing participation in sport and outdoor activities, including some passive recreation activities.

I have referred the Deputy's question to Sport Ireland for direct reply.

I would ask the Deputy to inform my office if a reply is not received within 10 days.

Sport and Recreational Development

280. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to outline the extent to which he and his Department can promote and support amateur golf in all areas throughout the country; the extent to which he expects to be in a position to meet the demand in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6394/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Sport Ireland, which is funded by my Department, is the statutory body with responsibility for the promotion, development and co-ordination of sport. This includes responsibility for the allocation of funding for National Governing Bodies of Sport.

As this question is a matter for Sport Ireland, I have referred it to Sport Ireland for direct reply.

I would ask the Deputy to inform my office if a reply is not received within 10 days.

Regional Airports

281. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to outline the extent to which he continues to monitor the developmental requirements at regional airports with a view to eventual provision of an integrated system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6395/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Development issues at airports, whether State airports or regional airports, are primarily a matter for the relevant airport authorities.

In the case of the four smaller regional airports of Donegal, Ireland West Airport Knock, Kerry and Waterford, my Department's *Regional Airports Programme 2015-2019* provides financial assistance towards specific developments and costs in the areas of safety and security. As the grant schemes under this Programme operate on an annual basis, my Department maintains regular contact with these four airports in relation to their funding proposals in these two areas.

This approach is recognised by, and is consistent with, the *National Aviation Policy* which was completed and published by my Department eighteen months ago. That Policy noted the strategic importance of aviation access infrastructure to this country for underpinning and growing our economic activity and that the Irish airport network is well placed to grow its share of global passenger traffic over the coming decade. The Policy also acknowledges the role played by the regional airports in promoting a level of international connectivity to support the tourism and business sectors in their regions.

The Exchequer does not, however, invest in airports for development purposes and the grant schemes under our *Regional Airports Programme* do not support development projects which are designed to expand capacity. Any proposals in that regard are a commercial matter for airports themselves.

Road Improvement Schemes

282. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the need to meet road and bridge realignments in County Kildare with particular reference to the replacement of the Liffey Bridge in Celbridge and provision of a further bridge thereat to facilitate current and anticipated traffic volumes arising from the Celbridge local area plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6396/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads (including bridges) in Kildare is the statutory responsibility of Kildare County Council, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993-2015. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is also a matter for the Council.

The assessment of options in relation to bridges in County Kildare, including at Celbridge is, therefore, a matter for consideration by Kildare County Council.

Bus Éireann

283. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide a breakdown of the internal transfer of funds within Bus Éireann from its Expressway service to its public service obligation service for each of the past five years; if he will provide a breakdown of the transfer of funds from Bus Éireann to Irish Rail and from Dublin Bus to Irish Rail for each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6027/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issues raised are matters for Bus Éireann and Córas Iompair Éireann (CIÉ) respectively and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to both companies for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive responses within ten working days.

Financial Instruments

284. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation to outline her views on whether the accounting standard known as IAS 39 is fit for purpose with regard to rules adopted by banks when valuing assets, including loans; her plans to amend its instructions (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6140/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): International Accounting Standard 39 (IAS 39) entitled "Financial Instruments: Recognition and measurement" attracted adverse comment in the context of the financial crisis. Accordingly, IAS 39 has been replaced by International Financial Reporting Standard 9 (IFRS 9), "Financial Instruments".

This newer standard is intended, in part, to address concerns with the "incurred loss" approach to the recognition of losses on loans that is used in IAS 39. IFRS 9 requires the recogni-

tion of expected credit losses on, inter alia, loans advanced by banks, so that it will no longer be necessary for a “credit event” to have occurred before credit losses are recognised, as was the case with IAS 39.

IFRS 9 will apply in the EU to IFRS financial statements for financial years beginning on or after 1 January 2018, with earlier application permitted. IAS 39 will then cease to apply in all but one specific instance.

