

## 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 19, inclusive, resubmitted.*

*Questions Nos. 20 to 31, inclusive, answered orally.*

### Cultural Policy

32. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the status of Creative Ireland; the way in which this programme links with the Action Plan for Rural Development in terms of promoting the arts in rural counties; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11546/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Taoiseach and I launched the Creative Ireland Programme/Clár Éire Ildánach 2017-2022 on the 8 December 2016 as the Government Legacy Programme for Ireland 2016 and as the main implementation vehicle for the priorities identified in Culture 2025/Éire Ildánach, the draft cultural policy which I published in July 2016.

This is a cross-Government initiative to mainstream culture and creativity in the life of the nation and to promote individual, community and national wellbeing. The Creative Ireland Programme will embrace the whole cultural sector, bringing together all those involved in the arts, film, broadcasting, visual arts, cultural heritage, the Irish language and Gaeltacht, with Government Departments and State agencies.

*Realising our Rural Potential*, the Government's Action Plan for Rural Development, was launched on the 23rd January. The Action Plan will act as an overarching structure for the co-ordination and implementation of initiatives right across Government which will benefit rural Ireland. It seeks to unlock the potential of rural Ireland through a framework of supports at national and local level which will ensure that people who live in rural areas have increased opportunities for employment locally, and access to public services and social networks that support a high quality of life.

Arts and Heritage are covered under the fourth pillar of the Action plan - *Fostering Culture and Creativity in Rural Communities* whose key objectives are to;

- Increase access to the arts and enhance cultural facilities in rural communities.
- Further develop and enhance culture and creativity in rural Ireland through the establishment of culture teams and creativity hubs as part of the *Creative Ireland Programme*.

- Promote the Irish language as a key resource in Gaeltacht and other rural communities.

This is reinforced by Pillar Two of the Creative Ireland Programme - *Enabling Creativity in Every Community* which focuses on the contribution which local government can make to enriching the cultural life of the community.

I am confident that that the initiatives being planned for the arts and cultural sector in both the *Creative Ireland Programme* and in the *Government's Action Plan for Rural Development* will complement each other and go a long way towards enhancing culture and creativity across the whole of Irish society.

### Straitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge

33. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Ealaíon, Oidhreachta, Gnóthaí Réigiúnacha, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta cén dul chun cinn a dhéanfar i mbliana maidir le cur i bhfeidhm na Straitéise Fiche Bliain don Ghaeilge, cad iad na beartais nua atá i gceist don bhliain seo; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [11361/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Seán Kyne):** Tá cur i bhfeidhm an phróisis pleanála teanga ag imirt páirt lárnach i gcur i bhfeidhm córasach na Straitéise 20-Bliain don Ghaeilge 2010-2030. I measc na bpríomh-chéimeanna chun tosaigh a ghlacfar sa bhliain reatha mar a bhaineann sé leis an bpróiseas pleanála teanga:

- Tá i gceist go gcuirfear tús leis an bpróiseas sa 3 Limistéar Pleanála Teanga Gaeltachta atá ar cholbha Chathair na Gaillimhe, eadhon: Bearna & Cnoc na Cathrach; An tEachréidh agus Oirthear Chathair na Gaillimhe;

- Táthar ag súil go gcuirfear suas le 12 plean teanga faoi bhráid mo Roinne le bheith faofa idir seo agus deireadh na bliana;

- In éindí le hullmhúchán pleananna teanga a bheith ar bun i ngach ceann eile de na Limistéir Pleanála Teanga Ghaeltachta, leanfar ar aghaidh in 2017 le hullmhú pleananna teanga i leith dhá Bhaile Seirbhíse Gaeltachta, Daingean Uí Chúis agus Leitir Ceanainn, agus cuirfear tús le hullmhú plean teanga i leith Chathair na Gaillimhe. Ina theannta sin tá sé i gceist go leathnófar an próiseas pleanála teanga amach le go gcuimseofar cuid de na bailte eile a d'fhéadfadh a bheith aitheanta in am trátha mar Bhaile Seirbhíse Gaeltachta; agus,

- Tá i gceist chomh maith go leanfar ar aghaidh le hullmhú pleananna teanga sna Líonraí Gaeilge - Baile Loch Riach, Co. na Gaillimhe, Inis, Co. an Chláir agus Cluain Dolcáin, Baile Átha Cliath.

In éindí leis an gclár oibre seo, tá i gceist go dtógfar roinnt céimeanna faoi leith sa bhliain reatha chun tacú tuilleadh le feidhmiú na Straitéise. Ina measc siúd, tá:

- Comhoibriú leanúnach idir mo Roinn fhéin agus an Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna ar mhaithe le cur i bhfeidhm an Pholasaí don Oideachas Gaeltachta 2017-2022;

- Bille a fhoilsíú chun forálacha áirithe d'Acht na dTeangacha Oifigiúla 2003 a leasú;

- Leanúint leis an bplé idir mo Roinn agus Ranna Stáit eile maidir le hearcú daoine le Gaeilge don státseirbhís;

- Tacú le hÚdarás na Gaeltachta a sprioc 500 post úr a chruthú sa Ghaeltacht a bhaint amach.

Ar deireadh, mar Aire Stáit do Ghnóthaí Gaeltachta, i bhfianaise a thábhachtaí is atá an Straitéis 20-Bliain mar chloch coirnéil don Ghaeilge, leanfaidh mé orm ag plé le mo chomhghleacaithe Aireachta le cinntiú go dtugtar tosaíocht don Straitéis sna Ranna ábhartha agus leanfaidh mo Roinn uirthi ag obair i gcomhpháirtíocht leis na Ranna sin chun na bearta éagsúla a bhaint amach thar shaolré na Straitéise.

### Arts Funding

34. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the steps taken and grants provided in each of the years 2013 to 2016 and to date in 2017 to address the shortage of affordable studio space, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11768/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I am aware of the issue regarding the provision of affordable studio space, particularly as a result of the changing property market. In general, I would consider that local approaches driven by artists, local arts officers and the owners of vacant buildings are best suited to respond to the specific local circumstances involved and provide the most effective outcomes.

However, my Department is in discussion with the Arts Council, Dublin City Council and the OPW to consider some possible short-term and longer-term approaches to the issue, both in relation to specific issues in Dublin and to wider national approaches. In addition, as part of the Government's initiative on the North East Inner City, I awarded a grant of €35,000 this year to Fire Station Artists' Studios, Buckingham Street, to assist in providing additional studio space in conjunction with Dublin City Council.

In terms of investment by my Department, I recently announced details of more than €9 million in capital funding for 56 arts and culture centres across the country. This capital scheme is the most significant investment in arts and cultural centres in a decade and will target investment at a range of different facilities, including arts centres, theatres, galleries and museums, as well as artists' studios and creative spaces.

Eight of grants relate to artist studios and creative spaces amounting to a total of €850,000. These are set out in the table to the question which will be published in the official report.

A full list of organisations to benefit from funding under Stream 1 and 2 of the Arts and Cultural Capital Scheme 2016-2018 is available on my Department's website.

Furthermore, I will be announcing a new small capital grants Scheme in the coming weeks which will be geared towards providing grants of up to €20,000 to not-for-profit organisations with a defined arts and cultural remit. Organisations with artists' studios will also be eligible to apply under this new scheme.

#### Artists' studios and creative spaces funded under the Arts and Cultural Capital Scheme

Name	Amount
Firkin Crane Cork	€150,000
A4 Arts Studio & Community Education Centre Limited, Dublin	€22,800
Fire Station Artists Studio, Dublin	€30,643
Irish Aerial Creation Centre, Limerick	€35,0000
Dance Limerick	€75,015

Name	Amount
Custom House Studio	€ 43,274
Old Post Office Clones /Monaghan County council	€144,077
Birr Stage Guild	€32,844
Total	€848,653

### Heritage Sites

35. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the degree to which she and her Department continue to support, maintain, preserve and promote heritage sites throughout the country, with particular reference to the need to ensure that nothing is lost that can be preserved for future generations; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11713/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** My role, as Minister, with regard to the protection and management of our architectural heritage, is set out in the provisions of relevant legislation, as are the role of local authorities and the responsibilities of owners as regards heritage assets. Part IV of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, provides for the protection of architectural heritage. The Act gives primary responsibility to planning authorities to identify and protect the architectural heritage by including relevant structures on the Record of Protected Structures. Inclusion on the Record of Protected Structures places a duty of care on the owners and occupiers of protected structures and also gives planning authorities powers to deal with development proposals affecting them and to seek to safeguard their future.

Under Section 54 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, a planning authority may add to or delete from its record of protected structures, a structure, a specified part of a structure or a specified feature of the attendant grounds of a structure. Such a structure, specified part of a structure, or specified feature remains on the record of protected structures until such time as the planning authority deletes it. Provision is made in the Act for the carrying out of works to protected structures either by way of planning permission or on the foot of a declaration received from a planning authority that certain works that would not materially affect the character of a structure are exempted development. There is a duty of owners and occupiers to protect structures from endangerment. Where structures become endangered or unauthorised development has been or is being carried out, the planning authority has the powers to take appropriate action.

As Minister, and in terms of being a prescribed body under the Planning and Development Regulations 2001-2015, I also have a role whereby development proposals that may impact on our built heritage are referred by a planning authority to my Department so that recommendations can be made as appropriate to avoid or mitigate any such impacts.

Under the provisions of the National Monuments Acts 1930-2014, my Department has established and maintains the Record of Monuments and Places, which affords legal protection to over 120,000 recorded archaeological sites and monuments in the State. Anyone proposing works to a monument that is included in the Record of Monument and Places must give my Department two months prior notice before works can start.

My Department has a number of measures at its disposal to facilitate the maintenance and restoration of major historical or cultural sites. As Minister, I am the owner or guardian under the National Monuments Acts of approximately 1,000 national monuments located at approximately 750 sites and in such cases there is a statutory duty to maintain the national monument.

Such maintenance is undertaken by the Office of Public Works (OPW). Local authorities are responsible under the National Monuments Acts for maintaining the national monuments of which they are owners or guardians.

My Department is also providing €350,000 of funding to the OPW in 2017 to assist in the conservation and presentation of historic buildings and national monuments in State ownership. OPW undertakes the care and maintenance of national monuments in my ownership or guardianship (of which there are approximately 750). My Department's National Monuments Service works in close collaboration with the OPW on survey, excavation and research work to optimise the protection, management, interpretation and presentation of national monuments in State care.

There is a number of ways in which my Department acts in respect of possible heritage sites/buildings deemed to be at risk. One of these is the receipt of applications for funding for the repair, conservation, preservation or safeguarding of protected structures, sites or monuments. Financial support is being provided by my Department through a number of structured schemes for the conservation and protection of heritage buildings.

I launched a new €2 million scheme - the Built Heritage Investment Scheme - for the repair and conservation of protected structures on 21 October 2015. This scheme operated in 2016 and is being operated in 2017, via the local authorities, on the same model as the very successful Built Heritage Jobs Leverage Scheme, which ran in 2014. It is expected to support in excess of 330 projects across the country in 2017 and to create employment in the conservation and construction industries, while helping to regenerate urban and rural areas.

The Structures at Risk Fund enables conservation works to heritage structures, in both private and public ownership, which are protected under the Planning and Development Acts and are deemed to be at significant risk of deterioration. This fund, administered through the local authorities, supported 57 projects nationally in 2016. It seeks to encourage the regeneration and reuse of heritage properties and to help to secure the preservation of protected structures which might otherwise be lost. The scheme is operating again in 2017.

## Arts Funding

36. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if her attention has been drawn to the concerns raised by members of the artistic community here regarding the increasing role of her Department and the Department of the Taoiseach in decision making in addition to financial allocations with regard to the Creative Ireland plan; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11743/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Taoiseach and I launched the *Creative Ireland Programme/Clár Éire Ildánach 2017- 2022* on the 8 December 2016 as the Government Legacy Programme for Ireland 2016 and as the main implementation vehicle for the priorities identified in Culture 2025/Éire Ildánach, the draft cultural policy which I published in July 2016. From my experience the response to the *Creative Ireland Programme*, and to the significant increases in funding for the arts and culture which I secured in Budget 2017, have been widely welcomed across the sector.

This is a cross-Government initiative to mainstream culture and creativity in the life of the nation and to promote individual, community and national wellbeing. The Creative Ireland Programme embraces the whole cultural sector, bringing together all those involved in the arts, film, broadcasting, visual arts, cultural heritage, the Irish language and Gaeltacht, with Govern-

ment Departments and State agencies.

The core proposition of this programme is that participation in cultural activity drives personal and collective creativity, with significant implications for individual and societal wellbeing and achievement. The programme is based on five pillars:

- Enabling the creative potential of every child
- Enabling creativity in every community
- Investing in our creative and cultural infrastructure
- Establishing Ireland as a centre of excellence in media production
- Unifying our global reputation.

In Budget 2017, I secured €5m to commence the implementation of the Creative Ireland programme which includes an ambitious plan to deliver 10 major initiatives by the end of this year. Further details of these initiatives are available on <http://creative.ireland.ie>.

It is important to note that the delivery of the Creative Ireland Programme, while under the aegis of my Department, will primarily be through, and in partnership with, existing agencies, local authorities, cultural institutions and State bodies. For example I have already made a specific allocation of €1m out of the €5m available to the local authorities towards the implementation of the 2017 Creative Ireland Plans and it is the local authorities that will decide how this money will be spent. Significant funding will also be provided for *Cruinniú na Cásca* on the Easter Bank holiday.

The objectives of the Programme will also be delivered through the Arts Council, the Irish Film Board, the Heritage Council, Culture Ireland and the national cultural institutions. All of the institutions received substantial increases in funding this year, which was warmly welcomed.

### Heritage Sites

37. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the reason the draft National Biodiversity Action Plan 2017-2021 contains no actions in relation to the network of natural heritage areas; and the reason actions contemplated in the plan to designate proposed NHAS and to strengthen the coherence, connectivity and resilience of the protected areas network, which have not been completed, were not put into the current draft plan. [11751/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** My Department is drafting Ireland's 3rd National Biodiversity Action Plan 2017-2021. This work contributes to the Government's commitment to produce a National Heritage Plan and it is also meeting Ireland's obligations as a Party to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity. This will be the third such plan for Ireland, and it will capture the actions for biodiversity that will be undertaken by a wide range of government, civil society and private sectors to achieve a long term vision for Biodiversity: *"That biodiversity and ecosystems in Ireland are conserved and restored, delivering benefits essential for all sectors of society and that Ireland contributes to efforts to halt the loss of biodiversity and the degradation of ecosystems in the EU and globally"*.

The draft Biodiversity Action Plan was developed in cooperation with an inter-departmental

Biodiversity Working Group, and the Biodiversity Forum which represents various interested sectors of Irish society. I invited views of the public on the draft Plan on 21st of December 2016.

90 submissions were received, and these will be published on the Department's website [www.npws.ie](http://www.npws.ie), with a summary of the views provided and with comment on the main strands of the submissions made.

I recognise the value of Natural Heritage Areas in conserving this country's rich biodiversity and in providing connectivity and resilience to the Natura network. I note also that there has been a substantial response on this particular matter in the public consultation process. Therefore I will ensure that an action to continue to collect information on sites which are potential Natural Heritage Areas will be included in the Action Plan.

However, I am required under European Directives to focus efforts at this time on the completion of the designation process for the Natura network of SACs and SPAs, and to work through a Conservation Objective setting exercise for these sites, and furthermore a process to identify the Conservation Measures required to safeguard the network. Such tasks demand considerable resources and my Department is therefore constrained in the commitments it can make in regard to further work on proposed Natural Heritage Areas at this time.

At present there are 148 Natural Heritage Areas designated under the Wildlife Acts - 75 raised bogs and 73 blanket bog sites. I am pleased to note that County and Local Development Plans continue to aim to protect both the designated Natural Heritage Areas and the many proposed NHAs which were published in the 1990s.

### **Hen Harriers Threat Response Plan**

38. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the status of the hen harrier threat response plan; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11355/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The hen harrier is a protected bird, listed in Annex I of the EU Birds Directive and as such, Member States are obligated to protect and conserve the species. The National Parks and Wildlife Service of my Department has been involved in the monitoring of hen harrier at the national scale for nearly twenty years. National breeding surveys have been undertaken on a five yearly basis and the recent national survey, undertaken in 2015, estimated the population in Ireland to be between 108 and 157 breeding pairs. It is therefore a very scarce species. Over the last 15 years or so it has been estimated that the national population of hen harriers has declined by more than 30%. Research and monitoring initiatives undertaken by my Department and other bodies have identified likely pressures acting on the population that include continued afforestation; wind farm development; and agricultural intensification as well as possible increases in predation that are likely to be linked to the recently recorded declines. These led to the decision to develop a Hen Harrier Threat Response Plan. The primary focus in developing this plan is to set out a comprehensive framework of measures to ensure the recovery of the hen harrier population, and its continued conservation, in Ireland.

Development of the Hen Harrier Threat Response Plan is being led by my Department in cooperation with other Departments whose remits impact on the hen harrier and its supporting ecology. In July 2014 my Department established an inter-Departmental Steering Group, incorporating representatives from the key Departments to assist in the development of the Plan. In

addition, a Stakeholder Consultative Committee has also been established to assist in drafting the Plan. The Committee is chaired by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) and includes representatives from the forestry, agriculture and wind farm sectors. As a key stakeholder, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine is represented on both the Steering Group and the Stakeholder Consultative Committee.

The Inter-Departmental Steering Group has met on eight occasions. The main issues regarding land uses, wind farming, forestry and agriculture have been investigated and discussed in detail by the Steering Group and the Stakeholder Consultative Committee. The report of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Agriculture, Food and the Marine on this matter has also been taken into account.

Officials from my Department are in active discussions with the key Departments at this time in order to finalise the draft Plan shortly. It will be shared for discussion with the Stakeholder Consultative Committee and will then undergo a public consultation and screening for Strategic Environmental Assessment and Appropriate Assessment.

Substantial work has been, and is being, carried out by my Department, and the other stakeholders, in setting the key issues around managing the recovery and conservation of the hen harrier population in Ireland, with full recognition of the concerns of landowners and the other key groups involved in the development of this Plan.

### **Arts Centres**

39. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the status of the conference centre in Cork; the value of the shortfall; if the State is obliged to meet the funding shortfall; if the Government will meet the funding shortfall; if so, the source of the funding; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10591/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Cork Events Centre is a project being developed and managed by Cork City Council. My Department allocated €12 million to the City Council towards the cost of the Centre. This allocation is subject to a Service Level Agreement with the City Council to ensure compliance with all relevant requirements in relation to major capital projects.

Last month, my Department received a report from Cork City Council that the developer has now informed the Council that the overall project costs have risen to €65 million which is an increase of approximately €12 million.

The Department has not been informed of any details of the costing other than the headline figure. Nor has my Department received a request from the Cork City Council, as project promoter, for any additional funding over and above the €12 million already committed. I will consider the issue further should my Department receive any such request.

### **Arts Funding**

40. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs her plans to provide more performance spaces and exhibition spaces using properties held by NAMA; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11719/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** My Department does not itself operate performance and exhibition spaces and



does not purchase properties for this purpose. My Department does however provide capital support for arts and cultural centres operated by local authorities and other not-for-profit organisations. I recently announced details of more than €9 million in capital funding for arts and culture centres across the country. The announcement was part of the Creative Ireland Arts and Culture Capital Scheme 2016-2018. A total of 56 cultural organisations will benefit from this capital investment many of which incorporate performance or exhibition spaces. A full list of full list of organisations to benefit from funding under Stream 1 and 2 of the Arts and Cultural Capital Scheme 2016-2018 is available on my Department's website.

However, if the Deputy had any particular cases in mind I can ask my Department to consider them in consultation with the relevant local authority.

### **Departmental Expenditure**

41. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the amount which has been paid to companies (details supplied) by Government Departments and-or State agencies in the past five years. [11761/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I am informed by my Department that the amount paid to the first named party for the period concerned was €3,076,954. No payment was made to the second named party. With respect to the bodies under the aegis of my Department, I can confirm that no payment was made to either named party.

### **Rural Recreation Policy**

42. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs her views on the benefits of investing in recreation infrastructure in rural counties; the way in which this will help to attract more visitors to rural areas such as counties Sligo and Leitrim; if her Department will run a rural recreation programme in 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11549/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Activity and recreational tourism is a growth sector worldwide and the range of activities, volume of participants and number of providers of recreational tourism in Ireland have all increased in recent years. The development and promotion of this sector will provide opportunities for economic growth and jobs in rural areas in particular, by facilitating businesses to leverage their local tourism assets to support activities such as canoeing, cycling, angling, surfing, and hill walking.

The Government's Action Plan for Rural Development, which was published in January, contains a number of specific measures for delivery by a range of Departments and agencies to develop and promote activity tourism in rural areas.

For example, I will be providing funding of €7 million this year through the Rural Recreation Scheme for new recreational infrastructure and the maintenance of existing infrastructure. The scheme will be opened for applications shortly and all counties, including Sligo and Leitrim, will be invited to submit applications.

My Department will work with Waterways Ireland and Fáilte Ireland to develop and promote Blueways on the Royal Canal, Grand Canal and Barrow Canal and on the Shannon navi-

gation, with a capital investment of €6 million over the period 2017-2019.

My Department will also develop a Public Outdoor Recreation Amenities Plan, in association with a number of State agencies, to transform the provision of outdoor recreation facilities and services on public-owned land and waterways over the next five years.

I am confident that investment in the infrastructure that supports recreational activities in this growing sector will bring tangible benefits for those living in rural Ireland in terms of increased tourist numbers and job opportunities. For example, the Blueway Flagship Initiative, which was launched in June 2016, is bringing tourism to the rural areas of Cavan, Leitrim, Longford and Roscommon, by connecting 22 towns and villages along the River Shannon and the Shannon-Erne Waterway, through a Blueway.

### Cultural Policy

43. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the steps she will take to bring about the transformational change and to take Ireland off the bottom of the European table in view of the fact that Ireland is still at the bottom of the European league table in terms of cultural investment (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11749/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Taoiseach and I launched the *Creative Ireland Programme – Clár Éire Ildánach 2017 – 2022* on the 8 December 2016. This is a cross-Government initiative to mainstream culture and creativity in the life of the nation and to promote individual, community and national wellbeing. This will focus on boosting cultural provision and participation in communities and harnessing the goodwill and engagement generated by the 2016 commemorative programme.

The core proposition of this programme is that participation in cultural activity drives personal and collective creativity, with significant implications for individual and societal wellbeing and achievement. The *Creative Ireland Programme* is the main implementation vehicle for the priorities identified in *Culture 2025/Éire Ildánach*, the draft cultural policy which I published last year and which sees a vibrant cultural ecosystem as essential to society.

The programme is based on five pillars:

- Enabling the creative potential of every child
- Enabling creativity in every community
- Investing in our creative and cultural infrastructure
- Establishing Ireland as a centre of excellence in media production
- Unifying our global reputation

The *Creative Ireland Programme* is supported by significant additional resources which are being directed towards the arts and culture sector. In Budget 2017 I secured significant additional funding for the Arts Council and the Irish Film Board. The increase in the Arts Council's allocation in 2017 is €5 million, or 8%, and will assist the Council greatly in implementing its 10-year strategy Making Great Art Work (2016-2025). I also secured an increase of €2 million for the Irish Film Board, representing a 14% increase in its annual budget.

Budget 2017 also includes:

- increased funding for all of the National Cultural Institutions;
- an increase of €1 million for Culture Ireland;
- an additional €1 million to the Heritage Council; and
- funding of €5m for the implementation of the *Creative Ireland Programme* .

I also recently announced details of more than €9 million in capital funding for existing dedicated arts and culture centres across the country. The Arts and Culture Capital Scheme is the most significant investment in arts and cultural centres in a decade and will target investment at a range of different facilities, including arts centres, theatres, galleries and museums, as well as artists' studios and creative spaces. This kind of investment is at the centre of what I am trying to achieve through *Creative Ireland Programme* and the *Action Plan for Rural Development*. In this regard, I announced funding of €1M for Wexford Arts Centre.

All of this represents real and substantial funding increases across the arts and cultural area and has been welcomed across the sector. It re-affirms the commitment of this Government to progressively increase funding for the arts as the economy improves, as set out in *the Programme for a Partnership Government*.

I understand that the source of the reference quoted by the Deputy is a Council of Europe research project and that many European countries, including ten EU member states, are not included in the data. I understand also that the data is not standardised and is not comparable across countries. For example, local authority expenditure on the arts, the artists' exemption tax relief, expenditure on public service broadcasting and the Irish language are not included in the figures for Ireland but comparable figures are included in the data for some other countries.

I have previously stated that further research on this issue is warranted. The issue of a definition of culture and of capturing public expenditure on culture is an element of the draft *Culture 2025* framework policy, which was sent to the Oireachtas Committee on Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs for input in July 2016.

### **Wildlife Protection**

44. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if her Department measured the impacts of allowing hedge cutting in August and the impact it may have on wildlife; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11365/17]

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

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

Seanad Éireann. In the meantime, the existing provisions relating to Section 40 of the Wildlife Acts remain in force.

### **Straitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge**

45. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** den Aire Ealaíon, Oidhreachta, Gnóthaí Réigiúnacha, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta ós rud é gur léiríodh sa tuarascáil is déanaí ó Acadamh na hOllscolaíochta Gaeilge, breis is bliain i ndiaidh í a chur le chéile, go bhfuil bac ar dhul chun cinn na Straitéise 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge de bharr easpa monatóireachta, céard a dhéanfaidh an tAire chun an Straitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge a chur i bhfeidhm agus a chinntiú go bhfuil maoriseacht á déanamh ar an straitéis agus go bhfuil cuspóirí beachta leagtha amach, le hamscála soiléir agus sprioc-am luaite le gach gníomh, mar atá molta sa tuarascáil; cathain a chuirfear sin i gcríoch; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [11763/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Seán Kyne):** I dtús báire, mar atá ráite agam sa Seanad le déanaí, measaim gur gá a aithint gur le linn na géarchéime eacnamaíoch is measa a bhuaíl an Stát riamh a lainseáladh an Straitéis 20-Bliain don Ghaeilge 2010 – 2030. Ainneoin na gcúinsí deacra ina raibh gníomhaireachtaí na Gaeilge ag feidhmiú, idir mo Roinn féin, Foras na Gaeilge, Údarás na Gaeltachta agus na heagraíochtaí éagsúla atá á maoiniú acu, t áim sásta go bhfuil dul chun cinn suntasach déanta agus á dhéanamh maidir le raon leathan gníomhaíochtaí faoin Straitéis a chur i bhfeidhm de réir a chéile ar bhealach córasach laistigh de na hacmhainní atá ar fáil. Go deimhin, creidim go bhfuil éacht déanta leis an méid den Straitéis atá bainte amach sa chéad sé bliana dá saolré. Sin ráite, mar is eol don Teachta, eagraíodh díospóireacht oscailte faoin Straitéis i mí na Nollag 2015. Ceapadh Acadamh na hOllscolaíochta Gaeilge, OÉ Gaillimh ag an am le tuairisc maidir leis an díospóireacht oscailte agus na príomhthosaíochtaí straitéiseacha don tréimhse amach romhainn a chur i dtoll a chéile. Tá an tuairisc seo curtha faoi bhráid an Choiste Comhairligh a bunaíodh chun tacú le cur i bhfeidhm na Straitéise. Agus tuairimí agus moltaí an Choiste a bheith faighte ina leith, tá sé i gceist go mbeidh plean gníomhaíochta don tréimhse 2017-2022, ina mbeidh spriocanna sonracha agus amscálaí ina leith, á chur i dtoll a chéile ag mo Roinn agus á fhoilsiú faoi lár na bliana seo.

### **Rural Transport Services Provision**

46. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if she has made representations to the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport for an increased subsidy to Bus Éireann and to the Minister for Social Protection for an increased contribution to cover the cost of free travel in order to safeguard rural public transport connectivity; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11748/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** While I acknowledge the importance of public transport in support ing the connectivity of people living in rural areas, policy responsibility for public transport is a matter for the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport and I have no function in this area. I have not made representations to the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport or to the Minister for Social Protection in relation to the issues raised by the Deputy.

### **Rural Development Plan**

47. **Deputy Ciarán Cannon** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and

Gaeltacht Affairs the way the Action Plan for Rural Development can act as a catalyst for renewing rural areas; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11364/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** *Realising our Rural Potential*, the Government's Action Plan for Rural Development, was launched in Ballymahon, Co. Longford on the 23rd January last. The aim of the Action Plan is to progress the economic and social development of rural Ireland through a framework of supports at national and local level. The Plan will act as an overarching structure for the co-ordination and implementation of initiatives right across Government which will benefit rural Ireland. The Plan contains over 270 actions to be delivered by a range of Government Departments, State agencies and other bodies across five thematic Pillars, as follows:

- Supporting Sustainable Communities,
- Supporting Enterprise and Employment,
- Maximising our Rural Tourism and Recreation Potential,
- Fostering Culture and Creativity, and
- Improving Rural Infrastructure and Connectivity.

Each of the Pillars contains a series of high-level priorities or objectives which will help to rejuvenate rural areas.

The actions in this Plan are only the start of an on-going process which will be built on continuously to unlock the potential of rural Ireland and improve the lives of people who live and work in rural communities. I intend to work closely with all my colleagues in Government in a co-ordinated way to effectively and efficiently deliver on the actions in this Plan.

### **Rural Development Plan**

48. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the status of the clearing house forum to investigate the best ideas to advance economic and social progress in rural Ireland, as provided for under the programme for Government; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11766/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The economic and social development of rural Ireland is a key priority in the *Programme for a Partnership Government*. In order to progress this priority, I was assigned responsibility for coordinating and prioritising the work across Government Departments which impacts on rural Ireland. The Programme for Government also committed to establishing a clearing house forum to investigate the best ideas to advance economic and social progress in rural Ireland.

In this context, I recently published the Government's Action Plan for Rural Development which acts as an overarching structure for the co-ordination and implementation of initiatives right across Government which will benefit rural Ireland. In preparing the Action Plan, my Department conducted a series of consultations with stakeholders around the country to seek ideas from people in rural Ireland on how to tackle the issues of concern to them.

The Action Plan contains over 270 actions to be implemented by a range of Government Departments, agencies and other bodies to progress the economic and social development of rural Ireland. Implementation of the Action Plan will be overseen by a Monitoring Committee

which I will be establishing shortly. The Monitoring Committee will include key stakeholders, Government Departments and experts in rural development. One of the tasks for this Committee will be to ensure that the Action Plan for Rural Development stays relevant and is informed by best practice nationally and internationally. The Committee will also help to identify new actions which can be added to the Plan over its three-year lifecycle.

The Government has established a Cabinet Committee on Regional and Rural Affairs which also acts as a forum to consider ideas to support economic and social progress in rural Ireland. The Cabinet Committee meets on a regular basis and is supported by a group of senior officials from relevant Government Departments.

### **Rural Development Plan**

49. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs her views on the lack of a shortlist of priorities, as highlighted by a person (details supplied), with regard to the recently launched Action Plan for Rural Development; the details of any progress regarding the establishment of targets and performance metrics for the actions included in the plan; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11741/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** *Realising our Rural Potential*, the Government's Action Plan for Rural Development, was launched on the 23rd January. The Action Plan contains more than 270 actions for the delivery across Government, State agencies and other bodies to support the economic and social progress of rural Ireland. Each action has been assigned to a lead body which will be responsible for implementation of the action within a definite timescale.

The Action Plan is built around five thematic Pillars, each of which contains a series of high-level priorities or objectives. The Plan also contains a number of high-level targets, such as supporting the creation of 135,000 jobs outside of Dublin by 2020, increasing overseas tourists to rural areas by 12%, supporting the rejuvenation of over 600 towns and villages across the country, and protecting vital local services.

Because the Plan will be delivered across a range of Government Departments and agencies, it is possible to deliver on the key priorities simultaneously. Delivery of the Plan will be overseen by a Monitoring Committee, which I will chair, and it will meet on a regular basis to identify progress and address any potential delays in the delivery of individual actions. The inaugural meeting of the Monitoring Committee will take place in the coming weeks.

To add further value to the targets and output indicators already set out in the Plan, the Monitoring Committee will also assist with the development of appropriate impact indicators to measure the social and economic impact of the Action Plan on rural communities. My Department has already conducted some initial work in this regard.

### **Arts Funding**

50. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the steps taken and grants given to provide income for artists, in view of the recent findings from a study (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11764/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather**

**Humphreys):** Under the Arts Act 2003, primary responsibility for the promotion and support of the arts throughout the country is devolved to the Arts Council. The Arts Council is dedicated to supporting a vibrant community of visual artists, visual arts groups and organisations so that the public can experience the highest standard of visual arts, in urban and in rural parts of Ireland. The strategic context for the Arts Council's support all areas of arts practice is set out in *Making Great Art Work: Arts Council Strategy (2016 –2025)*. This describes how the Council will lead the development of the arts in Ireland over the next decade. Its strategy has five priority areas: the artist; public engagement; investment strategy; spatial and demographic planning; and developing capacity.

The Arts Council offers a number of complementary supports so that visual artists can develop their practice and create artistic work. Through its partnership with *Culture Ireland* and a number of Cultural Institutions, the Council supports representation of visual artists internationally. A number of schemes and initiatives have been established by the Arts Council towards the support of visual arts and full details can be accessed on the Arts Council website at the following link:

<http://www.artscouncil.ie/Arts-in-Ireland/Visual-arts/Schemes-and-initiatives/>

In Budget 2017, I secured significant additional funding for the Arts Council of €5m, or 8%. The increase will assist the Council in implementing its 10-year strategy. It also reaffirms the commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government to progressively increase funding for the arts as the economy improves.

Artists may benefit under the artists' exemption tax relief (Section 195 Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (TCA 1997)). The first €50,000 per annum of income earned by writers, composers, visual artists and sculptors from the sale of their work is exempt from income tax in Ireland.

In December, I announced that my Department in conjunction with the Department of Social Protection would devise a mechanism during 2017 to assist self-employed artists who have applied for Jobseeker's Allowance. I have been in contact with my colleague the Minister for Social Protection on the matter and officials of our two Departments have already begun working on this initiative in consultation with the Arts Council. The scheme will be a pilot scheme and is part of the *Creative Ireland Programme* launched in December. Details of the pilot scheme will be announced as soon as possible.

## **Irish Language**

51. **Deputy Colm Brophy** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs her plans to support the Irish language and Irish language facilities outside of Gaeltacht areas, such as the recent allocation of €150,000 to a centre (details supplied). [11740/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Seán Kyne):** At the outset, I should clarify that Foras na Gaeilge, an agency of the North South Language Body, which is co-funded by my Department and the Department for Communities in Northern Ireland, is the agency charged with promotion of the Irish language on an all-island basis. In carrying out its legislative mandate, Foras na Gaeilge provides support, advice and financial assistance to many groups who promote the language, including for the provision of courses and activities to help people improve or learn the language .

At present, Foras na Gaeilge contributes funding to staffing and revenue costs and provides project funding for centres in Northern Ireland. Other indirect support is provided by Foras na Gaeilge through its community capacity building scheme Scéim Pobal Gaeilge 2016-2020. I

have been informed by Foras na Gaeilge that they have committed to provide 4 year funding to a number of Irish language groups which have Irish language centres all over Ireland.

Area for Action 6.4 of the 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language provides for the development of Irish language social and resource centres in urban centres around Ireland. Discussions are underway between my Department and Foras na Gaeilge regarding the establishment of a new scheme to address this Area for Action, subject to funding becoming available.

My Department also, under its Irish Language Support Schemes, provides funding for small scale capital projects associated with the promotion of the Irish language outside the Gaeltacht. As the Deputy is aware, in 2016, I provided capital funding of €150,000 over a three year period for the development of the Irish language and Cultural Centre referred to by the Deputy. This funding will allow for the development of the centre's facilities for the Irish speaking community in the area. The works will include the construction of a new single storey extension to be used as a cultural centre, café and bookshop.

The architect is currently working on the drawings of phase one of the project which it is hoped will be open to the public in September. Phase two of the project is estimated to cost €80,000. This will involve the construction of a theatre and meeting space for the various Irish language and cultural groups in the area.

## **Rural Development Plan**

52. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the plans she has developed to facilitate the return of Irish emigrants to help rejuvenate rural Ireland. [11760/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade provides significant funding and support through the Emigration Support Programme, to assist citizens who wish to return to Ireland. Through the Interdepartmental Committee on the Irish Abroad, the Minister for the Diaspora, Joe McHugh T.D., has been working to oversee joined-up delivery of the diaspora policy and also to examine issues affecting the Irish abroad and those wishing to return home to Ireland. My Department is represented on this Committee and will work closely with colleagues across Government to ensure that rural Ireland remains a tangible option for those returning to Ireland.

The Government's Action Plan for Rural Development, which was launched in January, will help to improve the quality of life for those who live and work in rural Ireland. By supporting new economic opportunities in the regions, rejuvenating rural towns and villages and supporting vibrant local communities, we can make rural Ireland an attractive proposition for those emigrants who wish to return home to Ireland.

## **Cultural Policy**

53. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs her plans to use the medium of the arts to project a positive national image, promote tourism and generate renewed economic activity; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11752/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather**



**Humphreys):** The Taoiseach and I launched the *Creative Ireland Programme- Clár Éire Ildánach 2017-2022* on the 8 December 2016. This is a cross-Government initiative to mainstream culture and creativity in the life of the nation and to promote individual, community and national well-being. This will focus on boosting cultural provision and participation in communities and harnessing the goodwill and engagement generated by the 2016 commemorative programme.

The core proposition of this programme is that participation in cultural activity drives personal and collective creativity, with significant implications for individual and societal well-being and achievement. The *Creative Ireland Programme* is the main implementation vehicle for the priorities identified in *Culture 2025/Éire Ildánach*, the draft cultural policy which I published last year and which sees a vibrant cultural ecosystem as essential to society.

The programme is based on five pillars:

- Enabling the creative potential of every child
- Enabling creativity in every community
- Investing in our creative and cultural infrastructure
- Establishing Ireland as a centre of excellence in media production
- Unifying our global reputation

Specifically the 5th Pillar - *Unifying our Global Reputation* - is about presenting a coherent representation of Ireland to the world as a creative people. This will seek to capture the overarching narrative of Ireland's unique creativity and cultural heritage, and builds on the work of *Culture Ireland*, a division of my Department, which has an existing remit to promote Irish arts worldwide. The Government's intentions in this regard were welcomed when I launched the *Creative Ireland Programme* on the international stage in New York in January and in London last week.

In addition, the *Action Plan for Rural Development*, which I launched with the Taoiseach last month, is the first whole-of-government strategy aimed at people living and working in rural Ireland. It aims to unlock the potential of rural Ireland through a framework of supports at national and local level which will ensure that people who live in rural areas have increased opportunities for employment locally, and access to public services and social networks that support a high quality of life.

The Action Plan is an overarching structure for the co-ordination and implementation of initiatives right across Government which will benefit rural Ireland. It takes a cohesive and coordinated approach across the whole of Government to the implementation of both economic and social policies that impact on rural communities.

The Plan contains 276 actions which aim to improve both the economic and social fabric of rural Ireland spread across five pillars.

Arts and Heritage are covered under the fourth pillar of the plan - *Fostering Culture and Creativity in Rural Communities*.

The key objectives of this Pillar are to;

- Increase access to the arts and enhance cultural facilities in rural communities.
- Further develop and enhance culture and creativity in rural Ireland through the establishment of culture teams and creativity hubs as part of the *Creative Ireland Programme*

- Promote the Irish language as a key resource in Gaeltacht and other rural communities.

These policy initiatives are supported by significant additional resources which are being directed towards the arts and culture sector. In Budget 2017 I secured significant additional funding for the Arts Council and the Irish Film Board. The increase in the Arts Council's allocation in 2017 is €5 million, or 8%, and will assist the Council greatly in implementing its 10-year strategy Making Great Art Work (2016-2025). I also secured an increase of €2 million for the Irish Film Board, representing a 14% increase in its annual budget.

Budget 2017 also includes:

- increased funding for all of the National Cultural Institutions;
- an increase of €1 million for Culture Ireland;
- an additional €1 million to the Heritage Council; and
- funding of €5m for the implementation of the *Creative Ireland Programme*.

I also recently announced details of more than €9 million in capital funding for existing dedicated arts and culture centres across the country. The Arts and Culture Capital Scheme is the most significant investment in arts and cultural centres in a decade and will target investment at a range of different facilities, including arts centres, theatres, galleries and museums, as well as artists' studios and creative spaces. This kind of investment is at the centre of what I am trying to achieve through *Creative Ireland Programme* and the *Action Plan for Rural Development*.

All of this represents real and substantial funding increases across the arts and cultural area and has been welcomed across the sector. It reaffirms the commitment of this Government to progressively increase funding for the arts as the economy improves, as set out in *the Programme for a Partnership Government*.

These initiatives and additional funding will all support the achievement of the objectives set out in the questions.

## National Gallery

54. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs when the renovation of the National Gallery of Ireland will be complete and the gallery fully open to the public; the cost of the works carried out to date; the cost of the remaining renovation works; the original projected cost of the renovation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11611/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The major restoration programme at the National Gallery of Ireland commenced with the project to replace the Dargan Wing Roof. This element of the works commenced in March 2011 and was completed in August 2012. The Tender Price for these construction works was €2.093m and Final Account on completion was agreed with the Main Contractor at €2.135m.

In January 2014, works relating to the refurbishment of the Historic Wings, including the replacement of the Milltown Wing Roof commenced based on a Tender Price of €25.806m. These works were completed in December 2016 but the final cost of works will not be established until the Final Account has been completed with the Main Contractor.

7 March 2017

The project included the repair and restoration of the fabric of the Dargan and Milltown Wings, infill of the voids between the wings and the installation of 21st century climate, heating, fire suppression and lighting systems amongst other things.

The Office of Public Works, the National Gallery of Ireland and my Department are cooperating on the oversight of this project. It is expected that the Dargan and Milltown wings will be open to the public in June 2017.

This is a sizable historic restoration and upgrade project and represents an important capital investment by the State in one of its important cultural institutions. It will provide the National Gallery with first class environmental standards that allow it to host world class exhibitions in an appropriate setting.

### Scéim na mBóithre Áise

55. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** den Aire Ealaíon, Oidhreachta, Gnóthaí Réigiúnacha, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta an bhfuil sé i gceist aici airgead faoi leith a chur ar fáil faoi scéim na mbóithre aise chun cúnamh a thabhairt do dhaoine nach bhfuil a mbóithre faoi chúram na gcomhairlí contae; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [11367/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Seán Kyne) (Deputy Seán Kyne):** Tá forfheidhmiú na Straitéise 20-Bliain don Ghaeilge 2010-2030 a foilsíodh i mí na Nollag 2010 áirithe go sonrath mar sprioc i gClár an Rialtais Rannpháirtíochta. Anuas air sin, tugann Acht na Gaeltachta 2012 feidhm reachtúil don phróiseas pleanála teanga sa Ghaeltacht faoina mbeidh pleananna teanga á n-ullmhú ag leibhéal an phobail. Tabharfar tréimhse ama don phobal chun pleananna teanga a ullmhú agus a fheidhmiú, le tacaíochtaí chuí ón Stát.

Tá an scéim atá luaite ag an Teachta ar fionraí anois. I bhfianaise na n-éileamh airgeadais a eascróidh as chur i bhfeidhm na Straitéise 20-Bliain agus an phróiseas pleanála teanga, agus an tábhacht a bhaineann leis an obair sin, ní bheidh ar chumas mo Roinne an scéim sin a athnuachan i mbliana.

### Rural Development Policy

56. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the progress made on the roll-out of the regional and rural portion of her Department's remit in 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11360/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** My Department has made significant progress across a range of issues within the rural and regional policy areas of my Department so far this year.

For example, *Realising our Rural Potential*, the Government's Action Plan for Rural Development, was launched on Monday 23rd January in Ballymahon, Co. Longford. The Plan contains over 270 actions to be implemented by a range of Government Departments, agencies and other bodies to progress the economic and social development of rural Ireland. It is the first time a framework such as this has been developed to provide a co-ordinated approach across Government to the economic and social development of rural areas.

In relation to the implementation of the LEADER Programme, over 3,000 Expressions of Interest requesting funding of over €140 million have been received since the new programme

was launched in July 2016. The Local Action Groups are now concluding calls for proposals and working with potential applicants to develop and finalise project applications in each area. A significant increase in project approvals and payments is expected as the year progresses, and a total of €40 million has been provided for the LEADER Programme in my Department's Estimate this year.

Minister of State Michael Ring has secured an allocation of €5 million for the CLÁR programme for 2017 and details of the particular measures to be funded will be announced shortly.

I have secured funding of €12 million for an enhanced Town and Village Renewal scheme this year and I will be launching the first phase of this scheme shortly. As part of the scheme, I intend to launch a pilot project to encourage residential occupancy in rural towns and villages and this phase will be launched in the second half of the year.

My Department is working with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment and the Local Authorities on an on-going basis to facilitate the roll-out of the National Broadband Plan. An Implementation Group has also been established to oversee the implementation of the actions contained in the Report of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce, which was published last December. The Implementation Group will meet for the first time this week and will be co-chaired by myself and Minister Naughten.

Yesterday, An Taoiseach and Minister of State Ring convened the inaugural meeting of a new Atlantic Economic Corridor Taskforce in Castlebar. The Taskforce will provide a platform for collaboration between stakeholders from the private sector, the public sector and the wider community, to identify how best an economic corridor can be created along the Atlantic sea-board region. The Atlantic Economic Corridor concept aims to contribute to effective regional development by creating sufficient scale along the western part of Ireland to match other regions – and particularly the East coast - in attracting Irish and multinational investment, growing jobs and supporting vibrant local communities.

## **Arts Funding**

57. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the details of the €9 million in capital funding for arts and culture centres throughout the country announced by her on 13 February 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11612/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** On 13 February, I was very pleased to announce the details of more than €9 million in capital funding for arts and culture centres across the country as part of the Creative Ireland programme.

A total of 56 cultural organisations will benefit from this capital investment, including theatres, heritage centres, galleries, archives, integrated arts centres, artist studios and creative and performance spaces. Of the €9 million over 85% is going to projects outside Dublin.

There are seven flagship projects which will receive substantial funding as follows:

- Solstice Meath Arts Centre – €300,000
- The Irish Aerial Creation Centre (home of Fidget Feet) – €350,000
- The Hunt Museum, Limerick – €400,000

7 March 2017

- The Hawk's Well Theatre in Sligo – €550,000
- Cavan Town Hall Theatre – €750,000
- The Riverbank Arts Centre, Kildare – €1,000,000
- Wexford Arts Centre – €1,000,000

A further 49 projects will receive funding ranging from €20,000 to €276,000 as set out in the Table to this question and as published on the website of my Department at [www.ahrrga.gov.ie](http://www.ahrrga.gov.ie).

Organisation	County	Grant award
Glór	Clare	€37,029
Firkin Crane Ltd.	Cork	€150,000
The Everyman Palace Ltd	Cork	€155,463
Wandesford Quay Ltd (WQL)	Cork	€90,842
Cork County Council /Briery Gap	Cork	€250,000
Cork Opera House DAC	Cork	€176,288
Abbey Arts and Cultural Centre	Donegal	€164,785
An Grianán Theatre	Donegal	€46,420
Donegal County Museum	Donegal	€27,962
Lifford Association Tourism Commerce and Heritage Limited (LATCH)	Donegal	€215,753
A4 Arts Studio & Community Education Centre Limited	Dublin	€22,800
Civic Theatre Company Limited	Dublin	€132,280
Draíocht	Dublin	€47,730
Fire Station Artists's Studios	Dublin	€30,643
First Fortnight Ltd	Dublin	€20,560
Fund it	Dublin	€21,250
Gallery of Photography Ireland	Dublin	€24,963
Irish Film Institute	Dublin	€149,801
Irish Georgian Society	Dublin	€90,000
National Irish Visual Arts Library (NIVAL)	Dublin	€120,000
National Maritime Museum of Ireland	Dublin	€49,705
Pavilion Theatre Management Co. Ltd	Dublin	€149,855
Project Arts Centre	Dublin	€260,485
The Ark t/a The Children's Cultural Centre ltd	Dublin	€130,429
The MART Gallery Ltd,	Dublin	€34,825
Galway City Museum	Galway	€180,280
Glenamaddy Arts & Historical Co-Op Society Ltd	Galway	€50,000
Town Hall Theatre	Galway	€118,129
Yeats Thoor Ballylee Development Ltd	Galway	€22,000
Cultural Centre Killarney /Kerry County Council	Kerry	€120,320
The Watergate Theatre	Kilkenny	€81,858
North Leitrim Glens Development Company Ltd	Leitrim	€50,000
The Dock / Leitrim County Council	Leitrim	€128,337
Dance Limerick Hub CLG	Limerick	€75,015

Organisation	County	Grant award
Lime Tree Theatre Limerick Limited	Limerick	€45,232
Limerick City Gallery of Art	Limerick	€125,850
Custom House Studios	Mayo	€43,274
Jackie Clarke Collection	Mayo	€24,300
Linenhall Arts Centre Co Ltd	Mayo	€42,000
Inniskeen Development Group Ltd	Monaghan	€188,636
Old Post Office Clones /Monaghan County Council	Monaghan	€144,077
Birr Stage Guild Ltd.,	Offaly	€32,844
Roscommon Arts Centre	Roscommon	€276,615
Blackcastle Theatre Company	Tipperary	€23,000
The Source Arts Centre	Tipperary	€68,000
Barker Arts Centre t/a	Waterford	€54,000
Dean Crowe Trust	Westmeath	€113,772
Mermaid County Wicklow Arts Centre	Wicklow	€36,036
Tinahely Courthouse CLG t/a The Courthouse Arts Centre	Wicklow	€28,000

### Cultural Policy

58. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs her views on the way arts and culture can play a role in revitalising rural areas in places such as Counties Sligo and Leitrim; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11548/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Taoiseach and I launched the *Creative Ireland Programme – Clár Éire Ildánach 2017- 2022* on the 8 December 2016.

This is a cross-Government initiative to mainstream culture and creativity in the life of the nation and to promote individual, community and national well-being. This will focus on boosting cultural provision and participation in communities and harnessing the goodwill and engagement generated by the 2016 commemorative programme.

The core proposition of this programme is that participation in cultural activity drives personal and collective creativity, with significant implications for individual and societal well-being and achievement. The *Creative Ireland Programme* is the main implementation vehicle for the priorities identified in *Culture 2025/Éire Ildánach*, the draft cultural policy which I published last year and which sees a vibrant cultural ecosystem as essential to society.

The programme is based on five pillars:

- Enabling the creative potential of every child
- Enabling creativity in every community
- Investing in our creative and cultural infrastructure
- Establishing Ireland as a centre of excellence in media production

- Unifying our global reputation

Specifically the 5th Pillar - *Unifying our Global Reputation* - is about presenting a coherent representation of Ireland to the world as a creative people. This will seek to capture the overarching narrative of Ireland's unique creativity and cultural heritage, and builds on the work of *Culture Ireland*, a division of my Department, which has an existing remit to promote Irish arts worldwide. The Government's intentions in this regard were welcomed when I launched the *Creative Ireland Programme* on the international stage in New York in January and in London last week.

In addition, the *Action Plan for Rural Development*, which I launched with the Taoiseach last month, is the first whole-of-government strategy aimed at people living and working in rural Ireland. It aims to unlock the potential of rural Ireland through a framework of supports at national and local level which will ensure that people who live in rural areas have increased opportunities for employment locally, and access to public services and social networks that support a high quality of life.

The Action Plan is an overarching structure for the co-ordination and implementation of initiatives right across Government which will benefit rural Ireland. It takes a cohesive and coordinated approach across the whole of Government to the implementation of both economic and social policies that impact on rural communities.

The Plan contains 276 actions which aim to improve both the economic and social fabric of rural Ireland spread across five pillars.

Arts and Heritage are covered under the fourth pillar of the plan - *Fostering Culture and Creativity in Rural Communities*.

The key objectives of this Pillar are to;

- Increase access to the arts and enhance cultural facilities in rural communities.
- Further develop and enhance culture and creativity in rural Ireland through the establishment of culture teams and creativity hubs as part of the *Creative Ireland Programme*
- Promote the Irish language as a key resource in Gaeltacht and other rural communities.

These policy initiatives are supported by significant additional resources which are being directed towards the arts and culture sector. In Budget 2017 I secured significant additional funding for the Arts Council and the Irish Film Board. The increase in the Arts Council's allocation in 2017 is €5 million, or 8%, and will assist the Council greatly in implementing its 10-year strategy *Making Great Art Work (2016-2025)*. I also secured an increase of €2 million for the Irish Film Board, representing a 14% increase in its annual budget.

Budget 2017 also includes:

- increased funding for all of the National Cultural Institutions;
- an increase of €1 million for Culture Ireland;
- an additional €1 million to the Heritage Council; and
- funding of €5m for the implementation of the *Creative Ireland Programme*.

I also recently announced details of more than €9 million in capital funding for existing dedicated arts and culture centres across the country. The Arts and Culture Capital Scheme is

the most significant investment in arts and cultural centres in a decade and will target investment at a range of different facilities, including arts centres, theatres, galleries and museums, as well as artists' studios and creative spaces. This kind of investment is at the centre of what I am trying to achieve through *Creative Ireland Programme* and the *Action Plan for Rural Development*. In this regard, I announced funding of over €728,000 for 3 projects in Sligo and Leitrim.

All of this represents real and substantial funding increases across the arts and cultural area and has been welcomed across the sector. It reaffirms the commitment of this Government to progressively increase funding for the arts as the economy improves, as set out in *the Programme for a Partnership Government*.

These initiatives and additional funding will all support the achievement of the objectives set out in the questions.

### Rural Development Policy

59. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs when she expects to launch the town and village renewal scheme 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11356/17]

**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.

As part of Budget 2017, I have secured funding of €12 million for an enhanced Town and Village Renewal scheme this year. I intend to launch the first phase of this scheme in the coming weeks, with a focus on improving the economic development of our towns and villages.

To ensure the maximum impact of the scheme, I am exploring how best we can align this scheme with other initiatives across Government which can also support the rejuvenation of rural towns and villages.

The Town and Village Renewal scheme will be funded by my Department and administered by the Local Authorities. Full details of the initiative will be made available when the scheme is launched.

I also intend to launch a second phase of the scheme later this year. This will be a pilot project to encourage residential occupancy in rural towns and villages. The pilot will be launched in the second half of the year, when details of the scheme have been finalised in consultation with relevant Departments.

### Regional Development Initiatives

60. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs her plans for the creation of a Border development zone, similar to the Atlantic economic corridor, to ensure proper regional development. [11762/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** As the Deputy is aware, the Border region covers the counties of Donegal, Sligo Leitrim, Cavan, Monaghan and Louth, and stretches from the North West of the country to the



North East. The region is unique in that it provides an interface between the economies of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Each of the counties in the region has its own characteristics and its own economic ties with areas both North and South of the Border. The region faces a number of challenges because of the peripherality of some of its areas and its potential exposure to the impact of Brexit.

The Action Plan for Jobs for the North West and North East regions, which is overseen by the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, Mary Mitchell O'Connor, T.D., is seeking to develop the potential of the region through enhanced cooperation between public and private stakeholders to support enterprise growth and job creation.

In addition, the Action Plan for Rural Development, which I launched recently, includes a number of measures to support the region, including through the development of cross-Border tourism initiatives.

The Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, Simon Coveney, T.D., also recently launched a consultation process on the development of a new National Planning Framework which will provide a basis to support more effective regional development in the future.

In light of the initiatives outlined above, I do not have any additional plans at this point in time to develop a Border development zone. However, the outcome of the National Planning Framework process should help to inform the potential for the development of the Border region in the long-term.

### **Hare Coursing**

61. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the details of the methodology behind the figure that more than 99% of hares used for coursing meetings are released unharmed back into the wild as she has previously stated; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11744/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Figures available to my Department for the 2015/16 hare coursing season indicate that of the 5,348 hares captured for use at coursing meetings, some 5,312 or 99% were released back into the wild. I will arrange for the Deputy to be furnished directly with the calculation methodology.

### **Arts Funding**

62. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the details of the system used in determining approvals during the assessment process of the creative arts and culture capital scheme 2016; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11717/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Arts and Culture Capital Scheme was specifically targeted at supporting our regional arts centres with applications invited from arts and cultural centres across the country.

In total, 106 applications were received by the Department. The detailed selection criteria and eligibility requirements were published in the Guidelines of the Scheme. There was a two stage assessment process. The first stage involved all applications being reviewed on receipt to

ensure eligibility. All eligible applications were then forwarded to an Assessment Panel which undertook the second stage of the assessment of the applications which advanced from stage one. The Assessment Panel reviewed each eligible application within the defined criteria and scored them accordingly. The recommendations were then forwarded to me for decision as set out in the published scheme conditions. Following these assessment processes 56 projects are being funded.

This capital scheme is the most significant investment in arts and cultural centres in a decade and will target investment at a range of different facilities, including arts centres, theatres, galleries and museums, as well as artists' studios and creative spaces. This kind of investment is at the centre of what I am trying to achieve through Creative Ireland and the Action Plan for Rural Development.

### Cultural Policy

63. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs her plans to obtain the maximum benefit from the European year of cultural heritage in 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11753/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** At the most recent Education, Youth, Culture and Sports Council held in Brussels in November, 2016 a general approach on the proposal to designate 2018 the European Year of Cultural Heritage was reached. To ensure successful implementation of this initiative, each Member State has been requested by the European Commission to nominate a National Coordinator. The National Co-ordinator will work with the competent authorities here in Ireland together with the European Union institutions to multiply its impact through additional activities and community involvement.

I am pleased to advise the Deputy that I have already written to the Chief Executive of the Heritage Council - the national agency which has responsibility for protecting our national heritage inviting the Council to act as Ireland's national co-ordinating body.

Given the experience of the Heritage Council in working with partners the length and breadth of Ireland, I am confident that Ireland will be well placed to benefit from the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018 to influence broader civil society to protect, safeguard, re-use, enhance and promote our national and our shared European cultural heritage. The Year will also form part of the *Creative Ireland Programme*, which the Taoiseach and I launched on the 8th of December 2016, and which is underpinned by values which recognise the importance of our culture heritage and the role our culture plays in fostering a more sustainable future for Ireland and in presenting Ireland to the world.

### CLÁR Programme

64. **Deputy Ciarán Cannon** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs when the 2017 CLÁR programme will open for applications; the types of projects that will be supported under the scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11363/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Michael Ring):** CLÁR is a targeted investment programme which provides funding for small scale infrastructural projects in rural areas which have suffered the greatest levels of population

decline.

I have secured an allocation of €5 million for CLÁR for 2017 and my objective is to maximise the impact of the funding which is available, for the benefit of communities in CLÁR areas. I will shortly be announcing details of the measures to be funded under the programme this year.

In 2016, the CLÁR programme provided funding to over 650 projects for the development of local infrastructure such as safety lights at rural schools, better road markings and pedestrian crossings close to community facilities, the provision of play areas and multi-use games facilities, and support for access roads to public amenities.

While often modest in nature, these interventions play a very significant role in improving the lives of the people who live in CLÁR areas.

### EU Directives

65. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the total fines imposed on Ireland to date for breach of the habitats directive; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11362/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** No such fines have been imposed.

### Tourism Policy

66. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs her plans to instigate an artist's trail in County Wexford as a pilot scheme, similar to the Wild Atlantic Way and Ireland's Ancient East but which instead promotes artistic heritage (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11750/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The initiatives outlined in the question are the responsibility of my colleague the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport. The issue of a county Wexford artistic trail could be a matter which the county council may wish to consider in terms of the local response to the *Creative Ireland programme*.

### Cultural Policy

67. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs her plans to make departmental funding available for multicultural integration events to communities such as Kildare town which have a large multicultural society; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11366/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Taoiseach and I launched the *Creative Ireland Programme/Clár Éire Ildánach 2017 – 2022* on the 8 December 2016 as the Government Legacy Programme for Ireland 2016 and as the main implementation vehicle for the priorities identified in Culture 2025/ Éire Ildánach, the draft cultural policy which I published in July 2016.

This is a cross-Government initiative to mainstream culture and creativity in the life of the nation and to promote individual, community and national well-being. This will focus on boosting cultural provision and participation in communities and harnessing the goodwill and engagement generated by the 2016 commemorative programme.

The core proposition of this programme is that participation in cultural activity drives personal and collective creativity, with significant implications for individual and societal well-being and achievement. The programme is based on five pillars:

1. Enabling the creative potential of every child
2. Enabling creativity in every community
3. Investing in our creative and cultural infrastructure
4. Establishing Ireland as a centre of excellence in media production
5. Unifying our global reputation

The second pillar – *Enabling creativity in every community* – will be implemented primarily through our local authorities. This is because local authorities are the primary instruments of community engagement and second, local authorities have a particular capacity for engaging citizens through local programme delivery including cultural events.

Each local authority has now established a Culture Team bringing together arts officers, librarians, heritage officers, museum curators, archivists and other relevant personnel led by a Director of Services, with a nominated person as ‘Creative Ireland Co-ordinator’.

A dedicated budget of €1m from the overall Creative Ireland Programme budget of €5m has been allocated to the local authorities towards the implementation of initiatives under Pillar Two including the publication of a Culture and Creative Plan for each county - reflecting at local level the overall structure and aims of the national programme - and the implementation of Cruinniú na Cásca, a programme of arts activities and events on Easter Monday. This funding will be in addition to the normal funding provided by the local authorities for cultural and artistic initiatives.

I understand that additional support will also be made available to the local authorities for these initiatives by the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government.

I am confident that this additional funding, together with the Culture Teams being put in place, will go a long way to promoting cultural activity across the country including multicultural events.

### **Rural Development Policy**

68. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the extent to which she has identified the primary issues deemed to hinder rural development, with particular reference to the need to maintain a viable rural population thereby ensuring the future of rural schools, post offices and convenience shops; the specific objectives she has set to address the issues in view of the recently announced Action Plan for Rural Development; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11714/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** On 23rd January, I launched *Realising our Rural Potential*, the Government’s

Action Plan for Rural Development. The Plan contains over 270 actions to be delivered by a range of Government Departments, State agencies and other bodies to support the economic and social development of rural Ireland. The Plan was developed following an extensive consultation process with stakeholders to identify the key issues affecting rural communities today.

The Action Plan contains measures across a range of policy areas which will help to maintain and revitalise rural communities. For instance, a key component of the Plan is to support the creation of jobs throughout the regions to ensure that people who live in rural areas have increased opportunities for employment locally. The Plan aims to deliver 135,000 extra jobs outside of Dublin by 2020.

Our towns and villages are the heart of our rural communities, and it is important that we implement measures to help breath life back into these rural towns and villages. The rejuvenation of towns and villages will be supported under the Action Plan through schemes such as the Town and Village Renewal Scheme and the CLÁR Programme. I also intend to launch a pilot scheme later in the year to encourage people to take up residential occupancy of premises in town centres.

The Action Plan also sets out a number of actions which will protect and enhance vital services in rural communities. For example, the Plan includes a commitment that no small school will close against the wishes of parents; it also sets out a number of actions in relation to access to healthcare, including an increase in the number of GPs in rural areas.

The actions in this Plan are only the start of an on-going process which will be built on continuously to unlock the potential of rural Ireland and improve the lives of people who live and work in rural communities.

### **Departmental Funding**

69. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the total amount of funds allocated by her Department received by each county. [11765/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Details of the annual funding allocation to my Department at subhead level are published in the annual Revised Estimates Volume. Through these subheads, my Department administers and delivers a wide range of programmes and measures, descriptions of which are available on its website at <http://www.ahg.gov.ie/>

Expenditure under these programme areas is recorded and accounted for on a national basis and it is not possible to give a regional, county-by-county or constituency breakdown of that expenditure. For example, a number of my Department's programmes are delivered through agencies and other intermediary bodies that operate across county boundaries and in respect of which there is no detailed breakdown on a county basis or constituency basis held by my Department. Groups and organisations that receive grants directly from my Department are not typically constituted on a single-county basis or constituency basis.

In view of this and because of the wide range of my Department's schemes and programmes, and the large volumes of payments and grants involved, it is not possible to provide the information sought. However, if the Deputy has specific queries relating to a particular programme or grant, I will endeavour to provide him with relevant information in that regard.

## **National Parks and Wildlife Service**

70. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if her attention has been drawn to an investigation by the National Parks and Wildlife Service regarding the loss of high calibre weapons and ammunition from armouries in different parts of the country; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11715/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Michael Ring):** My Department is not aware of the loss of any high calibre weapons or ammunition from armouries and no such investigation is under way.

As part of its annual asset verification processes, my Department undertakes reviews of sensitive assets, including firearms. These are routine and standard management exercises. An annual report is currently being prepared for the Department's Management Board with regard to the verification exercise conducted in 2016. No loss of weapons or ammunitions were identified.

The 2017 audit of such firearms has recently commenced and is being combined with an additional review of the Department's management procedures in respect of both firearms and ammunition. The purpose of this review is to ensure that the Department's management procedures and policies with regard to controls on firearms and ammunitions remain robust.

As the Deputy will appreciate, given the particular security considerations attached to firearms, the Department would generally not publish any details concerning the number of firearms held or their location. In the event that the Department became aware of the loss of a firearm, it would, of course, notify the relevant authorities.

## **Rural Development Plan**

71. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the new elements of the Action Plan for Rural Development that were not already in train before the launch of the plan and that will be rolled out in 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11359/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Government's Action Plan for Rural Development was launched on 23rd January 2017. It is the first plan of its kind to take a cohesive and coordinated approach across the whole of Government to both economic and social development.

Examples of new elements of the Plan which will be rolled out in 2017 include:

- An enhanced Town and Village Renewal scheme, with funding of €12 million per annum, which represents a threefold increase on the 2016 baseline. This scheme will include a pilot initiative to encourage residential occupancy of buildings in town and village centres.

- The provision of 500 extra places on the Rural Social Scheme, which were announced by the Minister for Social Protection, Leo Varadkar, T.D., in January.

- The development of a Public Outdoor Recreation Amenities Plan to transform the provision of outdoor recreation facilities and services on public-owned land and waterways over the next five years.

- €6 million for investment in the development of Blueways over the period 2017-2019, and

a capital investment of up to €10 million over four years in Ireland's six National Parks and Nature Reserves.

- The establishment of a Taskforce to process the proposal for an Atlantic Economic Corridor. The first meeting of this Taskforce took place on 6th March.

- The development of a national policy on Social Enterprise.

- The development of a new and effective rural proofing model which will ensure that rural development issues are considered in the decision-making processes of all Government Departments, State bodies and agencies.

- A new Community CCTV grant scheme, which will be introduced by the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality.

Every action in the Action Plan has been accorded an appropriate timeline for implementation. The monitoring mechanisms set out in the Plan will oversee and drive this implementation.

## Cultural Policy

72. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the amount of funding that will be delivered under pillar 2 of the Creative Ireland plan; and her views on whether this is sufficient. [11607/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Taoiseach and I launched the *Creative Ireland Programme/Clár Éire Ildánach 2017 – 2022* on the 8 December 2016 as the Government Legacy Programme for Ireland 2016 and as the main implementation vehicle for the priorities identified in *Culture 2025/ Éire Ildánach*, the draft cultural policy which I published in July 2016.

This is a cross-Government initiative to mainstream culture and creativity in the life of the nation and to promote individual, community and national well-being.

The second pillar of the Programme – *Enabling creativity in every community*- will be implemented primarily through our local authorities as they are the primary instruments of local community engagement.

Each local authority has now established a Culture Team bringing together arts officers, librarians, heritage officers, museum curators, archivists and other relevant personnel led by a Director of Services, with a nominated person as 'Creative Ireland Co-ordinator'.

A dedicated budget of €1m from the overall Creative Ireland Programme budget of €5m has been allocated to the local authorities towards the implementation of initiatives under Pillar Two including the aforementioned culture teams, the publication of a Culture and Creative Plan for each county - reflecting at local level the overall structure and aims of the national programme - and the implementation of *Cruinniú na Cásca*, a programme of arts activities and events on Easter Monday.

I understand that additional support will also be made available to the local authorities for these initiatives by the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government.

This funding is in addition to the other significant additional resources that I secured under Budget 2017 for the arts and culture sector including €5m extra funding for the Arts Council and an additional €1 million to the Heritage Council. I also recently announced details of more

than €9 million in capital funding for existing dedicated arts and culture centres across the country.

All of this represents real and substantial funding increases across the arts and cultural area and has been welcomed across the sector. It reaffirms the commitment of this Government to progressively increase funding for the arts as the economy improves, as set out in the *Programme for a Partnership Government*.

### **Post Office Network**

73. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the steps she has undertaken to secure the rural post office network; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11610/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Michael Ring):** 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.

Two Working Groups were established last year to progress the recommendations in the report of the Post Office Network Business Development Group which was published in January 2016. The first Group, chaired by Mr. Bobby Kerr, examined, on behalf of An Post, issues such as the number and spatial distribution of post offices, branch modernisation, the streamlining of products and services, postmaster payments and contracts, and training and qualifications for post office employees. Arising out of the Group's work, a report was submitted to An Post for their consideration on 23 December 2016.

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. This Group has completed its work and I will report to Government shortly on its findings.

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.

The implementation of any of the recommendations or proposals which have emerged from this process will require the agreement and input of An Post, which is a commercial State company.

### **Exports Data**

74. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Taoiseach the Irish exporting firm to active enterprises ratio in 2014, 2015 and 2016; and the corresponding EU average rate. [11554/17]

88. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Taoiseach if he will provide Ireland's ratio of exporting firms to active enterprises in the EU. [11025/17]



89. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Taoiseach the total number of SMEs that account for total exports from Ireland, on a percentage basis, based on latest data at hand. [11024/17]

91. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Taoiseach the total number of Irish firms that account for total exports from Ireland, on a percentage basis, based on latest data at hand. [11040/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 74, 88, 89 and 91 together.

The exact data requested by the Deputy is not available but some estimates can be made for the industrial sector from the CSO's Structural Business Statistics (SBS). The annual Census of Industrial Production, which is a component of SBS, is based on survey returns from a sample of about 2,000 industrial enterprises, combined with estimates for other enterprises based on Revenue data. The sample returns give an indication of whether the enterprise is involved in exporting goods. In 2014, there were 16,497 active industrial enterprises in Ireland. Of these, 11,183 employed less than three persons. The following information relates to the responses to the survey from industrial enterprises which employed three or more persons. From the sample returns for 2014, it is estimated that 54% of industrial enterprises with three or more persons employed exported some goods and exports accounted for about 65% of turnover. In the case of SMEs, 52% exported some goods and their exports accounted for 46% of turnover.

For large enterprises, employing 250 persons or more, 85% exported some goods and exports accounted for 71% of turnover. These are very broad estimates and a more detailed breakdown is not available from the SBS survey questions.

While corresponding figures for other EU Member States or further breakdowns of these CSO figures are not available, some breakdowns of trade by size of enterprise are available from the Trade by Enterprise Characteristic (TEC) statistics.

### **Exports Data**

75. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Taoiseach the reason Ireland did not provide data for the incidence of exporting published by the OECD in 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11555/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The data referred to in the OECD "Entrepreneurship at a Glance 2016" publication is based on Trade by Enterprise Characteristics (TEC) data, which the Central Statistics Office supplies annually to Eurostat. The 2013 data was transmitted to Eurostat by the deadline in 2015, however at that time the data was marked confidential.

During 2015, the Central Statistics Office implemented major revisions to the trade data to take account of new methodology for the treatment of trade in aircraft. As this revised time series of data had not been published nationally, and was still being incorporated into Balance of Payments and National Accounts statistics, the TEC data submitted to Eurostat were temporarily marked as confidential. When the nationally published data were fully revised in early 2016, the confidentiality marks for the 2013 TEC tables were removed and resubmitted to Eurostat in March 2016.

As a result of this temporary confidentiality flagging of 2013 data, the "Entrepreneurship at a Glance 2016" report includes 2012 data, but not 2013 data for Ireland. We expect that the OECD will update their website to take account of the 2013 data, and the CSO are currently liaising with Eurostat to clarify issues surrounding the 2014 data before publication on the Eu-

rostat and OECD databases.

### Unemployment Data

76. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Taoiseach the total number of young persons here aged between 15 to 29 years of age who are classified as NEETs, that is, not in employment, education, or training; the percentage of NEETs as a proportion of the total number of unemployed; and the corresponding EU average rate, in tabular form. [11557/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) is the official source of estimates of unemployment (International Labour Organisation - ILO) in the State. The latest annual (average) unemployment data available for Ireland is for 2016.

The following table shows, for Ireland, the number of persons between 15-29 years of age classified as NEET and the total number of those classified NEET being unemployed (ILO) for the years 2015 and 2016. The table also includes for Ireland the percentage share of all unemployed persons aged between 15 and 29 years represented by those classified as NEET above.

The most recently available annual unemployment data for the EU28 is for 2015. However, the corresponding EU28 figure for the percentage share of all unemployed persons aged 15-29 years accounted for by those of same age group and classified as NEETS and unemployed was not available from Eurostat at the time of writing. This information will be forwarded to the Deputy when available.

Table Unemployed persons aged 15 - 29 years classified NEET, 2015 and 2016

Unemployed persons aged 15 - 29 years	2015	2016
NEET and unemployed (ILO) - Ireland ('000)	59.4	48.1
Total number of persons aged 15-29 years classified as NEET - Ireland ('000) 1	135.6	121.3
Total unemployment for persons aged 15-29 years - Ireland ('000)	68.5	58.7
Percentage share of total unemployment for persons aged 15-29 years represented by those classified as NEET for the same age group - Ireland	86.7%	81.9%
Percentage share of total unemployment for persons aged 15-29 years represented by those classified as NEET for the same age group - EU28	*	

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

Data may be subject to future revision.

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

1 Includes persons who are unemployed and inactive

\* Not available at time of issue

### Brexit Issues

77. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his most recent bilat-

eral meeting on Brexit. [11617/17]

**The Taoiseach:** Since the UK referendum last June, I have had an intensive series of bilateral meetings with my counterparts in EU Member States, and with the heads of the EU institutions. I have also attended all meetings of the European Council, both formal and informal. At all my meetings I have highlighted and explained Ireland's particular concerns arising from Brexit, including in relation to Northern Ireland and the peace process; the Common Travel Area; our interwoven economies; and the future of the EU.

I met with First Vice President of the Commission, Frans Timmermans, in Government Buildings on 21 February.

His visit followed those of other Commissioners, including Mr. Moscovici and Ms. Vestager, which have served to underline the Commission's understanding of Ireland's particular concerns and support for our approach.

The meeting was friendly and constructive, with Commissioner Timmermans demonstrating a good understanding of Ireland's concerns, and offering strong Commission support for our approach in addressing these.

I visited Brussels on 23 February and met with the Prime Minister of Belgium, Charles Michel, and the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker. I also participated in a business event organised by the Ireland Belgium Business Association, supported by the Embassy of Ireland and Enterprise Ireland.

Continuing this strategic programme of engagement, I again travelled to Brussels on 2 March, when I had separate meetings with the President of the European Council, Donald Tusk; the recently elected President of the European Parliament, Antonio Tajani; a number of key Members of the European Parliament; and the chief Commission Brexit negotiator, Michel Barnier.

The focus of these meetings was on Brexit as well as the future direction of the EU. In addition to setting out our concerns around the economic and trade implications of the UK departure, I again explained in detail the peace process in Northern Ireland, the Good Friday Agreement, and the unique circumstances on the island of Ireland that must be recognised from the start and reflected in the final agreement. President Tusk, President Tajani and Mr Barnier understood and acknowledged these issues and expressed their openness to working closely with us in the negotiations ahead.

It was also useful to highlight these issues to key MEPs. The European Parliament will adopt a resolution on Brexit in the coming months and will ultimately have to approve the final exit deal, so it is very important that we continue to engage to seek support there.

With regard to the debate on the future of the EU, I underlined to all my interlocutors the need for unity and the importance of our core European values which are central to our continuing peace and prosperity.

I believe that we must deliver for our citizens and, in that context, press ahead in areas of particular relevance, including jobs, growth, investment, the Single Market and Digital Single Market. I will continue to make these points in the build up to the Summit in Rome at the end of this month and into the future.

The next European Council meeting will take place on 9 March. The draft agenda, published by the General Secretariat of the Council, envisages that the Maltese Presidency will provide an overview of progress on the implementation of earlier European Council conclusions, and that

the European Council will look at a number of the most pressing issues, including in relation to Jobs, Growth and Competitiveness; Security and Defence; Migration; and External Relations. Decisions are also to be taken on the position of the President of the European Council and establishing the European Public Prosecutor's Office. The agenda is in order from Ireland's perspective and I have therefore not sought any particular items for inclusion on it. I will be making a full statement on the European Council, as I always do, on Wednesday 8 March.

### **Regulatory Impact Assessment Data**

78. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Taoiseach if regulatory impact assessments for legislative proposals published by his Department include impacts (details supplied); the impact categories not included; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11177/17]

79. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Taoiseach the legislative proposals published by his Department between 2011 to 2016 that underwent a regulatory impact assessment; the legislative proposals published by his Department that did not undergo a regulatory impact assessment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11178/17]

**The Taoiseach:** I propose to take Questions Nos. 78 and 79 together.

My Department has published one Bill since the start of 2011, the Thirty-second Amendment of the Constitution (Abolition of Seanad Éireann) Bill 2013.

As the Bill concerned involved amending the Constitution for the purpose of abolishing the Seanad rather than significantly impacting on the regulatory environment, a RIA was not completed, in keeping with precedents for Bills of this nature.

With regard to the impacts included in regulatory impact assessments, my Department adheres to the guidelines published in 2009 on how to conduct such assessments. These guidelines contain a list of impacts that must be considered as part of the RIA process. Of course, other impacts, like those indicated by the Deputy, can be considered depending on the topic and nature of the legislation being drafted.

### **Unemployment Data**

80. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Taoiseach the proportion of jobless households on a percentage basis; and the corresponding EU average rate. [11031/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The exact information requested by the Deputy is not available.

Data on the proportion of persons aged 18-59 years in jobless households are estimated in the Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS). The latest QNHS data available for Ireland is the 2016 annual average.

The latest corresponding EU 28 data available are for the year 2015.

The following table shows the proportion of persons aged 18-59 years in jobless households in 2015 and 2016 (averages) for Ireland and the corresponding EU 28 data for 2015.

#### **Proportion of persons aged 18-59 years in jobless households, 2015 and 2016**

Proportion of persons aged 18-59 years in jobless households	2015 %	2016 %
Ireland	12.4	11.6
EU 28	10.6	:

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

Data may be subject to future revision.

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

### Employment Data

81. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Taoiseach the female employment rate, in addition to the corresponding EU average rate, based on latest data at hand. [11033/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) is the official source of estimates of employment (International Labour Organisation - ILO) in the State. The latest female employment rate (15-64 years) available is for Q4 2016.

The latest corresponding EU 28 female employment rate (15-64 years) available is Q3 2016.

The following table shows the employment rate for females aged 15-64 years (Q3 and Q4 2016) for Ireland and the corresponding EU 28 average female employment rate for Q3 2016.

#### Employment (ILO) rate of females aged 15-64 years, Q3 and Q4 2016

-	Q3 16 %	Q4 16 %
Female employment rate (Ireland)	59.8	60.1
Female employment rate (EU 28)	61.7	:

Source: Quarterly National Household Survey, Central Statistics Office and Eurostat;

: Not available;

Data may be subject to future revision;

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

Reference period: Q3=July-September and Q4=October-December.

### Unemployment Data

82. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Taoiseach the total number of long-term unemployed, based on latest data at hand, over a one year duration; the percentage of unemployed persons this represents; and the corresponding EU average rate. [11026/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The

Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) is the official source of estimates of unemployment (International Labour Organisation - ILO) in the State. The latest unemployment data available for Ireland are for Q4 2016.

The latest corresponding EU 28 data available are for Q3 2016.

The following table shows, for Ireland, the total number of unemployed persons (one year and over) together with the total number of unemployed persons for Q3 and Q4 2016. The table also includes the percentage share of all unemployed persons represented by those who are unemployed for one year and over for the same periods for Ireland, along with the corresponding percentage share for the EU 28 in respect of Q3 2016.

**Unemployed persons aged 15 - 74 years classified by long-term (one year and over) unemployment (ILO) Q3 16 and Q4 16**

Unemployed persons aged 15 - 74 years	Q3 16	Q4 16
Long-term (one year and over) unemployed - Ireland ('000)	92.3	79.7
Total unemployed - Ireland ('000)	177.7	147.4
Long-term (one year and over) unemployed as a percentage of total unemployment - Ireland (%)	51.9	54.1
Long-term (one year and over) unemployed as a percentage of total unemployment - EU 28 (%)	46.7	:

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

Data may be subject to future revision.

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

Reference period: Q3=Jul-Sep, Q4=Oct-Dec.

**Unemployment Data**

83. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Taoiseach the total number of long-term unemployed over one year duration based on latest data at hand with regard to persons aged 15 to 24 years of age; the percentage of total unemployed persons this category represents; and the corresponding EU average rate. [11027/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) is the official source of estimates of unemployment (International Labour Organisation - ILO) in the State. The latest unemployment data available for Ireland are for Q4 2016.

The latest corresponding EU 28 data available are for Q3 2016.

The following table shows the total number of unemployed persons (one year and over) aged 15-24 years for Ireland together with the total number who are unemployed for this age group in Q3 and Q4 2016. The table also includes the percentage share of all unemployed persons in this age category who are unemployed for one year and over for the same periods, along with the corresponding percentage share for the EU 28 in respect of Q3 2016.

Unemployed persons aged 15-24 years	Q3 16	Q4 16
Long-term (one year and over) unemployed persons aged 15-24 years- Ireland ('000)	11.9	10.7
Total unemployed persons aged 15-24 years - Ireland ('000)	39.4	30.4
Long-term (one year and over) unemployed persons aged 15-24 years as a percentage of total unemployment of persons aged 15-24 years - Ireland (%)	30.2	35.2
Long-term (one year and over) unemployed persons aged 15-24 years as a percentage of total unemployment of persons aged 15-24 years - EU 28	27.6	

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

Data may be subject to future revision.

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

Reference period: Q3=Jul-Sep, Q4=Oct-Dec.

### Unemployment Data

84. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Taoiseach the total number of very long-term unemployed over two years duration based on latest data at hand; the total in percentage terms out of total persons unemployed this category represents; and the corresponding EU average rate. [11028/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) is the official source of estimates of unemployment (International Labour Organisation - ILO) in the State. The latest unemployment data available for Ireland are for Q4 2016.

The latest corresponding EU 28 data available are for Q3 2016.

The following table shows the total number of very long term unemployed persons (over two years duration) together with the total number of persons who are unemployed in Q3 and Q4 2016 for Ireland. The table also includes the percentage share of all unemployed persons represented by this category for the same periods for Ireland, along with the corresponding percentage share for the EU 28 in respect of Q3 2016.

#### Unemployed persons aged 15 - 74 years classified by long-term (two years and over) unemployment (ILO) Q3 16 and Q4 16

Unemployed persons aged 15 - 74 years	Q3 16	Q4 16
Long-term (two years and over) unemployed - Ireland ('000)	65.3	56.5
Total unemployed - Ireland ('000)	177.7	147.4
Long-term (two years and over) unemployed as a percentage of total unemployment - Ireland (%)	36.7	38.3
Long-term (two years and over) unemployed as a percentage of total unemployment - EU 28 (%)	29.4	:

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

and Eurostat.

Data may be subject to future revision.

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

Reference period: Q3=Jul-Sep, Q4=Oct-Dec.

### **Employment Data**

85. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Taoiseach the number of persons employed in low-paid jobs, with “low-paid” defined as earning below two thirds of the median wage, broken down by percentage. [10941/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The exact information requested by the Deputy is not available. The estimates presented below are derived from the CSO’s Earnings Analysis using Administrative Data Sources. This analysis is based primarily on the Revenue Commissioner’s P35L data which provides details of gross annual earnings and number of weeks worked in the year for all employments. This includes employees who held more than one job during the year; each job is counted as a separate employment.

In 2014, the median pay derived from this data source was €528.81 per week. Half of all employments had weekly pay above this amount and half were below. Two thirds of median weekly pay was €352.19 per week. An estimated 29% of all employments were below this figure and 71% were above.

### **Public Relations Contracts Expenditure**

86. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Taoiseach the amount his Department spent on public relations consultants and all matters relating to public relations costs in 2016. [11436/17]

**The Taoiseach:** There was no expenditure on public relations consultants in 2016 by my Department.

### **Construction Industry**

87. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Taoiseach the level of construction inflation that has been experienced by his Department in each of the past six years and to date in 2017 in respect of construction projects and other capital projects; and the way in which he monitors construction inflation and the mechanisms he employs to establish this. [11543/17]

**The Taoiseach:** My Department has no capital expenditure.

*Questions Nos. 88 and 89 answered with Question No. 74.*

### **Employment Data**

90. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Taoiseach the number of jobs, or if not available, the



estimated number of jobs here that are supported by exports. [10814/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The exact data requested by the Deputy is not available but some estimates can be made for the industrial sector from the CSO's Structural Business Statistics (SBS). The annual Census of Industrial Production, which is a component of SBS, is based on survey returns from a sample of about 2,000 industrial enterprises, combined with estimates for other enterprises based on Revenue data. The sample returns give an indication of whether the enterprise is involved in exporting goods.

In 2014, an estimated total of 199,200 persons worked in enterprises employing three or more persons: 103,300 of these were in SMEs and 95,900 were in large enterprises. Exporting firms accounted for 82.2% of jobs in respondent enterprises and they accounted for 73.0% in SMEs and 89.0% in large enterprises. These figures do not exactly reflect jobs directly related to export activity and they do not take account of any indirect or downstream employment.

*Question No. 91 answered with Question No. 74.*

### **Commercial Rates Valuation Process**

92. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the measures she proposes in conjunction with the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation under point 76 of the Action Plan for Rural Development to conduct a revaluation of commercial properties in nine rural counties; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11711/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** Action Number 76 of the Government's Action Plan for Rural Development, "Realising Our Rural Potential", published on 23 January 2017, provided a commitment to conduct a revaluation of commercial properties in nine rural counties to ensure fairness and equity in the levying of commercial rates on business with a view to rolling out to further counties in 2017.