IFRS 9 was adopted by means of Commission Regulation (EU) 2016/2067 of 22 November 2016 amending Regulation (EC) No 1126/2008 adopting certain international accounting standards in accordance with Regulation (EC) No 1606/2002 of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards International Financial Reporting Standard 9. Therefore, it will be a matter for the Commission to bring forward any proposals for amendment if it sees that as necessary. If so, any such proposals will be considered by the Council and the European Parliament.

Action Plan for Jobs

285. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the sections in the action plan for jobs specifically relating to counties Cavan and Monaghan; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6152/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The Action Plan for Jobs, one of the Government’s chief instruments to support job creation, is a whole of Government, national level initiative aimed at creating the optimum conditions for private sector and export led job creation. The Plan does not deal with actions on a county by county basis but does contain a strong focus on developing the regions.

Its objectives include the creation of an additional 200,000 jobs by 2020, including 135,000 outside of Dublin; reduction of the State unemployment rate to 6%; and at a regional level, having an additional 10% to 15% at work in each region, and closing their unemployment rates to within 1% of the State average.

Action Plan for Jobs 2017 includes a series of collaborative actions aimed at stimulating regional growth, including the progression, monitoring and support of the eight Regional Action Plans for Jobs, which aims to realise the national Action Plan’s regional employment targets.

The Regional Action Plan for the North East/North West region aims to support the creation of 28,000 jobs across Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Cavan, Monaghan, and Louth by 2020. The first Progress Report was published in December and shows strong progress to date, with 5,600 more people in employment across the region since the start of 2015.

Sectors targeted as part of the plan include traditionally strong sectors for the region like agrifood, manufacturing/engineering and tourism, including active promotion of the tourism potential of the Lakelands Region, which includes Cavan and Monaghan.

The Local Authorities, LEOs, and other key public and private sector stakeholders in Cavan and Monaghan have been strongly involved in, and are key drivers of, the North East/North West Action Plan for Jobs.

Job Creation

286. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the

status of the work that is ongoing to find a company for a factory (details supplied) in Carrickmacross; the action that has been taken by her Department to date on this issue; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6153/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): I am informed by IDA Ireland that the Agency has had frequent engagement with Monaghan County Council and District Council with regard to the site in question and continues to bring the facility to the attention of prospective investors.

In mid-December, together with the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, I met with representatives from Monaghan County Council and IDA Ireland. We also met a further delegation of Monaghan elected representatives in January. Following these meetings, I have asked IDA Ireland to work together with Enterprise Ireland to progress the development of a new master plan. This is designed to enhance the value proposition for indigenous enterprise at IDA Ireland owned lands in Knockaconny, County Monaghan.

Securing new investment for Monaghan, as well as other regional areas of Ireland, will remain a priority of mine in the time ahead.

Job Creation

287. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the progress in the State's industrial promotional agencies' efforts to attract investment and jobs to a location (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6272/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): In mid-December, together with the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, I met with representatives from Monaghan County Council and IDA Ireland. We also met a further delegation of Monaghan elected representatives in January.

Following these meetings, I asked IDA Ireland to work together with Enterprise Ireland to progress the development of a new master plan. This is designed to enhance the value proposition of IDA Ireland owned lands in Knockaconny for indigenous enterprise.

Securing new investment for Monaghan, as well as other regional areas of Ireland, will remain a priority of mine in the time ahead.

IDA Data

288. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of IDA Ireland landbanks in County Wicklow, with a breakdown by town; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6288/17]

289. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of IDA Ireland business parks in County Wicklow, with a breakdown by town; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6289/17]

290. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of IDA Ireland owned land parcels in County Wicklow, both serviced and unserved, with a breakdown by location and acreage; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6290/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): I

propose to take Questions Nos. 288 to 290, inclusive, together.

IDA Ireland has a 24 hectare business park in Arklow, with 14 hectares available. The Agency also has a 25.58 hectare strategic site in Greystones, with 18 hectares available.