The Valuation Office is currently undertaking a systematic national programme of revaluating, for rates purposes, all industrial and commercial properties in the State on a rating authority basis. The purpose of revaluation is to bring more equity, fairness and transparency into the local authority rating system and to distribute the commercial rates liability more equitably between ratepayers. The immediate objective of the revaluation programme is to ensure that the first revaluation of all rating authority areas in more than 150 years is conducted as soon as possible. Following this revaluation, subsequent revaluations of each rating authority area will then be carried out on a cyclical basis no sooner than five years and no later than ten years after the first revaluation, in accordance with Section 25 of the Valuation Act 2001.

The Commissioner of Valuation is independent in the performance of his functions and decisions with regard to the selection of rating authority areas for revaluation is his sole prerogative. Section 19(1) of the 2001 Act empowers the Commissioner, after consultation with the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government and the rating authority concerned, to make a Valuation Order specifying a rating authority area over which a revaluation is to be conducted. I am advised that the revaluation programme which began with South Dublin, Fingal and Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council areas has also been rolled out to the Dublin City Council area, Waterford City and County Council area and Limerick City and County Council area.

The current phase of the National Revaluation Programme known as "ReVal 2017" covers revaluation of counties Longford, Leitrim, Roscommon, Westmeath, Offaly, Kildare, Sligo,

Carlow and Kilkenny for the first time since the nineteenth century. These are the nine counties referenced in Action No. 76 in the Government's Action Plan for Rural Development "Realising Our Rural Potential", published on 23 January 2017. The revaluation of these nine rural counties is expected to be completed in September 2017 and become effective for rates purposes from 2018 onwards.

### **Garda Data**

93. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 130 of 1 December 2016, if the information requested was a major part of wage agreements and therefore should be readily available. [11209/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** As the Deputy will be aware the Garda Representative Association and Association of Garda Sergeants and Inspectors members accepted the recommendation of the Labour Court which sought to address the concerns that they had articulated in relation to their pay and conditions, the pay and conditions of new recruits, and their access to the statutory dispute resolution bodies. As a consequence, all of the Garda representative bodies are within the framework of the Lansdowne Road Agreement.

In making its recommendation the Court, which is independent in the performance of its functions, acknowledged the uncertainty that Garda members face in availing of approved annual leave due to the requirement to attend Court even at short notice when on annual leave, resulting in the cancellation of their leave and any plans they may have made. To compensate for the uncertainty attaching to the taking of annual leave by members of An Garda Síochána the Recommendation provides for a payment of a €15 premium payment per annual leave day to the ranks of Garda, Sergeant and Inspector on commencement of the next leave year.

In relation to the information previously requested by the Deputy, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for carrying on and managing and controlling generally the administration and business of An Garda Síochána. As advised in my reply to Parliamentary Question No 130 of 1 December 2016 and Parliamentary Question No 79 of 13 December 2016, the Commissioner has informed me that the information requested by the Deputy is not readily available and would require a disproportionate amount of Garda time and resources to compile.

### **Road Safety**

94. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of mandatory alcohol testing checkpoints performed in each of the years 2012 to 2016; the number of breath tests performed; and the number of driver under the influence incidents in each year. [11252/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** Mandatory Alcohol Checkpoints allow members of An Garda Síochána to stop any vehicle at the checkpoint and, without prejudice to any other legislative provisions, may require a person in charge of the vehicle to provide a specimen of his or her breath to indicate the presence of alcohol in the breath, which is provided for under section 10, Road Traffic Act, 2010, as amended.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that the apparatus used by An Garda Síochána for breath-testing is issued, and maintained, by the Medical Bureau of Road Safety.

In July, 2015 a review of ‘Recording Equipment and Data on PULSE (Traffic related matters)’ was undertaken by An Garda Síochána, during the course of which the number of breath tests at Mandatory Alcohol Testing (MAT) checkpoints recorded on the PULSE system, for the period 1st July 2009 to the 31st December 2014, was compared to data recorded on the equipment issued, to each Division, for breath-testing. The preliminary outcome of this review identified an anomaly, between the number of breath tests recorded on PULSE and the number of breath tests recorded on the recording equipment.

In April 2016, new procedures were put in place by An Garda Síochána for the recording of the number of breath tests conducted at each MAT checkpoint, with additional instructions issued in May, 2016, including that the information being recorded on PULSE be verified on a monthly basis.

In June 2016, a National Audit was directed by Assistant Commissioner, Traffic, of all the data recorded on the Garda PULSE system relating to the number of roadside breath tests conducted at MATs in each Garda Division, for the period 1 January 2009 to 30 June 2016. The data collated during the National Audit is currently being verified in conjunction with the Medical Bureau of Road Safety. It is anticipated that the matter will be finalised in the second quarter of 2017 and it will not be possible to give the statistical information sought until the data has been verified by way of the National Audit.

The Garda authorities have assured me that no issues stem from this audit with regard to the performance of MAT checkpoints or prosecutions emanating therefrom.

### **Garda Reserve**

95. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to expand the role, powers and duties of the Garda Reserve; her plans to review the present functions of the Garda Reserve with a view to establishing the most effective way its members may serve communities; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11253/17]

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

The Garda Reserve was established in accordance with the Garda Síochána Act 2005 to enhance the links between An Garda Síochána and local communities and consists of voluntary unpaid members, drawn from the community, to support the work of An Garda Síochána. The Reserve perform policing duties as determined by the Garda Commissioner, while accompanied by full time Gardaí. Their role is to provide local patrols and participate in crime prevention initiatives targeted at specific local problem areas. Reserve members are also involved in policing major incidents and events, and in providing other operational support to full time Gardaí. In recent years the Garda Commissioner has conferred further powers on reserve members under the Criminal Justice (Public Order) Act 1994 and the Road Traffic Act 1961 and has also decided that they should carry out more duties including the serving of summonses, and the issuing of Fixed Charge Penalty Notices where offences are detected.

The “Programme for a Partnership Government” includes a commitment to double the Garda Reserve to act in a supportive role undertaking local patrols and crime reduction measures.

Reserve members have undergone training in many of the skills required to be an effective full-time member of An Garda Síochána and it is important that we build on the very real contribution that they are making to the policing of communities right across the country.

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

In relation to what steps that might be taken to ensure that the expanded Reserve is used to best effect in support of communities I am informed that the Garda Reserve Management Office is undertaking an audit of the experience and skills of Reserves which, when completed, will assist Garda management in considering the future role to be played by the Reserve including whether additional powers should be conferred on Reserve members. Work is also well advanced on the development of a recruitment plan with the objective of recruiting and training 300 new Reserves annually starting later this year, to bring the strength of the Reserve up from its current strength of 690 members to 2,000 by 2021.

### **Probate Applications**

96. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she will ascertain from the Courts Service when the grant of probate will issue in a case (details supplied) in view of the fact the delay is causing undue hardship. [11258/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** As the Deputy may be aware, the Probate Office is an office of the High Court and management of the courts is the responsibility of the Courts Service which is independent in exercising its functions under the Courts Service Act 1998. Probate functions are also carried out by County Registrars at District Probate Registries in a number of provincial court offices.

However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has informed me that while the staff member who dealt with probate matters in the Castlebar Office retired recently, management in the office were aware of the pending retirement and another staff member in the office has been trained and has commenced processing probate applications. The Castlebar Office will be reviewing all cases to identify urgent cases and priority will be given to probate applications where it is considered that extenuating circumstances so warrant. It is open to the executor, in the case referenced, to make an application to the Probate Section of the Castlebar Court Office to have the probate matter expedited, if they have not already done so.

The Courts Service has also informed me that the current waiting times in the Probate Office in Dublin for Grants of Representation are 20 weeks for applications lodged by a solicitor and 28 weeks for personal applications. There have been a number of staff changes in the Probate Office during the last year due to retirement and promotion and this has impacted on the waiting times. The examination of probate applications requires a thorough legal examination of documents and it takes a new staff member a period of at least six months to acquire a satisfactory knowledge in this area. As new staff members become more proficient, the waiting times will reduce. Additional staff resources are now being provided in Dublin to address the

current situation and I am optimistic, subject to full staff capacity being in place, that there will be a reduction in waiting times this year. Efforts continue to be made to give priority to urgent applications. The backlogs in the probate system are a cause for concern and review of the probate system is being carried out at present. It is anticipated that a report with recommendations for the modernisation of the process will be presented by mid 2017 to the Senior Management Team of the Courts Service and to the Courts Service Board for their consideration.

### **Garda Operations**

97. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the details of the Garda divisions with protective services units; and the number of staff in each, in tabular form. [11269/17]

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

The Second National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence 2016-2021 envisages a range of actions to be implemented by State, voluntary and community sector organisations aimed at preventing and responding to domestic, sexual and gender-based violence. An Garda Síochána is committed to supporting this strategy, and in 2015 a number of Garda units were brought together to leverage their experience and expertise in investigating serious crimes against the person, including sexual offences, to form the Garda National Protective Services Bureau (GNPSB).

The GNPSB is a specialist team dedicated to making sure each and every complaint relating to child protection, human trafficking and domestic and sexual violence is thoroughly investigated and handled correctly. In addition, the GNPSB is responsible for working with other agencies to manage sex offenders in the interest of community safety. I am informed by the Commissioner that as of 31 January 2017, the latest date for which figures are available, there were 29 Garda members and 8 civilians assigned to the GNPSB.

As part of the Commissioner’s Modernisation and Renewal Programme 2016-2021 Protective Services Units (PSUs) are to be established in every Garda Division with specially trained staff. These PSUs will ensure a consistent approach to domestic abuse and sexual crime, which will be supported by the national Bureau. The PSUs will work with the Garda Victim Service Offices in their area to ensure that the needs of victims are adequately catered for. I am advised by the Commissioner that these Divisional PSUs are being rolled-out in two phases. Phase 1 which will commence shortly, will involve the setting up of an initial three PSUs in the DMR West, Cork City, and Louth Garda Divisions over the next year on a pilot basis. The assessment of this pilot phase will inform the further roll-out to of PSUs to each Garda Division.

### **Garda Deployment**

98. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of staff in each Garda division that assigned to each Garda victim service office, in tabular form. [11287/17]

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

A key element of the Garda Modernisation and Renewal Programme 2016-2021 is ensuring victims are at the heart of the service provided by An Garda Síochána and that they receive the quality service to which they are entitled. Following a successful pilot programme, the Commissioner has now put in place Garda Victim Service Offices across all 28 Garda Divisions. These offices provide a central point of contact for victims of crime in each Division and are staffed by specially trained Garda members and civilian personnel.

I have requested the specific information sought from the Commissioner and when it is to hand I will forward it to the Deputy.

### **Visa Applications**

99. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality when a decision will be made on an application for the spouse of a person (details supplied). [11288/17]

**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 application referred to was received in the Irish Visa Office in New Delhi on 21 November 2016. The application is currently awaiting examination.

I am further advised that while a business target of 6 months is advertised for long term 'join family' applications where the spouse is an Irish national, this time-frame is subject to the receipt of all required documentation as set out in the Family Reunification Policy Document updated in December 2016. The Visa Office endeavours to have applications of this nature processed earlier than this target but this is not always possible. As you will appreciate, in order to be fair to all applicants, applications are processed in order by date received. Both the applicant and the sponsor will be informed as soon as a decision is made.

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

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

### **Naturalisation Applications**

100. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality when a determination will be made on a citizenship application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11289/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** I am ad-

vised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the processing of an application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy, who currently has permission to reside in the State until 28 February 2019, is ongoing with a view to establishing whether the conditions for naturalisation, such as good character and lawful residence are satisfied.

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

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

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

### **Prison Staff**

101. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if new entrants to the position of prison officer will be in receipt of rent allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11302/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** I am informed by the Irish Prison Service that discussions are currently ongoing between the Irish Prison Service and the Prison Officers' Association on the productivity/reform measures required for the reinstatement of the rent allowance to new Recruit Prison Officers. Once finalised, these will be submitted to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, which is the sanctioning authority for such payments.

### **Road Traffic Offences Data**

102. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of roadside checks of heavy goods vehicles in each of the years 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017; the number of heavy goods vehicle drivers arrested for road traffic offences, indicating the road traffic offences, in the same period; the number of prosecutions that were brought and convictions made; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11304/17]

103. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number and results of discrete heavy goods vehicles stopping and checking operations An Garda Síochána has carried out to detect the permit status of heavy goods vehicles requiring a permit in 2016 and to date in 2017; the number of tachograph checks carried out; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11306/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 102 and 103 together.

I have requested a report from the Garda authorities in relation to the information requested by the Deputy and I will contact the Deputy directly upon receipt of the relevant information.

Insofar as conviction statistics are concerned, the Courts Service is not in a position to match specific prosecutions initiated to court results.

### **Road Traffic Offences Data**

104. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of roadside checks of buses and mini buses, vehicles to carry eight or more passengers in each of the years 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017; the number of drivers of such vehicles arrested for road traffic offences, indicating the road traffic offences, in the same period; the number of prosecutions brought and convictions made; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11307/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** I have requested a report from the Garda authorities in relation to the information requested by the Deputy and I will contact the Deputy directly upon receipt of the relevant information.

Insofar as conviction statistics are concerned, the Courts Service is not in a position to match specific prosecutions initiated to court results.

### **Property Registration**

105. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the status of an application for land registry by a person (details supplied). [11348/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** I can inform the Deputy that under the Registration of Deeds and Title Act 2006, the Property Registration Authority (PRA) was established as and from 4 November 2006. The PRA replaces the Registrar of Deeds and Titles as the registering authority in relation to property registration in Ireland and, subject to the above Act, is independent in the performance of its functions.

The Deputy will be aware of the service to T.D.s and Senators which provides information on the current status of applications, such as the subject of this question, which was introduced in May 2006. The service provides a speedier, more efficient and more cost effective alternative to submitting Parliamentary Questions. It is operated by the PRA and is available all year round.

I can further inform the Deputy that his query has been forwarded to the PRA for attention and direct reply via the above mentioned service.

### **Peace Commissioners**

106. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if a stamp issued by her Department can be given to appointed peace commissioners to allow them to carry out their duties in a professional manner; and if she will make a statement on the mat-



ter. [11415/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** Peace Commissioners are appointed under section 88 of the Courts of Justice Act, 1924. That legislation does not require that Peace Commissioners add a stamp to their signature and it is not a requirement of my Department that they have a stamp. A Peace Commissioner's signature is the only official requirement.

No case has been made to me that a stamp is necessary and I do not intend to amend the legislation relating to Peace Commissioners at this time. Nonetheless, I will keep the matter under review.

### **Public Relations Contracts Expenditure**

107. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the amount her Department spent on public relations consultants and all matters relating to public relations costs in 2016; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11433/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** My Department did not incur any costs in relation to the provision of public relations services in 2016. It is my Department's policy to use in-house resources as much as possible and to restrict the use of external groups to a minimum.

### **Gambling Legislation**

108. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if, following the Taoiseach's commitment on 14 December 2016 that he would make the gambling control Bill a priority, she will confirm that her Department has been provided sufficient resources to complete the task of writing the Bill; the progress of the Bill; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11466/17]

109. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she has identified the individual pressing areas of concern regarding gambling legislation that she plans to address by way of separate legislative matters ahead of the gambling control Bill, as raised in Dáil Éireann on 16 December 2016; if so, if she will highlight such areas; and the effect this will have on the ultimate progression of the Gambling Control Bill. [11467/17]

110. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the reason she intends on prioritising certain areas of gambling legislation by way of separate legislative matters in Q1 2017, ahead of the full gambling control Bill, particularly if she plans to bring forward the main gambling control Bill for Government approval and publication later in 2017. [11468/17]

111. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she will ensure that the gambling control Bill will be published in 2017, in line with commitments made by her in Dáil Éireann on 24 January 2017 that it would be brought forward for Government approval and publication in 2017; and the specific measures she envisages as hindering its final drafting. [11469/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 108 to 111, inclusive, together.

As I have previously conveyed to the House, it remains the intention to proceed with gambling legislation at the earliest opportunity including under the powers of the Minister for Justice and Equality under the gaming and lotteries legislation which have been delegated to me as Minister of State. The preparation of a Gambling Control Bill, and of a number of related early measures for inclusion in the General Scheme of the forthcoming Courts and Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill, continues on that basis. I intend to move forward as quickly as possible with the appropriate measures on both of these fronts. In that endeavour, I am being assisted by the staff of the Department of Justice and Equality who have been previously assigned to support me in this work in both the Gambling Policy and Civil Law Reform areas. Against that background I am not aware of any issues that are, as the Deputy has put it, hindering final drafting of the legislation concerned. I can also confirm that it remains my intention to bring forward the main Gambling Control Bill for government approval and publication, as the Deputy has anticipated, later this year.

Work on the preparation of the General Scheme of the Courts and Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill is at an advanced stage in my Department. The General Scheme for this Bill will contain a range of provisions, many of them technical in nature, that are expected to relate to such matters as electronic courts services and some early amendments, as previously signalled, to gaming legislation. In that regard, we expect to bring forward a number of useful modernisation and clarification measures to the outdated Gaming and Lotteries Act 1956. In particular, it is hoped to address issues concerning minimum age for gambling activities, realistic stake and prize amounts and a clearer setting out of the circumstances for the conduct of certain activities. It is anticipated that the General Scheme of the miscellaneous Bill will be brought to Government by the Tánaiste this month for approval both to publish it and to submit it for pre-legislative scrutiny and for detailed drafting to the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel.

In parallel to these imminent measures, work also continues in bringing forward the main Gambling Control Bill building on the General Scheme that was published in 2013. Deputies should be cognisant that the preparation of legislation providing for the regulation of a large, multi-million euro economic activity, with significant cross-border and electronic on-line operations, will be a major and complex undertaking.

In support of this work, I published, on 23 February 2017, a study by University College Dublin under Dr. Crystal Fulton which I had commissioned at the end of 2016. The aims of the study, entitled “Developments in the Gambling Area - Emerging trends and issues supporting the development of policy and legislation in Ireland”, were to identify developments in the area of gambling, inclusive of all aspects of gambling such as technological innovation and international legislation, and, to identify new or emerging legislative and policy issues in the area of gambling not currently represented in the original General Scheme and which may need to be addressed in new legislation. The study can be accessed through the internet link <http://justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/PB17000062>.

Along with officials of my Department, I am continuing to consult with relevant stakeholders. We are particularly mindful to hear from those who work with persons for whom gambling has become a problem. In that spirit, I look forward to discussing quite soon, with the Deputy and other Members, the gambling measures that will be contained in the General Scheme of the Courts and Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill and, after that, to discussing the main Gambling Control Bill when it, in turn, is approved by Government for publication.

## **Prison Service**

112. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if the Prison Service will recruit staff in the near future; the procedures to be used; her views on the fact that applicants that already hold the relevant custodial care qualification must go through stages one and two of the recruitment process; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11476/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** I can inform the Deputy that a competition for Recruit Prison Officer was advertised by the Public Appointments Service in 2016 with a closing date of 28 July 2016. The terms and conditions for this competition were set out in the booklet for the competition.

Any person interested in the role of Recruit Prison Officer is required to go through the recruitment process which was provided for in the booklet. The Irish Prison Service does not give preference to individuals who may have served in the role of prison officer in other jurisdictions. It is of course open to such individuals, where appropriate, to highlight whatever experience or skills they may have acquired abroad in the course of the recruitment process.

During the competency based interview candidates can draw on their experience from whatever context, be it in a similar role elsewhere or other unrelated role.

### **Immigration Status**

113. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the detail of the application process for a non-EU person applying for a de facto visa; the rules pertaining to the granting of a de facto visa; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11499/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the information required for seeking a 'De Facto Partnership' immigration permission includes:

- A history of the relationship including when the partners met and when they began the relationship;
- Legible copies of all pages of both partners' passports;
- Dated documentary evidence of living together continuously over a period of two years (is being revised down to 1 year) in a common place of residence such as official letters or bills sent to the same address and/or joint tenancy agreement and dated documentary evidence of the relationship;
- Dated evidence of financial inter-dependence such as transfer receipts, joint accounts, joint purchases, joint assets or loans;
- Financial statements covering the previous 6 months for both partners showing living expenses i.e. where the finances are coming from and where they are going to;
- Evidence of contact between the Applicant and the Sponsor, such as letters, emails, phone contacts, screenshots of Facebook and Skype to cover the entire length of the relationship but at the very least covering two years;
- Evidence of time spent together such as dated photographs for the Applicant and the Sponsor together with family and friends and air tickets showing travel together;

- Police clearance from any country the Applicant has resided in over the last 5 years. The Police clearance should be no more than six months old at the date of application;

- If the Applicant and the Sponsor intend to marry in the State, they are required to provide evidence of when the marriage will take place e.g. documents from the Registrar's Office;

- If the Applicant has dependant children who intend to live with the Applicant and the Sponsor in Ireland

- copies of birth certificates and copies of passport(s) of the child(ren)

- evidence that the Applicant is the child's legal guardian and

- evidence that the Applicant has sole custody and guardianship of the child(ren).

or

- evidence that the Applicant has the permission of any other guardian or custodian to have the child live with them in Ireland

Evidence that the Applicant and any dependant child(ren) are covered by private medical insurance.

All documentation should be submitted via registered post to INIS, PO Box 12695, Dublin 2. Each case is decided on the circumstances taking into account all of the above information.

I am further advised by INIS that the process is currently under review and revised criteria for the scheme, together with a new application form, is being finalised to bring further clarity to the process. These will be published shortly on the INIS website [www.inis.gov.ie](http://www.inis.gov.ie).

## **Bail Law**

114. **Deputy Josepha Madigan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if electronic tagging of prisoners on bail has been implemented; if there are plans to expand its usage; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11509/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** Section 11 of the Criminal Justice Act 2007 inserted a new section 6B (Electronic monitoring of certain persons admitted to bail) into the Bail Act 1997. This section made provision for the introduction of electronic monitoring as a condition of bail. However, due to operational issues regarding electronic monitoring in general, these provisions have not yet been brought into operation.

The proposed Bail (Amendment) Bill 2016, currently awaiting Committee Stage in the Dáil, will make provision for electronic monitoring of persons on bail, based on the existing provisions in the Bail Act.

However, unlike the existing provisions, the Bail (Amendment) Bill will provide that electronic monitoring may be imposed as a bail condition only if the prosecution applies to the court for such a condition. This will ensure that the use of electronic monitoring can be targeted at those cases where it is most likely to be effective. In parallel with the progress of the Bill, a working group has been established within my Department to identify how best this provision might be operated, including the categories of offences or offenders most suitable for electronic monitoring and the making of contractual arrangements for the provision of the service.

## Road Traffic Offences Data

115. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of repeat offenders under the Road Traffic Act 2012 that previously were fined for having more than 50 mg of alcohol per 100 ml of blood but less than 80 mg. [11514/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** The Deputy is aware from my post reply correspondence of 1 March 2017 to Parliamentary Question No. 83 of 16 February 2017 that section 29 of the Road Traffic Act 2010, as amended, provides that, in certain specified circumstances, a person detected for a drink-driving offence may benefit from a Fixed Penalty Notice being issued, rather than criminal proceedings being commenced. Furthermore, a person who has been served with a fixed penalty notice and has paid the fixed charge, is not eligible to be served with another fixed penalty notice within the period of 3 years from the appropriate date relating to the endorsement of penalty points on the entry relating to the person, or the date of commencement of disqualification, whichever is applicable.

The specific statistical information sought by the Deputy is not readily available but I understand that the Deputy has discussed the matter referred to in this Parliamentary Question with An Garda Síochána directly at a second meeting of the Joint Committee on Transport, Tourism and Sport on 1 March 2017 to discuss road safety. I note that An Garda Síochána offered to provide further clarification on this matter to the Deputy if required.

## International Students

116. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the regulations and guidelines in place for teenage international students arriving here that live with a host family and attend secondary schools for an academic term or complete school year, without the presence of their parents or legal guardians within the State; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11515/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** As the Deputy will appreciate any regulations or guidelines on access to secondary education of any child, regardless of their nationality, and for their care in the State is primarily the responsibility of my colleagues the Minister for Education and Skills and the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. However, I am aware that the Final Report of the Interdepartmental Committee on Non-EEA Students (September 2010) recommended the following:

“no further placement of unaccompanied non-EEA children in Irish Schools will be permitted except where

(i) the programme is part of a Government approved exchange programme with another state or

(ii) the school operates entirely without state support or

(iii) the parent has paid an immigration levy set by the Government as a means of recovering some or all of the costs of the child’s education and the Department of Education and Skills has approved the placement on an individual basis or via a general sanction for all placements”

Any such levy would come under the responsibility of my colleague the Minister for Education and Skills.

On a more general note, immigration officials at ports of entry maintain a vigilant watch in

relation to unaccompanied minors entering the State so as to ensure that a guardian is available to take responsibility for the minor concerned. This process can include, as necessary, contact with the parents, the host family or the school concerned.

### Construction Industry

117. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the level of construction inflation that has been experienced by her Department in each of the past six years and to date in 2017 in respect of construction projects and other capital projects; the way in which she monitors construction inflation and the mechanisms she employs to establish this; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11540/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** My Department has not engaged in any construction projects over the past 6 years in which construction inflation has been a factor. However, it is anticipated this issue may become more problematic as the construction industry continues to recover. As the Deputy will be aware, the Office of Public Works acts on behalf of my Department and many of the agencies under its aegis and may be best placed to provide the Deputy with any relevant information in this regard.

### Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal

118. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the value of each payment awarded by the criminal injuries compensation scheme for each of the years 2012 to 2017; the budget allocated to the scheme in each of these years; the number and value of all offered awards which were rejected by victims in each of the years 2012 to 2017; the number of cases referred to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal due to the fact the award offered was rejected in each of the years 2012 to 2017; the average waiting time for such cases to be heard by the tribunal; the reason there have been such lengthy delays in cases being heard by the tribunal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11605/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** As the Deputy may be aware, the Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal administers the Scheme of Compensation for Personal Injuries Criminally Inflicted (General Scheme). Under the terms of the Scheme, the Tribunal is entirely independent in the matter of individual decisions on applications for compensation under the Scheme.

The following are the annual compensation budgets for each Scheme during the period 2012 - 2017.

Year	General Scheme (€)
2012	4m
2013	11.3m*
2014	4m
2015	4m
2016	4m
2017	4m

\*A backlog of payments had built up that was cleared by the allocation of additional funding in 2013.

The details sought regarding individual awards under the scheme are not readily available.

I am informed that the number of applications received, number of payments made, highest and lowest payments made during the period 2012 - 2017 are as follows:

Year	Number of Applications Received	Number of Cases in which Payments Made	Total Compensation-Paid (€)	Highest Payment Made (€)	Lowest Payment Made (€)
2012	191	144	4.012m	0.253m	100
2013	228	105	11.294m	2.5m	200
2014	257	75	3.955m	1.850m	182
2015	217	159	4.016m	0.747m	170
2016	210	73	3.765m	0.954m	67
2017 to date	26	6	0.768m	0.618m	1,020

A decision by the Tribunal on a claim, in the first instance, is normally taken by a single member. The Tribunal has discretion to hear any claim at a hearing before three members of the Tribunal and a person who is dissatisfied with a decision given by one member may also have his/her claim so heard. In the latter case the member who gave the initial decision will not be one of the three members of the Tribunal who hear the appeal. At appeal, an application is considered “de novo”. Consequently, the Tribunal may uphold the decision at first instance, increase/decrease an award or make no award. The number of appeals received in each of the years in the period 2012 -2017 are as follows.

Year	General Scheme - Appeals
2012	22
2013	28
2014	16
2015	32
2016	17
2017	2

The Deputy should note that Tribunal members, who are practising barristers and practising solicitors in the Courts system, provide their services on a part-time basis. Under the terms of paragraph 6 of the Scheme of Compensation for Personal Injuries Criminally Inflicted, the Tribunal is obliged to determine applications and may award ex-gratia compensation “*on the basis of damages awarded under the Civil Liability Act*”. Each case is addressed on the basis of its individual circumstances. While applications are processed with the minimum of formality compared to court proceedings where compensation is being claimed under the Civil Liability Acts, in making their decisions Tribunal Members must be satisfied that all supporting documentation submitted is in order. In some cases there can be delays pending the availability of all required documentation and some cases are complex in terms of medical conditions. As a result, waiting times can vary significantly and no data is currently available on what constitutes an average waiting time.

### Garda Reserve

119. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the current strength of the Garda Reserve; and the estimated full year cost of increasing it to 2,500. [11626/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that as of 31 January 2017, the latest date for which figures are readily available, the strength of the Garda Reserve is 690 members. The Government is committed to increasing the strength to 2,000 by 2021 and Budget 2017 provides funding for the recruitment of 300 Reserves this year.

Uniform costs for the recruitment of an additional 1,800 Reserves to bring the overall strength to 2,500 would amount to an estimated €2.3 million. Costs would also arise in relation to the provision of training. However, as the cost of training both Garda recruits and members of the Reserve is subsumed into the overall training costs of the Garda College the costs associated with the Reserve are not easily identifiable.

Further costs would arise on an ongoing basis from the payment of an annual allowance of €1,000 as a contribution to the expenses of those Reserves who perform 208 hours service and from reimbursing Reserves for expenses incurred while attending court in respect of their service as a Reserve.

### **Garda Strength**

120. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the full year cost of increasing enlisted membership of An Garda Síochána to 15,000. [11627/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** I have asked the Garda Commissioner for the specific information requested and I will write directly to the Deputy when it is to hand.

### **Garda Civilian Staff**

121. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the full year cost of providing an extra 2,000 civilian staff in An Garda Síochána. [11628/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** As the Deputy will be aware the Government has in place a plan to achieve an overall Garda workforce of 21,000 personnel by 2021 comprising 15,000 Garda members, 2,000 Reserve members and 4,000 civilians. In 2017, funding has been provided for the recruitment of 800 Garda recruits and up to 500 civilians to support the wide ranging reform plan in train in An Garda Síochána. Funding has also been provided for the recruitment of approximately 300 Garda Reserves.

I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that there are currently in the region of 2,000 civilians undertaking administrative and technical duties within An Garda Síochána. Increasing the number of civilians in An Garda Síochána by 2,000 to 4,000 civilians will effectively double this figure and represents a medium term target of 20% civilians by 2021. This will bring An Garda Síochána, currently with 14% civilians, more into line with international norms and ensure that trained Gardaí are not engaging in administrative and technical duties which could be done by suitably qualified civilian staff. 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.



I am advised by the Garda Authorities that the estimated cost of an additional 2,000 civilians is €86 million including 20% administration costs and employer's PRSI on a full year basis. This estimated cost is contingent on the make up of the civilian staff profile in the 5 year plan currently in development and in particular on the qualifications and skills required on the part of civilians to backfill posts occupied by redeployed Gardaí.

### Visa Applications

122. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding an application in respect of a person (details supplied). [11803/17]

**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 visa application referred to was refused by the Visa Office in Abu Dhabi on 6 October 2015. An appeal was subsequently made and refused on 29 January 2016. This decision was communicated to the applicant.

No further applications have been made. If one is made, the applicant should bear in mind the original refusal reasons communicated to him and be in a position to address them.

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

In addition, applicants may themselves e-mail queries directly to INIS (visamail@justice.ie).

### Maternity Leave

123. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if consideration will be given to extending the basic 26 week maternity leave for families with multiple births; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11811/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** There is no provision under current legislation for additional Maternity Leave in cases of multiple births, nor is such a provision being actively considered. As the Deputy will be aware, since 30 September 2016, new fathers can avail of two weeks' Paternity Leave and Benefit. This legislation, in addition to the existing payment of maternity benefit, means that the State now offers a total of 28 weeks of paid support to parents upon the birth of their child or children. In this regard, the Deputy will be aware of the Programme for a Partnership Government commitment to significantly increase parental leave in the first year of a child's life over the next five years. It is my intention that this Government will be in a position to extend the provision of paid leave further in the years ahead subject to the resources becoming available and I intend to publish my proposals in that regard this year for inclusion in the Family Leave Bill. The Bill will also review all existing family leave legislation such as parental leave, carer's leave, maternity leave, and adoptive leave and consolidate this legislation into one Act.

### **Probate Applications**

124. **Deputy Josepha Madigan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if her attention has been drawn to delays in the processing of probate claims; and her plans to alleviate these delays. [11850/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** As the Deputy may be aware, the Probate Office is an office of the High Court and management of the courts is the responsibility of the Courts Service which is independent in exercising its functions under the Courts Service Act 1998. Probate functions are also carried out by County Registrars at District Probate Registries in a number of provincial court offices.

However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has informed me that the current waiting times in the Probate Office in Dublin for Grants of Representation are 20 weeks for applications lodged by a solicitor and 28 weeks for personal applications.

Where a person elects to apply for a Grant without the assistance of a solicitor the process requires significant support from the Probate Office and is more resource intensive. The Probate Office is actively involved in preparing the necessary paperwork and in servicing queries from the applicants by way of telephone, e-mail or post. Each personal applicant is required to attend at the Probate Office in person by prior appointment to complete the application process.

All applications for Grants of Representation in deceased persons' estates are made on foot of a number of mandatory legal documents which must be furnished by the applicants and these require detailed checking by the Probate Office to ensure that the estate of the deceased person is administered correctly and in accordance with the law. All applications are assessed on the basis of the date on which they are lodged, an approach which provides fairness and equity to all applicants. Priority is given to probate applications which display a particular urgency or where it is considered that extenuating circumstances so warrant. In such circumstances it is open to applicants to bring the matter to the attention of the Probate Office.

The Courts Service also informed me that there have been a number of staff changes in the Probate Office during the last year due to retirement and promotion and this has impacted on the waiting times. The examination of probate applications requires a thorough legal examination of documents and it takes a new staff member a period of at least six months to acquire a satisfactory knowledge in this area. As new staff members become more proficient, the waiting times will reduce.

Additional staff resources are now being provided in Dublin to address the current situation and I am optimistic, subject to full staff capacity being in place, that there will be a reduction in waiting times this year. Efforts continue to be made to give priority to urgent applications. The backlogs in the probate system are a cause for concern and review of the probate system is being carried out at present. It is anticipated that a report with recommendations for the modernisation of the process will be presented by mid 2017 to the Senior Management Team of the Courts Service and to the Courts Service Board for their consideration.

### **Alcohol Sales Legislation**

125. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality her views on the Intoxicating Liquor (Amendment) Bill 2017, which aims to reverse the mandatory closure of pubs and all licensed hospitality businesses on Good Friday; and if she will make a

statement on the matter. [11878/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** The position is that the text of the Intoxicating Liquor (Amendment) Bill 2017 is being examined by my Department at present. As I have stated in response to previous Parliamentary Questions on the subject, statutory restrictions relating to the sale of alcohol on Good Friday have historical origins. The forthcoming Sale of Alcohol Bill will update the law relating to the sale, supply and consumption of alcohol in licensed premises by repealing statutory provisions set out in the Licensing Acts 1833 to 2011, and the Registration of Clubs Acts 1904 to 2008, and replacing them with streamlined and updated provisions more suited to modern conditions. Drafting of that complex Bill has, however, been delayed due to other legislative priorities and I am not in a position at present to say when it will be published.

### **Garda Reserve**

126. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda Reserves in counties Cavan and Monaghan in tabular form; the way they are being utilised, in view of the shortages of gardaí in divisions across the country due to the number of retirements and lack of recruitment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11912/17]

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

The Garda Reserve was established in accordance with the Garda Síochána Act 2005 to enhance the links between An Garda Síochána and local communities and consists of voluntary unpaid members, drawn from the community, to support the work of An Garda Síochána. The Reserve perform policing duties as determined by the Garda Commissioner, while accompanied by full time Gardaí. Their role is to provide local patrols and participate in crime prevention initiatives targeted at specific local problem areas. Reserve members are also involved in policing major incidents and events, and in providing other operational support to full time Gardaí. In recent years the Garda Commissioner has conferred further powers on reserve members under the Criminal Justice (Public Order) Act 1994 and the Road Traffic Act 1961 and has also decided that they should carry out more duties including the serving of summonses, and the issuing of Fixed Charge Penalty Notices where offences are detected.

The “Programme for a Partnership Government” includes a commitment to double the Garda Reserve to act in a supportive role undertaking local patrols and crime reduction measures. Reserve members have undergone training in many of the skills required to be an effective full-time member of An Garda Síochána and it is important that we build on the very real contribution that they are making to the policing of communities right across the country.

As the Deputy will be aware, when the financial crisis hit, the Government of the time introduced a moratorium on recruitment. Thankfully, in a recovering economy, we were able to reopen the Garda College in September 2014 and the current Government is committed to steadily increasing Garda numbers. This Government is committed to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country in order to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and deter crime. To make this a reality for all, the

Government has in place a plan to achieve an overall Garda workforce of 21,000 personnel by 2021 comprising 15,000 Garda members, 2,000 Reserve members and 4,000 civilians. This year, funding has been provided for the recruitment of 800 Garda recruits and up to 500 civilians to support the wide ranging reform plan in train in An Garda Síochána. Funding has also been provided for the recruitment of 300 Garda Reserves. I am advised by the Commissioner that planning is well advanced for a fresh recruitment campaign for Reserves.

For the Deputy's information I have set out in the following table, as provided by the Commissioner, the strength of the Reserve in the Cavan/Monaghan Division as of 31 January 2017, the latest date for which figures are readily available.

	Cavan/Monaghan Garda Reserve Strength 31-01-2017
Cavan	5
Carrickmacross	2
Baileboro	1
Clones	0
Castleblaney	2
Monaghan	4
Total:	14

### Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal

127. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if there is a secure measure for advanced payments in relation to the operation of English language schools and the difficulties associated with these in the past; the number of schools operating at present; the accreditation system in place to ensure financial protection for students and to ensure quality standards; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11926/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** It is important at the outset to explain the roles and responsibilities of my Department with regards to the English Language Training (ELT) sector. The sector, which predominantly operates in the commercial sphere, recruits students from a wide range of international markets with a particular focus on students from within the European Union. Students from the European Economic Area (EEA) are under no obligation to register for an immigration permission while in the State and will have no interaction with the immigration authorities. Similarly, participants in programmes of short duration who are from outside the EEA will not require to register for an immigration permission for their stay in Ireland.

Accordingly, the main group of English language students who will have any significant interaction with the immigration authorities will be adult non-EEA nationals participating in examination focused programmes of twenty five weeks or longer duration. ELT providers seeking to recruit from this particular student group are required to satisfy a number of minimum standards in order to be listed by my Department on the Interim List of Eligible Programmes (ILEP).

Several of the standards imposed by my Department are intended to ensure that measures are put in place by the providers for the financial protection to students under the ILEP. These standards are set out in the Criteria for English Language Programmes publically available and published on the website ([www.inis.gov.ie/en/INIS/ELT%20criteria%20for%20ILEP%20Updated%2009%20November%202016%20.pdf/Files/ELT%20criteria%20for%20ILEP%20Updated%2009%20November%202016%20.pdf](http://www.inis.gov.ie/en/INIS/ELT%20criteria%20for%20ILEP%20Updated%2009%20November%202016%20.pdf/Files/ELT%20criteria%20for%20ILEP%20Updated%2009%20November%202016%20.pdf)) of the Irish Immigration and Naturalisation Service.

Specifically, they include important measures to protect students who make payments of fees up front for their courses and also to protect students in the event of an ELT provider goes out of business.

With regards to quality standards, my Department works closely with their colleagues in the Department of Education and skills, who have responsibility for the quality of education delivered. This cooperation includes a joint inspection regime including unannounced visits to the schools. As outlined above my role is limited to those schools on the ILEP and in that regard, I am informed by the Irish Immigration and Naturalisation Service (INIS) of my Department that the programmes of one hundred and twenty five (125) ELT providers are listed on the ILEP at this time.

### **English Language Training Organisations**

128. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of English language schools which were inspected under the Interim list of eligible programs in each of the past three years; the number of these inspections which found irregularities; the action taken if irregularities were found; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11927/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** The Interim List of Eligible Programmes (ILEP) was introduced on a phased basis from June 2015 with the first phase confined to higher education programmes which had previously been listed on the Internationalisation Register. The next phase took place in January 2016 with English language programmes being listed for the first time. Unannounced inspections of educational providers by the immigration authorities began in November 2015. There have been twenty five (25) such inspections in total to date.

The purpose of these inspections is to satisfy the immigration authorities that providers are operating their services in compliance with the Guidelines for English Language Programmes on the Interim List of Eligible Programmes. For the most part services have been found to be compliant or have been reminded of their obligations under the Guidelines in relation to minor infractions. In the case of more serious infractions a provider would have been denied a full listing until such time as they could satisfy the immigration authorities they were compliant with the relevant criteria.

### **Naturalisation Applications**

129. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality her plans, by way of legislation or ministerial order, to allow INIS provide refunds or waive fees when clerical mistakes have been made in INIS applications for persons applying for naturalisation (details supplied) [11957/17]

**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 Section 17 of the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended, provides that an application for a certificate of naturalisation shall be in the prescribed form and accompanied by the prescribed fee. Both the application form and the required fee are prescribed by the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Regulations 2011.

An application for naturalisation from the person concerned was deemed ineligible as the

Statutory Declaration, which forms a solemn and fundamental part of the prescribed application form, was not completed.

The application fee, stipulated at €175, is payable on application for a certificate of naturalisation. There is no provision for the discretionary waiver or reduction or refund of fees. All of the fees payable under the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956 are kept under ongoing review by my Department; however, there are no plans to reduce or abolish or introduce provisions for a waiver or refund of these fees.

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

Detailed information on Irish citizenship and naturalisation is available on the INIS website at [www.inis.gov.ie](http://www.inis.gov.ie). The website also contains guidance on the completion of an application for naturalisation and an on-line naturalisation residency calculator which individuals may find of assistance in establishing if the residency requirements are met.

### **Stardust Fire**

**130. Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if the terms of reference have been developed within the remit of the recent Dáil Éireann motion on the Stardust fire; the process involved in developing the terms of reference; the source from which input was gathered into the development of the terms of reference; if there is a timeframe proposed into establishing a commission of investigation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11968/17]

**131. Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she met with the families of the victims of the Stardust fire in respect of progressing the content of the recent motion passed by Dáil Éireann regarding the Stardust fire; if the families had input into the development of terms of reference in respect of commitments in the motion; if not, if families will be given an opportunity to have input into the development of terms of reference; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11969/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 130 and 131 together.

The ‘Programme for a Partnership Government’ committed the Government to have full regard to “...any new evidence which emerges which would be likely to definitively establish the cause of the fire at Stardust”.

During 2016, there was extensive correspondence between the Stardust Relatives and Victims Committee (‘the Committee’) and the nominated official of the Department of Justice and Equality in order to establish whether any new evidence existed which would be likely to definitively establish the cause of the fire at Stardust, without being able to reach an agreed position.

A motion was subsequently passed by Dáil Éireann on 26th January 2017 which called on the Government “... to meet with the Stardust Relatives’ and Victims Committee regarding the new and updated evidence they have uncovered since reviewing Judge Keane’s Report of the Tribunal of Inquiry on the fire at the Stardust, Artane, Dublin in 2006, to have that new and updated evidence assessed urgently by an independent person who has the trust of the families; and

*If the independent assessment confirms the existence of new evidence, calls on the Government to immediately establish a Commission of Investigation into the Stardust Tragedy of 1981.”*

The Committee identified (now retired) Judge Pat McCartan as an independent person who has their trust and as a result, officials from my Department contacted Judge McCartan to ascertain his interest or otherwise in taking on the role of assessing the new evidence. Judge McCartan expressed a desire to assist by taking on this role and he was appointed by the Government today to assess the evidence and make a recommendation with a view to recommending whether, in the circumstances, the evidence identified is sufficient to warrant establishing a Commission of Investigation into the Stardust Tragedy of 1981.