Brexit Issues

291. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the amount she has allocated to specifically assist the agrifood and drinks sector for 2017 in view of Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6331/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The Agrifood sector is of critical importance to the Irish economy, and its regional spread means it underpins the socio-economic development of rural areas in particular.

Enterprise Ireland works closely with Irish Food and Drink companies to support innovation and build scale and resilience in order for them to be positioned to compete on world markets.

I have secured additional funding for Enterprise Ireland to respond to Brexit and this includes additional staff with sectoral knowledge and expertise.

While Enterprise Ireland is the development agency for companies in the Food and Drink sector in Ireland, Bord Bia under the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine is responsible for working with these companies to access overseas markets.

The UK remains a key market, however Enterprise Ireland is also working closely with Bord Bia to help Irish Food and Drink companies build on their international reputation for product excellence and also drive growth in other key markets such as the Eurozone, Canada, the US and Asia.

Youth Employment Initiative

292. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if her attention has been drawn to the fact that in the progress report of the Limerick regeneration framework plan published in December 2016 that of 32 electoral divisions in Limerick city 11 have a youth unemployment rate of 60% or more; her plans to address this; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6332/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): Youth unemployment is primarily a policy matter for my colleague, Minister Varadkar.

Government policy to reduce unemployment is two-fold. First, through policies set out in the national 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 the new jobs and other vacancies that arise in our economy are filled by people taken from the Live Register, including young people.

The Action Plan for Jobs is a whole of Government, national level initiative aimed at creating the optimum conditions for private sector and export led job creation. Its objectives include the creation of an additional 200,000 jobs by 2020, including 135,000 outside of Dublin.

Key actions within the Plan on increasing the numbers of apprenticeship and traineeship

schemes will help to support employment growth, in particular, youth employment.

The Pathways to Work 2016-2020 strategy, which is the responsibility of my colleague, Minister Varadkar, has set a target of bringing youth unemployment to 12% or less by 2020 in the context of an overall employment rate of 6%. It continues to prioritise support for the long-term unemployed and youth unemployed and commits to increasing the share of workplace-based interventions for youth unemployed.

The measures in the Action Plan for Jobs designed to support jobs growth, together with the targeted measures delivered by the Department of Social Protection, will support further reductions in youth unemployment, both long and short-term.

IDA Staff

293. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the total number of employees employed by IDA Ireland in each of the years 2006 to 2016, in tabular form. [6333/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The total number of employees in IDA Ireland for the period in question is set out in the table. The figures are representative of all IDA Ireland staff, including contract staff. The increase in staff in 2013 was due to the dissolution of Forfás and Shannon Development and the absorption of their staff back into the Department and its other agencies, including IDA Ireland.

IDA Ireland Staff 2006-2016

2006	299
2007	298
2008	302
2009	277
2010	252
2011	249
2012	247
2013	272
2014	272
2015	272
2016	272

Enterprise Ireland Staff

294. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the total number of employees employed with Enterprise Ireland in each of the years 2006 to 2016, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6334/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): In recent years, Enterprise Ireland has implemented an ambitious reform agenda to ensure more effective delivery of services to Enterprise Ireland clients. As part of the organisation's resource plan, Enterprise Ireland launched a Voluntary Leaving Programme in November 2014, which closed in January 2015. Fifty one staff availed of the Voluntary Leaving Programme in 2015 and 2016.

The reform agenda included an ongoing process to analyse the skills and capabilities of the organisation. Recruitment has been ongoing within the agency to address critical gaps in the management structure and current skill gaps in emerging and future sectors to reflect the needs of Irish industry.

In 2017, Enterprise Ireland will recruit 39 additional staff as part of its strategic response to Brexit.

Table 1 presents the total number employed in Enterprise Ireland from 2006 to 2016. These figures include all staff employed by Enterprise Ireland including Irish Based Staff, Expatriated Staff, Local Overseas Staff and Graduate Programme Staff on 31st December of each year.

Table 1 – Total number of Enterprise Ireland employees in each of the years 2006 to 2016

December 31st	Total Staff (WTE)*
2016	663.5
2015	658.5
2014	722.5
2013	730.0
2012	742.0
2011	797.5
2010	828.0
2009	841.0
2008	874.0
2007	831.5
2006	880.5

*Whole Time Equivalent (WTE)

Commissions of Inquiry

295. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of commissions of inquiry or other formal investigations or inquiries being conducted in her Department; the name of these; the date they were established; the expected date the work is intended to be completed; the cost incurred to date; the estimated final cost; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6361/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): I am interpreting the Deputy's question to relate to ongoing statutory enquiries or investigations. No such enquiries or investigations are currently being conducted in my Department.

Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement

296. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation when she expects Dáil Éireann to discuss and vote on the trade deal CETA; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3099/17]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): CETA was adopted by Council of the European Union and signed by Canada, the EU and its Member States at the EU-Canada Summit on 30 October. The European Parliament vote on

CETA is provisionally scheduled for 15 February 2017.

Should the Parliament give its consent, the agreement will be provisionally applied. The provisions in CETA relating to investment protection and investment dispute resolution will be excluded from provisional application.

The full entering into force of the agreement will be subject to a Council decision with the consent of the European Parliament and by the approval of all Member States through the relevant national ratification procedures. This means that Dáil Eireann will be part of the final decision to ratify the agreement.

My view is that it is important to wait to see the benefits of CETA come into being, before CETA is put before the Dáil for ratification. Then we can have a fully informed debate based on real facts and evidence. I will be working with Enterprise Ireland and Business Groups to ensure that Irish firms take early advantage of the terms of this Agreement. In this context I have prioritised a trade mission to Canada in the first half of this year.

Aftercare Services

297. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the total number of young persons that have been assessed as currently requiring an aftercare worker, by county; the total number of young persons that have yet to be allocated same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6157/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Under the current National Leaving and Aftercare Policy of Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, all young people leaving care who have been in care for 12 months on their 16th birthday or for 12 consecutive months prior to their 18th birthday are entitled to an aftercare plan. Tusla is currently reviewing their operational National Leaving and Aftercare Policy in line with the *Child Care (Amendment) Act 2015*.

Data provided by Tusla (table 1) show that during Quarter 3, 2016 approximately 152 young people were discharged from care by reason of turning 18. Of these, 98% were assessed as being eligible for an aftercare service (149) and 88% were availing of the aftercare service (131). 87% of those discharged had an aftercare worker (132).

Table 1: Aftercare Data Q2 2016 - Q3 2016

AREA	No discharged Q3 2016	No discharged eligible for aftercare Q3 2016	No availing of an aftercare service Q3 2016	No with allocated aftercare worker Q3 2016	% with allocated aftercare worker Q3 2016
Dublin South Central	13	12	7	7	54%
Dublin South East/ Wicklow	10	10	10	10	100%
Dublin South West / Kildare/West Wicklow	8	7	5	5	63%

AREA	No discharged Q3 2016	No discharged eligible for aftercare Q3 2016	No availing of an after-care service Q3 2016	No with allocated after-care worker Q3 2016	% with allocated after-care worker Q3 2016
Midlands	6	6	6	6	100%
Dublin North City	12	12	6	6	50%
Dublin North	25	25	23	23	92%
Louth/Meath	8	8	8	8	100%
Cavan/Monaghan	5	5	4	5	100%
Cork	22	22	21	21	95%
Kerry	2	2	2	2	100%
Carlow/Kilkenny/South Tipperary	2	2	1	1	50%
Waterford/Wexford	8	7	7	7	88%
Midwest	13	13	13	13	100%
Galway/Roscommon	10	10	10	10	100%
Mayo	2	2	2	2	100%
Donegal	5	5	5	5	100%
Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan	1	1	1	1	100%
Total	152	149	131	132	87%

The transition to independent adulthood can be challenging for many young people and a key factor in achieving success is ensuring that assessment, preparation and planning for leaving care begins in the years prior to leaving care and continues as part of the care planning process. This work is based on collaboration with the young person, their carers and partner agencies to generate an aftercare plan that is specific to the individual young person's needs. Advice, guidance, support and signposting are key elements of the supports available to care leavers.