This initial assessment process is governed by the Dáil Motion. Terms of Reference will only apply if and when Judge McCartan recommends that a Commission of Investigation is warranted, so it is premature to discuss them at this stage. Officials from my Department are in regular contact with the Committee and have met them on a number of occasions to update them on the process and a further meeting is planned. Their views will be taken into account as far as possible if a Commission of Investigation is to be established and Terms of Reference are to be drawn up.

While I have offered to meet with the Committee, they have indicated a preference not to do so at this time. However, the offer of a meeting still stands and will be facilitated, should the Committee express a desire to meet.

### **Peace Commissioners Appointments**

132. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding the appointment of peace commissioners; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11981/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** I can advise the Deputy that Peace Commissioners are appointed under section 88 of the Courts of Justice Act, 1924. The Office of Peace Commissioner is an honorary appointment and Peace Commissioners receive no remuneration or compensation by way of fees or expenses for their services.

An application for appointment may be submitted by a person who is interested in obtaining an appointment or a third party may submit a nomination in respect of a person considered suitable for appointment. Nominations are generally received from public representatives. A local Garda Superintendent sometimes requests an appointment in a particular area in the public interest.

There is no qualifying examination involved but appointees are required to be of good character and they are usually well established in the local community. Persons convicted of serious offences are considered unsuitable for appointment. Persons who are members of professions or employed in occupations which engage in legal work or related activities and members of the clergy are, as a matter of practice, not appointed because of their occupation. Civil servants are usually only appointed where the performance of their official duties requires an appointment (i.e. *ex-officio*).

Finally, I can confirm that a background check on nominees is carried out by An Garda Síochána.

### **Crime Prevention**

133. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the grant assistance available towards the installation of CCTV in towns; her plans to roll out such initiatives; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11985/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** I am very conscious of the value that communities, especially rural communities, place on CCTV as a means of deterring crime and assisting in the detection of offenders.

The Deputy will be aware that the Programme for a Partnership Government commits to providing investment in CCTV systems and that I have secured €1 million in Budget 2017 to begin a new round of community CCTV schemes in line with the Programme.

My Department is currently developing a framework for the scheme and, while applications are not being invited or considered at this time, I expect to make an announcement in due course.

### **Garda Data**

134. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí by rank attached to the Garda North Dublin Divisional Drugs Unit in each of the years 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12015/17]

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

I am informed that the number of Gardaí assigned to the Dublin Metropolitan Region (DMR) North Garda Division on the 31 January 2017, the latest date for which figures are readily available was 672, of which 21 were assigned to the Divisional Drugs Unit. It is important to note that all Gardaí have a responsibility in the prevention and detection of criminal activity whether it be in the area of drug offences or otherwise. The Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau leads out the policing strategy for tackling drugs supply. This approach allows for the co-ordinated use of Garda resources in tackling all forms of organised crime, including illicit drug activity nationwide. When appropriate, the work of the Division is supported by a number of Garda national units such as the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation, the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau, and the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau.

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



of 300 Garda Reserves.

I am informed by the Commissioner, since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, that 838 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide, 66 of whom have been assigned to the DMR North Garda Division. I am also informed that another 750 trainee Garda are scheduled to attest this year which will see Garda numbers, taking account of projected retirements, increase to around the 13,500 mark by year end.

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

The investment in personnel is complemented by substantial investment in resources across the board for An Garda Síochána. The Deputy will be aware of the significant resources that have been made available to An Garda Síochána under the Government's Capital Plan 2016 - 2021. In particular, some €205 million in additional funding for Garda ICT and €46 million for new Garda vehicles has been allocated over the lifetime of the plan. This investment will facilitate the provision of more effective policing services and support An Garda Síochána in tackling illicit drug activity.

I am advised by the Commissioner that the following table gives a breakdown of the number of Garda members assigned to the DMR North Divisional Drugs Unit by rank in each of the years 2014 to 31 January 2017, the latest date for which figures are readily available.

DMR North Divisional Drugs Unit Personnel 2014 - 2017			
Year	Sergeant	Garda	Total
2014	2	14	16
2015	3	22	25
2016	3	18	21
*2017	3	18	21

\*As of 31 January 2017, the latest date for which figures are readily available.

### Visa Applications

135. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if her attention has been drawn to the extreme hardship her decision to continue with a blanket restriction on visa applications from Libya is having on persons that are studying and working here [12019/17]

136. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she will reconsider the present restrictions on visa applications from Libya and allow individual exemptions to be considered on humanitarian grounds, in view of the fact families are being torn apart and separated for years as a result of the decision. [12020/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 135 and 136 together.

I refer the Deputy to my reply to Parliamentary Question No. 68 of 16 February, 2017 copied below for ease of reference. As I explained then, certain restrictions on consideration of

Irish visa applications from residents of Libya have been in place since August, 2014 due to the political and security situation in Libya. In doing so, all relevant considerations including the ongoing security situation in Libya and the potential economic impact of the restrictions were taken into account.

There is also provision for a small number of exceptions to the extent indeed that 109 visas were granted to Libyan nationals in 2016, and 96 in the previous year. As with any visa application, each application is assessed individually based on its own merits and having regard to all the information put forward for consideration.

The Deputy can be assured that the position will continue to be kept under review by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service of my Department.

Reply to Parliamentary Question No. 68 of 16 February, 2017.

*I can confirm that certain restrictions on consideration of Irish visa applications from residents of Libya have been in place since August, 2014 due to the political and security situation in Libya. In doing so, all relevant considerations including the ongoing security situation in Libya and the potential economic impact of the restrictions were taken into account.*

*There is provision for a small number of exceptions relating to the beef industry where applications may be accepted from persons who are known to and sponsored by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and/or An Bord Bia and who have a good travel history to Ireland, the UK or the Schengen countries. Certain applications in relation to the oil industry and which are supported by the internationally recognised Government in Libya are also considered.*

*The position continues to be kept under review by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service of my Department.*

### **Garda Data**

137. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the current Garda numbers per head of population for the cities of Dublin, Galway, Limerick, Cork, Waterford and Kilkenny, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12168/17]

138. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the previous Garda numbers per head of population for the cities of Dublin, Galway, Limerick, Cork, Waterford and Kilkenny, for each of the years 2011 to 2016, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12169/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 137 and 138 together.

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

The information requested by the Deputy is not readily available in my Department as the

recording of the population of the towns in question is a matter for the Central Statistics Office while Garda resources are allocated on a Divisional basis. I am, in any case, advised that ratios such as the number of Garda per head population are not an appropriate tool to use when considering the allocation of Garda resources as they fail to take account of, among other things, the fact that crime levels and types can vary significantly among communities of similar population size.

### **Garda Data**

139. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the current Garda number per 500 head of population for towns (details supplied), in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12170/17]

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

The information requested by the Deputy is not readily available in my Department as the recording of the population of the towns in question is a matter for the Central Statistics Office while Garda resources are allocated on a Divisional basis. I am in any case advised that ratios such as the number of Garda per head population are not an appropriate tool to use when considering the allocation of Garda resources as they fail to take account of, among other things, the fact that crime levels and types can vary significantly among communities of similar population size.

### **Garda Data**

140. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Gardaí employed on community policing duties in Waterford city for each of the years 2007 to 2016 and to date in 2017 in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12171/17]

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

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

Community policing is at the heart of An Garda Síochána. It provides a means of recognising that every community – both urban and rural – has its own concerns and expectations. In this regard I welcome the strong emphasis placed by the Garda Commissioner's Modernisation

and Renewal Programme 2016-2021 on further developing and supporting the community policing ethos of the organisation so that Gardaí spend more time in the community, gaining public confidence and trust and providing a greater sense of security. Proposed initiatives include the establishment of local Community Policing Teams (CPTs) headed by an Inspector and made up of Gardaí from across a range of areas to proactively work with the community to prevent and detect crime; and the establishment of Community Safety Fora in every District comprising local Gardaí, local communities and key stakeholders.

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

I am informed by the Commissioner, since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, that 838 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide, 24 of whom have been assigned to the Waterford Division. I am also informed that another 750 trainee Garda are scheduled to attest this year which will see Garda numbers, taking account of projected retirements, increase to around the 13,500 mark by year end.

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

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

The following table shows the number of Community Gardaí assigned to Waterford Garda Station for each of the years since 2007 to 31 January 2017, the latest date for which figures are readily available, as provided by the Commissioner.

Community Gardaí Waterford Garda Station 2007-2017	
Year	Total
2007	14
2008	15
2009	18
2010	18
2011	16
2012	12
2013	11
2014	8

Community Gardaí Waterford Garda Station 2007-2017	
2015	9
2016	12
2017*	13

\*As of 31 January 2017, the latest date for which figures are readily available

### Garda Data

141. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí employed in the drug units in Waterford city for each of the years 2007 to 2016, and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [12172/17]

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

It is important to note that all Gardaí have a responsibility in the prevention and detection of criminal activity whether it be in the area of drug offences or otherwise. I can assure the Deputy that An Garda Síochána continues to pro-actively and resolutely tackle all forms of drug crime in this jurisdiction. The Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau leads out the policing strategy for tackling drugs supply and works closely with dedicated Divisional Drugs units and other national units, including the Criminal Assets Bureau (CAB) in targeting persons involved in the illicit sale and supply of drugs. This approach allows for the co-ordinated use of Garda resources in tackling all forms of organised crime, including illicit drug activity nationwide.

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

I am informed by the Garda Commissioner, since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, that 838 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide, 24 of whom have been assigned to the Waterford Division. I am also informed that another 750 trainee Garda are scheduled to attest this year which will see Garda numbers, taking account of projected retirements, increase to around the 13,500 mark by year end.

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

The investment in personnel is complemented by substantial investment in resources across the board for An Garda Síochána. The Deputy will be aware of the significant resources that have been made available to An Garda Síochána under the Government's Capital Plan 2016 - 2021. In particular, some €205 million in additional funding for Garda ICT and €46 million for new Garda vehicles has been allocated over the lifetime of the plan. This investment will facilitate the provision of more effective policing services and support An Garda Síochána in tackling illicit drug activity.

The Garda Síochána's 2008 Policing Plan contained the Commissioner's proposals for re-aligning Garda Divisional boundaries to make them coterminous with local authority boundaries. As a consequence, Waterford, which was part of the Waterford/Kilkenny Division, was established as a stand-alone Division as of 1st January 2009. Accordingly, the following table outlines the strength of the Waterford Divisional Drugs Unit from 2009 onwards and up to 31 January 2017, the latest date for which figures are available.

#### **Waterford Divisional Drugs Unit**

Year	Numbers
2009	12
2010	14
2011	10
2012	10
2013	9
2014	5
2015	5
2016	5
*2017	5

\*As of 31 January 2017

#### **Visa Applications**

142. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she will address the serious concerns of a person (details supplied) in relation to their ongoing INIS application issues; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12175/17]

**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 visa application referred to was received in the Dublin Visa Office on 25 May, 2016.

More generally, the Visa Office is currently experiencing delays in processing such applications due to the large volumes of applications of this type received particularly since the second quarter of 2015. Legal proceedings in relation to a number of similar such applications are currently before the courts, and accordingly, the Deputy will appreciate that I am somewhat limited in what I can say on the matter. However, I can say that there has been an exponential increase in the number of such applications and with it increasing concerns around potential abuse of the Directive in relation to such cases. This has given rise to a current caseload in the region of 10,500 applications overall which have to be assessed very carefully to ensure that any fraudulent applications or potential abuses of the Directive are detected and dealt with appropriately.

While every effort generally is made to process these applications as soon as possible, processing times will vary having regard to the volume of applications, their complexity, the pos-

sible need for the Visa Office to investigate, enquire into, or seek further information in relation to certain applications, and the resources available. Unfortunately, due to the large number of applications waiting to be processed and the fact that such applications are processed in chronological order (i.e. based on date order of receipt), I cannot at this time give a definitive date as to when this application will be finalised.

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

In addition, applicants may themselves e-mail queries directly to the INIS Visa Office (visa-mail@justice.ie).

### **Help-To-Buy Scheme**

143. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the European Commission's report on the economy, which criticised the help-to-buy scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11876/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I assume the Deputy is referring to the 2017 European Semester Country Report on Ireland, which was published on 22 February. In that document the European Commission acknowledged the work undertaken by the Government in addressing the current shortage of housing, including 'Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness'. This comprehensive Action Plan takes a holistic approach in addressing the many interacting structural constraints affecting the housing market in areas such as planning and land use, as well as regulation and skills deficits in the construction sector. While the primary focus of the Action Plan is to tackle structural constraints, fiscal supports can play a supporting and time-bound role in addressing the current problems in the housing sector. In my view the wording used by the Commission in relation to the help to buy scheme is not definitive, and merely points to the possibility that it could act to increase prices. However, the impact of the Help to Buy incentive on the property market generally cannot be considered in isolation from the impact of other measures contained in the Action Plan, which are primarily designed to increase supply.

It should be noted that the Help to Buy incentive is not a broad based relief available for the purchase of any home by any buyer. Rather, it is a targeted response that is aimed solely at first-time buyers, buying (or building) new residences. This targeting is designed to help encourage the building of new homes, thereby increasing supply, by turning notional demand into real demand. By restricting this initiative solely to new dwellings and new self builds, it is anticipated that the resulting increase in demand for affordable new build homes should encourage the construction industry to provide for an additional supply of such properties.

I wish to assure the Deputy that my Department continues to monitor developments in the property market on an ongoing basis. I have also committed to commissioning an independent economic impact assessment of the Help to Buy incentive which will look at a variety of issues relating to the scheme's impact on the property market.

### **Tax Reliefs Availability**

144. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Finance the tax incentives and reliefs that will be available to owners of properties in rural towns and villages following on from the Government's launch of the Action Plan for Rural Development; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11935/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** The recently launched "Realising our Rural Potential: Action Plan for Rural Development" by the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs contains a detailed list of actions and priorities with a view to revitalising rural Ireland generally. This effort is being led by the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs in conjunction with Ministers and officials from other Departments, as well as the Local Authorities and a range of other stakeholders. A variety of actions included in this plan aim to assist in improving rural towns and making rural Ireland a better place to live. These include the Town and Village Renewal Scheme, under which funding of up to €12 million per annum is available to revitalise rural towns and villages, while there is also a commitment to develop and pilot an initiative to encourage increased residential occupancy in town and village centres.

My Department is engaged in a range of actions relating to the action plan including tax related measures for the farming and fisheries sectors. However, the action plan does not provide for additional tax incentive schemes targeted specifically at the owners of property in rural towns and villages. However, the Deputy may be aware of a number of tax incentives that are already available to the owners of residential property in all areas, including rural towns and villages.

The Home Renovation Incentive provides for an income tax credit for homeowners or landlords of residential property, who carry out repair, renovation or improvement works on their property. It provides for tax relief by way of an income tax credit of 13.5% of qualifying expenditure. Qualifying work must cost a minimum of €5,000 (including VAT). The maximum qualifying cost for the purpose of the incentive is (€30,000 including VAT), which equates to a maximum credit of €4,050. The tax credit is payable over two years following the year in which the work is paid for and I have extended the scheme for a further two years in the recent Budget.

In addition, (limited) relief is available for expenditure on approved gardens and buildings in the State in accordance with Section 482 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997. To qualify for this relief the relevant building must be determined by the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht to be of significant scientific, historical, architectural or aesthetic interest and the Revenue Commissioners must be satisfied that reasonable access to the building is afforded to the public.

### **Help-To-Buy Scheme Administration**

145. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Finance if he will review various scenarios (details supplied) with regard to the help-to-buy scheme; if he will address the disadvantages for those planning to build, particularly in the constituency of Cavan-Monaghan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11181/17]

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



sales, by purchasers who may otherwise have deferred purchases, pending the commencement of the incentive.

One of the primary policy aims of the incentive is to assist those struggling to save for the deposit required in purchasing a house. Individuals who contracted to purchase new homes before the announcement of the incentive, did not need the assistance of the State to fund the required deposit. Such individuals made their purchasing decisions on the basis of the information available to them at the time of purchase, and could not have expected a subsequently introduced tax relief to also be available to them. Similarly, those who commenced the draw-down of agreed mortgages in respect of self built properties before 19 July 2016, could also not have expected a subsequently introduced tax relief to be available to them. It is not clear from the example provided by the Deputy, whether the couple purchasing off plans entered into a contract to purchase on 17 July, or merely put down a booking deposit. If it was the former then the couple would not be eligible for a tax refund under the Help to Buy incentive, as the contract would have been entered into before 19 July 2016.

Furthermore, I do not believe that having separate criteria for applicants that are purchasing a new build, or those undertaking a self build, means that either group are disadvantaged in the manner suggested by the Deputy. The scheme aims to assist a first-time purchaser with funding a deposit at the outset of the purchase or self building process. However, there are inherent differences in the relevant processes. For a purchaser buying a new build, the first major expenditure is the point at which they enter into a contract to purchase and pay over the deposit, which is usually 10% of the value of the home. This is usually some time before a mortgage is drawn down or a purchase is completed. For a self-build property, the first major expenditure usually coincides with the draw down of the first tranche of the relevant mortgage, and thus the refund is payable at this point in respect of self builds.

### Excise Duties Yield

146. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of excise duty collected, by amount and fuel category, on light oil, heavy oil, liquified petroleum gas and substitute fuels in each of the past three years, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11205/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I am informed by Revenue that the amount of Excise Duty and Carbon Tax collected on Light Oil, Heavy Oil, Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) and Substitute Fuels for the years 2014 to 2016 is as outlined in the table that follows. Please note that 2016 data are provisional and may be subject to revision.

Excise/Carbon	2014 €m		2015 €m		2016 €m	
	Excise	Carbon	Excise	Carbon	Excise	Carbon
Petrol	799.1	65.7	767.9	62.3	720.4	58.5
Aviation Gasoline	0.5	0.02	0.5	0.05	0.6	0.04
Substitute Fuels	0.02	0.002	0.02	0.002	0.01	0.001
Heavy Oil						
Auto-Diesel	1,181.6	144.9	1,307.5	158.1	1,408.4	171.4
Fuel Oil	1.0	1.8	0.9	2.0	0.8	2.2

Excise/Carbon	2014 €m		2015 €m		2016 €m	
Marked Gas Oil	36.0	54.2	37.3	55.0	38.0	56.1
Kerosene	-	42.3	-	52.8	-	52.8
Auto LPG	0.2	0.1	0.3	0.1	0.3	0.1
Other LPG	-	7.5	-	8.4	-	8.8
Substitute Fuels	0.20	0.12	0.12	0.09	0.16	0.12

I am also informed by Revenue that a wide range of additional statistical information on Excise receipts from 2003 to 2015 is available on the Revenue's Statistics webpage at <http://www.revenue.ie/en/about/statistics/excise.html> .

### Mortgage Interest Rates

147. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Finance the measures he will take to reduce the interest rates being charged by the so-called subprime mortgage lenders; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11218/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** The issue of mortgage rates is a significant one for this Government. The Programme for a Partnership Government sets out a number of important and practical measures which can be taken to improve the position of mortgageors and in particular variable rate mortgage holders. Firstly, it wishes to promote competition in the supply of mortgage finance. To that end, the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) has been asked to work with the Central Bank to set out options for Government in terms of market structure, legislation and regulation to lower the cost of secured mortgage lending and to improve the degree of competition and consumer protection. The CCPC has now commenced this work, with a public consultation phase closing on 20 March 2017 and the CCPC will then produce a final report by the end of May 2017.

Secondly, the Government considers that measures to encourage and promote a greater level of switching in the mortgage market would also help boost the level of competition in the market for existing mortgages. In particular, the Programme for Government considers that the development of a code of conduct for switching mortgage provider would be a useful and practical initiative which would have the potential to deliver savings to many existing mortgage holders. To that end, the Central Bank has commenced a programme of further research on this topic and the Bank has indicated that the output of this work will be used to inform its consideration of the need for any future work in the area of mortgage switching and specifically around the need for a mortgage switching code. However, Central Bank research has already shown the scope for borrowers to save money by switching mortgages and the CCPC has launched a mortgage switching tool to assist consumers (which itself notes the findings of the Central Bank research of cases where borrowers could make savings). In conjunction with this, my Department has also launched a media campaign to raise awareness and promote consumer switching in the retail financial product area, including mortgages. This initiative was funded in its entirety by AIB and Permanenttsb as was agreed in the context of both banks restructuring plans. The campaign website [www.switchyourbank.ie](http://www.switchyourbank.ie) provides straightforward practical information and support on switching and I would strongly encourage people to visit it.

While the Central Bank does not have a statutory role in relation to prescribing the rates that mortgage lenders charge on their loans, the Bank does require that all mortgages are advertised

and sold in accordance with the requirements of financial services legislation (including Central Bank Codes), and that consumers who choose a given mortgage product (or to switch to a new product) are treated in accordance with these requirements in the context of the product they have chosen. Also, it could be noted that when it appeared before the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, and Taoiseach on 8 December last, the Central Bank indicated that it had not seen any sign of interest rates on mortgages being increased by entities which acquired loans from lenders which initially provided the mortgage.

In overall terms, the Government is of the opinion that increased competition rather than administrative controls is the best way to ensure that retail lending rates are driven down in a sustainable way for the market as a whole but without giving rise to potentially undesirable consequences for the provision of new mortgage lending. This is a policy area that the Government will keep under active review in its ongoing engagement with mortgage lenders and in implementing the Programme for Government commitments to help deliver on a long term basis better outcomes for all mortgage borrowers.

### **Credit Availability**

148. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Finance his views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding financing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11222/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** As the Deputy is aware, small and medium sized businesses (SMEs), such as the construction sector firm in the details provided, 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. 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.

The Deputy will 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 and lending as determined by the banks.

There are a number of initiatives that have been introduced to assist SMEs with access to credit. I would particularly recommend that the firm set out in the details supplied make contact with the Credit Review Office (further information below):

In 2014, I launched an SME online-tool, a website which makes it easier for small businesses to find information on over 170 Government business supports from 30 Departments and Agencies. On answering eight quick and simple questions, businesses are returned a list of all available Government business supports tailored to their business requirements, with further information on each support and contact details for follow-up. I would encourage all SMEs, at any stage of their development, to check which supports are available. The Supporting SMEs online tool can be found at [www.supportingsmes.ie](http://www.supportingsmes.ie).

The Credit Review Office helps SME or Farm borrowers who have had an application for credit of up to €3 million declined or reduced by participating banks, and who feel that they have a viable business proposition. They also look at cases where borrowers feel that the terms and conditions of their existing loan, or a new loan offer, are unfairly onerous or have been unreasonably changed to their detriment. This is a strictly confidential process between the

business, the Credit Review Office and the bank. Further details on this process are available at [www.creditreview.ie](http://www.creditreview.ie).

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

### **Credit Availability**

149. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance his views on whether the banking sector is playing a full role in lending to builders in order that housing construction can reach the levels required to meet the need; the engagements he or his officials have had with the banking sector on this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11223/17]

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

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

The Government is committed to ensuring that all viable businesses operating in Ireland have the opportunity to access sufficient finance to meet their enterprise needs in a manner that supports growth and employment in the economy. As the Deputy will be aware, 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 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.

It should be noted that the results of the most recent Department of Finance SME Credit Demand Survey, covering the period April to September 2016, show that, when pending applications are excluded, 84% of credit applications to banks were approved or partially approved. Demand for credit remains subdued and the latest survey shows only 39% of SMEs in the construction sector requested bank finance in the previous six months a decrease of 9% from September 2015. Furthermore, the main reason for not applying for bank finance is that SMEs do not need it (86%). Further results from the survey can be found at [www.finance.gov.ie/what-we-do/banking-financial-services/sme-credit-lending](http://www.finance.gov.ie/what-we-do/banking-financial-services/sme-credit-lending).

I note that the data recently published by the Central Bank of Ireland for Credit Advanced to Irish Resident Small and Medium Sized Enterprises shows that new lending to the Construction sector (construction of buildings carried out on contract) for Q1 to Q3 2016 totalled €59 million compared to €50 million for Q1 to Q3 2015. New lending to Property Investment / Development enterprises for Q1 to Q3 2016 totalled €961 million a growth of €582 million (c. 154%) when compared to the same period in 2015. This data can be found in Table A.14.1 Credit Advanced to Irish Resident Small and Medium Sized Enterprises published on the Central Bank's website.

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

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

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

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

The Government remains committed to the SME sector, including those involved in the construction sector, and sees it as the key engine of ongoing economic growth. I can assure the Deputy that my Department, working with other relevant Departments, Bodies and Agencies, such as the Credit Review Office, will continue to advance policies to ensure the availability of both bank and non-bank credit so as to ensure that viable Irish SMEs have sufficient access to finance.

### **Tax Exemptions**

150. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Finance when an application for VRT by a person (details supplied) will be approved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11310/17]

151. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Finance when an application for VRT exemption by a person (details supplied) will be approved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11311/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 150 and 151 together.

I am advised by Revenue that initially an incomplete application under the Disabled Drivers and Passengers Scheme was received from the person concerned on 8 February 2017. The required information has since been received and processing of the application is expected to be completed within the next week.

### **Public Relations Contracts Expenditure**

152. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Finance the amount his Department spent

on public relations consultants and all matters relating to public relations costs in 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11429/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I take it that the Deputy is referring solely to external public relations and not to advertising that would be incurred by my Department in the normal course of business, such as entries into telephone directories, the placing of advertisements in national newspapers, recruitment advertising, etc.

The use of external Public Relations consultants in respect of my Department in 2016 is outlined in the following table:

Details of service provided	Public Relations Firm
<p>Following the Government decision of 13 May 2015 on mortgage arrears, my Department was asked to coordinate the development and implementation of a communications strategy around the Government-funded and other available supports for borrowers in arrears. The duration of the contract was from October 2015 until June 2016. Responsibility for the mortgage arrears publicity campaign now rests with the Abhaile Mortgage Arrears Resolution Service. The amount spent on this campaign in 2016 was €73,135.76</p>	<p>Carr Communications was the successful tenderer following a public procurement exercise advertised on eTenders.</p>
<p>Under the Action Plan for Jobs 2015, Action 110 required an “advertising campaign to leverage support for and drive utilisation of the Supporting SMEs Online Tool and increase awareness of the existence of State supports for business.” This advertising campaign was coordinated by the SME Communications Group a sub-group of the SME State Bodies Group which is chaired by my Department. The second phase of this advertising campaign took place in March 2016 at a cost of €14,314.74.</p>	<p>ICAN was the successful tenderer following a public procurement exercise.</p>
<p>As part of a range of competition measures agreed with the European Commission under their respective EU-Restructuring plans, AIB and Permanent TSB are required to provide funding to a public awareness campaign (such campaign to be facilitated by Ireland through an appropriate state body) to raise awareness and promote customer switching. As such my Department is currently managing a contract for the provision of Research, Design and Media Buy Services (Public awareness and customer switching campaign) in retail banking markets. The media campaign went live on a variety of media channels from 27th February 2017 and the campaign website, <a href="http://www.switchy-ourbank.ie">www.switchy-ourbank.ie</a>, is also currently live. The amount spent on this public awareness campaign in 2016 was €24,682.00. It is important to note that this campaign is being funded by the two banks in its entirety.</p>	<p>Language Communications Ltd was appointed as Prime Contractor for this campaign following a public procurement competition advertised on eTenders and the Official Journal of the EU.</p>

The Department's policy regarding employing external groups is to follow the relevant public procurement rules and procedures.

### Help-To-Buy Scheme

153. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of applications received for the help-to-buy scheme in the Tipperary revenue district; the number of applications processed and approved to date; the current processing time for applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11444/17]

159. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the number of applications to date for the help-to-buy scheme as announced in budget 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11631/17]

160. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the number of applications for the help-to-buy scheme that have been deemed valid to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11632/17]

161. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the number of successful or pending applications for the help-to-buy scheme with in each categories (details supplied) in tabular form; and the total potential cost of the scheme in each category. [11633/17]

162. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the total anticipated cost of the help-to-buy scheme based on the applications to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11634/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 153 and 159 to 162, inclusive, together.

The Deputies will be aware that a two-stage process is employed for the Help To Buy (HTB) incentive, under which individuals submit an application for the incentive to receive an indication of the level of tax relief that may be available to them, and subsequently submit a claim for a tax refund.

I am advised by Revenue that the number of HTB applications received up to the end of February 2017 was:

No. of Applications	Successful applications	Pending
3,449	1,218	2,231

The data indicates that around one-third of applications received are approved automatically, while the remainder are generally allocated a status of pending. Pending means that the applicants either have to file an outstanding return or address a compliance issue, the application is to be reviewed by a Revenue caseworker, or the applicant needs to finalise his or her application.

The processing time for pending applications depends on the time it takes an applicant to resolve any outstanding matters and Revenue is encouraging prospective applicants to file any necessary tax returns and resolve any outstanding issues before making the HTB application. The bulk of applicants to date are PAYE taxpayers and if a Form 12 tax return is outstanding it can be filed online very quickly by using "PAYE Services" in myAccount. If there is a tax liability outstanding it can be paid using the 'Payments' facility in myAccount. A HTB applica-

tion can be approved automatically, and very quickly, on the online system where there are no outstanding issues.

Once an application is successful, the time taken for the claim to be submitted depends on the claimant. If he or she has the necessary evidence, which is a signed contract, mortgage agreement, deposit details, details of the property for first-time purchasers or, in the case of first-time self-build claimants evidence of drawdown of the first tranche of the mortgage, the claim can be submitted. More detailed information and guidance regarding these requirements is available on the Revenue website.

Information about the loan-to-value ratios is not available at the application stage, as such figures are not usually finalised at that stage of the process. However, this information is required from successful applicants to finalise their claims. I am advised that the categorisation of claims by the requested loan-to-value ratios as of end February 2017 was:

Loan-to-value (LTV)	90%	85% to 90%	80% to 85%	Below 80% (and above 70% minimum LTV)
Total (449)	120	175	83	71

The purpose of the application stage of the HTB process is such that would-be first-time buyers can determine whether, and to what extent, they qualify for the incentive. As the data from the application stage are only an indicator as to possible take-up of the incentive, for example, an applicant may not proceed to claim stage or may not get mortgage approval, the application statistics are not collated by County.

Successful applicants are required to provide information on the location of the qualifying residence in finalising their claims, and therefore Revenue is in a position to provide certain details on the location of HTB claims made. However, to protect the confidentiality of taxpayer information, I can only provide a breakdown based on properties situated in Dublin and in provincial locations. Up to the end of February 2017, Revenue has processed 449 claims and the relevant breakdown is as follows:

Location	Connacht/ Ulster	Dublin	Leinster (outside Dublin)	Munster
Number (449)	31	179	157	82

The number of applications and claims for the incentive continue to be too small to materially affect the previously estimated cost of the scheme. In this regard, the Deputy may wish to note that at Budget time, it was estimated that the Help to Buy incentive would cost €40m per annum, but €50m in 2017 due to the backdating of the relief in respect of properties which became eligible for the scheme since 19 July 2016.

### Brexit Issues

154. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Finance if his Department has conducted any analysis of the potential impact of cross-Border smuggling on the economy as a result of Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11474/17]

155. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Finance the discussions he has had on the issue of cross-Border smuggling and its potential impact on the economy with his EU counterparts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11475/17]



**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 154 and 155 together.

I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners, who are responsible for combating smuggling, that action against this criminal activity is, and will continue to be, a central element of their work, including in the context of Brexit.

The Government priorities for Brexit are clear: minimising the impact on trade and the economy, protecting the Northern Ireland Peace Process, maintaining the Common Travel Area and influencing the future of the European Union. A programme of intense engagement at political and official level is continuing to ensuring that our priorities are heard and understood across Europe, and that the EU's position for the forthcoming negotiations reflects our priorities.

### **Capital Expenditure Programme**

156. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the level of construction inflation that has been experienced by his Department in each of the past six years and to date in 2017 in respect of construction projects and other capital projects; the way in which he monitors construction inflation and the mechanisms he employs to establish this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11536/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** My Department monitors inflation across the economy on an ongoing basis, including in the construction sector. For example, the National House Construction Cost Index, published by the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, provides an indication of labour and material cost developments within the construction industry. The latest available figures suggest annual house construction cost inflation of 0.1 per cent on average between 2010 and 2016. A number of construction sector organisations also conduct periodic assessments of construction costs in Ireland. For example, in May of last year, the Society of Chartered Surveyors Ireland (SCSI) published a report *The Real Cost of New House Delivery* which examined the component costs of housing delivery in the Dublin region.

As part of Rebuilding Ireland, the Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, detailed studies into construction costs are currently ongoing. A Working Group, chaired by the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, has been established to work with industry representatives in order to benchmark housing delivery input costs in Ireland. It is my understanding that the Housing Agency is also coordinating an independent review and analysis of delivery costs in Ireland. Both of these studies are due to be completed during the first half of 2017.

With regards to the construction projects undertaken by my Department over the past six years, a project to update fire and electrical systems has recently been completed in offices shared by my Department and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. The programme was managed by the Office of Public Works. My Department made a fixed contribution to the total cost of the project.

### **Insurance Industry Regulation**

157. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the countries which have compensation schemes in place for collapsed insurance companies; if these schemes would

compensate Irish claimants in the event of a motor insurance company collapsing (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11579/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** Insurance guarantee schemes provide last-resort protection to policyholders and beneficiaries when insurers are unable to fulfil their contractual commitments. They protect against the risk that claims will not be met in the event of a failure of an insurance undertaking. Such schemes can offer protection by paying compensation to policyholders or beneficiaries, or by securing the continuation of insurance contracts.

There is no common EU framework in the insurance sector in relation to insolvencies, as exists in other sectors, e.g. bank deposits. As part of the recent review of motor insurance compensation in Ireland, my Department established that there are a wide variety of insurance guarantee schemes in other jurisdictions. Comparing these arrangements to the Irish compensation framework was difficult as there were significant differences between the schemes established. For example, these differences relate to eligibility restrictions, protection limits, the nature of intervention, the funding arrangements and the corresponding financial capacity of the schemes. The Deputy will appreciate therefore that, in the absence of a common EU insurance guarantee scheme, it is difficult to provide the information sought given the differences outlined above. The provision of such a list may create an incorrect impression that each of the schemes is directly comparable.

The European Commission undertook a review in 2010 of the insurance compensation issue. My Department responded at the time and indicated that Ireland was in broad agreement with the objectives of the White Paper and supported most of the specific proposals contained therein. In particular, it sought the inclusion of motor insurance business in any proposal from the Commission as its inclusion would ensure appropriate harmonised treatment of all claims of a particular insurance undertaking in the event of an insolvency. The European Commission has not subsequently advanced their work in this area, and I am not aware of any imminent developments on this front.

Finally, I have attached a link to a 2007 Oxera Report titled “Insurance guarantee schemes in the EU Comparative analysis of existing schemes, analysis of problems and evaluation of options” which should provide some greater insight into the complexity of the matter.

[http://ec.europa.eu/internal\\_market/insurance/docs/guarantee\\_schemes\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/insurance/docs/guarantee_schemes_en.pdf).

### **Insurance Industry Regulation**

158. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if insurance companies currently passporting into Ireland from the UK and its jurisdictions have the ability to continue passporting into Ireland if the UK exited EIOPA when the UK exits the European Union, if the UK and its jurisdictions automatically exit the European Insurance and Occupational Pensions Authority, EIOPA; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11580/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** The ability for financial services entities such as insurance companies or investment firms to passport financial services is based on a collection of measures in EU law that describes how the EU fundamental freedoms operate in the context of financial services. Once a financial services entity is authorised in one European Economic Area (EEA) Member State the financial services passport allows that firm to carry out its authorised permitted activities in any other EEA state. This is achieved by either exercising the right of establishment such as setting up a branch, or by providing cross-border services. The option of a passport is only open to EEA Member States due to the fact that these

countries are subject to EU rules.

The ability of the UK and its jurisdiction's regulatory authorities' to participate in the European Insurance and Occupational Pensions Authority (EIOPA) and the ability for UK insurance companies to continue to passport financial services as described above will therefore depend on the outcome of the forthcoming negotiations. These negotiations will commence once the UK notifies the European Union of its intention to leave through the activation of Article 50 of the TFEU. At that point, we will be at the start of a process, within which there is expected to be a number of phases. Ireland will participate fully in all of the structures of the EU 27 in preparing for and conducting the negotiations. Ireland will continue working with both our EU partners and with the UK to maintain a positive, constructive and orderly approach to these negotiations. In my view, it would not be appropriate at this stage to try to pre-empt the outcome of those negotiations.

*Questions Nos. 159 to 162, inclusive, answered with Question No. 153.*

### **Tax Reliefs Application**

163. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Finance if he has considered extending similar tax treatment to persons that are renting out rooms in a house they are living in through a company (details supplied), as distinct to renting out an entire home, to persons that rent out rooms for students; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11780/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** It is not fully clear from the Deputy's question as to the specific aspect of the tax code that his enquiry relates to. However, I assume that the Deputy is referring to the Rent-a-Room scheme, which is provided for in Section 216A Taxes Consolidation Act 1997. This scheme was introduced with the aim of increasing the availability of rented residential accommodation. The room or rooms must be used for the purposes of residential accommodation, i.e. the occupants are effectively using the room on a long-term basis, either on its own or in conjunction with other parts of the residence, as a home. The relief does not apply to rooms that are used for business purposes.

Under the scheme, sums arising to an individual in respect of the letting, for residential purposes, of a room or rooms in his or her home, including, for example, sums arising from lettings to students for an academic year, and the provision of meals or other services supplied in connection with the letting, may be exempt from income tax where they meet the conditions of the scheme and where the individual's total gross income from such letting(s) is below the annual limit for the tax year in question. This limit was increased to €14,000 with effect from the 2017 tax year.

Income from the provision of accommodation to occasional visitors for short periods, including, for example, where the accommodation is provided through online accommodation booking sites, does not qualify for relief as the visitors use the accommodation as guest accommodation rather than for residential purposes. The tax treatment of such income is dependent on the nature of the accommodation irrespective of whether or not this is arranged through an internet letting platform or other form of intermediary.

I am not favourably disposed to the extension of rent-a-room relief to income earned from the provision of accommodation through platforms such as the company in question, I am mindful such an extension could lead to unfair competition in the guest accommodation sector generally, by placing B&B and guest house operators who provide accommodation in the course of a trade at an unfair disadvantage.

## **Tax Yield**

164. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Finance the total tax take from residential property landlords derived from their rental income; and the total value of the residential property rental market here. [11781/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that tax returns up to the 2015 year of assessment did not require rental income to be returned in a manner that would enable income from residential property lettings be separately identified from rental income in respect of other types of property, such as commercial rental property. It is not therefore possible to provide the amount of revenue raised from the taxation of residential rental income, nor the total value of such income.

However, the Deputy may wish to note that the 2013 Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General contained, in Chapter 16, a detailed review of the taxation of rental income and expenses deductible therefrom. This report is available on the website of the Comptroller and Auditor General at the link below.

<http://audgen.gov.ie/documents/annualreports/2013/report/en/Chap16.pdf>

The Deputy may also wish to note that tax returns for the 2016 year of assessment onwards have separate data fields for residential property rental income and non-residential property rental income. The relevant information will become available in due course.

## **Banking Sector**

165. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 55 of 28 February 2017, the reason his Department acted as a guarantor for a bank (details supplied) regarding the €10 billion facility deed from the Central Bank; the purpose and or intended use of the €10 billion facility deed, in view of his Department's involvement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11858/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** During the latter half of 2010, Irish banks were encountering difficulties in sourcing funding. In order to allay these difficulties, the Central Bank of Ireland entered into facility deed agreements with a number of banks, including Bank of Ireland. Under these agreements, the Central Bank of Ireland could make loans to a relevant bank, by way of emergency liquidity assistance, which would be guaranteed by the Minister. The bank, in turn, agreed to indemnify the Minister against any payment the Minister made in relation to the guarantee. When the agreement between the Central Bank of Ireland and Bank of Ireland was put in place, it was the policy of the Government at that time that the Central Bank of Ireland should not incur a loss in the provision of emergency liquidity assistance in support of the banks.

## **Tax Reliefs Application**

166. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Finance the progress of his plan, which he announced as part of his 2017 budget speech, to extend mortgage interest relief; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11860/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** At present, Section 244 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 provides for tax relief in respect of interest paid on qualifying home

loans taken out on or after 1 January 2004 and on or before 31 December 2012, with relief being available until 31 December 2017. Mortgage interest relief has been abolished for homes purchased since 1 January 2013.

In the Programme for a Partnership Government a commitment was given to retain mortgage interest relief (MIR) beyond the current end date on a tapered basis. As legislation currently provides for the relief to continue until the end of December 2017, it was not necessary to include legislation in Finance Act 2016 to provide for the tapered extension of the relief. However in my Budget speech last October I confirmed my intention to extend MIR beyond the current end date on a tapered basis to 2020. The purpose of the tapered extension proposal is to avoid a sudden significant increase in mortgage repayments for those losing the relief, but instead to withdraw the relief gradually, allowing the mortgage holder time to adjust to the change in mortgage repayments.

Final decisions in relation to the tapered extension of the relief will be considered in the context of my deliberations for Budget 2018, which is scheduled to be announced in October.

A review of policy considerations and potential costs relevant to the extension of MIR was contained in the Income Tax Reform Plan published by my Department in July last year and may be of interest to you. The plan is available at:

[http://www.finance.gov.ie/sites/default/files/Income%20Tax%20Reform%20Plan-FINAL\\_0.pdf](http://www.finance.gov.ie/sites/default/files/Income%20Tax%20Reform%20Plan-FINAL_0.pdf).

### VAT Yield

167. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of VAT collected in 2015 and 2016 by the Revenue Commissioners from a retail service (details supplied). [11867/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I am informed by Revenue that it is not possible to furnish figures on the amount of VAT from a specific retail service such as barber shops. Information provided to Revenue on a VAT return does not require the yield from individual products or activities to be identified.

### Corporation Tax Regime

168. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the European Commission's report on the economy, which highlighted the State's dependence on corporate tax revenue as a concern; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11877/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** In 2016, Exchequer corporation tax receipts of €7,351 million represented an important revenue source, accounting for just under 15.5 per cent of all Exchequer tax receipts. However, by way of context, it is important to point out that income tax and VAT accounted for around two-thirds of the total tax yield last year. Furthermore, it should be noted that corporation tax as share of all Exchequer tax revenues in 2016 is in-line with previous parameters. For example, throughout the first half of the last decade, corporation tax receipts varied in a range between 14-16.5 per cent as a share of all Exchequer tax revenues.

My Department and the Revenue Commissioners have highlighted on many occasions that corporation tax is highly concentrated in Ireland, with approximately 80 per cent of receipts

received from the multinational sector. In addition, in 2016, it is estimated that the top ten tax paying companies accounted for around 37 per cent of the total corporation tax receipts, down slightly from an estimated 41% in 2015. It is for these reasons that a potential concentration risk in corporation tax receipts, was acknowledged and highlighted in the Budget 2017 document.

In terms of the sustainability of the corporation tax receipts, following the ‘level shift’ in 2015, these receipts increased by a more modest 7 per cent in 2016. For 2017, the corporation tax forecast produced by my Department with assistance from the Revenue Commissioners is prudent. Overall growth of 5.0 per cent in corporation tax is projected for 2017, which is comfortably below the year-on-year growth recorded in 2016.

Finally, to sustain the hard won improvements in our public finances, we must guard against complacency and maintain our prudent management of the public finances in order to provide a sustainable budgetary platform upon which funding for the provision of public services can be provided for the years ahead. Accordingly, we are committed to complying with the fiscal rules, which are designed to ensure that increases in public expenditure are sustainably financed and decoupled from dependence on cyclical or windfall revenues.