For those young people who are not in training or education, aftercare services have a key role in providing support to them in liaising with the relevant departments and agencies in accessing financial assistance, employment opportunities, training or supporting them to return to education. Those who are unemployed, and not engaged in training or education, can apply for jobseeker's allowance from the Department of Social Protection. The jobseeker's allowance payable to care leavers is the full rate and not the reduced rate normally payable to those under 25.

At the end of September 2016, there were 1,841 young people aged 18 to 22 years in receipt of an aftercare service, with 54% (1,001) in full-time education or training.

Homeless Persons Data

298. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her Department is working on risk assessments for every homeless child; the mental health monitoring that is taking place for children experiencing homelessness; if free counselling or other mental health interventions are being made available to the 2,505 homeless children across the country; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6219/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): While my Department and Tusla have no responsibility in relation to mental health services, I would like to inform the Deputy of Tusla's response, relevant to this area.

A child, irrespective of accommodation status, who comes to the attention of Tusla and whose circumstances are such, will, where the appropriate threshold has been reached, have an assessment carried out by a social worker.

Where Tusla has concerns regarding the welfare and development of a child, due to parenting difficulties or adverse environmental factors, they will provide family supports to assist the family and child.

If during the course of an assessment the social worker forms the view that a further mental health assessment is required an appropriate referral will be made for the child in question. Social workers do not carry out mental health assessments nor monitor mental health. Mental health service provision, in a similar vein, is not the responsibility of Tusla. As with other therapeutic and general medical services, Tusla relies on other State agencies for the delivery of the appropriate support.

Policy in relation to mental health and associated service provision is a matter for the Department of Health and the Health Service Executive respectively, who may be able to provide further and particular information to the Deputy.

Youth Services

299. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the position regarding an application for the funding of a youth project (details supplied). [6228/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Youth Affairs Unit of my Department provides a range of funding schemes, programmes and supports to the youth sector. Funding of €51m for current expenditure is available from my Department in 2016 to support the provision of youth services and programmes to young people throughout the country including those from disadvantaged communities. The funding schemes support national and local youth work provision to some 380,000 young people. It is estimated that the voluntary youth services involve approximately 1,400 youth work staff in 477 projects and 40,000 volunteers working throughout the country.

Budget 2017 has provided an additional €5.5m in current funding to my Department to support the provision of youth services. This will bring the total youth funding in 2017 to €57.4m. This additional funding will be used for programmes that target disadvantaged young people and to assist national youth organisations in their work to support local voluntary youth services. My Department has commenced the process with national organisations and local services to identify service development needs for 2017 and to agree the 2017 allocations.

The Deputy will be aware that a number of funding schemes supporting youth services were

the subject of a Value for Money and Policy Review in 2014. The review involved an in-depth scrutiny of the impact youth service provision has on young people's lives. The review made a number of recommendations for the future operation of the youth schemes and their development in the years ahead.

Work on the development of a new funding scheme has been prioritised by my Department and consultations with youth services are continuing with a view to introducing the new youth funding programme in line with the review over the coming years.

My Department has embarked on an exercise, in conjunction with Pobal and each Education and Training Board (ETB) Youth Officer, which will map youth service provision across the State. This mapping exercise will assist my Department and the relevant ETB in developing a detailed socio-demographic profile in terms of both population numbers and deprivation levels. It is my intention that this mapping exercise will inform future development and investment in youth services, including areas such as Mitchelstown.