### **Banking Sector Regulation**

169. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Finance if a UK citizen living in the UK and purchasing a property here is required to have an Irish bank account as part of any requirements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11884/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I am advised by the Central Bank that neither the Central Bank’s Consumer Protection Code 2012 nor the European Union (Consumer Mortgage Credit Agreements) Regulations 2016 include a requirement that a citizen from another EU Member State purchasing a property in Ireland must hold an Irish bank account. Nevertheless, it could also be noted that the Regulations provide that a lender may request a consumer borrower to open or maintain a payment or savings account where the only purpose of such an account is to accumulate capital to repay the credit, to service the credit, to pool resources to obtain the credit or to provide additional security for the creditor in the event of default (Regulation 13).

Subject to compliance with relevant legal and regulatory requirements, it is however important to note that it is a matter for Central Bank regulated lending institutions to set their own commercial and other mortgage lending policies.

### **Tax Rebates**

170. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 130 and 156 of 14 February 2017, if he will make provision for refunds to be issued to persons outside of the four-year rule in the event that the Court of Appeal upholds the High Court decision in respect of the deductibility of the NPPR against rental profits; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11924/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the applicable provision giving a right to repayment of tax is section 865 of the Taxes Consolidation Act (TCA) 1997, where a person has paid an amount of tax which is not due. However, as I advised in my response to PQ numbers 130 and 156 of 14 February 2017,

section 865(4) provides that that right is subject to a statutory limit of four years from the end of the chargeable period to which the claim relates. That statutory limit is binding on Revenue as well as on the taxpayer. Decisions of the Tax Appeals Commission in differing appellant circumstances published recently have confirmed that there is no discretion in the application of the four-year rule for claiming repayments.

Section 865 of the TCA was introduced in 2003 and provides a statutory general right to repayment of tax as well as payment of interest, subject to a four year time limit. It provides that no repayment may be made based on claims submitted more than four years after the end of the period to which they relate. Prior to that there was no statutory right to repayment, though a taxpayer could sue for repayment under common law. The Minister at the time indicated that, in introducing the new arrangements, he was satisfied that they achieved the necessary balance between establishing a fair and uniform system for taxpayers while providing necessary protection for the Exchequer.

At the same time, the general right of the Revenue Commissioners to raise assessments or make enquiries as respects taxpayer returns was also reduced to four years though in certain circumstances, for example where fraud or neglect is suspected, or in the context of the application of general anti-avoidance rules, Revenue's right to enquire or raise assessments is not time limited. Previously, the general time limit on the raising of assessments by Revenue had been ten years. The convergence of these various time limits on four years creates parity between a taxpayer's right to repayment and Revenue's powers to raise assessments.

I am further advised by Revenue that any repayment claims made in relation to the deduction of Non Principal Private Residence charges against rental profits that are received within the statutory time limits, as they apply to each year of assessment, will be retained and processed when the outcome of the Appeal case is known. Revenue also advises that they are developing a simple, easy to use process to facilitate taxpayers who may wish to lodge a claim in relation to this matter and that this will be available in the very near future.

### **Revenue Commissioners Investigations**

171. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Finance the final findings of the Revenue Commissioners' investigations into the incidences of petrol stretching that occurred across County Mayo in 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11955/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I am advised by Revenue that their investigations into the incidences of petrol stretching that occurred in Co. Mayo in 2014 revealed that there was no evidence of any excise offences in that county.

Despite extensive testing, evidence of the presence of prohibited stretching agents was found in only two samples, both from one location outside Co Mayo. These two prosecution cases were heard at Dundalk District Court on 3 March 2016. The defendant, who pleaded guilty, was fined €5,000 mitigated to €2,500.

Revenue will take swift and robust action and pursue prosecution against alleged offenders where possible. Revenue works closely with An Garda Síochána on such matters where appropriate.

### **Help-To-Buy Scheme**

172. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he has initiated the pro-

cess of carrying out an independent impact assessment on the help-to-buy scheme introduced as part of budget 2017; if this will involve assessing the impact of the scheme on the price of new homes, new housing supply and on the property market generally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12027/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** The Deputy will be aware that I agreed during the Committee Stage debate on the relevant section of Finance Bill 2016, to commission an independent impact assessment on the effects of the Help to Buy incentive on the supply of new homes, house prices, and the residential property market generally, for completion prior to Budget 2018.

My officials have drafted and issued a Request for Tender (RFT) for the production of an assessment of the Help to Buy tax incentive scheme by an independent body/expert. The request for tender stipulates that the study should assess whether the policy objectives on the supply of new homes are being met, what impact (if any) the scheme is having on new and second-hand house prices, and what impact the scheme is having generally on the residential property market. The RFT has been advertised on the Office of Government Procurement eTenders website at <http://www.etenders.gov.ie>.

The output of this assessment will be a written report to be completed and submitted to me by 31 August 2017.

### Tax Rebates

173. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Finance when a person (details supplied) can expect to receive payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12155/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I am advised by Revenue that processing of the refund claimed is pending until supporting documentation is submitted. This documentation was requested on two occasions in June 2013 and again in March 2015 but has not been received. Following a recent visit by the person concerned to his local Revenue District, Revenue has arranged to confirm the position again in writing to the person concerned.

### School Enrolments Data

174. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the post primary student population nationally for the school year 2013 to 2014. [11292/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The information requested by the deputy is available in the table.

Pupils enrolled in Post-Primary Education.

Academic Year	Total Post-Primary Pupils
2013/2014	367,178

### Apprenticeship Programmes

175. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the State has adopted the European Commission's European alliance for apprenticeships, which was a key element of the youth guarantee; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11946/17]



**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan)**  
**(Deputy John Halligan):** The European Alliance for Apprenticeships Alliance was launched in July 2013 with a joint declaration by the European Social Partners, the European Commission and the Presidency of the Council of the EU. This was followed by a Council Declaration by EU countries.

Ireland made a commitment through the alliance to review and expand its apprenticeship system. An independent group produced the Review of Apprenticeship Training in Ireland, which was published in 2014. The review contained a range of recommendations to expand participation of apprenticeship, including the establishment of an Apprenticeship Council. The Council was established in November 2014 and immediately began work on a call for proposals for the development of new enterprise-led apprenticeships. The call issued in January 2015 and over 80 proposals were received from industry stakeholders working with education and training providers. The Apprenticeship Council has been working with the proposers of these new programmes to develop them in 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.

An Action Plan to expand Apprenticeship and Traineeship in Ireland 2016-2020 was launched on the 26th January 2017 and sets 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. 50,000 people will be registered on apprenticeship and traineeship programmes over the lifetime of the Action Plan, a doubling of current activity. The Plan sets out how we will manage the pipeline of new apprenticeships already established through the first call for proposals and also commits to a new call for apprenticeship proposals in 2017.

The Insurance Practitioner Apprenticeship, the first of the new programmes developed through the Apprenticeship Council's first call for proposals, launched in September 2016 and an Industrial Engineer Apprenticeship commenced in November 2016. 13 further new apprenticeships are due to launch later this year in various sectors including medical devices, polymer processing and financial services.

### **Third Level Data**

176. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount allocated and also needed for demographics, which relates to higher education funding in each of the years 2010 to 2021, in view of the recent Cassells report in which is quantified the provision needed for demographics for higher education as including an average 1.7% increase per year – c. 3,000 students (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11990/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** In Budget 2017 I secured, for the first time in nine years, additional funding for the sector of €36.5m for 2017. This includes an allocation of €14m towards anticipated demographics increases in the sector. €160m additional funding overall over the next three years has been agreed.

Increasing the level of funding to the sector is a key concern for my Department, particularly in light of the expected increases in the number of students expected over the next decade or so - a point that is clearly set out in the Report of the Expert Group on the Future Funding for Higher Education. As the Deputy will be aware, the report is currently with the Oireachtas Committee for consideration and following its deliberations it is hoped to put in place an agreed approach as to how the sector should be funded in the long term.

In addition, in Budget 2017 the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform and I, announced a policy review with the aim of designing and implementing a sustainable and predictable multi-annual funding model for higher and further education and training involving increased Employer and Exchequer contributions from 2018. The review will be undertaken as part of the overall response to meeting the anticipated skills needs in the economy over the coming years, in line with the policy framework set out in the National Skills Strategy.

It will include an analysis of the business case for enhanced investment in the higher and further education and training sectors and of the most effective funding mechanisms to deliver outcomes in respect of our ambitions in this area. In this context it will identify key elements of the new funding model and of the expected impacts including those on employers. The review will include consultation with stakeholders which it is intended will commence in early March 2017. It is expected that the policy review will be published by the end of April 2017, and will complement the ongoing work by the Oireachtas Committee in relation to the Cassells report.

### **Child Protection Services Provision**

177. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department institutes procedures and training for the mandatory reporting of child protection concerns by home tutors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11188/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** My Department funds a number of Home Tuition Schemes which provide a compensatory educational service for children who are not attending school for a number of reasons. These schemes cater for children who are:

- Unable to attend school due to chronic illness;
- Children with special education needs seeking an educational placement;
- Early education intervention for children with autism;
- Children (non-medical or non-special education needs) who are temporarily without a school place and
- Children whose education may be disrupted due to pregnancy.

My Department does not recruit or employ individuals to provide home tuition. A parent/guardian must source and recruit a home tutor.

Information in relation to the Home Tuition schemes is set out in Department Circular letters published by my Department. The Circular letters contain detailed information for parents/guardians on the scheme and information on the qualification and vetting requirements of tutors. As a condition of funding for the various home tuition schemes, parents/guardians are advised that tutors must be registered with the Teaching Council.

Parents/guardians are also advised that they must satisfy themselves that all tutors have applied for and have been vetted by the Teaching Council of Ireland via the Teaching Council's online vetting process. Information on Child Protection is also provided in Circular letters.

As a condition of funding under the Home Tuition Schemes, tutors must also provide a completed child protection related Statutory Declaration and Form of Undertaking.

In relation to mandatory reporting, the Children First Act provides that all registered teach-

ers are mandated persons. According to the Act, the duty to report applies in respect of information that a mandated person “has received, acquired or becomes aware of in the course of his or her employment or profession as such a mandated person”. The part of the Act providing for mandatory reporting has not yet been commenced.

### **School Accommodation Provision**

178. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a request by a school (details supplied) for a link corridor for connectivity between various buildings in the school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11206/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I can confirm that the school in question recently submitted an application to my Department, for significant capital funding for additional school accommodation. The application will be considered and a decision will be conveyed to the school authority as soon as the assessment process has been completed.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

179. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the construction of a new school (details supplied) County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11208/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The project to which the Deputy refers has been devolved for delivery to the OPW.

My Department recently gave approval to the OPW to tender for enabling works to clear the site by re-routing overhead electrical cabling underground. The consents from the adjacent landowner to enable this are being acquired. In the meantime, the OPW is finalising the tender documents for the main project and my Department expects to be able to approve the issue of the tender documentation as soon as the enabling works are completed.

### **School Accommodation Provision**

180. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status and time-frame for an application in respect of a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11232/17]

181. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if approval will issue at an early date in respect of provision of additional accommodation at a school (details supplied); if his attention has been drawn to the fact that this accommodation is required for the commencement of the 2017-18 school year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11237/17]

204. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his Department’s plans regarding the application for additional accommodation submitted in early October 2016 by a school (details supplied) which is due an extra teacher for the 2017/2018 academic year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11392/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 180, 181 and 203 together.

I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has approved funding to the school in question to construct a mainstream classroom for the additional teacher appointment in September 2017. The school has been advised accordingly.

### **Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools Scheme**

182. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the additional resources which will be made available to a school (details supplied) as a result of being awarded DEIS status; the date those resources will be made available from; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11256/17]

183. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the additional resources which will be made available to a school (details supplied) as a result of being awarded DEIS status; the date those resources will be made available from; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11259/17]

184. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the additional resources which will be made available to a school (details supplied) as a result of being awarded DEIS status; the date those resources will be made available from; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11260/17]

185. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the additional resources which will be made available to a school (details supplied) as a result of being awarded DEIS status; the date those resources will be made available from; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11261/17]

186. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the additional resources which will be made available to a school (details supplied) as a result of being awarded DEIS status; the date those resources will be made available from; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11262/17]

187. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the additional resources which will be made available to a school (details supplied) as a result of being awarded DEIS status; the date those resources will be made available from; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11263/17]

188. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the additional resources which will be made available to a school (details supplied) as a result of being awarded DEIS status; the date those resources will be made available from; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11264/17]

189. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the additional resources which will be made available to a school (details supplied) as a result of being awarded DEIS status; the date those resources will be made available from; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11265/17]

190. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the additional resources which will be made available to a school (details supplied) as a result of being awarded DEIS status; the date those resources will be made available from; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11266/17]

191. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the additional resources which will be made available to a school (details supplied) as a result of being

awarded DEIS status; the date those resources will be made available from; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11267/17]

192. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the additional resources which will be made available to a school (details supplied) as a result of being awarded DEIS status; the date those resources will be made available from; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11268/17]

193. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the additional resources which will be made available to a school (details supplied) as a result of being awarded DEIS status; the date those resources will be made available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11270/17]

195. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the additional resources which will be made available to a school (details supplied) as a result of being awarded DEIS status; the date those resources will be made available from; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11322/17]

196. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the additional resources which will be made available to a school (details supplied) as a result of being awarded DEIS status; the date those resources will be made available from; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11323/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 182 to 193, inclusive, and 195 and 196 together.

I wish to advise the deputy that details of the supports which are available to schools participating in DEIS are outlined in DEIS Plan 2017 which is available on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools/>.

As outlined in the DEIS Plan, the range of supports under the School Support Programme will be extended on a phased basis to those schools, contained in the lists published on 13th February, with effect from September 2017 including those schools for whom details was supplied by the Deputy.

### **Famine Commemorations**

194. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will, noting prior approval by the Minister for Education in Northern Ireland, approve by means of a letter of recommendation that schools with gardens take part in the lumper schools project to facilitate learning of the history of the Famine. [11319/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** My Department is keen to support Famine commemoration where it is feasible and practicable to do so. My officials will seek further clarification regarding the project in question. This will include seeking copies of the literature being proposed for issue to schools, clarification regarding how the project would work during the period when schools are closed (i.e. holiday times), and ascertaining an understanding of how the project is being rolled out in Northern Ireland. When these details have been provided, they will be considered by my Department and a decision made.

*Questions Nos. 195 and 196 answered with Question No. 182.*

**Departmental Expenditure**

197. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the total capital funding provided to schools during 2016, by county, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11330/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The total capital funding allocated to Primary and Post-Primary Schools in 2016 amounted to €544m and is outlined in the following table on a county basis. The funding was allocated from the following sub-heads:

D3 Building, Equipment & Furnishing of Primary and Post Primary Schools

A10 Book Rental Scheme Capital

A14 School ICT - Capital

COUNTY	AMOUNT
Carlow	€2,981,787
Cavan	€16,560,436
Clare	€6,763,607
Cork	€64,890,844
Donegal	€8,082,778
Dublin	€167,140,596
Galway	€36,366,639
Kerry	€7,658,845
Kildare	€16,561,570
Kilkenny	€9,846,523
Laois	€13,987,954
Leitrim	€872,994
Limerick	€15,679,688
Longford	€4,266,804
Louth	€18,069,273
Mayo	€11,506,542
Meath	€42,644,393
Monaghan	€4,724,722
Offaly	€12,585,445
Roscommon	€3,329,665
Sligo	€1,702,525
Tipperay	€12,583,166
Waterford	€10,435,036
Westmeath	€4,048,844
Wexford	€31,279,860
Wicklow	€15,698,585
Unassigned	€4,050,282
TOTAL	€544,319,403

## Foireann Roinne

198. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** den Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna cad é an stádas maidir le bunú an Aonaid Gaeltachta tiomnaithe nua sa Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna chun maoirseacht a dhéanamh ar chur i bhfeidhm an Pholasaí don Oideachas Gaeltachta agus chun tacú leis sin; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [11368/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Tá Aonad um Oideachas Gaeltachta bunaithe anois san Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna chun maoirsiú a dhéanamh agus tacaíocht a thabhairt do chur i bhfeidhm an Pholasaí don Oideachas Gaeltachta 2017-2022. Tá ceathrar baill ar fhoirean an Aonaid. Tá foireann beag de chigirí aitheanta freisin chun tacú leis an Aonad agus obair a dhéanamh le scoileanna a roghnaíonn chun páirt a glacadh sa phróiseas aitheantais Scoileanna Gaeltachta ó Mheán Fómhair 2017. Tá an tAonad um Oideachas Gaeltachta ag díriú isteach ar thosaíochtaí a chuirfear i bhfeidhm in 2017 lena n-áirítear dréachtú na gCiorclán do bhunscoileanna agus d'iar-bhunscoileanna Gaeltachta don scoilbhliain 2017/2018.

### Clár Oiliúna Tosaigh Múinteoirí

199. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** den Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna an bhfuil tús curtha leis an bpróiseas tairisceana chun soláthraí an Chláir Oiliúna Tosaigh Múinteoirí a roghnú mar atá leagtha amach sa Pholasaí don Oideachas Gaeltachta agus, mura bhfuil, cathain a chuirfear tús leis an bpróiseas tairisceana; an bhféadfaidh an tAire cur síos a dhéanamh ar stádas reatha an phróisis tairisceana; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [11369/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Tá teagmháil déanta ag an Aonad um Oideachas Gaeltachta leis an Oifig um Sholáthar Rialtais maidir le tús a chur leis an bpróiseas tairisceana agus na doiciméid ábhartha don phróiseas tairisceana a dhréachtú maidir le gairm tograí.

### Clár Oiliúna Tosaigh Múinteoirí

200. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** den Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna cathain a bheidh daoine a ghlacfaidh páirt sa Chlár Oiliúna Tosaigh Múinteoirí cáilithe agus ag teagasc sna scoileanna Gaeltachta de réir an amscála atá i bhfeidhm faoi láthair; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [11370/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Cé go bhfuil céimithe do chlár oideachais tosaigh múinteoirí do mhúinteoirí bunscoile cáilithe an Ghaeilge a mhúineadh agus múineadh trí Ghaeilge, aithníonn an Polasaí don Oideachas Gaeltachta go bhfuil gá le clár oideachais tosaigh múinteoirí a sholáthar chun tuiscint níos doimhne a fhorbairt ar na dushláin a bhaineann le bheith ag múineadh i suíomh tumoideachais agus i scoileanna lán-Ghaeilge le daltaí ó réimse de chulrú teanga. Mar chuid de chur i bhfeidhm an Pholasaí don Oideachas Gaeltachta, tá súil agam go mbeidh Clár Oideachais Tosaigh Múinteoirí nua trí mheán na Gaeilge á sholáthar do mhúinteoirí bunscoile thar thréimhse ceithre bliana ó 2018/19. Tá na spriocdhátaí don chúrsa seo ag brath go mór ar thoradh rathúil an phróisis tairisceana, acmhainní a bheith ar fáil agus líon na ndaoine a roghnóidh an clár oideachais tosaigh múinteoirí seo. Má thosnaíonn an clár i 2018/19, táthar ag súil go mbeadh an chéad grúpa d'iarchéimithe bunscoile ón gClár Oideachais Tosaigh Múinteoirí seo cáilithe chun teagasc i mbunscoileanna trí mheán na Gaeilge ó Mheán Fómhair 2022.

Tá clár oideachais tosaigh múinteoirí do mhúinteoirí iar-bhunscoile á sholathar faoi láthair ag Ollscoil na hÉireann Gaillimh (OEG). Ach, aithníonn an Polasaí don Oideachas Gaeltachta go bhfuil gá le líon na múinteoirí iar-bhunscoile nua-cáilithe atá in ann múineadh in iar-bhunscoileanna lán-Ghaeilge/Gaelcholáistí a mhéadú. Táthar ag súil sa Pholasáí, go mbeidh soláthar na múinteoirí iar-bhunscoile atá in ann múineadh trí mheán na Gaeilge láidrithe trí chúrsa Oideachais Tosaigh Múinteoirí breise thar thréimhse dhá bhliain a chur ar fáil, go hidéalach ó 2018/19. Tá na spriocdhátaí don chúrsa seo ag brath go mór ar thoradh rathúil an phróisis tairsceana, acmhainní a bheith ar fáil agus líon na ndaoine a roghnóidh an clár oideachais tosaigh múinteoirí seo. Táthar ag súil go mbeadh an chéad ghrúpa d'iarchéimithe iar-bhunscoile ón gClár Oideachais Tosaigh Múinteoirí seo cáilithe chun teagasc in iar-bhunscoileanna trí mheán na Gaeilge ó Mheán Fómhair 2020.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

201. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a new build for a school (details supplied); if the works will be put out to tender in March 2017 as previously indicated; if the actual works will get under way over the summer of 2017; the arrangements for staff and pupils over the period of construction of the new school; the moneys that have been approved for the overall development; the way in which that sum breaks down; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11371/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The building project for the school to which the Deputy refers is at an advanced stage of architectural planning, Stage 2(b) – Detailed Design, which includes the applications for Planning Permission, Fire Cert and Disability Access Cert and the preparation of tender documents. All statutory approvals have been obtained for both the major building project and the temporary decant accommodation for which a temporary site has been secured.

The school and its design team are currently working towards completion of the stage 2(b) report for submission to my Department. Upon receipt and review of the completed stage 2(b) report my Department will revert to Board of Management with regard to the further progression of the project at that time.

As with any other project approaching tender stage the Deputy will understand that project cost information cannot be released at this time due to commercial sensitivities relating to the tender process.

### **Famine Commemorations**

202. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to introduce the lumper project as part of the green school project, as suggested by the Committee of the Commemoration of the Irish Famine Victims, similar to that which is being rolled out in schools in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11375/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** My Department is keen to support Famine commemoration where it is feasible and practicable to do so. My officials will seek further clarification regarding the project in question. This will include seeking copies of the literature being proposed for issue to schools, clarification regarding how the project would work during the period when schools are closed (i.e. holiday times), and ascertaining an understanding of how the project is being rolled out in Northern Ireland. When these details have been provided, they will be considered by my Department and a decision made.



Green-Schools is Ireland's leading environmental management and education programme for schools. Promoting long-term, whole-school action for the environment Green-Schools is a student led programme with involvement from the wider community. The programme is operated and co-ordinated by the Environmental Education Unit of An Taisce (FEE member for Ireland).

Green-Schools is operated in partnership with Local Authorities and is supported by the Department of Housing, Planning, Community & Local Government; Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment; Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport; The Department of Arts, Heritage Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs; Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade; Irish Aid, National Transport Authority; National Parks and Wildlife Service, Irish Water and the Wrigley Company Limited.

### **Special Educational Needs Service Provision**

203. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to outline the way in which a person (details supplied) in County Louth who has been privately assessed and diagnosed as meeting the DSM V diagnostic criteria of developmental co-ordination disorder dyspraxia can access the educational supports which the assessment recommends, that is, the maximum amount of resource hours available. [11385/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** On 18th January last, I announced that a new model for allocating Special Education Teaching Resources to mainstream primary and post primary schools will be introduced from September 2017.

The aim of this new model is to deliver better outcomes for children with special educational needs. Large amounts of research, analysis, consultation with service users and stakeholders, and piloting have gone in to the development of this model and all the evidence points to the fact that this new system will deliver better outcomes for children.

No school will lose supports as a result of the implementation of the new model. In addition, no school will receive an allocation, for the support of pupils with complex needs, less than the allocation they received to support such pupils during the 2016/17 school year. No allocation made for such pupils by the NCSE will be removed from schools as long as that pupil remains in the school.

I also announced that an additional 900 teaching posts will be provided to support the introduction of this new allocation model. The provision of an additional 900 teaching posts is a very significant investment in the provision of additional teaching support for pupils with special educational needs in our schools. This is additional to an increase of 41% in the number of resource teachers allocated to schools annually by the NCSE since 2011, when 5265 teachers were allocated, as opposed to provision for 7542 posts in the current school year.

The additional funding will provide additional supports to over 1000 schools who are identified as needing additional supports as a result of the new model. Supports for children with special educational needs is a huge priority for this Government. We currently spend over €1.6 billion, or one fifth of the total education budget, on supports for children with special educational needs.

This investment will ensure that all schools receive a sufficient allocation of special education needs resources to provide additional teaching support to all pupils who require such support.

Under the new allocation model, schools will be provided with a total allocation which includes a baseline allocation for the school and an allocation based on the school profile.

The provision of a profiled allocation will give a fairer allocation for each school which recognises that all schools need an allocation for special needs support, but which provides a graduated allocation which takes into account the actual level of need and pupils in each school.

Schools will be frontloaded with resources, based on each school's profile, to provide supports immediately to those pupils who need it without delay. This will reduce the administrative burden on schools as they will no longer have to complete an application process annually and apply for newly enrolled pupils, or pupils transferring in to the school, who require resource hours, including those children with developmental coordination disorder dyspraxia.

Children who need support can have that support provided immediately rather than having to wait for a diagnosis.

Schools will therefore no longer have to make applications for newly enrolled pupils, for whom resource teaching hours may have been provided under the old model, as school will now receive a single allocation for all of their special education teaching needs, based on their school size and profile.

Accordingly, the NCSE advised schools that there was no longer a requirement for schools to make applications for special education teaching supports for individual pupils with special education teaching needs, as resources would be provided for schools by the profiled allocation.

For the introduction of the new allocation model, from September 2017, the NCSE 'Low Incidence' allocations which had been made for each school during the preceding year 2016/17 school year, have been used to establish the complex needs component of the new allocation model for each school.

A model for the identification of pupils with complex needs in future is being devised by the NCSE, in consultation with the Health Service Executive and National Educational Psychological Services (NEPS). This model will take account of the qualification criteria for the selection of children for access to HSE Children Disability Network Teams.

For the next re profiling of the model, the pupils with newly identified Complex Needs will be included in this revised allocation.

It should be noted that this is a brand new model of allocation and is not comparable to the existing model. By using a broad range of attainment and socio-economic criteria it is expected that allocations made to school will be sufficient to meet both current and future needs as they arise until the next review.

Currently most schools' educational profiles remain relatively constant from year to year. Each year, some students with additional teaching needs will leave and others will enrol, broadly balancing the school profile.

The model will provide, from this year, additional resources to schools where it is expected that there will be additional needs. In protecting resources in schools where the profiles indicate that the levels of need are lower than are currently provided for some additional capacity is also provided for in those schools. Accordingly, all schools should have the capacity to meet the needs of additional children enrolling in the school in the following school year without the need for additional or new resources.

The model will, however, allow for some additional provision for very exceptional circum-

stances or where a school's enrolment levels increase very substantially prior to the next review of the model. The Inclusion Support Service, being established under the National Council for Special Education will support schools in managing their special education teaching allocations in the first instance. Only in very exceptional circumstances, where it can be demonstrated that the schools profile has changed very significantly since the allocation was made to the school, may an additional allocation of hours be made to the school.

A new Circular will be issued to schools shortly which will provide details of how the scheme will operate while details of the allocations for each school will also be provided to schools.

*Question No. 204 answered with Question No. 180.*

### Schools Building Projects Data

205. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to set out the number of schools in Dublin mid-west that have applied for the 2017 summer works scheme; when decisions on applications for the summer works scheme will be returned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11397/17]

207. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to set out in tabular form the details of schools that are included in the six-year construction programme 2016 to 2021 in Dublin mid-west; the status of each school's stage in the programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11399/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 205 and 207 together.

I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department does not hold information on the basis of the geographic area that he has outlined.

However, with regard to the Summer Works Scheme (SWS) 2016/2017, details of all successful school applicants, including schools in Dublin, in respect of Categories 1 and 2 for Gas and Electrical works, were announced last April and may be accessed on my Department's website [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie).

Assessment of valid projects in further categories of the SWS is now being undertaken by my Department, subject to the overall availability of funding, in accordance with the terms and conditions of the scheme as outlined in Circular Letter (0055/2015), and can also be accessed on my Department's website. It is my intention to publish a list of successful applicants in due course.

With regard to the Deputy's second question relating to the schools included in the 6 Year Construction Programme 2016-2021, I have set out in tabular form a list of schools in the Lucan, Dublin 22 and Dublin 24 areas including details of the current status of each project.

County	Roll Number	School Name and Address	School Type	Status Notes
Co Dublin	76454S	New Post Primary School - Lucan, Co Dublin	Post Primary	New school opening September 2017. Site to be acquired

Questions - Written Answers

County	Roll Number	School Name and Address	School Type	Status Notes
Co Dublin	19542R	St Thomas Junior NS, Lucan, Co. Dublin	Primary	Stage 2b -- Detailed Design Stage
Co Dublin	19676P	Scoil Aine NS, Lucan, Co. Dublin	Primary	Stage 2b-- Detailed Design Stage
Co Dublin	19865S	Archbishop Ryan Junior, Lucan, Co Dublin	Primary	Stage 2b-- Detailed Design Stage
Co Dublin	20187H	Archbishop Ryan Senior, Lucan, Co. Dublin	Primary	Stag2 2b -Detailed Design Stage.
Co Dublin	60263V	St. Joseph's College, Lucan, Co. Dublin	Post Primary	Stage 2b-- Detailed Design Stage.
Co Dublin	70080T	Lucan CC, Esker Drive, Lucan, Co Dublin	Post Primary	Stage 2A-- Developed Design Stage
Co Dublin	91301D	Holy Family Community School, Rathcoole, Co Dublin	Post Primary	Stage 2b--- Detailed Design Stage
Dublin 22	19590F	Scoil Mochua Clondalkin, Dublin 22	Special School	Schedule of accommodation being developed
Dublin 22	19855P	Gaelscoil na Camóige, Clondalkin, Dublin 22	Primary	Stage 2A - Developed Design Stage
Dublin 22	19991A	Gaelscoil Chluain Dolcáin, Clondalkin, Dublin 22	Primary	Stage 2A -Developed Design Stage.
Dublin 24	19462T	Naomh Maolruain (Jnr), Oldbawn, Tallaght, Dublin 24	Primary	Stage 2A - Developed Design stage
Dublin 24	19463V	Naomh Maolruain (Snr), Oldbawn, Tallaght, Dublin 24	Primary	Stage 2A - Developed Design stage

County	Roll Number	School Name and Address	School Type	Status Notes
Dublin 24	19702N	St Thomas Junior NS, Jobstown, Tallaght, Dublin 24	Primary	Architectural planning to be initiated
Dublin 24	76293U	Kingswood Post Primary, Tallaght, Dublin 24	Post Primary	At tender Stage
Dublin 24	To be determined	New Post Primary School - Firhouse/Oldbawn Dublin 24	Post Primary	New school opening September 2018. Site to be acquired

### School Enrolments Data

206. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to set out in tabular form the number of planned new primary schools in Dublin that are due to open in 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020 by area; the number of extra places these schools will add to the current number of school places; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11398/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The information requested by the Deputy regarding details of the new primary schools due to open in 2017 and 2018 in Dublin is set out in the following table.

As the Deputy may be aware, my Department uses a Geographical Information System (GIS) to identify where the pressure for school places across the country will arise. The GIS uses data from the Central Statistics Office, Ordnance Survey Ireland, the Department of Social Protection and my Department's own databases. With this information, my Department carries out nationwide demographic exercises at primary and post-primary level to determine where additional school accommodation is needed.

A range of areas nationwide are experiencing increased demographic pressure and will be kept under review by the Department. This review takes account of updated enrolment and child benefit data and also the impact of existing and planned capacity increases to existing schools in the area.

Once this review has been completed my Department will publish details of any new schools that may be established from 2019.

Year of Opening	School Planning area to be served	Indicative school start-up sizes (Junior Infant intake)	Maximum number of places for complete school (junior infants to sixth class)
2017	Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin	Up to 2 Junior Infant classes	432
2017	Pelletstown, Dublin 7 (Scribblestown/ Finglas West school planning area)	Up to 2 Junior Infant classes	432

Year of Opening	School Planning area to be served	Indicative school start-up sizes (Junior Infant intake)	Maximum number of places for complete school (junior infants to sixth class)
2018	Dublin South City Centre (Regional Solution for Dublin 2/4 and Dublin 6/ Clonskeagh school planning areas)	Up to 3 Junior Infant classes	648

*Question No. 207 answered with Question No. 205.*

### Special Educational Needs Service Provision

208. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if, in the case of the family of a person with special needs on the home tuition scheme that is offered a placement in a religious school or a school with an ethos contrary to their own and they reject the placement offer, his department will withdraw funding for home tuition. [11407/17]

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

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

A school placement can be a place in a special school which enrolls children with ASD; a place in a special class for children with ASD attached to a mainstream school; a place in an early intervention class for children with ASD or a place in a mainstream class – with additional resources allocated by the NCSE where necessary.

In the event that school placement is not available, my Department may provide a grant to fund Home Tuition provision for the child as a compensatory measure until such time as a placement is available. The Home Tuition Grant is an interim measure to provide for education until an educational placement is becomes available. When a school placement becomes available the Home Tuition Grant will be discontinued.

The religious ethos of a school is not considered when determining the availability of a school placement.

Article 44 of the Constitution and Section 30 of the Education Act 1998, provides that parents have a right to have their children opt out of religion classes if they so wish. The manner in which any school ensures that the right to opt out of religion classes is upheld is a matter for the school concerned.

Each individual school must determine the particular arrangements which are most appropriate in its individual circumstances having regard to local issues such as available space, supervision requirements and how the school concerned organises classes etc.

The Education (Admission to Schools) Bill 2016, includes a specific requirement that school enrolment policies must include details of the school's arrangements for any students who do not wish to attend religious instruction. This is an important measure which will help ensure transparency from the outset as to how a school will uphold the rights of parents in this regard.

The operation of all other recognised schools, is subject to ongoing inspection and evaluation. My Department's school inspectorate inspects the schools on an ongoing basis and this has included a Whole School Evaluation in certain cases. The findings of such Whole School Evaluations are published on my Department's website. In addition, the schools all engage in school self-evaluation, the findings of which are published on school websites. In addition, the schools all engage in school self-evaluation, the findings of which are published on school websites.

### **Bullying in Schools**

209. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to outline the action a person (details supplied) can take in a situation. [11412/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Deputy may be aware that under the Education Welfare Act 2000 all primary and post primary schools are required to have an anti-bullying policy. The attention of the parents/guardians of the pupil concerned in this question should be drawn to the terms of this policy in the particular school and the process for pursuing investigation of any bullying allegations enshrined therein.

In relation to psycho-educational assessment 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), full details of which are in the NEPS section of my Department's website. Under this scheme schools can have an assessment carried out by a member of the panel of private psychologists approved by NEPS, and NEPS will pay the psychologist the fees for this assessment directly. This process is moderated through the school.

I have made enquiries in the matter and can confirm that NEPS has not been contacted by the school regarding the child in question. I would advise therefore that the parents/guardians of the child should raise the matter, in the first instance, with the principal of the school concerned with a view to his / her discussing the matter with the assigned NEPS psychologist.

The Deputy may be aware that an extended absence from school is a matter for the local Educational Welfare Service. The parents/guardians of the child in this case should make contact with Tusla to seek advice on how the child can best pursue or recommence their Second Level education.

My Department's NEPS service is available to assist as appropriate, if requested by either the School Principal or the Educational Welfare Service.

### **Departmental Expenditure**

210. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to set out the amount the Department has spent on public relations consultants and all matters relating to public relations costs in 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11427/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The information sought by the Deputy in respect of the year 2016 is set out in the following table.

Name of Firm	Purpose	Cost in 2016
Career Zoo	Cost of stand space at Career Zoo, IFSC	€7,257.00
Carr Communications	Communication/Interview Skills Training	€430.50
Carr Communications	Communication/Interview Skills Training	€676.50
Carr Communications	Communication Workshop	€799.50
Public Relations Institute Of Ireland	Public Relations Institute of Ireland Certificate for Civil Service Press Officers	€1,890.00
Zoo Digital D2	ToolTip Skills to Work website pop-up installation	€2,435.40
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>€13,488.90</b>

### Education and Training Boards

211. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will put in place appropriate courses for the local community of north Kilkenny to assist persons to prepare for the employment potential at a nursing home and retail outlets currently under construction at Urlingford, County Kilkenny; if a resource centre (details supplied) will be approved for such courses by SOLAS; if the funding will be provided to SOLAS to provide the courses locally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11439/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Through the annual service planning process that takes place each year between SOLAS and each Education and Training Board (ETB), ETBs are primarily responsible for the identification and planning of provision to meet the identified needs of learners, enterprise and communities within their regions.

Since 2014, SOLAS and the ETBs work together to produce annual service plans that are informed by national policies and strategies and are grounded in an analysis of local skills demand and labour supply. In the context of this process, funding of the relevant resource centre is primarily a matter for Kilkenny Carlow ETB, currently completing its 2017 Funding Allocation Request to SOLAS. I have asked the Education and Training Board to follow up on this matter directly with the Deputy.

### School Accommodation Provision

212. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to set out the number of portacabins in use in schools here; the length of time each portacabin is in place; the total cost involved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11452/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I wish to advise the Deputy that there are in the region of 950 prefabricated units rented at Primary and Post Primary schools across the country, with some schools having multiple units. In the region of 458 units were installed between 2010 and 2016 with 440 units installed between 2003 and 2009.



The cost of rentals prior to 2009 is not readily available, however, information requested by the Deputy in relation to the cost of rented accommodation from 2009 is contained in the following table.

I also wish to advise the Deputy that prior to 2013, separate information on the rental of pre-fabs, 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 prefabricated accommodation only.

In this regard it is my intention over the lifetime of my Department's Capital Programme, to replace all purchased temporary accommodation with permanent accommodation, where the need is established. To enable this development, my Department will be carrying out an assessment of the number of prefabs being used in schools to deliver the curriculum. This will also determine whether or not individual prefabs need to be replaced in the context of the long-term accommodation needs of each individual school. When completed, this assessment will quantify the number of prefabs to be replaced.

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

### Student Accommodation

213. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to outline his plans to combat the accommodation crisis for students attending UCD in 2017-18; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11483/17]

215. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to outline the timeframe for the increase in student accommodation for students attending UCD; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11485/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 213 and 215.

Alleviating the housing crisis is a cross-Government priority. Accordingly, my colleague Mr. Simon Coveney T.D., Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, on 19 July 2016 published "Rebuilding Ireland – an Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness", following Government approval of this comprehensive and ambitious Plan. The full plan can be accessed at: [http://rebuildingireland.ie/Rebuilding%20Ireland\\_Action%20Plan.pdf](http://rebuildingireland.ie/Rebuilding%20Ireland_Action%20Plan.pdf).

My Department worked closely with the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government in developing this Plan, with a specific focus on student accommodation, and I very much welcome the commitments contained in the plan and I look forward to working with colleagues on a cross-Departmental basis to ensure that the commitments contained in the Plan are implemented as soon as practicable.

As outlined in the Action Plan for Education 2017 which was published on 6 February 2017 and in the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan, my officials have been working closely with officials from the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government and with other relevant stakeholders with a view to implementing all of the relevant actions in relation to student accommodation that were detailed in Rebuilding Ireland. This includes the development of a national student accommodation strategy which is due for completion in Q2 2017 and which will set out a broad framework for delivery of an enhanced level of student accommodation.

In addition to this an inter-departmental steering group on student accommodation has been established which is chaired by the Deputy Secretary General of my Department. This steering group is comprised of officials from my Department in addition to representatives from the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, the Department of Finance, the Higher Education Authority, the Irish Universities Association, the Technological Higher Education Association, the Union of Students in Ireland, the University of Limerick, Trinity College Dublin and the National Treasury Management Agency.

Turning specifically to UCD, I welcomed the launch of a new Student Accommodation Block in UCD in September 2016 which provided an additional 350 new student accommodation bed spaces on campus bringing total student accommodation now available on campus to 3,164.

The university also plans to develop this area of the campus as a vibrant residential sector and hopes to double resident numbers to just over 6,000 in the coming years.

UCD also provides a dedicated off-campus support office to its students to give advice and actively identify and register private individuals and companies who are interested in renting out rooms, apartments, and houses to UCD students. Students can also seek advice from their Students Union, and other state organisations such as the PRTB and Threshold.

In addition to this, €30,000 was provided to USI by the HEA to fund their 2016 #Homes-ForStudy campaign. A Final Report on the 2016 campaign published by USI showed that at least 2,258 students accessed “DIGS” accommodation directly as a result of the campaign spearheaded by USI. This is a significant win – win situation, as students get accommodation and homeowners can now earn up to €14,000 a year tax - free providing this service. The Government provided for an increase in the ceiling for exemption from income tax under the Rent-a-Room scheme in Budget 2017. The ceiling has increased from €12,000 to €14,000 from 2017.

Funding for a full-time Student Housing Officer for the 16/17 academic year has also been provided by the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government to the Union of Students in Ireland.

### Third Level Admissions Data

214. **Deputy Fiona O’Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to set out the number of students attending UCD from outside County Dublin for the each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11484/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The information requested by the Deputy is outlined in the following table. The total student numbers from outside Dublin include international students.

Year	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Domicile outside Dublin	12,935	13,393	14,346	14,773	15,396

*Question No. 215 answered with Question No. 213.*

## School Staff

216. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to set out the details of the staffing levels at a school (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11489/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The criteria used for the allocation of teachers to primary schools is published annually on the website of the Department of Education and Skills. The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30 September.

Following a review of the staffing allocation for Small Primary Schools, Budget 2017 announced two adjustments in relation to one teacher schools. Where the school is the sole primary school on an island the school will be able to appoint a second teacher.

In relation to single teacher schools generally with an enrolment of 15 or more pupils, the school can apply to the staffing appeals board for a second post where the single teacher has pupils across 6 or more class groups. This new measure is in recognition of the challenges faced by the teacher having to teach 6 class groups or more.

These arrangements will be effective from September 2017 and will be set out in the staffing schedule circular for the 2017/18 school year which will be available on my Department's website in the coming weeks.

The school referred to by the Deputy had an enrolment of 15 on 30th September 2015. This allows for a mainstream staffing of 1 teacher (Principal) for the current school year.

## Schools Building Projects

217. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to outline the level of construction inflation that has been experienced by his Department in each of the past six years and to date in 2017 in respect of construction projects and other capital projects; the way in which he monitors construction inflation and the mechanisms he employs to establish this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11534/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** According to the Society of Chartered Surveyors Ireland tender index, tender levels peaked in the first half of 2007, dropped by about 33% to their lowest level in 2010 and 2011 and had recovered to a level approximately 17% below the peak by the first half of 2016, the most recent index published.

The Department publishes a Basic Building Cost limit for primary and post primary schools which provides a guideline to Design Teams as to the level of specification and design that is appropriate for school buildings. The Basic Building Cost along with site specific Abnormal Costs, External Works costs and Fitted Furniture costs are used to calculate the predicted construction cost of a project ahead of a tender exercise.

The Department's Basic Building Cost limit was first introduced in 1975 (€136/m<sup>2</sup>). It reached a peak of €1,230/m<sup>2</sup> in June 2006. The cost limit was reduced for the first time ever in November 2009 to €990/m<sup>2</sup> (a 19.5% reduction) and again in January 2011 to €930/m<sup>2</sup> (a further 6% reduction). The Basic Building Cost limit has undergone three increases since then – April 2014 (€1,050/m<sup>2</sup>, +12.9%), June 2015 (€1,150/m<sup>2</sup>, +9.5%) and February 2016 (€1,210/m<sup>2</sup>, +5.2%) and currently stands at €1,210/m<sup>2</sup>. It should be noted that a significant proportion

of the recent increases relate to improvements in building standards and not just construction inflation.

The Basic Building Cost limit is regularly adjusted to take account of construction inflation and changes in building standards. The Department continuously monitors tender details across all major school building projects, as well as trends in labour and materials costs, and periodically adjusts its Basic Building Cost limit accordingly. Figures in relation to each of the past 6 years are not readily available. However, the overall level of increase in the Basic Building Cost Limit since January 2011 was +30%.

### **Teachers' Remuneration**

218. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to set out the number of incremental credit years that can be carried forward by a person who is employed as a Youthreach resource person and who then transfers to a position within the post-primary sector as a subject teacher, principal or deputy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11571/17]

219. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a person with a recognised teaching qualification who is employed as a Youthreach resource person can receive incremental credit as a teacher for work carried out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11572/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 218 and 219 together.

The criteria for the award of Incremental Credit to recognised post-primary teachers under Circulars 29/2007 and 29/2010 was agreed in the first instance under the auspices of the Teachers Conciliation Council. This Council is comprised of representatives of the teacher unions, school management bodies, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, and the Department of Education & Skills chaired by an official of the Workplace Relations Commission.

This scheme applies only to qualified registered teachers employed as teachers, in receipt of incremental salary on the teachers' incremental salary scale in a recognised second-level school or an E.T.B. Centre.

Under the terms of Circular 29/2007, at 6(c) Relevant Non-Teaching Experience, teachers who hold non-teaching service which is relevant to the teaching post that they are first appointed to may apply for the award of Incremental Credit for this service. Details of this scheme are available on my Department's website [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie).

### **Special Educational Needs Expenditure**

220. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to set out the funding available for special units in terms of sensory needs and occupational therapist needs, including soft padding and soft toys for special needs children. [11584/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Grant aid is made available to schools under my Department's Loose Furniture & Equipment Scheme to fund the purchase of special items of furniture for special needs pupils. This scheme applies to all children who are diagnosed as having special needs. Items funded include classroom seating, desks and changing/toileting items for both primary and post primary schools. Any items that would be regarded as sensory or therapeutic based are a matter for the HSE.

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

### **Special Educational Needs Staff**

221. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to outline the specific training teachers in special needs units are required to have to teach. [11585/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** It has been the policy of my Department for some time that only qualified and registered teachers should be employed by schools. This is set out in Circular Letters 31/2011 and 0025/2013.

Current recruitment procedures direct schools to ensure that teachers proposed for appointment to publicly paid posts must be registered with the Teaching Council and have qualifications appropriate to the sector and suitable to the post, including posts in Special Classes, for which they are proposed.

It is a matter for school authorities to employ teachers in accordance with the Department's policy in this regard and the deployment of teaching staff in the school is in the first instance a matter for the school management authorities.

Teachers can access additional continuous professional development through a number of means including the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) which offers professional learning opportunities to teachers and school leaders in a range of pedagogical, curricular and educational areas.

In addition, the Special Educational Support Service (SESS) aims to enhance the quality of learning and teaching in relation to special educational provision. The service co-ordinates, develops and delivers a range of professional development initiatives and support structures for school personnel working with students with special educational needs in mainstream primary and post-primary schools, special schools and special classes.

### **Intellectual Property Management**

222. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to outline the national policy that exists to guide institutes of technology and universities on intellectual property policy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11586/17]

223. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if it is mandatory for universities and institutes of technology to have intellectual property guidelines and policy in place; if policy varies from institution to institution; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11587/17]

224. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if national policy guidelines regarding the ownership of intellectual property or the commercialisation of intellectual property in institutes of technology exist; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11588/17]

225. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to outline the policy guidelines that exist in respect of spin-out companies from third and fourth level institutions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11589/17]

226. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to any breaches in intellectual property policy at institutes of technology or universities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11590/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 222 to 226, inclusive, together.

The Deputy may be aware that the first Technology Transfer Strengthening Initiative programme (TTSI1) was a €30 million, six year programme, introduced by Enterprise Ireland in 2007. Introduction of the TTSI programme enabled the start of a process of development of technology transfer offices (TTOs) with appropriate skills, and access to funding for the management of intellectual property (IP), to facilitate meaningful interactions with business. Prior to the programme there was little or no such capability available within Ireland's HEIs.

The period of the Technology Transfer Strengthening Initiative (TTSI1) programme maps a period of evolution in the technology transfer and commercialisation system in Ireland. From a low baseline of technology transfer capacity from the Higher Education Institute (HEI) sector within the State, through the creation and management of the Initiative, Enterprise Ireland has been able to develop infrastructure within the HEI sector to support the engagement of businesses with the research base with a view to supporting those businesses that want to enhance their competitiveness.

A review of the technology transfer system shows that in 2005, prior to the introduction of TTSI1, HEIs across the State transferred technology and intellectual property to business by way of only 12 licences, option or assignment agreements (LOAs) with business and spun out five new companies. By the end of the funding period, in 2012, the average number of LOAs executed each year was up over seven-fold to 85 and the number of spin-out companies created each year was averaging 22, an increase of nearly 450%.

Further information on the first TTSI1 is available in the review of the programme:

[http://www.knowledgetransferireland.com/About\\_KTI/Reports-Publications/A-review-of-the-performance-of-the-Irish-technology-transfer-system-2007-2012.pdf](http://www.knowledgetransferireland.com/About_KTI/Reports-Publications/A-review-of-the-performance-of-the-Irish-technology-transfer-system-2007-2012.pdf).

TTSI continues and is now in its third phase which commenced this year and runs to 2021.

The national IP Protocol 2012 "Putting public research to work in Ireland" was developed by a task group comprised of leaders from industry, the investment community and TTOs. The new protocol built on earlier guidelines and codes of practice, using the lessons learned from their use. In particular the protocol replaced three earlier documents:

- National Code of Practice for Managing Intellectual Property from Publicly Funded Research (Irish Council for Science, Technology and Innovation, January 2004)

- National Code of Practice for Managing and Commercialising Intellectual Property from Public-Private Collaborative Research (Advisory Council for Science, Technology and Innovation, November 2005).

- Funding Agency Requirements & Guidelines For Managing Research-Generated Intellectual Property (February 2006).

In 2013 the Government established a centralised function with responsibility for technology transfer in the State which led to the creation of Knowledge Transfer Ireland, launched in May 2014. Knowledge Transfer Ireland (KTI) now has responsibility for setting direction for research performing organisations (RPOs) best practice to enable compliance with IP policy and procedures.

The publication of the national IP protocol in 2012, and its subsequent refresh in 2016, sought to establish policy and guidelines on the interactions between industry and Ireland's Higher Education Institutes, including the treatment of intellectual property. It provides guidelines and sets expectations for the RPOs and for industry.

The national IP Protocol 2016 comprises two volumes:

(i) the National IP Protocol policy document which sets out the framework underpinning research collaboration and access to intellectual property from state-funded research

(ii) the IP Protocol Resource Guide which provides an overview of the national IP management guidelines and links to resources and template documents, available for industry and RPOs. It also provides an overview of the knowledge transfer structures in Ireland and the kinds of agreements that can be used to formalise research-industry engagements.

The protocol explains the National IP Management Requirements and requires that RPOs have in place and operate internal IP management systems that meet or exceed these. The protocol also includes "good practice" that will normally be followed. However, industry and RPOs are free to adopt a different approach where this is in the best interests of successful relationships and research commercialisation. Practices are also highlighted that may be followed if industry / RPOs choose to do so.

The IP Protocol is a key reference source for Ireland's HEIs and research funders. HEIs have developed IP policies that are in line with national guidelines and good practice. These will include policy on spin-out formation. The detail of policies will differ amongst institutions.

Responsibility to ensure implementation of IP policies is a matter for the relevant higher education institution. I have not been informed of occasions where breaches of policy have occurred.

The Protocol and related information can be accessed on the KTI website at [http://www.knowledgetransferireland.com/About\\_KTI/Knowledge-Transfer-Framework/](http://www.knowledgetransferireland.com/About_KTI/Knowledge-Transfer-Framework/).

### **Educational Disadvantage**

227. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to set out the exact scores on the Pobal HP index of deprivation that have excluded a school (details supplied) from inclusion in the 2017 DEIS programme; the relative index score that merits inclusion in DEIS; the way in which the POD and CSO small area of population statistics interact with the Pobal HP index of deprivation in determining the score that a school requires to be included in DEIS; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11592/17]

228. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to set out the exact scores on the Pobal HP index of deprivation that have excluded a school (details supplied) from inclusion in the 2017 DEIS programme; the relative index score that merits inclusion in DEIS; the way in which the POD and CSO small area of population statistics interact with the Pobal HP index of deprivation in determining the score that a school requires to be included in DEIS; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11593/17]

229. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to set out the exact scores on the Pobal HP index of deprivation that have excluded a school (details supplied) from inclusion in the 2017 DEIS programme; the relative index score that merits inclusion in DEIS; the way in which the POD and CSO small area of population statistics interact with the Pobal HP index of deprivation in determining the score that a school requires to be included in DEIS; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11594/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 227 to 229, inclusive, together.

A significant benefit of the new identification process for DEIS Plan 2017 lies in its capacity as a uniform system adopting common criteria and a consistent application across all primary and post-primary schools.

The key data sources are the DES Primary Online Database (POD) and Post-Primary Online (PPOD) Databases, and CSO data from the National Census of Population as represented in the Pobal HP Index for Small Areas which is a method of measuring the relative affluence or disadvantage of a particular geographical area. Variables used in the compilation of the HP Index include those related to demographic growth, dependency ratios, education levels, single parent rate, overcrowding, social class, occupation and unemployment rates. This data is combined with pupil data, anonymised and aggregated to small area, to provide information on the relative level of concentrated disadvantage present in the pupil cohort of individual schools. This data is applied uniformly across all schools in the country. The Pobal HP Index provides only one element of the data required for the assessment of schools, accordingly the HP score for the small area in which a school is located is not relevant to the new identification process.

In its initial application, the new identification model has identified that there are schools in disadvantaged areas, not previously included in DEIS, whose level of disadvantage is significantly higher than many schools already in the programme. Accordingly, we are moving as a first step to include these schools within the DEIS School Support Programme.

Schools included in the list published by my Department on 13th February are those whose level of concentrated disadvantage has been identified as being at the same level as the current DEIS category for schools serving the highest concentrations of disadvantage.

Schools which have not been included at this stage, including the schools referred to by the deputy, are those which have not been identified as having the highest levels of concentrated disadvantage amongst their pupil cohort, under the new model, which is fair and objective.

The implementation of a new objective, central data-based model of identifying levels of disadvantage within school populations will be followed by a further programme of work to ensure that levels of resource more accurately follow the levels of need identified by the model.

Once this work has been completed, consideration will be given to extending DEIS supports to a further group of schools as resources permit.

Further information is available in the DEIS Review report which can be found on my Department's website at <http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools-/>.

### **Summer Works Scheme Applications**

230. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will award a grant under the summer works scheme to a school (details supplied); and if he will make a



statement on the matter. [11595/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department is in receipt of a Category 3 (Mechanical Works) application under the Summer Works Scheme (2016-2017) from the school to which he refers.

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

### **Special Educational Needs Service Provision**

231. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department and the NCSE will accept a private diagnosis to enable children join a waiting list for a place in a special school with regard to children that are on public waiting lists for an assessment of need; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11674/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** My Department provides for a range of placement options and 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.

Children with special educational needs may be enrolled in a mainstream school and attend all mainstream classes and receive additional teaching support through the learning support and/or resource teacher.

Some students with more complex needs may be supported in a special class in a mainstream school where they have the option, where appropriate, of full or part time inclusion and interaction with other children.

Special schools support students with more severe and/or complex special educational needs in cases where a full time mainstream placement would not be in the student's best interest. These students may find the demands of mainstream schools very difficult, or may have complex learning or other difficulties which require smaller class sizes. In order to be placed in a special school, a child must have a formal assessment of disability/professional report stating that s/he has a special educational need, which requires placement in a special school setting. The type of professional assessment will depend on the category of special educational need of the child involved.

The enrolment of a child to a school, however, is a matter in the first instance for the parents of the child and the Board of Management of a school. My Department has no role in relation to processing applications for enrolment to schools. Where a parent seeks to enrol their child in a school and that school refuses to enrol a pupil, the school is obliged to inform parents of their right under Section 29 of the Education Act 1998 to appeal that decision to the Secretary General of my Department. Only where an appeal under Section 29 is upheld, may the Secretary General of my Department direct a school to enrol a pupil.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE), through its network of local Spe-

cial Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), is responsible for processing applications from schools for special educational needs supports. The NCSE operates within my Department's criteria in allocating such support.

SENOs are also a valuable source of support to parents who are actively sourcing a placement for their children. SENO contact details are available on [www.ncse.ie](http://www.ncse.ie). The NCSE has published a Guide for Parents and Guardians of Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs on Choosing a School, which is also available on their website.

The NCSE works in collaboration with the Educational Welfare Services of the Child and Family Agency which is the statutory agency that can assist parents who are experiencing difficulty in securing a school place for their child or can offer assistance where a child is out of school. The EWS may be able to offer assistance and advice on securing a school placement within a pupil's area. The contact details for the EWS is Educational Welfare Services, Child and Family Agency, Floors 2-5, Brunel Building, Heuston South Quarter, Dublin 8. Telephone 01 7718500 email: [ewsinfo@tusla.ie](mailto:ewsinfo@tusla.ie).

### **School Transport Applications**

232. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to outline the position regarding school transport for a person (detail supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11733/17]

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

Currently over 115,000 children, including almost 12,000 children with special educational needs, are being transported in over 4,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually.

Bus Éireann, which operates the School Transport Scheme, has advised that the family in question applied for school transport on the 16th January 2017 and were incorrectly categorized as ineligible for school transport.

Bus Éireann will be in with contact the family to discuss school transport arrangements.

### **Summer Works Scheme Applications**

233. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will take into account recent concerns that have been raised in relation to a school (details supplied) in County Donegal; if this will be considered in the context of its application to the summer works scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11777/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department is in receipt of a Category 6 (Roof Works) application under the Summer Works Scheme (2016-2017) from the school to which he refers.

Nearly 50% of schools have applied for inclusion under the scheme which reflects a very high demand. Details of successful school applicants in respect of Categories 1 and 2 were announced in April last and are published on my Department's website [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie). Assessment of valid projects in further categories is now being undertaken by my Department,

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

### **Autism Support Services**

234. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of ASD units in County Dublin. [11795/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** 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 cannot be accommodated in mainstream education, they may be enrolled in special classes or special schools where more intensive and supportive interventions are provided. Special classes are for students who have a recommendation for a special class placement in their professional reports.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), for allocating resource teachers and special needs assistants to schools to support students with Special Educational Needs, including Autism. It is also the role of the NCSE to make appropriate arrangements to establish special classes in schools in communities where the need for such classes has been identified.

Special classes within mainstream schools are intended for children who, by virtue of their level of Special Educational Needs, cannot reasonably be educated in a mainstream class setting, but who can still attend their local school in a special class with a lower pupil–teacher ratio of 6:1 at primary level and 6:1.5 at post primary level, and also have Special Needs Assistant support normally amounting to 2 Ss for a class of 6 children.

Progress in developing this network has been significant and in addition to the special school placements there are currently 1,153 special classes throughout the country at primary and post primary level of which 889 are for children with Autism.

The NCSE, in consultation with the relevant education partners, must take into account the present and future potential need, location and sustainability in looking to establish special classes in certain areas.

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

With regard to Co. Dublin (city and county), the NCSE has advised that there 119 ASD special classes attached to mainstream primary schools of which 19 are ASD Early Intervention classes and there are 30 ASD classes attached to mainstream post primary schools. Details of all special classes for children with special educational needs, including those in County Dublin, are available on [www.ncse.ie](http://www.ncse.ie).

## **Higher Education Authority Staff**

235. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when he will fill the eight vacancies that currently exist on the Higher Education Authority; and if he will make these appointments a priority in view of the fact that the current membership of the HEA does not meet the minimum statutory requirement of seven academic members as set out in section 2 of the Schedule to the Higher Education Act 1971. [11865/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The appointment process to fill the current vacancies on the Board of the Higher Education Authority (HEA) is underway. My Department will be in direct contact with the HEA when the process is completed.

## **Scoileanna Gaeltachta**

236. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna cén toradh a bhí ar an bplé a rinneadh ag an bhFochoiste Rialtais ar an nGaeilge a bhí ar siúl ar an 27 Feabhra maidir le pacáiste cúnaimh ar leith a chur ar fáil do na meánscoileanna ar na hoileáin amach ón gcósta; an bhfuil sé i gceist ag an Aire pacáiste dá leithéid a chur ar fáil; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [11908/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Is féidir liom a chur in iúl don Teachta Dála go bhfuil an sceideal foirne d'iar-bhunscoileanna eisithe ón Roinn le déanaí. Níl sé ceart ná cóir an gnó a pléadh ag Coiste Caibinéid na hEalaíona, na Gaeilge, na Gaeltachta, agus na nOileán a scileadh, de bharr prionsabail rúndachta an Choiste Caibinéid. Ina ainneoin sin, níl aon chinneadh eile déanta agam faoi mháoiniú na n-iar-bhunscoileanna ar na hoileáin.

## **English Language Training Organisations**

237. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there is a secure measure for advanced payments in relation to the operation of English language schools and the difficulties associated with these in the past; the number of schools operating at present; the accreditation system in place to ensure financial protection for students and ensure quality standards; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11925/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** In line with the Government decision of 19 May 2015 a series of reforms to the student immigration system for international education are being implemented. These reforms include the restriction of the list of education programmes considered to justify the granting of permission to students to live and work in Ireland (known as the Interim List of Eligible Programmes – the ILEP).

As part of this new process all providers of English language training wishing to recruit non-EEA students are required to apply to the Department of Justice and Equality for inclusion on the ILEP.

All English language providers seeking inclusion on the ILEP are required to have mandatory protection for enrolled learner policies in place. Providers are also required to operate a separate account facility to safeguard student advance payments.

A listing on the ILEP also requires providers to comply with certain new requirements including declaration of ownership, teacher qualifications, attendance rates, compulsory exam registration policies and maximum class size.

The ILEP was introduced in January 2016 and is managed by the Department of Justice and Equality in association with my Department. Details on the number of providers currently listed on the ILEP are available on the website of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of the Department of Justice and Equality at the following link: <http://www.inis.gov.ie/en/INIS/Pages/Interim%20List%20of%20Eligible%20Programmes%20-%20ILEP>. The next update to the ILEP is scheduled to take place on 16 March 2017.

The ILEP process is an interim measure until the introduction of the International Education Mark (IEM) for the provision of education to international learners, which will provide a full quality framework in the future. The measures necessary to facilitate the introduction of the IEM are being progressed by my Department.

### **Autism Support Services**

238. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of children in County Kildare availing of autism spectrum specific services, by the type of service, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11934/17]

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

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.

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

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

The range of supports and services for schools which have enrolled pupils with special educational needs 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.

With regard to Kildare there are 942 students with ASD attending schools in the County. Of these, 520 students attend mainstream schools and are accessing in-school supports including

Resource teaching and S support. 322 students are attending 59 ASD special classes, including 6 early intervention classes, 41 primary ASD classes and 12 post primary ASD classes. A further 100 students with ASD are placed in 4 special schools. The number of ASD classes has increased in the area by 24% since the 2013/14 school year.

The NCSE also provides information for Parents of Children with Special Education Needs through its website ([www.ncse.ie](http://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.

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.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

239. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the provision of a school building project (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11953/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The project to which the Deputy refers was authorised to proceed to tender in October 2016. This project is the second phase of accommodation for the school in question and will cater for an additional 650 pupils.

The Design Team has rerun the pre-qualification of suitable contractors and is currently finalising a shortlist of up to ten contractors who will be requested to tender for the project.

Subject to no issues arising it is anticipated that construction will commence in the summer of 2017 and the project is scheduled to take approximately 18 months to complete.

### **School Staff**

240. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the operations of a company (details supplied) in schools are kept under review, with a view to ensuring that the work carried out by the company is up to the appropriate standards and to ensuring that expenditure by the State on this company's services represents value for money.

[11963/17]

241. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a tender process was run before giving the contract for occupational health services for teachers and SNAs to a company (details supplied). [11964/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 240 and 241 together.

An Occupational Health Strategy is in place as a supportive resource for teachers and special needs assistants (Ss). The aim of this strategy is to promote the health of teachers and Ss in the workplace, with a focus primarily on prevention rather than cure. The Occupational Health Strategy comprises the Employee Assistance and Occupational Health Services for teachers and Ss. The Occupational Health Service incorporates pre-employment health assessments, sickness absence management, assessments of medical fitness for work and ill health retirement assessments.

The current Occupational Health service provider is Medmark Occupational Healthcare who, following a successful tendering process, was awarded a fixed-price contract for this service. This contract is due to expire on 31 December 2017. The Office of Government Procurement have recently issued a request for tenders to establish a Multi Supplier Framework Agreement for the provision of Occupational Health Services. The Department intends to purchase future Occupational Health services under this Framework Agreement.

Payments under the contract are made to the provider on receipt of properly furnished invoices accompanied by operational reports. This is in accordance with Service Level Agreements as provided for in the contract. The service is also reviewed by the education partners including the School Management Bodies and Teacher/Special Need Assistant representatives in consultation with the Chief Medical Officer of the civil service.

### **Student Grant Scheme Eligibility**

242. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the rationale for a situation whereby a couple with one working parent (details supplied), that have seven children, can qualify for FIS yet will not qualify for a SUSI grant for their eldest child; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11965/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Deputy will appreciate that in the absence of all of the relevant details that would be contained in an individual's application form, including those relating to nationality, residency, previous academic attainment and means, it would not be possible for me to say whether or not a student would qualify for a grant or what level of grant would be appropriate.

Under the terms of the student grant scheme, Family Income Supplement (FIS) is treated as an income disregard and is therefore not included in the calculation of reckonable income. It is also a qualifying payment for the special rate of grant.

The scheme provides for different levels of income thresholds where families have (i) less than 4 dependent children, (ii) between 4 and 7 dependent children and (iii) 8 or more dependent children. Furthermore, in recognition of the additional cost to families where more than one person is attending college, income thresholds may also be increased by up to €4,830 for each additional family member attending college at the same time. In this way, the Student Grant Scheme is responsive to the individual circumstances of particular families.

If an individual applicant considers that she/he has been unjustly refused a student grant she/he may appeal in the first instance to SUSI. Where an individual applicant has had an appeal turned down in writing by SUSI and remains of the view that the scheme has not been interpreted correctly in his/her case, an appeal outlining the position may be submitted by the applicant to the independent Student Grants Appeals Board.

## **Special Educational Needs Service Provision**

243. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when schools will be advised of their special needs supports in view of the implementation of the new model; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11991/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I wish to advise the Deputy that schools will receive details of their allocations under the new model for allocating special education teachers to mainstream schools this week.

A new Circular setting out details of the scheme will also be published this week.

The aim of this new model is to deliver better outcomes for children with special educational needs. Large amounts of research, analysis, consultation with service users and stakeholders, and piloting have gone in to the development of this model and all the evidence points to the fact that this new system will deliver better outcomes for children.

No school will lose supports as a result of the implementation of the new model. In addition, no school will receive an allocation, for the support of pupils with complex needs, less than the allocation they received to support such pupils during the 2016/17 school year. No allocation made for such pupils by the NCSE will be removed from schools as long as that pupil remains in the school.

An additional 900 teaching posts will be provided to support the introduction of this new allocation model. The provision of an additional 900 teaching posts is a very significant investment in the provision of additional teaching support for pupils with special educational needs in our schools. This is additional to an increase of 41% in the number of resource teachers allocated to schools annually by the NCSE since 2011, when 5265 teachers were allocated, as opposed to provision for 7542 posts in the current school year.

The additional funding will provide extra supports to over 1000 schools who are identified as needing additional supports as a result of the new model. Supports for children with special educational needs is a huge priority for this Government. We currently spend over €1.6 billion, or one fifth of the total education budget, on supports for children with special educational needs.

This investment will ensure that all schools receive a sufficient allocation of special education needs resources to provide additional teaching support to all pupils who require such support.

Under the new allocation model, schools will be provided with a total allocation which includes a baseline allocation for the school and an allocation based on the school profile.

The provision of a profiled allocation will give a fairer allocation for each school which recognises that all schools need an allocation for special needs support, but which provides a graduated allocation which takes into account the actual level of need and pupils in each school.

Schools will be frontloaded with resources, based on each school's profile, to provide supports immediately to those pupils who need it without delay. This will reduce the administrative burden on schools as they will no longer have to complete an application process annually and apply for newly enrolled pupils, or pupils transferring in to the school, who require resource hours. Children who need support can have that support provided immediately rather than having to wait for a diagnosis.

Full details of the scheme will be set out in the Circular which will be published this week.



## **Traveller Education**

244. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps he will take to ensure Traveller history and culture features in the national curriculum in view of the recognition of the Traveller community as an ethnic group; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12160/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Inclusion in all its forms, including Travellers, is a key component of our primary and post-primary education.

At primary level, schools are expected to provide a broad and balanced curriculum that reflects the interests of their pupils and the school's context. The Primary Curriculum 1999 is complemented by Guidelines on Traveller Education in Primary Schools (DES, 2002) and Intercultural Education in the Primary School (NCCA, 2005). These guidelines promote an intercultural approach in the classroom and provide practical examples of how intercultural themes, including Traveller culture, can be accommodated through the various curriculum areas.

The current history specifications at junior and senior cycle have the flexibility to look at different aspects of Irish history on a thematic basis or on the basis of local historical study. Junior Cycle History is currently under review by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment and will shortly go to public consultation. The potential for Traveller history and culture to be examined in this context will be fully explored.

Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) at junior cycle and the new Politics and Society subject at Leaving Certificate level also present opportunities to explore the theme of Traveller culture and society and the issues involved in questions of ethnic identity and interculturalism. In Transition Year also, schools offer modules on interculturalism and many schools examine Travellers as an ethnic group in this context.

The Framework for Junior Cycle which was published in October 2012, is underpinned by eight key principles - one of which is inclusive education - whereby the educational experience is inclusive of all students and contributes to equality of opportunity, participation and outcomes for all.

### **Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools Scheme**

245. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will reconsider the decision to omit Cork south-west from the list of new schools appointed to the DEIS scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12166/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The key data sources used under the new DEIS identification process are the DES Primary Online Database (POD) and Post-Primary Online (PPOD) Databases, and CSO data from the National Census of Population as represented in the Pobal HP Index for Small Areas. Variables used in the compilation of the HP Index include those related to demographic growth, dependency ratios, education levels, single parent rate, overcrowding, social class, occupation and unemployment rates. This data is combined with pupil data, anonymised and aggregated to small area, to provide information on the relative level of concentrated disadvantage present in the pupil cohort of individual schools. This data is applied uniformly across all the schools in the country and are not affected by electoral boundaries.

In its initial application, the new identification model, applied across all schools, identified

schools in disadvantaged areas, not previously included in DEIS, whose level of disadvantage is significantly higher than many schools already in the programme. Accordingly, we are moving as a first step to include these schools within the DEIS School Support Programme.

This has resulted in the addition of 15 new Urban Band 1 schools, 30 Urban Band 2 raised to Band 1, 51 new rural DEIS schools and 13 new Post-Primary schools. Schools entering DEIS for the first time represent no more than 2% of all schools.

The implementation of a new objective, central data-based model of identifying levels of disadvantage within school populations will be followed by a further programme of work to ensure that levels of resource more accurately follow the levels of need identified by the model.

Once this work has been completed, consideration will be given to extending DEIS supports to a further group of schools as resources permit.

It is important to note that the fact that a school in any area has not been included in the programme on this occasion does not preclude its inclusion at a later date, should its level of disadvantage warrant the allocation of additional resources.

In the 2016/17 School Year there are 825 schools participating in the DEIS Programme. The list of schools, which includes DEIS Schools in Co Cork, is available on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools/>

### **Garda Vetting of Personnel**

**246. Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to deal with the delay in Garda vetting procedures for special needs assistants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12173/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** 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 to undertake relevant work or activities with children or vulnerable persons. 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. A Frequently Asked Questions document was also published by my Department to assist schools with queries in respect of the circular.

Under the new statutory vetting procedures, the vetting of Ss and other non-teaching staff in schools continues to be conducted via the relevant diocesan office or school management body as the relevant conduit organisation for the vetting of such persons. In the case of ETB schools the relevant ETB is the relevant organisation for such vetting.

The vetting legislation and the vetting procedures operated by the National Vetting Bureau fall within the remit of the Minister for Justice and Equality. My Department understands that the vast majority of the bodies acting as conduits for schools are now using the National Vetting Bureau's electronic vetting (e-vetting) facility.

## Higher Education Authority Staff

247. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide an update on his meeting with the University of Limerick whistleblowers; the feedback provided to them; the course of action he now plans to follow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12174/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Last month I met with the individuals referred to by the Deputy and they provided me with details regarding their complaints against the University of Limerick (UL). The issues raised have previously been the subject of a review by Mazars into the processes employed by UL to enquire into the allegations. Following that process the HEA have been in contact with UL regarding the implementation of the recommendations of the report, and have been assured by the University that most have been implemented. The HEA is continuing to work with UL on the implementation of the outstanding issues. A facilitator was also appointed by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) to explore options for facilitation and see if a basis could be found for a resolution to the dispute. This process failed to advance a solution to the issues.

My Department in conjunction with the HEA is continuing to work to find a solution to this highly complex dispute. I have received an update on the issues from my officials and have sought further clarification. I have recently written to the individuals concerned and will issue a more comprehensive reply shortly.

## Archival Material

248. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the supports in place for development and protection of county archive services to preserve local cultural patrimony. [11693/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I refer to the reply to Question No. 249 of 29 November 2016 which sets out the position in this matter.

## Library Services

249. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he has considered re-evaluating the criteria for tendering and considered the regionalisation of tenders to allow booksellers and local library sellers a chance to compete (details supplied). [11783/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** My Department has no role in relation to the procurement of book-stock for public libraries. The provision of public library services, including the procurement of books, is a matter for each local authority in its capacity as a library authority under the Local Government Act 2001. A national tender for book-stock procurement was run recently by the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) on behalf of local authorities. All matters related to the tender process were managed by the LGMA with support from the e Education Procurement Service. My Department had no direct role in this regard and, therefore, has no authority to intervene in what was an independent procurement process.

Arrangements have been put in place by bodies under the aegis of my Department to facili-

tate the provision of information by those bodies directly to members of the Oireachtas. Accordingly, any information sought in respect of the tender process can be sought directly from the LGMA at [corporate@lgma.ie](mailto:corporate@lgma.ie).

### **Turf Cutting**

250. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government when legislation governing peat extraction is due before the Houses of the Oireachtas to provide clarity for the EPA to monitor same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11923/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** My Department is currently progressing draft Regulations under the European Communities Act 1972 that will establish a new regulatory regime in respect of large-scale peat extraction. Under the new regime, the Environmental Protection Agency will be required to carry out an environmental impact assessment as part of its examination of licence applications for existing and new peat extraction of 30 hectares or more. Interested parties and stakeholders were consulted on the draft Regulations in October 2016. These draft Regulations are now being further reviewed in the light of the comments received, with a view to finalising them as soon as possible.

### **Housing Adaptation Grant Expenditure**

251. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the expenditure on the housing adaptation grant scheme from 2011 to date; the cost of restoring expenditure to 2011 levels; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12011/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Information on the exchequer funding provided by my Department to each local authority for the Housing Adaptation Grants for Older People and People with a Disability is available on my Department’s website at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/social-and-affordable/other-local-authority-housing-scheme-statistics> .

These figures were supplemented by a 20% contribution in each case from the resources of the local authority.

The total funding allocation announced for these grants in 2016 was €56.25m nationally. As the total funding provided in 2011 was €76m, additional funding of almost € 20m would be required to restore funding to that level. This would consist of almost €16m exchequer funding and €4m from the resources of the local authorities. I am aware of the social benefit accruing from these grants in terms of facilitating the continued independent occupancy of their own homes by older people and people with a disability and further funding increases will be provided to achieve the annual target, set in Rebuilding Ireland, of supporting 10,000 households under these grants.

### **Housing Assistance Payments Eligibility**

252. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if a single person that has access or joint custody of a child or children can access

the family rate of the housing assistance payment. [11182/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Under section 20 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009, a household is defined as a person living alone, or two or more persons, who in the opinion of the local authority concerned, have a reasonable requirement to live together. Under the 2009 Act, it is also a matter for each housing authority to decide on the type of social housing support to be allocated or provided to individual households. In the case of the provision of social housing support under the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme, the maximum prescribed HAP rent limits are defined by a number of household classes, as provided for under section 43 of the 2014 Act. As the housing authority, it is a matter for the local authority to determine the household class and level of support that should be applied in respect of a household that has been assessed as having a housing need.

Factors such as legally provided for custodial and access arrangements that may be in place will be considered in this context. As Minister, I am precluded by the 2009 Act from intervening in relation to the procedures followed, or decisions made, by housing authorities in the assessment of households, the allocation of particular dwellings and the provision of social housing supports.

### **Water and Sewerage Schemes**

253. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the status of the situation and prospects for funding in 2017 of the Milltown group sewerage scheme in Monaghan (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11203/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** My Department's new Multi-annual Rural Water Programme 2016-2018 includes funding for group sewerage schemes, through Measure 4(d), where clustering of households on individual septic tanks is not a viable option, particularly from an environmental perspective. Local authorities were invited in January 2016 to submit bids under the programme. The invitation envisaged no more than two demonstration group sewerage schemes being brought forward under the measure in any one year of the three year programme. The demonstrations will allow my Department, over the course of the programme, to determine the appropriate enduring funding levels and relationship with the current grant scheme. A proposed Milltown Group Sewerage Scheme was included by Monaghan County Council in its bids under the measure. In total, 83 Bids were received from 17 Local Authorities requesting funding under this measure.

An Expert Panel was convened by my Department to examine the 2016 bids from local authorities for projects under a number of the programme's measures, including Measure 4(d), and to make recommendations to the Department on funding. The Panel recommended a priority list, including the Milltown scheme at priority five, to my Department, which accepted the recommendations in full when approving the rural water allocations for 2016.

As only two demonstration group sewerage schemes can be advanced in any given year, funding will not be available to Monaghan County Council for the Milltown scheme until 2018 unless a scheme prioritised higher than Milltown is not be in a position to be advanced this year, whereby the Milltown scheme would be given a higher priority.

It is intended to make interim funding allocations under the programme to the local authorities by the end of March 2017 and any reprioritisation of the Milltown scheme would be noti-

fied Monaghan County Council at this time.

A copy of the Expert Panel's report and consideration of all proposals under the Programme for 2016 for are available on my Department's website at the following link:

<http://www.housing.gov.ie/water/water-services/rural-water-programme/group-water-schemes-and-rural-water-issues>.

### **Tenant Purchase Scheme Administration**

254. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will address the anomalies in the tenant purchase scheme, in particular the exclusion of Part V dwellings, in view of the fact that tenants that made applications and took occupancy of houses on the basis that they could purchase their home are now excluded from doing so; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11238/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme came into operation on 1 January 2016. The Scheme is open to eligible tenants, including joint tenants, of local authority houses that are available for sale under the Scheme. The Housing (Sale of Local Authority Houses) Regulations 2015 governing the Scheme provides for a number of specified classes of houses to be excluded from sale, including houses provided to Local Authorities under Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, houses specifically designed for older persons, group Traveller housing and houses provided to facilitate people with disabilities transferring from institutional care to community-based living.

Part V housing units are among the classes of house excluded from the tenant purchase scheme, and this is to ensure that units delivered under this mechanism will remain available for people in need of social housing support, and that the original policy goals of the legislation are not eroded over time. The provisions of Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, are designed to enable the development of mixed tenure, sustainable communities.

In line with the commitment given in Rebuilding Ireland - Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, a review of the first 12 months of the scheme's operation is currently being undertaken by my Department. To inform the review, a public consultation was undertaken, with a closing date for submissions of 10 February 2017. I expect this review to be completed by the end of Quarter 1 2017. Any changes to the terms and conditions of the scheme which are considered necessary based on the evidence gathered will be brought forward.

### **Irish Water Staff**

255. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if Irish Water or local authorities are responsible for the payment of superannuation benefits for local authority employees transferred to Irish Water; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11239/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Irish Water has entered into service level agreements (SLA) with each of the 31 authorities for the provision of water services. Staff in local authorities working under these arrangements remain local authority employees. The SLA reflects the transformation agenda required for the water sector and makes provision for annual service plans to be agreed between

Irish Water and the relevant local authority setting out the required performance, budgets and headcount to deliver the service. The length of the service level agreement and the fact that the agreement will include a programme of change are reflected in a Framework document, agreed with the Trade Unions under the auspices of the Labour Relations Commission. This agreement and the Water Services (No.2) Act 2013 provide that, in the event of an SLA coming to an end, the staff covered by the SLA will become Irish Water employees and their terms and conditions and superannuation arrangements will be protected by legislation.

Local authority staff who have taken up employment with Irish Water were, until January 2017, working on a secondment basis pending the establishment of the superannuation arrangements provided for under the Water Services (No.2) Act 2013. Those arrangements are now in place and such staff are now directly employed by Irish Water who has responsibility for their superannuation entitlements under the Irish Water Defined Benefit Scheme. Superannuation entitlements related to their previous employment with a local authority are the responsibility of that local authority as provided for under the Irish Water (Previous Service) Superannuation Scheme 2016 (S.I. No. 57 of 2016).

### **Tenancy Protection Scheme**

256. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the way in which he proposes to regulate the rent a room scheme in view of the fact there is very little regulation in place in this sector to protect tenants renting rooms in such properties. [11245/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The Residential Tenancies Act 2004 regulates the tenant-landlord relationship in the private rented residential sector. The Act applies to every dwelling that is the subject of a tenancy, subject to a limited number of exceptions. The dwellings to which the Act does not apply are set out in section 3(2) of the Act. Where the owner of a dwelling, residing in that dwelling, lets a room, that letting is not considered to be a tenancy within the meaning of the Residential Tenancies Act. I have no plans at this time to amend the Act in this regard but will keep the matter under review.

### **Homeless Accommodation Provision**

257. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 17 of 23 February 2017, if the supported temporary accommodation initiatives being pursued by housing authorities for housing homeless families will include hostel type accommodation or congregated settings; his views on the appropriateness of such accommodation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11303/17]

**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 homeless services, including accommodation, rests with individual housing authorities, in the first instance. My Department will continue to engage proactively with the Dublin local authorities in relation to funding the delivery of a range of identified temporary accommodation arrangements for homeless families which, while clearly an intervention of a temporary dura-

tion only, are considered to have the potential to provide improved supported family living arrangements compared to hotel accommodation, while longer term sustainable accommodation solutions are identified for the families concerned.

### **Wind Energy Guidelines**

258. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if a strategic environment assessment is required in respect of drafting new guidelines for the wind energy industry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11316/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** In light of the commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government to finalise the review of the 2006 Wind Energy Development Guidelines and on-going policy and legal developments in this area, my Department is continuing to advance work on the proposed revisions to the Guidelines and related matters in conjunction with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment, in order to bring the various issues to a conclusion as early as possible. I expect to be in a position to make a statement on the matter in the coming weeks, outlining the timelines for implementation of the various elements. As part of the overall review, and with regard to the recent ECJ Judgement in Case C-290/15 on the Belgian/Wallonian wind energy guidelines, it is proposed to undertake a strategic environmental assessment (SEA) of the proposed revisions to the 2006 Guidelines - in accordance with the requirements of Directive 2001/24/EC on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment - before they are finalised.

### **Irish Water Administration**

259. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if payment of domestic water charges to Irish Water is a criteria for eligibility for the current tenant purchase scheme; if so, the rationale for this criteria; the reason this criteria was included while other utility debts such as for gas and electricity were not; and if he is reviewing this criteria in the current review of the tenant purchase scheme. [11331/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme came into operation on 1 January 2016. The Scheme is open to eligible tenants, including joint tenants, of local authority houses that are available for sale under the Scheme. Under Section 3(A)(9) of the Water Services Act 2014 (inserted by Section 48 of the Environment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2015), a person who is a tenant of a dwelling let to him/her under the Housing Acts 1966 to 2014 and who proposes to purchase the dwelling shall, before completion of the sale, provide the local authority concerned with a certificate of discharge from Irish Water confirming that any charge under section 21 of the Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 in respect of the dwelling owed to Irish Water has been paid. The sale of the dwelling cannot proceed until a certificate of discharge in respect of the dwelling has been received from Irish Water.

The Water Services (Amendment) Act 2016 suspends charges for a period of nine months, commencing on 1 July 2016 and ending on 31 March 2017. This Act provides that any period of suspension of domestic water charges shall not count towards the time period for the calculation of late payment charges in respect of unpaid water bills. However, arrears of water charges incurred by households remain to be discharged.



Therefore, under the current legislative framework, tenants who propose to purchase a property under the Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme must provide a certificate of discharge from Irish Water confirming charges up to 30 June 2016 have been paid.

In line with the commitment given in the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, a review of the first 12 months of the scheme's operation is currently being undertaken by my Department. To inform the review, a public consultation was undertaken, with a closing date for submissions of 10 February 2017. Any changes to the terms and conditions of the scheme which are considered necessary based on the evidence gathered will be brought forward.

I expect the review to be completed on schedule by the end of Quarter 1 2017.

### **National Planning Framework**

260. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the total cost of marketing for the Ireland 2040 campaign; the details of any payments made to persons to act on behalf of the campaign to promote it; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11347/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The development of the Ireland 2040 - Our Plan: National Planning Framework (NPF), one of the most strategically important public policy exercises currently underway by the Government, must be collaborative in nature, given that its ultimate success will depend on the degree to which all citizens and stakeholders have the opportunity to have their say on how Ireland should develop over the next twenty years or more, and how we can plan for and accommodate the substantial additional population expected by 2040 in a more strategic and sustainable way. With regard to associated awareness raising and promotion activities, a number of initiatives have been put in place providing both fora and points of contact for feedback. For example, a dedicated website - [www.npf.ie](http://www.npf.ie) - and email address - [npf@housing.gov.ie](mailto:npf@housing.gov.ie) - have been established. The website will be one of the main platforms for ensuring the public can be kept up to date over the life of the Plan and is seen as a long-term investment.

In addition to the standard provision of textual and graphic information to view and download, the website facilitates engagement with the general public through the use of easy to understand video presentations and social media which will be used and re-used throughout the process, bringing down costs. Total expenditure to date in these areas, including promotional material, graphic design and video, is €41,917, of which €1,624 was paid for voice-over work relating to the promotional video. Costs associated with the national and regional public consultation launches are being finalised at present.

The outcome of the public consultation process on Ireland 2040 currently underway will feed into further analysis and evidence-based policy in formulating a draft Framework by the Summer. All efforts are being, and will continue to be, made to ensure that expenditure in connection with engagement on and development of the Plan is kept to the minimum possible, commensurate with the scale and long-term policy nature of the task in hand.

### **Local Authority Housing Data**

261. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of local authority houses built in County Donegal in each

of the years 2007 to 2016, inclusive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11393/17]

262. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of local authority houses to be built in County Donegal in each of the years 2017, 2018 and 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11394/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 261 and 262 together.

Details on the number of properties constructed by all local authorities, including Donegal County Council, for letting to those on their social housing waiting lists are available on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision>. Information on quarter four of 2016 is currently being finalised and will be published shortly.