Area Based Childhood Programme

300. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the date to which she is operating to for the notification of each ABC project of their funding for 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6308/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Area Based Childhood (ABC) Programme is a prevention and early intervention initiative led by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. The ABC Programme commenced in 2013 and is a time-bound co-funding arrangement of €29.7m for the period 2013 to 2017 in conjunction with The Atlantic Philanthropies.

All sites are currently in contract for 2017 and operating according to their agreed budgets for 2017. Due to contractual arrangements, each of the existing 13 sites is scheduled to come to the end of their contracts at various points throughout 2017.

My department secured an additional €4.5million in Budget 2016 to extend all of the existing ABC Programme to the end of December 2017, bringing the total investment to €34.2 million. This means that sites being granted an extension to their original contract, may require additional funding.

To ascertain this, my Department requested that the ABC Programme Managers provide the Department with revised financial projections and information on the cyclical nature (including costs) of the various interventions/programmes implemented by each Area. The information currently to hand does not fully indicate the additional funding required by these sites. The programme managers will now be requesting additional detail from each site and, once received, it is expected that funding allocations can be agreed upon and all ABC areas notified by end February.

I look forward to the continued engagement of all ABC sites with my Department in 2017 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.

Commissions of Inquiry

301. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of commissions of inquiry or other formal investigations or inquiries being conducted in her Department; the name of these; the date they were established; the expected date the work is intended to be completed; the cost incurred to date; the estimated final cost; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [6350/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the following table.

Commissions of Investigation	Name	Date of Establishment	Cost to Date:(to 06/02/2017)	Expected Date of Conclusion	Estimated Final Cost
1	Commission of Investigation (Mother and Baby Homes and Certain Related Matters)	17th of February 2015	€4.1 million. This includes set-up costs and costs incurred by DCYA in supporting the Commission	The Commission is required to complete a final report no later than February 2018	Due to the nature of the investigative process it is not possible to provide an estimate of final costs at this time.

Passport Controls

302. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the procedures in place at Casement Aerodrome regarding customs and excise and passport controls; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6304/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe) (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Customs Service are facilitated in conducting screening for departures and arrivals to Casement Aerodrome when they so choose. There is a designated area within the Aerodrome for this purpose. All flights carrying Defence Forces personnel returning from overseas deployment through Casement Aerodrome are met and processed by the Customs Service on the base.

Protected Disclosures

303. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if the Defence Forces have written policies and procedures in place for dealing with whistleblowers; and if so, if he will publish same. [6307/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Defence Forces has a written policy and procedure in place in relation to protected disclosures. The policy is outlined in General Routine Order, 07 of 2015, "*Defence Forces Policy in relation to Protected Disclosures*" which was signed by the Deputy Chief of Staff (Support) and came into effect in August 2015.

This policy applies to all members of the Defence Forces, civilian employees, trainees, apprentices and interns. The policy applies to both current and past members of the Defence Forces and those at the recruitment stage.

The policy is available to all Defence Force personnel on the Defence Forces internal network web page, retired Defence Forces personnel, civilian employees and to members of the

public on request.

Following publication of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform's final Guidance for Public Bodies on the Performance of their Functions under section 21(1) of the Protected Disclosures Act 2014 in 2016, a joint review of the Defence Forces and Department of Defence protected disclosures policies is underway and work to develop a single policy for the Defence Organisation is at an advanced stage.

Commissions of Inquiry

304. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of commissions of inquiry or other formal investigations or inquiries being conducted in his Department; the name of these; the date they were established; the expected date the work is intended to be completed; the cost incurred to date; the estimated final cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6354/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): No Commissions of Investigation have been established by my Department since the Commissions of Investigation Act 2004 came into effect. In 2016 my Department paid a total of €23,954 to senior counsel in respect of a personnel investigation pertaining to the Defence Forces. In addition, professional assistance has been engaged in relation to a second ongoing personnel investigation pertaining to the Defence Forces but has not yet been the subject of an invoice or payment.