A substantial pipeline of new social housing construction projects is already in place both in terms of local authority direct build and approved housing body projects. We are now seeing progress through this pipeline, as is evident in the Social Housing Construction Projects Status Report which I published on 20 February 2017.

The report contains a range of information, including projects delivered in 2016 and those at various stages of advancement through planning, design and construction. It also includes information such as local authority area, project name, AHB name where applicable, the number of units and the status of each application in terms of its current level of advancement. The report can be accessed at the following link: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/social-housing-developments/>.

I expect that a number of the projects listed for Donegal County Council will be completed in 2017 and others will commence on site during 2017, as well as in the subsequent years; the precise timing for the advancement of each of these projects is a matter for the Council, in the first instance. Further project approvals are being added to the published list as they are developed by Donegal County Council and the other local authorities and forwarded to my Department. I am keen that all local authorities advance their social housing projects as speedily as possible and I have assured them that funding is in place to support their activity in this regard.

### Housing Provision

263. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the measures his Department has taken to encourage the supply of housing in the private sector in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11395/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** As the Deputy will be aware, under-supply of housing across all tenures is at the heart of the significant challenges which exist in the housing sector. At an overall level, 25,000 new homes per year are targeted to meet demand nationally. The key objective of the Government's Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness is to increase and accelerate housing delivery, across all tenures, to help individuals and families find homes.

With regard to increasing the supply of private housing in particular, Pillar 3 of Rebuilding Ireland, entitled "Build More Homes", has as its key objective a doubling of housing output, from approximately 12,500 homes in 2015, to deliver at least 25,000 homes per annum by

2021. In order to support the supply of affordable housing and to ensure a steady supply of development land and planning permissions so that housing providers can plan ahead effectively in response to current and emerging demands in Donegal and other counties, Rebuilding Ireland sets out key actions which provide for:

- active State-land management;
- greater certainty in the planning process, including provisions introduced in the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016;
- targeted investment in enabling infrastructure, including through the €200 million Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund;
- competitive financing for developers to fund on-site housing infrastructure through ISIF;
- reviewing and adjustment as necessary and practicable, in relation to construction cost inputs; and,
- development of capacity and skills within the construction sector.

The Strategy for the Rental Sector published in December 2016 also contains a number of actions targeted at increasing the supply of properties to rent; these actions have been incorporated into the reporting under Rebuilding Ireland. Updates on the implementation of Rebuilding Ireland, including those that will encourage the supply of housing nationally, are outlined in the first two Quarterly Progress Reports, covering the cumulative period from July to December 2016, available on [www.rebuildingireland.ie](http://www.rebuildingireland.ie). The Third Quarterly Progress Report, covering Quarter 1 2017, is expected to be published in late April/early May.

A new monthly housing activity report is available on the Rebuilding Ireland website at the following link:

<http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/january-housing-activity-report/>.

It shows upward trends in activity in terms of planning permissions, commencements and completions; indeed, completions reached approximately 15,000 homes in 2016.

Of course, while building new homes is a key part of the overall delivery under Rebuilding Ireland, making better use of vacant houses and property is another key objective under Pillar 5 – Utilise Existing Stock. A new National Vacant Housing Re-Use Strategy is currently being finalised and I have already announced a €32m Repair and Leasing initiative for vacant housing, one of several initiatives under Pillar 5. Other initiatives include the Buy and Renew Scheme which provides funding for local authorities to purchase and remediate vacant properties. Under the auspices of the Cabinet Committee on Housing, chaired by An Taoiseach, the Government and I will be keeping the implementation of Rebuilding Ireland under regular and active review.

### **Departmental Expenditure**

264. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the amount his Department spent on public relations consultants and all matters relating to public relations costs in 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11428/17]

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

**Coveney):** There was no expenditure on public relations consultants by my Department in 2016 with PR services provided by my Department's Press Office. The engagement of external expertise is generally only considered where the issues involved require expert skills or capabilities that are not readily available within my Department.

On occasion, photographers will be hired to support the Press Office and record events, with an expenditure in 2016 of €1,845.

### Planning Issues

265. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will provide a breakdown of all local authorities across the State that have granted planning permission for one-off rural housing which was subsequently appealed to An Bord Pleanála and overturned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11442/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Planning statistics are submitted by planning authorities on an annual basis for collation and publication on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/planning/statistics/planning-statistics-1>. These statistics include data in respect of each planning authority on the number and percentage of decisions to grant or to refuse permission, but not the detailed information sought by the Deputy in respect of single houses in rural areas.

An Bord Pleanála's Annual Reports - available at the following link: <http://www.pleanala.ie/publications/index.htm> - include statistics on appeals received and decided in respect of, among other development types, single houses, but not the detailed information sought by the Deputy in respect of single houses in rural areas.

The Central Statistics Office (CSO) publishes statistics, available at the following link: <http://www.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?Maintable=BHQ02&PLanguage=0>, on permissions granted for one-off houses by local authority area, but does not differentiate between houses in urban and rural areas.

### Unfinished Housing Developments

266. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the way in which the residents of an unfinished housing estate (details supplied) in County Sligo can make their estate safe from a health and safety perspective; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11445/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Section 180 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, provides that, as soon as possible following a request by the developer or by the majority of the house-owners, a planning authority must initiate procedures to take in charge a residential housing estate, completed to its satisfaction in accordance with the planning permission. Section 180 also provides that, following a request by the majority of the house-owners, a planning authority must initiate procedures to take an unfinished estate in charge, where the authority has not commenced enforcement proceedings in respect of the estate within seven years of the expiry of the planning permission concerned. In the case of an unfinished estate, where the planning authority has commenced enforcement proceedings within seven years of the expiry of the planning permission or considers that enforcement proceedings will not result in the satisfactory completion of the estate, section 180 provides that, following a request by the majority of the house-owners,

the authority may at its absolute discretion initiate procedures to take in charge the roads and some or all of the other services in the estate. A planning authority may, for the purposes of section 180, hold a plebiscite to ascertain the wishes of the house-owners.

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

- Certain core facilities/infrastructure to be taken in charge on request - public roads and footpaths, unallocated surface parking areas, public lighting, public water supply, foul and storm water drainage and public open spaces;

- The procedures for taking in charge to begin promptly on foot of a request by the majority of the residents in the development or by the developer, as appropriate. Protocols, including time frames, must be set out by planning authorities to respond to requests for taking in charge.

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

Under the provisions of Section 30 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) I am specifically precluded from intervening in individual cases. However my Department has made enquiries to Sligo County Council in relation to the estate the subject of this question and I have been informed that the vast majority of this estate has been completed to a satisfactory standard. The portion of the lands which has been left unfinished has recently been sold and the new owners have met with the planning and enforcement sections of Sligo County Council to outline their intentions for the lands. In this regard, a planning application was lodged on 22 February 2017 for the completion of this unfinished part of the overall development.

### **Local Authority Housing Eligibility**

267. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the details of the financial criteria to qualify for a local housing list; if he will review the financial limit for acceptance onto a housing list (details supplied) and introduce a window of discretion on the income amount in view of the fact that if a couple is even €1 over the limit they do not qualify for inclusion on the housing list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11446/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** For the purpose of assessing households under the income eligibility criteria, the Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011, as amended, prescribe the maximum net income limits that can be set by each housing authority to be applied in assessing an applicant's eligibility for social housing support. The 2011 Regulations do not provide housing authorities with any discretion to exceed the limits that apply to their administrative areas and I have no plans to amend the position in this regard. The limits are broken into three different bands according to the authority area, with income being defined and assessed according to a standard Household Means Policy. The income bands and the authority area assigned to each band were based on an assessment of the income needed to provide for a household's basic needs plus a comparative analysis of the local rental cost of housing accommodation across the country. The limits also reflect a blanket increase of €5,000 introduced prior to the new system coming into operation,

in order to broaden the base from which social housing tenants are drawn and thereby promote sustainable communities.

Under the Household Means Policy, which applies in all housing authorities, net income for social housing assessment is defined as gross household income less income tax, PRSI and the universal social charge. The Policy provides for a range of income disregards, and housing authorities also have discretion to decide to disregard income that is temporary, short-term or once off in nature.

I am satisfied that the current income limits generally provide for a fair and equitable system of identifying those households unable to provide accommodation from their own resources. These limits will continue to be kept under review by my Department, as part of the broader social housing reform agenda set out in the Social Housing Strategy 2020.

### **Water and Sewerage Schemes**

268. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to grant funding in relation to the cases of persons (details supplied); and if his attention has been drawn to the ongoing hardship being imposed on the persons concerned. [11453/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Ballyduff Upper Group Water Scheme, a small existing three house scheme located on the Cork – Waterford border, was included by Cork County Council in its 2016 bids under Measure 3 of the Multi-Annual Programme Rural Water 2016–2018. This measure supports social and economic development in rural towns and villages and their hinterlands by providing new group water schemes where public water supply schemes or private wells are not an option. An Expert Panel was convened by my Department to examine the 2016 bids from local authorities for projects under a number of the programme’s measures, including Measure 3, and to make recommendations to the Department on funding. However, following examination of the bids under this measure by the Panel, the Ballyduff Group Water Scheme was not recommended for funding under the programme. My Department accepted the recommendations of the Panel in full in making final overall funding allocations in 2016 to local authorities.

A copy of the Expert Panel’s report and consideration of all proposals under the Programme for 2016 for are available on my Department’s website at the following link:

*<http://www.housing.gov.ie/water/water-services/rural-water-programme/group-water-schemes-and-rural-water-issues>.*

As part of this year’s funding process under the programme, my Department will consider bids from local authorities for schemes for the period 2017–2018 for certain Measures. For example, Measure 1 is aimed at improving water quality in existing group water schemes so that they can achieve compliance with the parameters of the Drinking Water Regulations, 2014. It is a matter for Cork County Council to consider including the scheme in its bids.

### **Fire Stations Provision**

269. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the position regarding the development of a new fire station at Crossmolina in County Mayo. [11471/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The provision of fire services in local authority areas, including the establishment and maintenance of fire brigades, the assessment of fire cover needs and the provision of premises, is a statutory function of the individual fire authorities under the provisions of the Fire Services Act, 1981. My Department supports the fire authorities through setting general policy, providing a central training programme, issuing guidance on operational and other related matters and providing capital funding for priority infrastructural projects. In February 2016, my Department announced a five-year Fire Services Capital Programme with an allocation of €40 million, based on the current annual €8 million allocation, to be used for the purchase of fire appliances and specialist equipment, building or upgrading of prioritised Fire Stations, an upgrade of the Communications and Mobilisation system and improvements to Training Centres.

The provision of a new fire station at Crossmolina, Co Mayo has been included as part of this Capital Programme. In light of the fact that this is a priority project for Mayo County Council, my Department is liaising with them to progress it to the next stages of development. While the current indicative year for delivery is 2020, all projects in the Capital Programme are reassessed on an annual basis and priority may be adjusted to bring forward projects offering best value-for-money and to take account of the state of readiness of the projects.

### **Library Services Provision**

270. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the position regarding the development of a new library in Crossmolina in County Mayo. [11472/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The provision of premises and facilities in the public library service is generally a matter for each local authority in its capacity as a library authority. Notwithstanding that, in January 2016 my Department announced a new €22m Libraries Capital Investment Programme for the period 2016-2021 to support the development of priority capital projects submitted by local authorities. The programme was developed on the basis of priority proposals submitted by local authorities and will support the development of 16 capital projects over the programme period. In this regard, the programme includes a priority proposal submitted by Mayo County Council in respect of Westport library.

As the development of the library at Crossmolina was not submitted as a priority by Mayo County Council, it could not be considered for funding as part of the capital programme.

### **Tenant Purchase Scheme**

271. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he is reconsidering the tenant purchase scheme to allow the tenant and the subtenant to purchase jointly. [11502/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme came into operation on 1 January 2016. The Scheme is open to eligible tenants, including joint tenants, of local authority houses that are available for sale under the Scheme. To be eligible persons must be a tenant, or joint tenants, of the house to be sold by the housing authority, i.e. registered as joint tenants of the property for purposes of rent assessment with the local authority. A tenant, or joint tenants, must then meet the other eligibility criteria of the scheme as laid out in the Housing (Sale of Local Authority

Houses) Regulations 2015. In line with the commitment given in Rebuilding Ireland - Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, a review of the first 12 months of the scheme's operation is currently being undertaken by my Department. To inform the review, a public consultation was undertaken, with a closing date for submissions of 10 February 2017. Any changes to the terms and conditions of the scheme which are considered necessary based on the evidence gathered at that stage will be brought forward.

I expect the review to be completed on schedule by the end of Quarter 1 2017.

### **Construction Industry**

272. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the level of construction inflation that has been experienced by his Department in each of the past six years and to date in 2017 in respect of construction projects and other capital projects; the way in which he monitors construction inflation and the mechanisms he employs to establish this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11535/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** With the reduced level of capital funding that applied up until recently, there has been minimal tender activity up to 2016 to form a reliable data base in respect of construction projects for which my Department is the sanctioning authority. However, recently, there has been a much increased level of tender activity and my Department has a team of Quantity Surveyor advisors who monitor this activity for the reconstruction projects. This monitoring indicates that inflation in respect of such projects is in line with the Tender Price Index published by the Society of Chartered Surveyors Ireland (SCSI).

SCSI produces this independent assessment of construction tender prices biannually. The Index can be accessed at the following weblink:

*[https://www.scsi.ie/policy\\_research/indices](https://www.scsi.ie/policy_research/indices)*.

### **Water Supply**

273. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of households that have had their water supply restricted arising from the introduction of section 56 of the Water Services Act 2007 (details supplied). [11570/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The information requested is not available in my Department. Since 1 January 2014, Irish Water has statutory responsibility for all aspects of water services planning, delivery and operation at national, regional and local levels. The Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013, which came into effect on 1 January 2014, provides for the transfer of responsibility for the delivery of water services from the water services authorities to Irish Water.

Irish Water has established a dedicated team to deal with representations and queries from public representatives. The team can be contacted via email at [oireachtasmembers@water.ie](mailto:oireachtasmembers@water.ie) or by telephone on a dedicated number, 1890 578 578.

Prior to 2014, the operation of the legislation in question was a matter for individual local authorities.



*Question No. 274 withdrawn.*

### **Tenant Purchase Scheme**

275. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if a tenant can obtain a valuation in respect of their house that they reside in under the 2016 tenant incremental purchase scheme and in circumstances in which the local authority obtains a valuation; if that is the final word or if there are any reasonable grounds whereby an alternative valuation can be obtained from approved valuers and auctioneers and submitted to the council for their consideration; the mechanism used to ensure that the setting of the price is not a unilateral decision by the public body; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11604/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Under the terms of the Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme 2016, the purchase price for a house (as per section 10 of the Housing (Sale of Local Authority Houses) Regulations 2015 ) shall be the greater of: (a) The relevant market value of the house, or (b) 50 percent of the estimated cost to the housing authority of providing, on the same site as the house being purchased and in accordance with prevailing national building standards and design policies for local authority housing, a house of the same class that the house being purchased was designed for, and such estimated cost shall include, among other matters, the cost of site acquisition, legal and other professional fees.

In relation to valuations, the valuation is undertaken by a professional valuer either employed by or engaged by the housing authority. In the event of a valuation being disputed by a prospective tenant purchaser, it is open to the purchaser, at their own expense, to engage a valuer approved by the housing authority to prepare a second valuation. In such circumstances, the housing authority would generally engage with the purchaser and consider the two valuations with a view to agreeing a final purchase price.

In line with a commitment in Rebuilding Ireland, the first year of operation of the Tenant Purchase Scheme is currently under review. In that context, the arrangements in relation to valuations will be considered further. The review is targeted for completion by end Q1 2017.

### **Asbestos Remediation**

276. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if there is grant assistance available to community groups to remove asbestos from a community building; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11776/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** There is no funding programme managed by my Department granting assistance to community groups to remove asbestos from community buildings.

### **Water and Sewerage Schemes**

277. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of persons here that avail of group water schemes; if there is a breakdown by county of these numbers; the number of families that have private wells by county; the amount by which these costs are subsidised in comparison to Irish Water customers; the amount

these private supplies cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11797/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** In 2016, my Department recouped local authorities for subsidy payments made by them to 694 group water schemes serving 96,678 houses. This does not account for all group water schemes in the country as not all group water schemes claim subsidies. Some smaller schemes, particularly those that are supplied water from the Irish Water public mains supply, do not currently apply for subsidies. However, these figures are understood to represent the majority by household that avail of group water schemes to supply their domestic water. The following table provides a breakdown by county of the numbers claiming subsidies in 2016.

Numbers of Group Water Schemes and Associated Number of Houses Paid a Subsidy by the Department in 2016		
Local Authority	Number of Group Water Schemes	Number of Houses
Carlow	4	684
Cavan	27	10,367
Clare	39	5,140
Cork	31	958
Donegal	38	2,403
Galway	119	15,904
Kerry	41	4,151
Kildare	6	617
Kilkenny	50	1,543
Laois	24	1,700
Leitrim	26	2,178
Limerick	30	3,601
Longford	2	92
Louth	6	940
Mayo	95	22,402
Meath	3	519
Monaghan	12	9,574
Offaly	16	4,370
Roscommon	13	2,436
Sligo	16	2,233
Tipperary	61	2,722
Waterford	7	72
Westmeath	5	269
Wexford	16	1,409
Wicklow	7	394
<b>Total</b>	<b>694</b>	<b>96,678</b>

In order to establish a more complete picture of the group water scheme sector, work is being advanced on the compilation of a full dataset of group water schemes across the country. The dataset is being developed through the co-operation of key stakeholders involving local authorities, the National Federation of Group Water Schemes as well as my Department.

To ensure equity of treatment with households on public water supplies the subsidy rates for

group water schemes were adjusted down in 2015 to reflect the new domestic water charging regime introduced on 1 January 2015. In line with the suspension of domestic water charges for a period of nine months from 1 July 2016, as set out in the Water Services (Amendment) Act 2016, and to ensure equity of treatment with households on public water supplies, my Department advised local authorities in August 2016 that, for the duration of the suspension period, the subsidy rates were adjusted up to pre-2015 levels to reflect the suspension of domestic water charges for households connected to the public water supply. My Department will give further consideration to the subsidies available for the operation of group water schemes in light of the Oireachtas decision on the enduring funding model for public domestic water services.

Details of the level of subsidies are available from local authorities and on my Department's website at the following link: <http://housing.gov.ie/water/water-services/rural-water-programme/group-water-schemes-and-rural-water-issues>.

Census 2011 indicated that 161,532 private dwellings in the country are dependent on a private non-mains source of water supply (more commonly called private wells) for their household water supply. Figures for Census 2016 will not be available until later in 2017. There is no annual subsidy funding towards the operation and maintenance cost of private wells.

### **Housing Assistance Payments**

278. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the position regarding tenants who are receiving rent support and are now being told they must move to HAP (details supplied). [11871/17]

279. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the position regarding a tenant that is being moved to the HAP scheme but wishes to remain on the local authority waiting list for a local authority home. [11872/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 278 and 279 together.

The nationwide rollout of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme was completed with its introduction, on 1 March 2017, to the administrative areas of Dublin City Council, Fingal County Council and Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council. Eligible households in all 31 local authority areas can now avail of an immediate form of social housing support, with €153 million being made available for the scheme in 2017.

Upon commencement of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme in a local authority administrative area, the availability of rent supplement support is altered and in general rent supplement will no longer be available to any new applicant households that have an identified long-term housing need.

The Department of Social Protection may request long term recipients of rent supplement to contact their local authority in order to have their housing need assessed which could potentially allow them to access HAP. Should a rent supplement recipient fail to engage with their local authority as requested, the Department of Social Protection may suspend, or ultimately cease, their rent supplement payment. Local authorities are working closely with local Department of Social Protection staff to transfer eligible households from the rent supplement scheme to HAP. The phased process of transferring households from rent supplement to HAP, which only begins after the scheme has been introduced and established in a local authority area for some months, is carefully managed in order to ensure that no gaps in support arise within the transfer process. While the operation of the rent supplement scheme is a matter for the Depart-

ment of Social Protection, I understand that rent supplement has yet to be suspended or ceased due to the refusal of an existing landlord to accept HAP.

A landlord or an agent acting on behalf of a landlord is not legally obliged to enter into a tenancy agreement with a HAP recipient. However, since 1 January 2016, a person cannot be discriminated against when renting because they are getting rent supplement certain other payments, including HAP. If a person feels that they have been discriminated against by a landlord or their agent, they can make a complaint under the Equal Status Acts.

Following the commencement of the provisions in the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014, HAP is considered to be a social housing support and consequently households are not eligible to remain on the main housing waiting list. However, acknowledging that households on the waiting list who avail of HAP might have expectations that they would receive an allocated form of social housing support, Ministerial directions have issued to ensure that, should they so choose, HAP recipients can avail of a move to other forms of social housing support through a transfer list. With the completion of the HAP rollout and the ending of the scheme's pilot phase, I recently signed a Ministerial Direction instructing Local Authorities to continue to offer HAP tenants access to other forms of social housing through the transfer list. This refreshed direction ensures that following completion of the HAP pilot phase, HAP tenants still get all the benefits of HAP and are no less likely to get a different form of social housing support.

The practical operation of transfer lists is a matter for each local authority to manage, on the basis of their scheme of letting priorities. The setting of such schemes is a reserved function of the local authority and as such is a matter for the elected members. I understand that the majority of HAP households do avail of the option to be placed on a transfer list. Since its statutory commencement in September 2014, some 240 households (at the end of December 2016) have transferred from the HAP scheme to other forms of social housing support.

Further information in relation to the HAP scheme is available on [www.hap.ie](http://www.hap.ie).

### Tax Code

280. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if consideration will be given to introducing a vacant property tax as outlined by a charity (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11875/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Pillar 5 of the Government's Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness is specifically focussed 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.

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. The Working Group has met five times to date, and is considering a range of potential interventions with a view to facilitating and incentivising the greater re-utilisation of vacant properties. Ultimately, issues in relation to taxation are a matter for the Minister for Finance.

Furthermore, in relation to under-utilised and vacant lands, the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015, enacted in July 2015, introduced a new measure, the vacant site levy, which is aimed at incentivising the development of vacant, under-utilised sites in urban areas. Planning authorities are empowered to apply an annual vacant site levy, from 2019 onwards, of 3% of the market value of vacant sites, exceeding 0.05 hectares in area - with reduced or zero rates of levy applying in specific circumstances – which, in the planning authority’s opinion, were vacant or idle in the preceding year, in areas identified by the planning authority in its development plan or local area plan for residential or regeneration development. The 3% rate of vacant site levy is consistent with the rate applied to derelict sites under the Derelict Sites Act 1990 and is considered reasonable, without being over-punitive, for the purposes of incentivising the activation of such sites for residential or regeneration purposes. In this regard, it is also worth noting that all levies due on an individual site remain a charge on the land concerned until all outstanding levies due are paid. Accordingly, there will be a cumulative effect associated with not activating a site for development purposes for each year a site remains vacant or idle.

### **Pyrite Remediation Programme**

281. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to make more provision for the inclusion of level 1 homes in the pyrite remediation scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11954/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English):** The Pyrite Resolution Board, with the support of the Housing Agency, is responsible for the implementation of the pyrite remediation scheme. The pyrite remediation scheme is a scheme of “last resort” and is limited in its application and scope. The full conditions for eligibility under the scheme are set out in the scheme which is available on the Board’s website ([www.pyriteboard.ie](http://www.pyriteboard.ie)).

The scheme is applicable to dwellings which are subject to significant damage attributable to pyritic heave established in accordance with I.S. 398-1:2013 - Reactive pyrite in sub-floor hardcore material – Part 1: Testing and categorisation protocol. In this regard, it is a condition of eligibility under the scheme that an application to the Board must be accompanied by a Building Condition Assessment with a Damage Condition Rating of 2. Dwellings which do not have a Damage Condition Rating of 2 are not eligible to apply under the scheme. This ensures that, having regard to available resources, the focus of the scheme is on dwellings which are most severely damaged by pyritic heave. I have no proposals to amend this eligibility criterion.

While dwellings with Damage Condition Ratings of 1 do not qualify under the scheme, some may be considered in accordance with the exceptional circumstance provisions set out in section 17 of the Act. Section 17 provides that exceptional circumstances may apply where:

- failure to include a dwelling with a Damage Condition Rating of 1 in the scheme may result in damage to a dwelling which is being remediated under the scheme, or
- pyrite remediation work is causing or may cause damage to the dwelling with the Damage Condition Rating of 1.

Where a dwelling with a Damage Condition Rating of 1 adjoins a dwelling with a Damage Condition Rating of 2, the Housing Agency will be notified and will consider if exceptional circumstances apply when the Remedial Works Plan is being drawn up; the Board will be informed of any recommendation for a decision in the matter.

### County Development Plans

282. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he has received an application from Cork County Council to secure funds for the development of Monard, County Cork, which has been identified as the location of a new town on the county development plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11998/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I have not received any request from Cork County Council in respect of funding for the development of the Strategic Development Zone designated by the Government at Monard and for which a Planning Scheme was approved by An Bord Pleanála in May 2016, details of which can be accessed at the following link <http://www.pleanala.ie/casenum/ZD2012.html>. This is a matter for the local authority to progress.

### Seniors Alert Scheme

283. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of persons availing of the senior alert scheme in each of the years 2013 to 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12010/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The objective of the Seniors Alert Scheme is to encourage support for vulnerable older people in our communities through the provision of personal monitored alarms to enable them to continue to live securely in their homes with confidence, independence and peace of mind. Funding is available under the Scheme towards the purchase by a registered community-based organisation of equipment, i.e. a personal alarm and/or pendant, which is provided to the elderly person participating, while the associated monitoring and service charges are the responsibility of the individual participant. The data relating to the number of persons availing of this scheme is set out in the following table:

Year	Number of Beneficiaries
2013	10,597
2014	7,120
2015	6,705
2016	7,301

### Social and Affordable Housing Data

284. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of social housing units his Department estimates will be delivered each year through the Part V mechanism up until 2020; the number delivered in 2016; and the assumptions regarding housing output on which these estimates are based. [12177/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney):** My Department publishes a range of statistics in relation to housing, including on

Part V output which is available at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/affordable-housing/affordable-housing-and-part-v-statistics>. Information in respect of the full year of 2016 is currently being finalised and will be published shortly. It is anticipated that over the lifetime of the Action Plan, at least 4,700 new social homes will be delivered through the Part V mechanism. Under Pillar 3 of Rebuilding Ireland, the aim is to double the completion level of additional homes in the next four years to deliver over 25,000 homes on average per annum, which will potentially impact on Part V delivery, and therefore making assumptions regarding housing output on which to base Part V estimates is not straightforward. It depends to a significant extent on the profile of the delivered housing. For example, developments for nine houses or less are exempt from Part V, while there are other compliance options including the transfer of land.

Given our ambitious target to deliver 47,000 social homes over the period of Rebuilding Ireland, I am keen to see a strong delivery through all programmes, including Part V. Funding is in place to meet this delivery, including any increases that arise in private housing output. Accordingly, we will closely monitor the delivery of housing generally, and the options for housing providers for delivering on their Part V obligations, and we will adjust our targets for Part V social housing delivery in line with that delivery.

### **Free Travel Scheme**

285. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position of Irish and EU law with respect to State subventions for the free travel pass scheme being paid to private transport operators; if there are any cut-off dates before which or after which the subvention must be paid; if any changes are being proposed for new private transport operators; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11465/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** The free travel scheme provides free travel on the main public and private transport services for those eligible under the scheme. These include road, rail and ferry services provided by companies such as Bus Átha Cliath, Bus Éireann and Iarnród Éireann, as well as Luas and services provided by over 80 private transport operators. There are currently approx. 874,000 customers with direct eligibility with an annual allocation of €80 million.

The free travel scheme was introduced in 1967. It is not operated as a public service obligation (PSO) and it does not confer any financial advantage on participating transport undertakings or place participating transport undertakings in a more favourable competitive position as regards non-participants. The scheme operates in an objective and transparent manner and on the basic premise that participants should be left no better or worse off as a result of the existence of the scheme. To this end, compensation under the scheme is calculated on the basis of fares foregone at a reduced rate to take account of travel generated by the free travel scheme. Those operators which participate in the scheme receive a payment from my Department significantly below the standard fare whereas those operators which do not participate in the scheme are free to charge full fare for all passengers. Operators and routes have to be commercially viable in their own right and cannot rely on payment from the free travel scheme as some form of subvention. Many countries including United Kingdom, Germany and France have concessionary travel for the elderly, and it is a feature of supports for older people in many EU member states. I am satisfied that the arrangements which apply in Ireland under our Free Travel scheme are consistent with EU law.

Payments to private transport operators who participate in the free travel scheme are made on the 7th of each month in respect of the previous month. The amount each operator receives

is agreed following the survey of their route.

There are no new changes or conditions proposed for accepting new private transport operators into the free travel scheme at this time.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Disability Allowance Applications**

286. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an application for a long-term disability allowance in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11191/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** This lady submitted an application for disability allowance on 15 February 2016.

The application, based upon the evidence submitted, was refused on medical grounds and the person in question was notified in writing of this decision on 9 April 2016 and of her rights of review and appeal. No appeal/review was received.

If the person in question believes they may qualify, it is open to her to reapply by completing and submitting to my department the relevant application form (DA1).

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Disability Allowance Applications**

287. **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. [11211/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** This lady has been awarded disability allowance with effect from 16 November 2016. The first payment will be made by her chosen payment method on 22 March 2017.

Arrears of payment due will issue as soon as possible once any necessary adjustment is calculated and applied in respect of any overlapping payments or in respect of outstanding overpayments (if applicable).

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Disability Allowance Applications**

288. **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. [11213/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** I can confirm that my department received an application for disability allowance from this lady on 22 August 2016.

On 28 February 2017 the person concerned was requested to supply supporting documenta-



tion required by the deciding officer in order to make a decision on her eligibility. On receipt of this information a decision will be made and the person concerned will be notified of the outcome.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Carer's Allowance Applications**

289. **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. [11214/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** The application for carer's allowance in respect of the person concerned was awarded on 1 March 2017 and the first payment will issue to the person's bank nominated post office on 9 March 2017.

Arrears of allowance due from 28 July 2016 to 8 March 2017 2017 were issued by cheque on 1 March 2017. The person concerned was notified of these details on 1 March 2017.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Carer's Allowance Applications**

290. **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. [11215/17]

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

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

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Carer's Allowance Applications**

291. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an appeal for a carer's allowance in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11216/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** The person concerned applied for carer's allowance (CA) on 15 April 2016.

CA is a means-tested social assistance payment, made to persons who are providing full-time care and attention to a person who has a disability such that they require that level of care.

A person can be considered to be providing full-time care and attention where they are en-

gaged in employment, self-employment or on training courses outside the home for a maximum of 15 hours per week, provided that they can show to the satisfaction of a deciding officer that adequate care has been provided for the care recipient in their absence.

This application was disallowed on the grounds that she was not providing full-time care and attention because she was working outside the home in excess of 15 hours per week.

She was notified on 4 August 2016 of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

She appealed this decision and the case was submitted to the Social Welfare Appeals Office for determination. An Appeals Officer (AO), having fully considered all of the available evidence, disallowed the appeal.

The person concerned was notified on 9 February 2017 of the AO's decision and was provided at that time with an explanation of the basis for this decision.

Under Social Welfare legislation, the decision of an AO is final and conclusive and may only be reviewed in the light of additional evidence or new facts. If the person concerned has any additional evidence or new facts they wish to be considered they should submit them to the carer's allowance area of my Department which is based in Longford.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Invalidity Pension Payments**

292. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Social Protection the details of arrears due to a person (details supplied) with regard to an invalidity pension; when payment will issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11231/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The lady concerned has been awarded invalidity pension with effect from the 27 October 2016. Her first payment issued to her nominated bank account on the 09 February 2017 and all arrears due from the 27 October 2016 to the 08 February 2017 issued to her account on the 02 March 2017.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Employment Support Services**

293. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the options that are available for self employers that wish to take on an employee for a vacant post; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11243/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** The Jobsplus incentive is designed to encourage employers and businesses to focus their recruitment efforts on those who have been out of work for long periods, or on young people seeking employment. It provides employers with two levels of payment - €7,500 or €10,000 over two years, paid in monthly instalments, provided the employment is maintained. The rate of payment depends on the length of time the person employed has been on the Live Register.

The incentive is open to all eligible employers in the private, community and voluntary sec-

tors, including those who are self-employed. It is available to all employers filling new positions or vacancies that arise as a consequence of natural turnover.

Employers can find out more information and register for JobsPlus on the [www.jobsplus.ie](http://www.jobsplus.ie) website.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Employment Support Services**

294. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the service provided by the Jobs Ireland telephone service available to employers; the way this service operates; the details of recent changes to the service; the way in which employers are advised to best make use of this service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11244/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** Jobsireland.ie is a free online jobs site that enables employers to post job opportunities and jobseekers to search and apply for these opportunities online. At 20 years old, the original site was showing its age. For example, although it enabled jobseekers to search for job opportunities based on job type and location, it wasn't possible for employers to search for suitable jobseekers on the site.

Accordingly, my Department issued a tender last year for the development and implementation of a new service that would enable both employers and jobseekers to search for each other using competencies and skillsets as well as the traditional job-type classifications. As part of the new service, candidate profiles will be automatically matched to job specifications posted by employers. Candidates can also use the site to apply for the jobs advertised. The system will also integrate my Department's Intreo service.

Following the procurement process, a young Irish tech company is building and delivering the new service on a phased basis. There were some teething problems with the first phase implementation, but performance issues have largely been resolved. The Department continues to work with the supplier to enhance the service and to add new functionality over the coming months.

In addition to the online service, the Department's National Contact Centre provides a telephone service to assist employers and candidates. The original service operated from 10am to 4pm, Monday to Friday. In response to an increase in queries, additional staff were assigned to deal with phone queries and operating hours were extended to 9am to 5pm daily.

Employers can contact the JobsIreland team on LoCall 1890 800024 or Tel: +353 (0)1 2481398. Rates charged for the use of Lo-Call numbers may vary among different service providers. JobsIreland phone service details are available on the 'Contact Us' section of the website [www.jobsireland.ie](http://www.jobsireland.ie) and on [www.welfare.ie](http://www.welfare.ie) home page by clicking 'Contact Us' and then 'Employer Engagement Support Network'.

### **Labour Activation Projects**

295. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Social Protection the penalty clauses that apply to his Department under the agreement with Turas Nua and Seetec; the circumstances in which they arise; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11257/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** As the Deputy will be aware, JobPath is a service that supports people who are long-term unemployed (over 12 months) and

those most at risk of becoming long-term unemployed to secure and sustain paid employment. Contractors are paid via a combination of an initial registration fee and thereafter only on the basis of job sustainment fees: which are only paid in respect of each period of 13 weeks the former jobseeker is in sustained employment, up to a maximum of 52 weeks (i.e. a maximum of four payments).

Failure by a provider to deliver the service to the satisfaction of the Department may result in the application of penalties by the department. Contractors are subject to regular inspections, assessment of their performance against contracted targets and surveys of customer satisfaction. If the service is not being delivered to the department's satisfaction and/or if the employment placement targets as set out in the contract are not being achieved this may result in the application of penalties by the department through the retention of fees. Fees may be reduced by up to 15% until the underperformance is addressed. In addition, ultimately the Department has the right to terminate the contract in such circumstances.

No such penalty clauses apply to the department.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications**

296. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an application for a domiciliary care allowance for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11275/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** An application for domiciliary care allowance (DCA) was received in respect of this child on the 23rd November 2016. The applicant was notified on the 1st March 2017 that their domiciliary care allowance claim has been awarded from 1st December 2016. The first payment of the allowance, along with arrears due, will issue on the 21st March 2017.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications**

297. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of a domiciliary care allowance for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11283/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** An application for domiciliary care allowance (DCA) was received on behalf of the child concerned on the 26th July 2016. The original decision in the case was not to allow the application, as it was considered that the child did not meet the qualifying criteria. Following a review of that decision, the applicant has been notified that DCA has now been awarded in this case.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Disability Allowance Applications**

298. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of a disability allowance for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11286/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** I confirm that my department was notified by the Social Welfare Appeals Office on the 16 February 2017 that the appeal for this gentleman was upheld and was deemed to be medically suitable for the scheme.

His file has been passed to a deciding officer (DO) to implement the appeals officers' decision. As the person concerned omitted to fully complete the form, the DO sent these to be completed and returned. On receipt of these documents, his eligibility will be determined. The person concerned will be notified in writing once full entitlement has been established.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the deputy.

### **Departmental Legal Costs**

299. **Deputy Michael D'Arcy** asked the Minister for Social Protection the amount spent by his Department and other Government agencies in helping workers of a company (details supplied) take their case to the European courts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11300/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** The European Court of Justice (ECJ) delivered a judgement on 25 April 2013 arising from an investigation of complaints under Directive 2008/94/EC on the protection of employees in the event of the insolvency of their employer and the resultant contractual obligations that derive under the transposition of that Directive by the Irish Government.

The ECJ found in favour of the plaintiffs who were 10 former Waterford Crystal workers. The ECJ ruled that the Irish Government had failed to transpose the Directive in such a manner as to protect the rights of the plaintiffs to old-age benefits under a supplementary pension scheme established by their employer.

This case was taken by the plaintiffs against the Minister for Social and Family Affairs, and the Attorney General. It would not be normal practice for my Department to spend money to assist people in taking a case against the State. Therefore, in this case, I can confirm that my Department did not spend any money to assist the Waterford Crystal workers to take their case to the ECJ.

I do not have any information to confirm if other government agencies assisted the Waterford Crystal workers in taking their case to the European courts. If any such assistance was provided that would be a matter between the workers and the agency involved.

I hope that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Education Funding**

300. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection if there are specific programmes or schemes under the remit of his Department that support those 40 years of age and over that are long-term unemployed enter or return to third level education to reskill and retrain; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11313/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** The Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) Grant, payable by the Department of Education and Skills, represents the primary support for persons pursuing education. My Department provides income support in the

form of the Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) scheme for people on certain social welfare payments who wish to participate in full-time education. The scheme provides an approved recipient with a weekly payment while they are participating in full-time education.

A person wishing to pursue BTEA must satisfy a number of conditions. These include being in receipt of a prescribed social welfare payment for a specified time period, commencing the first year of a full-time course of study leading to a recognised qualification in a recognised college and, in general, progressing in the level of education held by the person, with reference to the national framework of qualifications.

A person must be at least 21 years of age and in receipt of a relevant social welfare payment for 3 months if pursuing a second level course, 9 months for third level study or 12 months if pursuing the Professional Masters of Education.

In general, BTEA can be approved where the course of study leads to a higher qualification on the National Framework of Qualifications other than that already held by the applicant up to a level 8.

A jobseeker who is interested in returning to education should make an appointment with a case officer in their Intreo Centre to discuss the BTEA, as part of their personal progression plan.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Exceptional Needs Payment Applications**

301. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of persons that have applied for an exceptional needs payment to date in 2017, in tabular form; the number that have been awarded a payment; the number that have been refused a payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11314/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** Under the supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) scheme, the Department may make a single exceptional needs payment (ENP) to help meet essential, once-off and unforeseen expenditure which a person could not reasonably be expected to meet out of their weekly income. The Government has provided €31.5 million for exceptional needs payments (ENPs) and urgent needs payments (UNPs) in 2017.

There is no automatic entitlement to a payment. The ENP scheme is demand led and payments are made at the discretion of the officers administering the scheme taking into account the requirements of the legislation and all the relevant circumstances of the case in order to ensure that the payments target those most in need of assistance.

Statistics are maintained relating to payments under the ENP scheme, however they are not maintained on the number of applications or the outcome of those applications. There have been 15,100 ENP payments made to 25 February 2017.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Rent Supplement Scheme Data**

302. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of house-

holds by county that have had their rent increased above the prescribed rent supplement limit, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11315/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** The rent supplement scheme, for which the Government has provided €253 million for in 2017, plays a vital role in housing families and individuals, with the scheme currently supporting approximately 46,000 tenants.

In recognition of the on-going rental market difficulties, my Department implements a targeted case-by-case policy approach that allows for flexibility where landlords seek rents in excess of the rent limits. Since the introduction of this flexible approach, almost 11,200 persons at imminent risk of homelessness have been supported through increased rent supplement payments. A county breakdown of these payments is provided in the following tabular statement.

The Deputy will be aware that the strategic policy direction of the Department is to return rent supplement to its original purpose of being a short-term income support with the introduction of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme, which from 1 March, 2017, is now available nationwide. HAP was first piloted in the Limerick area in early 2014, with the number of HAP recipients (c. 1,600) in Limerick City and County now exceeding the number of rent supplement recipients (945). In addition to the ongoing transfer of tenancies from rent supplement to HAP, the majority of new applicants in Limerick seeking State support towards their rent are being supported under HAP rather than rent supplement. This activity is reflected in the low number of increased payments provided under rent supplement in this area.

In tandem with the revised rental limits introduced in July 2016 and on-going transfers to HAP, my Department continues to implement a targeted, flexible, case-by-case approach where rents may exceed the appropriate maximum limit ensuring where possible that rent supplement tenants can retain their homes.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

#### **Tabular Statement**

##### **Total Cumulative Increased Rental Payments by County as at 28th February, 2017**

County	Cumulative Awards under National Tenancy Sustainment Framework	Cumulative Awards under protocol with Threshold	Total no. of increased payments by County
CARLOW	75		75
CAVAN	66		66
CLARE	60		60
CORK	454	97	551
DONEGAL	-		-
DUBLIN	4,320	2,570	6,890
GALWAY	207	3	210
KERRY	206		206
KILDARE	558	3	561
KILKENNY	136		136
LAOIS	119		119
LEITRIM	101		101
LIMERICK	17		17

## National Internship Scheme Review

303. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the evaluations he will carry out on JobBridge, Springboard and MOMENTUM in view of the recent EU Commission review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11351/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** In 2015 my Department initiated a rolling, multi-annual evaluations programme, using econometric and qualitative methods, of *Pathways to Work* programme and process reforms. This includes large-scale annual customer satisfaction surveys. It draws upon an episodic administrative database, the Jobseekers’ Longitudinal Database (JLD), capturing jobseekers spells of unemployment and exits to employment, training and education, from 2004.

The two major evaluations currently under way using the JLD are the evaluation of the Intreo ‘one-stop-shop’ service for jobseekers, and of the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance (BTWEA).

As part of this evaluation programme, the JobBridge evaluation report was published in October 2016. It had 3 elements: a rigorous counterfactual impact evaluation (that used cohort-building techniques to continuously assess impacts); a survey (response rate: 33.5% of all participants and 23.3% of all host organisations); and a cost-benefit analysis. Key findings included:

- Individuals similar to those who participated in JobBridge had a 36.6% probability of securing employment within one year, whereas the JobBridge interns’ probability of securing employment within one year increased to 48.4% (an 11.8 percentage point difference and a 32% increase in the probability of becoming employed).

- The overall economic cost-benefit analysis, taking account of increased employment and incomes, indicates a positive economic net benefit.

- Amongst interns, there was broad agreement that the internship provided them with new job skills and an opportunity to gain quality work experience. However, there was dissatisfaction with the value of the top-up payment and some aspects of the administration of the scheme.

Following publication of the evaluation in October 2016, I announced my intention to replace JobBridge in 2017 with a new work experience programme that better reflected the improved labour market and addressed certain criticisms of the scheme. The design of the scheme will be informed by learning from the evaluation, by proposed design principles as recommended by the Labour Market Council, and by consultation with stakeholders.

In relation to Springboard and Momentum, which are operated under the aegis of the Department of Education and Skills, there have been formal evaluations undertaken of both programmes in recent years. The latest statistics for Springboard show that 80% of participants between 2011 and 2015 are no longer on the Live Register.

The above information was supplied to the European Commission during the drafting of the 2017 Country Report on Ireland.

## Free Travel Scheme

304. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Social Protection his plans to make any changes to the free travel pass; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that many persons are



concerned regarding this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11396/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** The free travel scheme provides free travel on the main public and private transport services for those eligible under the scheme. These include road, rail and ferry services provided by companies such as Bus Átha Cliath, Bus Éireann and Iarnród Éireann, as well as Luas and services provided by over 80 private transport operators. There are currently approx. 874,000 customers with direct eligibility with an annual allocation of €80 million. The scheme is available to all people aged over 66 living permanently in the State. To qualify for the scheme, applicants who are under age 66 must be in receipt of a qualifying payment. These are invalidity pension, blind pension, disability allowance, carer's allowance or an equivalent social security payment from a country covered by EC Regulations or one with which Ireland has a Bilateral Social Security Agreement.

I have no plans to introduce any measures which would reduce the benefit of the pass to beneficiaries, or to reduce the number of people who qualify and I am fully committed to its retention. I am aware that the free travel pass is a valuable support for older people and people with disabilities, and that it has a significant role in preventing their isolation and promoting social inclusion.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Public Relations Contracts Expenditure**

305. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the amount his Department spent on public relations consultants and all matters relating to public relations costs in 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11435/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** There has been no expenditure by my department on public relations consultants in 2016.

Concerning matters relating to public relations costs, expenditure of €395 was incurred on an Effective Press Release Writing course delivered by the Public Relations Institute of Ireland in September 2016.

### **Disability Allowance Applications**

306. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will expedite a request for a review of an application for disability allowance in respect of a person (details supplied), in view of the medical evidence provided in their case. [11438/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath) (Deputy Finian McGrath):** This man has been awarded disability allowance with effect from 12 October 2016. The first payment will be made by her chosen payment method on 22 March 2017.

Arrears of payment due will issue as soon as possible once any necessary adjustment is calculated and applied in respect of any overlapping payments or in respect of outstanding overpayments (if applicable).

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

## **Community Employment Schemes Operation**

307. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will give consideration to removing the year 2000 rule to community employment schemes, which is proving to be a barrier to recruitment. [11447/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** As the Deputy may be aware, I brought a Memo to Government last week and obtained approval to publish my Department's review report on CE and the other work schemes, and to progress the various changes that were recommended. I will be publishing the review report shortly.

The changes proposed to the Community Employment (CE) scheme include moving the reference year. Currently participation on CE prior to the 3rd April 2000 is not counted. It is proposed to move this reference date to 1st January 2007. This will mean, when it is implemented, that more people will be able to avail of CE schemes as they will not have reached their maximum duration as any time on a scheme prior to 2007 will not be counted.

As part of the roll out of the new measures, my Department will consult with key stakeholders in the coming weeks and implementation of the new measures will be progressed subsequently.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

## **Jobseeker's Allowance Applications**

308. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an application in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11458/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** The person concerned was requested to supply additional information to the department so that a decision could be made on their application for Jobseekers Allowance. The department has now received that information and is in a position to make a decision on the application which will be done today. The Intreo Office concerned will be in contact with the applicant to advise of that decision.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

## **Social Welfare Benefits**

309. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will review the savings limit of €20,000 for a single person that is in receipt of the State pension non-contributory (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11463/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** In assessing means for social assistance payments, account is taken of the income and the value of capital and property of the claimant.

Social welfare legislation provides that the yearly value of property (including capital) owned but not personally used or enjoyed is assessable for means testing purposes for social assistance payments. Such property includes all monies held in financial institutions or otherwise, the market value of shares and houses and premises owned by a claimant which may or may not be put to commercial use. However, it does not include property such as the family

home or, for example, a premises used by the claimant in carrying out a business.

For assessment purposes, savings are assessed by reference to the following, as follows:

#### **Capital – Assessment Formula**

AMOUNT OF CAPITAL	WEEKLY MEANS ASSESSED
Up to €20,000	Nil
€20,000 - €30,000	€1 per each €1,000
€30,000 - €40,000	€2 per each €1,000
Over €40,000	€4 per each €1,000

It should be noted that for the purposes of the State pension non-contributory, the amounts above are doubled in the case of a couple. In addition, the State Pension Non Contributory has a general means disregard of €30 per week.

This means that a single claimant of SPNC with no other income can have savings of €40,000 (which would result in a weekly means assessment from capital of €30) and this would have no impact on their SPNC payment. Similarly, a SPNC claimant who is one of a couple can have savings of €80,000 (and no other means) and the claimant would still receive the maximum weekly rate of SPNC. Note that each member of the couple is assessed with half of the total property and income of the couple.

Furthermore, no account is taken of interest or dividend payments received in the means assessment. The assessment formula reflects the fact that there is an expectation that persons with reasonable amounts of capital and property are in a position to use that capital or to realise the value of property to support themselves without having to rely solely on a means tested welfare payment.

If the threshold were to be increased, the people who would benefit would be those who had income or assets of varying levels and, accordingly, such claimants would be treated more favourably than claimants who had fewer or no personal resources. Any changes to the current arrangements would have to be considered in an overall policy and Budgetary context.

### **Community Employment Schemes Data**

310. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of community employment scheme projects for each of the years 2012 to 2016, by county, in tabular form; the total number of participants for each of the years 2012 to 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11477/17]

311. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of projects supported through the community employment scheme which have been amalgamated for each of the years 2012 to 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11478/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 310 and 311 together.

The number of community employment (CE) scheme projects for each of the years 2012 to 2016, by county, in tabular form is provided in the following table 1. In addition, the total number of participants for each of the years 2012 to 2016 is provided in table 2.

**Table 1 :CE Projects by County (Year End Figures)**

County	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Carlow	18	16	16	15	15
Cavan	6	11	11	12	12
Clare	32	31	31	29	25
Cork	99	99	88	84	83
Donegal	62	59	57	55	51
Dublin	231	240	247	235	218
Galway	70	71	70	67	66
Kerry	46	50	47	45	44
Kildare	30	32	27	30	30
Kilkenny	16	17	16	16	16
Laois	17	16	16	16	15
Leitrim	10	8	7	7	7
Limerick	68	62	56	49	51
Longford	16	15	15	15	14
Louth	29	30	28	27	25
Mayo	38	38	36	36	34
Meath	14	17	14	18	18
Monaghan	13	13	12	12	12
Offaly	18	18	18	18	18
Roscommon	15	15	17	16	16
Sligo	21	21	20	20	20
Tipperary North	26	26	24	21	22
Tipperary South	31	35	34	28	26
Waterford	36	39	41	39	37
Westmeath	24	23	20	20	20
Wexford	45	47	45	45	44
Wicklow	30	26	25	23	23
Total	1061	1075	1038	998	962

**Table 2 - Number of CE Participants and Supervisors, (Year End Figures)**

County/ Area	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Total	22,445	23,943	24,645	24,218	23,733

Details of the projects that have amalgamated for each of the years 2012 to 2016 is being compiled and will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as it is available.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### Invalidity Pension Appeals

312. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a decision has been made on a review of an invalidity pension application in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11491/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** Following a review of all the information available it has been established that the lady referred to satisfies the medical conditions for Invalidity Pension (IP). She has been awarded the personal rate of IP with effect from 28 July 2016. Payment will issue to her nominated bank account on the 23 March 2017 and she was notified of this decision on the 06 March 2017.

She has applied for an increase for a qualified adult and a qualified child. Her entitlement to these increases is being assessed and when finalised she will be notified directly of the decision. Any arrears due from 28 July 2016 to 22 March 2017 (less any overlapping social welfare payment and/or outstanding overpayment) will issue in due course.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications**

313. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason for the refusal of a domiciliary care allowance for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11493/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** An application for domiciliary care allowance was received on the 20th October 2016. This application was not allowed as the child was not considered to satisfy the qualifying conditions for the allowance. A letter issued on the 2nd February 2017 outlining the decision of the deciding officer to refuse the allowance.

An appeal of this decision was registered on 2nd March 2017 and additional information on the child's condition/care needs was supplied. The application together with the new information supplied will be forwarded to a Medical Assessor for their professional opinion. Upon receipt of the Medical Assessor's opinion, the case will be further examined by a deciding officer, who will revise the original decision if warranted or alternatively, forward the case for consideration by the Social Welfare Appeals Office.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **State Pension (Contributory)**

314. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of old age pensioners whose weekly State pension payment is affected by his Department's practice of averaging contributions; his views on whether it is grossly unfair that some persons receive the full State pension with considerably less contributions than some persons that receive a reduced rate pension; the steps being taken to rectify this unfair anomaly; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11495/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** At present, entitlement to the contributory pension is determined by means of a 'yearly average' calculation, where the total contributions paid or credited are divided by the number of years of the working life (i.e. the period between when they first entered insurable employment and the year pension age). The yearly average test has been in existence since 1961 when contributory pensions were first

introduced. Payment rates are banded, e.g., someone with a yearly average of 48 or more contributions will qualify for a full pension, whereas someone with a yearly average of 20-29 will qualify for a pension at the 85% rate.

In most cases people will have a working life of between 40 and 50 years. However there would be a small number of cases where someone first entered employment in their early 50s, make 10 years of paid PRSI contributions, and manage to qualify for a full rate pension if their yearly average is 48 or higher. As the Deputy suggests, this is an anomaly, and has been inherent in the contributory pension since its introduction over 50 years ago.

The switch to a Total Contributions Approach is one of a number of planned reforms to State pensions set out in the National Pensions Framework (NPF) commissioned by the then Government and published in March 2010, and this will remove this anomaly. The aim of the total contributions approach is to make the rate of contributory pension more closely match contributions made by a person. Officials of my Department are currently working on the detailed development of the Total Contributions Approach with a view to making proposals for consideration later in the year. This is a very significant reform with considerable legal, administrative, and technical elements in its implementation. An important element in the final design of the scheme will be the position of women who have gaps in their contribution records as a result of caring duties, and this factor is being considered very carefully in developing this reform. When data becomes available from the Actuarial Review of the Social Insurance Fund which is currently underway, it will be used to draft material for use in the consultation phase of this reform. This is expected in the middle of this year.

For those with insufficient contributions to meet the requirements for a State pension (contributory), they may qualify for a means tested State pension (non-contributory), the maximum personal rate for which is €222 (95% of the maximum rate of the contributory pension). This will rise by €5 this month.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Disability Allowance Applications**

315. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a decision on a disability allowance will issue to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11501/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** I confirm that the application for disability allowance was withdrawn by this lady on 28 February 2017.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Disability Allowance**

316. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a person (details supplied) in County Kerry will receive credited contributions for the period they have been in receipt of disability allowance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11522/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The person in question was in receipt of disability allowance for the period 8 October 2008 to 28 February 2017. Notification has been issued to the relevant area to update the credited con-

tributions for this period of time.

### **Construction Contracts**

317. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Social Protection the level of construction inflation that has been experienced by his Department in each of the past six years and to date in 2017 in respect of construction projects and other capital projects; the way in which he monitors construction inflation and the mechanisms he employs to establish this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11542/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** Under the arrangements set out in Circular 1 of 2013, the OPW act as an agent for any building works carried out by the Department of Social Protection.

Providing a centralised service for the provision and management of accommodation is the most economic way of protecting the State property portfolio. OPW has the relevant expertise and trained personnel both in the procurement and undertaking of construction works. They place works contracts, certify works and pay contractors on behalf of the Department of Social Protection.

Details in relation to the level of construction inflation and how it is monitored are the responsibility of the OPW and should be addressed to the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

### **Labour Activation Projects**

318. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Social Protection the total number of participants at 31 December 2014, 31 December 2015 and 31 December 2016 from each activation scheme currently in operation; the number that subsequently took up employment within three, six, nine and 12 months after commencing an activation scheme, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11552/17]

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

To date, these policies have been effective in reducing unemployment. The unemployment rate has fallen from 14.8% in July 2012 to 6.6% in February 2017. The actual number of unemployed has fallen from 316,100 to 145,100 over this period. Irish unemployment is now significantly below the EU average.

The total number of participants at end 2014, end 2015 and end 2016 from each Department of Social Protection activation scheme currently in operation is given in Table 1.

**Table 1 Live Register Activation Programmes (Number) by Type of Activation**

Questions - Written Answers

Programme and Year	2014	2015	2016
Back to work allowance scheme - employee strand	3	0	0
Back to work enterprise allowance scheme - self-employed strand	11,166	11,881	10,977
Short-term enterprise allowance	479	396	409
Total back to work payments	11648	12277	11386
Other activation programmes - DSP part-time job incentive	397	421	482
Other activation programmes - TUS - community work placement initiative	7,877	7,939	7,273
Other activation programmes – JobBridge1	6,371	4,683	3,390
Other activation programmes - Gateway	1,685	2,350	692
Total other activation programmes	16,330	15,393	11,837
Community employment schemes (excluding supervisors)	23,249	22,813	22,356
Back to education courses - back to education allowance (BTEA)	23,366	18,345	14,386
Total back to education courses2	23,366	18,345	14,386
Total activation programmes3	79,593	73,828	64,965

1). JobBridge is closed to new entrants (last start date November 2016). JobBridge figure estimated at 3,390 December 2016 as data unavailable at time of publication.

2). Excludes DES/SOLAS schemes (FAS full-time training; Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS)).

3). Less DES/SOLAS schemes.

While systemised data are not readily available on employment outcomes on all programmes, some indicative figures are available. For example:

- The evaluation of JobBridge by Indecon (report published October 2016), shows on the



basis of self-reported survey results that 64.2% of interns were currently in employment at the time of the survey. Overall, individuals similar to those who participated in JobBridge had a 36.6% probability of securing employment within one year, whereas the JobBridge interns' probability of securing employment within one year increased to 48.4% (an 11.8 percentage point difference and a 32% increase in the probability of becoming employed).

- JobsPlus provides subsidies to employers for the full-time employment of those formerly long-term unemployed on the Live Register. In December 2016 there were 4,627 participants benefitting from JobsPlus.

- During 2015 3,100 (31%) of Community Employment leavers were reported to have progressed into employment.

I am confident that these measures, together with the continuing economic recovery, will support further reductions in unemployment.

### Rural Social Scheme

319. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Social Protection the cost of increasing the rural social scheme to levels of 3,500, 4,000, 4,500, 5,000, and 5,500 places; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11569/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** As the Deputy is aware, I have allocated an additional 500 places on the rural social scheme (RSS) as part of the social welfare budget package for 2017. This is the first increase in places since 2006 and will expand the overall number of participants from 2,600 to 3,100. The question of further additional places will be considered in the context of future Budgets.

The objective of the RSS is to provide income support for farmers and fishermen and all participants must be actively engaged in farming or fishing. In allocating the additional places, the Government recognises the benefits the RSS provides for participants and their families, as well as the valuable contribution the scheme makes to the provision of services in communities across Ireland.

Assuming that the participants supported by the RSS remain at the current payment rate, the full year cost of an additional 500 places is estimated at €8.5m, while the net cost is estimated at €3.8m. This costing consists of wages paid to participants, fuel allowance, supervisory costs, fees to implementing bodies, fees to the payroll provider and provision of input costs for implementing bodies.

**Table 1** below provides an estimate of the full year costs for the various participant numbers outlined in the Deputy's question.

Number of RSS participants	Estimated full year programme total cost - € million
3,500	€56.46m
4,000	€64.96m
4,500	€73.46m
5,000	€81.96m
5,500	€90.46m

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### Jobseeker's Allowance Data

320. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of recipients of jobseeker's allowance in County Kerry at 31 January in each of the years 2004 to 2011, by age, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11581/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** Due to changes in data systems in the Department, this level of breakdown is not available before 2012. However, the Central Statistics Office publishes a breakdown of the live register by age and county on its website monthly. I have collated, for the Deputy's convenience and information, the number of persons who were under 25 and those who were over 25 in Kerry that were recorded as being on the live register at the end of January in each of the years 2004 to 2011. This information is detailed in the following tabular statement. An official from my office recently sent an email detailing some other figures that will be of interest to you. Please don't hesitate to contact him about this email.

#### Number of persons on the live register in County Kerry at the end of January in each of the years 2004 - 2011

Year	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Under 25 years	1,189	1,127	1,110	1,176	1,380	2,533	3,016	2,802
25 years and over	5,959	5,844	5,709	5,945	6,550	10,770	13,902	14,343
All ages	7,148	6,971	6,819	7,121	7,930	13,303	16,918	17,145

Source: <http://www.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?Maintable=LRM07&PLanguage=0>.

### Community Employment Schemes Operation

321. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Social Protection the procedures that are in place to ensure that sponsors of community employment, CE, schemes manage and operate in accordance with the guidance as set out in the CE procedures manual, in particular the implementation of the 12 week exit plan for participants, adequate in situ on-the-job training and the three month follow-up on exiting the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11596/17]

322. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Social Protection the accountability measures in existence for sponsors and managers of community employment schemes that fail to implement the programme as set out in the community employment procedures manual; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11597/17]

323. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Social Protection the avenues and protections that are in place for participants on community employment, CE, schemes that wish to complain regarding the management and operation of a CE scheme by a sponsor or manager; if consideration will be given to the appointment of CE advocates to facilitate in providing an impartial and neutral place for participants to air concerns without fear of recriminations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11598/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 321, 322 and 323 together.

The Department of Social Protection (DSP) undertakes periodic Programme & Training Monitoring visits of all Community Employment (CE) schemes (at least one per year) in accordance with standard operating procedures. There is also a separate comprehensive monitor carried out on the financial aspects of each CE project every year. It is incumbent on every Sponsor to be compliant in all aspects of the operation of Community Employment.

Schemes that are found to be non-compliant as a result of a monitoring visit are given an opportunity to rectify any issues arising. DSP reserves the right, as per clause 16 of the Community Employment Agreement with the Sponsor, to terminate the agreement should the Sponsor fail to operate and administer the project to the satisfaction of DSP and in accordance with the specific conditions of the Agreement.

With respect to disputes arising within a CE scheme, complaints related to employment matters should be addressed to the complainant's Supervisor in the first instance. If the complaint remains unresolved, it should be referred to the complainant's employer, i.e. the Sponsor of the project.

Complaints related to the Sponsor's management of the programme should be referred to the local DSP Intreo Officer with responsibility for the project. If the complaint remains unresolved, it should then be referred to the local Area Manager with responsibility for CE schemes.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Pensions Data**

324. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will address concerns that persons eligible for the €5 pension increase may subsequently become ineligible for supplementary welfare payments; the number of pension recipients that may fall into this category; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11599/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** I understand that the Deputy is referring to the impact of the Budget 2017 increase on those in receipt of diet supplement, administered under the supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) scheme. Diet supplement is a means tested payment payable to qualifying persons, in receipt of the supplement prior to February 2014, who have been prescribed a special diet as a result of a specified medical condition. There are currently 3,400 in receipt of diet supplement at a cost of €4.6 million in 2017.

Following the outcome of a review of the costs of healthy eating and specialised diets by the Irish Nutrition and Dietetic Institute commissioned by the Department in 2013, the scheme is closed to new applicants since February 2014. In cases of particular hardship, officials continue to have the legislative power to award a SWA payment in cases of exceptional need.

When the diet supplement was abolished for new applicants, existing recipients continued to receive the supplement at the current rate of payment for as long as they continue to have an entitlement to the scheme or until their circumstances change. Arrangements are being put in place so that the effect of the Budget 2017 increase on weekly social welfare payments will not impact on the payment of diet supplement.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Community Employment Schemes Administration**

325. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Social Protection when community employment projects are being amalgamated; the reason assistant supervisors are not being approved to supervise larger projects; the reason little notice or consultation was carried out with sponsors and supervisors of schemes prior to changes made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11778/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** From time to time situations arise where Community Employment (CE) schemes amalgamate. In general a new sponsoring body is formed and it is a decision for the new sponsoring body as to what supervision arrangements are to be put in place (within the procedural framework of CE). My Department makes funding available for supervisory support. This grant support must be applied for by the sponsor with a detailed job description. The level of supervision required depends on the circumstances pertaining on a particular scheme.

It should be noted that the average supervisor to participant ratio is less than 17:1 which is well below the average approved level of 25:1.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Community Employment Schemes Data**

326. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Social Protection if his attention has been drawn to changes to job specification and terms and conditions for community employment supervisors due to larger numbers of participants per project; if his attention has been further drawn to the ongoing changes to the community employment manual yet no pay increases have been carried out to reflect this since 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11779/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** The Community Employment (CE) Sponsoring Organisations are the legal employers of Community Employment Supervisors. CE supervisors have benefited from pay increases linked to all phases of Benchmarking, Sustaining Progress (Parts 1 and 2) and Towards 2016 (all 4 phases) in the past, and have experienced no reduction in pay over recent years.

There have been no significant changes to the community employment manual in the last number of years and in addition the average supervisor to participant ratio is less than 17:1 which is well below the average approved level of 25:1.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Pensions Data**

327. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Social Protection the details of any pension schemes, occupational, private or public, which have requirements that potential payees under the widow's benefits element be notified before a certain time, such as under the a gold digger clause, that may allow for same sex couples to be denied succession rights on a pension due to the short timeframe since the Marriage Act 2015, in tabular form. [11796/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** There is no age criteria attached

to the widow's, widower's and surviving civil partner's pension, or criteria requiring such a marriage or civil partnership to have been entered into before a certain age. Provided a person was legally married or in a civil partnership at the time of the bereavement, and provided the other conditions such as PRSI are met, a person may qualify for a payment.

As regards the State pension, a pensioner's partner may qualify for an Increase for a Qualified Adult if they are wholly or mainly maintained by them. This payment can be made regardless of whether they are married, in a civil partnership, or simply cohabiting. A cohabitant is one of two adults (whether of the same or opposite sex) who live together as a couple in an intimate and committed relationship and who are not close relatives.

Private pension schemes (such as occupational pension scheme) are matters for pension scheme members, their employers, and the scheme trustees. My Department does not hold records of individual pension schemes and their rules (such as any "gold digger clause" in specific pension schemes). Therefore I cannot provide the information sought in tabular form.

Under the provisions of the Pensions Act, persons in civil partnerships, in same sex marriages or in opposite sex marriages are treated equally. Broadly speaking, pension scheme rules may provide :-

- That spousal pension benefits will be paid where the member is married at the point of retirement;

- That spousal pension benefits will be paid where the member is married at the point of death;

Under 1, where a same sex couple marry subsequent to the member's retirement, no pension would be payable. This also applies to an opposite sex couple, so there is no breach of the principle of equal pensions treatment.

Under 2, where a same sex couple marry subsequent to retirement, but before the member's death, a spousal pension would be payable. This would also be the case for a same sex couple.

Any changes to pension scheme rules would be required to apply equally to persons in civil partnerships, in same sex marriages or in opposite sex marriages.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Community Employment Schemes Operation**

328. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection when he will announce the reforms to the community employment and Gateway schemes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11807/17]

341. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will confirm or deny recent reports that employment schemes such as Tús and Gateway aimed at getting persons back to work face being cut (details supplied) as part of cost saving measures; the proposals in place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11977/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 328 and 341 together.

Community Employment (CE), Tús, Gateway and the Rural Social Scheme are part of the Department's range of programmes catering for long-term unemployed jobseekers and those

most distant from the labour market. The schemes are designed to break the cycle of unemployment and maintain work readiness, thereby improving a person's opportunities of returning to the labour market.

Tús was introduced as a direct response to the growth in the level of unemployment during the financial crisis. As the economic recovery takes hold and the overall level of unemployment continues to fall, my Department recognises the need to adapt these schemes to the changing circumstances, opportunities and the needs of jobseekers. With this in mind, my Department undertook an analysis of the CE programme and while the primary focus was on that scheme, the review also looked at other employment programmes such as Tús and Gateway and made a number of recommendations in relation to the operation of these schemes.

I recently brought a Memo to Government and obtained approval to publish the review report and to progress a number of recommendations. I will be publishing the review report shortly.

As part of the roll out of any new measures, my Department will be consulting with key stakeholders. The nature and format of the consultation process are being finalised at present.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputies.

### Public Transport Subsidies

329. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Social Protection the amount paid in subventions from his Department to Bus Éireann for the past five years to date in 2017, by scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11857/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** My Department pays the CIE Group centrally in respect of transport services provided nationwide for the free travel scheme by the Group and the apportionment of payment between the three constituent companies, Bus Éireann, Bus Atha Cliath and Iarnród Éireann is a matter for the CIE Group to determine. In this context my Department has had no role to date in determining the amount specifically directed to Bus Éireann.

The following are details of payments to the CIE Group in respect of the free travel scheme.

-	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012
CIE	€61,400,861.94	€60,951,683.05	€61,211,880.11	€61,290,112.66	€61,201,721

To date in 2017, my Department has made payments totalling €10.1million to CIE for free travel.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### Pensions Data

330. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason a person that is over 80 years of age and is a qualified adult on their spouse's pension is not eligible for the over 80 age allowance; his plans to change this position; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11859/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** The over 80 allowance is an in-

crease of €10 per week on the basic pension rate, which is automatically awarded to qualified pensioners on attaining 80 years of age. Only one such allowance is payable in respect of each pension.

An Increase for a Qualified Adult (IQA) is paid, generally, where a pensioner has an adult dependent (e.g., a spouse who is financially dependent upon them), who does not have enough contributions to claim a maximum rate State pension (contributory) in his/her own right.

The maximum rate of an IQA for someone over 66 is €209.00, and so in most cases where it is claimed, such couples have additional income or means above their State pension payments, as otherwise they would obtain a higher payment by the Qualified Adult claiming a State pension (non-contributory), which is subject to a household means-test, and has a maximum personal rate of €222 weekly (plus additional allowances, such as the over-80 allowance, where applicable). Where household means (e.g. the spouse with the State pension also having a significant occupational pension) result in this payment being reduced, the other spouse may instead claim the IQA, the means test of which is based on their own means instead. In such cases, the Qualified Adult can choose the payment which is most beneficial to them.

An additional €5 increase in weekly rates of payment for all social welfare recipients will come into force this month, with proportionate increases for qualified adults and those on reduced rates of payments.

I have no plans to increase the rate of the IQA for people who are over the age of 80. If a person over 80 is in receipt of an IQA and has only limited household means, they may make a claim to the State pension (non-contributory), and if that payment is more beneficial to them, they will be paid under that scheme.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Passport Applications Fees**

331. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Social Protection if consideration will be given to subsidising or making a grant available to persons over 70 years of age applying for passports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11881/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** State fees charged for passports are a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade.

### **Youth Guarantee**

332. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will provide a breakdown of participants in the youth guarantee nationally in the past three years; the number of participants that were offered full time employment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11947/17]

334. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of private sector employers that have engaged with the youth guarantee scheme to date; the number that have offered full time employment to participants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11949/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 332 and 334 together.

Government policy to reduce unemployment is twofold. First, through policies set out in the Action Plan for Jobs, to create an environment in which business can succeed and create jobs; and second, through Pathways to Work to ensure that as many of these new jobs and other vacancies that arise in our economy are filled by people taken from the Live Register, including young people.

To date, these policies have been effective in reducing youth unemployment. The youth unemployment rate has fallen from 31.1% in July 2012 to 14.5% in February 2017. The actual number of young unemployed has fallen from 70,000 to 30,500 over this period. Irish youth unemployment is now significantly below the EU average.

As many of the elements of a Youth Guarantee were already in place in Ireland prior to the EU Recommendation, the implementation of the Irish Youth Guarantee focused on enhancing processes and policies for assisting young unemployed people to find and secure sustainable jobs. To this end there is monthly engagement by case officers with all young unemployed to facilitate their return to employment.

Places on most of these programmes are demand led, and take-up by young people has fallen in line with the substantial fall in youth unemployment. The number of young people entering the programmes was 23,000 in 2014 and 19,000 in 2015. Final figures for 2016 are not yet available, but are expected to show a further fall on the 2015 level.

While systemised data are not readily available on employment outcomes on all programmes specifically for those jobseekers under 25, some indicative figures are available. For example:

- The evaluation of JobBridge by Indecon (report published October 2016), shows on the basis of self-reported survey results that 61% of interns aged 20 to 24 years (and 53.8% of those aged 15-19) were currently in employment at the time of the survey. Overall, individuals similar to those who participated in JobBridge had a 36.6% probability of securing employment within one year, whereas the JobBridge interns' probability of securing employment within one year increased to 48.4% (an 11.8 percentage point difference and a 32% increase in the probability of becoming employed). 70% of participants were engaged by private sector host organisations.

- JobsPlus provides subsidies to employers for the full-time employment of those formerly long-term unemployed on the Live Register. Between 2014 and 2016 a total of 2167 participants aged under 25 benefited from JobsPlus in 1,757 private sector companies.

I am confident that the measures taken under the Youth Guarantee, together with the continuing economic recovery, will support further reductions in youth unemployment.

## **Youth Guarantee**

333. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Social Protection the criteria in place to assess whether job offers under the youth guarantee scheme are quality offers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11948/17]

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



To date, these policies have been effective in reducing youth unemployment. The youth unemployment rate has fallen from 31.1% in July 2012 to 14.5% in February 2017. The actual number of young unemployed has fallen from 70,000 to 30,500 over this period. Irish youth unemployment is now significantly below the EU average.

As many of the elements of a Youth Guarantee were already in place in Ireland prior to the EU Recommendation, the implementation of the Irish Youth Guarantee focused on enhancing processes and policies for assisting young unemployed people to find and secure sustainable jobs. To this end there is monthly engagement by case officers with all young unemployed to facilitate their return to employment.

The quality of a job offer is retrospectively defined as a job offer that leads to sustainable employment. The Department of Social Protection participates in the EU-wide annual data collection to monitor progress on the Youth Guarantee, which includes tracking the employment outcomes of the young unemployed over 6, 12 and 18 months. In relation to the year 2014, the data showed that almost 31,000 young people who had been wholly unemployed and receiving job-seeker's payments exited unemployment to take up jobs during that year. Two-thirds of this group were still in employment 18 months later. Initial indications are that the follow-up information for those who exited unemployment in 2015 (which will be available in mid-2017) will show a broadly similar pattern of outcomes.

On this basis, a significant proportion of the young unemployed can be assessed as having taken up a quality job offer, in line with the Youth Guarantee Recommendation.

*Question No. 334 answered with Question No. 332.*

### **Youth Guarantee**

335. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will provide a list of all programmes run nationwide by the State under the youth guarantee scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11950/17]

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

To date, these policies have been effective in reducing youth unemployment. The youth unemployment rate has fallen from 31.1% in July 2012 to 14.5% in February 2017. The actual number of young unemployed has fallen from 70,000 to 30,500 over this period. Irish youth unemployment is now significantly below the EU average.

As many of the elements of a Youth Guarantee were already in place in Ireland prior to the EU Recommendation, the implementation of the Irish Youth Guarantee focused on enhancing processes and policies for assisting young unemployed people to find and secure sustainable jobs. To this end there is monthly engagement by case officers with all young unemployed to facilitate their return to employment. For those who do not find employment, additional offers are provided for, on a range of education, training and employment programmes. The main programmes involved over the period 2014-2016 were identified in the Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan, and are summarised in tabular form below.

**Table 1: Programmes available to the young unemployed set out in the Youth Guarant-**

**tee Implementation Plan**

Programme
Youthreach/Community Training Centres (aged 15-17)
JobBridge
Tús
JobsPlus (including JobPlus Youth)
Momentum
Back To Education Allowance (excl Momentum)
Back to Work Enterprise Allowance
Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme
SOLAS (Former FAS) training
International Work Experience and Training
Gateway
Community Employment
County Enterprise Board Youth Entrepreneurship Training and Mentoring supports [superseded by Ireland's Best Young Entrepreneur (IBYE)]*

\* The IBYE is an entrepreneurship support measure aimed at encouraging young people to start their own businesses and accordingly covers a wider age range (from 18-30).

I am confident that the measures taken under the Youth Guarantee, together with the continuing economic recovery, will support further reductions in youth unemployment. If you require any further assistance with this query please do not hesitate to contact my office.

**Departmental Expenditure**

336. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will provide a breakdown of communication and advertising costs spent by his Department to promote employment services and supports over the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11951/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** My Department is fully committed to ensuring that members of the general public are fully aware of the supports and services available from my Department. This includes employment activation services and supports.

The total expenditure on such activities from 2012 to 2016 was €337,000 and is detailed in the following tables.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

**2012 – AMOUNT SPENT PROMOTING EMPLOYMENT SERVICES AND SUPPORTS**

ADVERTISING	€	COMMUNICATIONS	€	TOTAL €
Print	33K	Events and Information Stands	2K	-
Radio	NIL	Stationery, Design and Other	36K	-
Digital Only	NIL	-	-	-
Digital and Print/Other	NIL	-	-	-
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>33K</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>38K</b>	<b>71K</b>

**2013 – AMOUNT SPENT PROMOTING EMPLOYMENT SERVICES AND SUPPORTS**

ADVERTISING	€	COMMUNICATIONS	€	TOTAL €
Print	2K	Events and Information Stands	NIL	-
Radio	NIL	Stationery, Design and Other	4K	-
Digital Only	NIL	-	-	-
Digital and Print/Other	NIL	-	-	-
TOTAL €	2K	-	4K	6K

**2016 – AMOUNT SPENT PROMOTING EMPLOYMENT SERVICES AND SUPPORTS**

ADVERTISING	€	COMMUNICATIONS	€	TOTAL €
Print	9K	Events and Information Stands	15K	-
Radio	9K	Stationery, Design and Other	NIL	-
Digital Only	40K	-	-	-
Digital and Print/Other	NIL	-	-	-
TOTAL €	58K	-	15K	73K

*Question No. 337 withdrawn.*

**Maternity Benefit**

338. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the progress to date in the determination of application for maternity benefit in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11959/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** An application for maternity benefit was received from the person concerned on 22nd Feb 2017 and processed on 3rd March 2017. Further information is required in order to make a decision regarding the claim and she has been contacted in writing requesting this information.

Once the required information is received, her claim will be processed, and a written decision will issue to her.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy. Please do not hesitate to contact Philip in my office if you require any further assistance with this query.

*Question No. 339 withdrawn.*

**State Pension (Contributory) Eligibility**

340. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Social Protection his views on the difficulty caused by the 2012 changes to the contributory State pension rates of payment, in view of the fact that the immediate change to the average bands drastically affected the pension eligibility of persons that were very close to pension age; his plans to rectify this situation; and

if he will make a statement on the matter. [11976/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** The overall concern in recent years has been to protect the value of weekly social welfare rates. Expenditure on pensions, at approximately €7 billion each year, is the largest block of expenditure in my Department in the Estimate for 2017, representing approximately 35% of overall expenditure. Due to demographic changes, my Department's spending on older people is increasing by approximately €200m year on year. Maintaining the rate of the State pension and other payments is critical in protecting people from poverty.

There are three main pensions paid by my Department to people aged 66 and over, namely the State pension contributory (which is based on PRSI contributions), the State pension non-contributory (which is based on means), and the Widows/Widowers/Surviving Civil Partners Contributory pension (which is based on PRSI contributions, and is also payable at a lower rate before 66).

The State pension contributory (previously called the Old Age Contributory Pension) was introduced in 1961, and is funded by PRSI contributions, on a pay-as-you go basis. Since its introduction, the rates of payment has been based on the 'yearly average' test. These rates are banded, and those bands have been amended from time to time, most recently in 2012.

As provided for in Budget 2012, and announced in late 2011, new rate bands for State pension (contributory) were introduced from September 2012. This resulted in one of the bands (in respect of those with a yearly average of 20-47 contributions) being replaced with three bands (in respect of yearly averages of 40-47, 30-39, and 20-29 respectively). These additional bands more accurately reflect the social insurance history of a person and ensure that those who contribute more during a working life are likely to benefit more in retirement than those with lesser contributions.

It is estimated that the cost of reverting to the rate-bands which existed between 2000 and 2012 would be over €60 million in 2018, if introduced from January 2018, and that this annual cost would rise at a rate of some €10 million each year.

Prior to these changes, in the period from 2000-2012, someone with a yearly average of 47 contributions qualified for the same rate of payment (98% of the maximum rate) as someone with a yearly average of 20 contributions, despite generally their much more significant PRSI record, and this was regardless of their means. A person with an average of 48-52 PRSI contributions per year over their working life received a weekly State pension of only €4.50 more than someone with a yearly average of 20 PRSI contributions. Aside from the lack of equity involved, this was a significant disincentive to longer working, as in most cases, contributions paid by people in their sixties had no impact upon the rate of their State pension upon retirement.

Given the requirement to make savings in recent years, it was considered more equitable to address this disparity, than to reduce the rate of payment for all pensioners by an across the board cut in payment rates. Such a cut would have reduced the incomes of the most vulnerable pensioners, who do not receive such reduced rate contributory pensions, but rather receive a maximum rate non-contributory pension, or a maximum rate contributory pension if they have the required contributions.

For those with insufficient contributions to meet the requirements for a full rate State pension (contributory), they may qualify for a means tested State pension (non-contributory) which has a maximum personal rate of €222, or just over 95% of the maximum rate of the State pension (contributory). Alternatively, if a person's spouse or civil partner is in receipt of a State

pension (contributory) they may instead qualify for an Increase for a Qualified Adult of up to €209, which is just less than 90% of the maximum personal rate of the State pension (contributory). The latter payment is made directly to them, and is based upon their own means, and not their household means. An additional €5 increase in the weekly rates of payment for maximum rate social welfare pensions will come into force this week, with proportionate increases for qualified adults and those on reduced rates of payment.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

*Question No. 341 answered with Question No. 328.*

### **Jobseeker's Allowance Eligibility**

342. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Social Protection his plans to amend eligibility criteria for jobseeker's allowance; in regard to a person who has invested in a private pension fund and is out of work and wishes to retain the investment for pension purposes, if such investment fund will be excluded from means assessment for jobseeker's allowance in view of the fact the person wishes to safeguard the private pension plan due to future limited entitlement to a State pension; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11980/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** My Department operates a range of means-tested social assistance schemes, where account is taken of the income and the value of capital, including shares, of the claimant and his or her spouse/ partner.

When assessing a claimant's (or the claimant's spouse/partner's) income from earnings, social welfare legislation provides for various payments to be deducted from gross earnings for means assessment purposes including: PRSI contributions, payments to a trade union, and superannuation contributions, such as additional voluntary contributions (AVCs) and personal retirement savings accounts (PRSAs). Payments made in respect of life assurance policies, including mortgage protection policies, are not deducted from earnings for means assessment purposes.

With regards to property and capital, social welfare legislation provides that the yearly value of property (including capital) owned but not personally used or enjoyed is assessable for means testing purposes. Such property includes all monies held in financial institutions or otherwise, the market value of shares as well as houses and premises owned by a claimant which may or may not be put to commercial use. However, it does not include property such as the family home a person is personally using or enjoying i.e. residing in or, for example, a premises used by the claimant in carrying out a business.

The assessment formula for most schemes, including Jobseeker's Allowance, is outlined in the following table. This formula applies regardless of the type of capital (including monies held in financial institutions or otherwise, the market value of shares or property).

AMOUNT OF CAPITAL	WEEKLY MEANS ASSESSED
Up to €20,000	Nil
€20,000 - €30,000	€1 per each €1,000
€30,000 - €40,000	€2 per each €1,000
Over €40,000	€4 per each €1,000

The general rule for assessment of pension funds or annuities is:

- Regular pension payments are treated as income for means purposes;
- The value of any cash otherwise available from a pension fund is assessed on the basis of the capital valuation of that fund; and
- Money invested in a pension fund is not assessable if it is not accessible to the claimant. However, this must specifically be a pension fund, and not a general savings account being used by the claimant as savings for their retirement.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Child Benefit Eligibility**

343. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Social Protection if child benefit is payable to fifth and sixth year students in secondary school that have reached 18 years of age; if he will review this situation to ensure that child benefit is payable in respect of all persons in full time second level education; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11983/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** Child Benefit is currently paid to around 625,000 families in respect of some 1.2 million children, with an estimated expenditure of over €2 billion in 2017.

Child Benefit is a universal payment paid in respect of all qualified children, who are ordinarily resident in the State, from the first month of their birth up until their 16th birthday. The Social Welfare Act does provide that Child Benefit can be paid between the ages of 16-18 in respect of children who are;

- Receiving full time education or
- Who have a disability.

Budget 2009 reduced the age for eligibility for Child Benefit from 19 years to less than 18 years.

Families on low incomes can avail of a number of provisions to social welfare schemes that support children in full-time education until the age of 22, including:

- qualified child increases (IQCs) with primary social welfare payments;
- family income supplement (FIS) for low-paid employees with children;
- the back to school clothing and footwear allowance for low income families (paid at the full-time second level education rate).

These schemes provide targeted assistance that is directly linked with household income and thereby supports low-income families with older children participating in full-time education.

Extending Child Benefit to students who are in full-time secondary education and who have reached 18 years of age if adopted would not be a targeted approach given the universality of Child Benefit. The adoption of such a proposal would have significant cost implications and would have to be considered in an overall budgetary context.

## Social Welfare Benefits

344. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Social Protection the supports available to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11986/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** The telephone allowance was introduced at a time when telephones were expensive and a landline service, available only from one company, was the only option available to the customer. The market has changed considerably since the introduction of the allowance, with several companies providing a range of services and rates, and a range of bundled services including television, telephone and broadband and mobile phone services. There are also personal security services that use mobile technology rather than land lines. Accordingly, customers now have a choice of multiple competing offers.

In 2013 the value of the telephone allowance was €114.00 per annum. The cost of restoring the allowance at 2013 levels is estimated to be in the region of €50 million per annum.

The Government is keenly aware of the impact of Budget decisions on the Department's clients, and strives to ensure that the money available is targeted in the most effective way.

In Budget 2016, the first increase in the basic rate of the State pension in seven years was given. This has increased the personal rate of the non-contributory pension to €222, and that of the contributory pension to €233.30. There was also a €2.50 increase in the rate of the Fuel Allowance, from €20 to €22.50 per week.

In Budget 2017, it was announced that there will be a further increase in the rate of State pensions, by €5, which will increase the maximum personal rate of the State pension (contributory) to €238.30 this month.

Therefore, over the past two Budgets, the maximum weekly rate for State Pensions has increased by €8 per week, which is the equivalent of over €416 per annum. The value of these increases is in excess of the value of the telephone allowance previously provided, and it is not necessary to have a landline in order to benefit from these increases.

Accordingly, I have no plans to introduce an additional allowance to cover the cost of a telephone line where a person has installed a phone watch alarm, and have instead concentrated on increasing the basic rate of pension for all older people.

The Department of the Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government has responsibility for the Seniors Alert Scheme which provides grant support for the supply of equipment such as personal alarms, smoke detectors and security lighting to enable older people without sufficient means to continue to live securely in their homes. The grant assistance is made available through community and voluntary groups registered with that Department and the equipment supplied under the scheme remains the property of the community group.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

## Social Welfare Code

345. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of the lone parent report committed to in the Social Welfare Bill 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11992/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** During the debate on the Social Welfare (SW) Bill 2016, I agreed that my Department would commission an independent report on the OFP reforms to examine the financial and social effects of the amendments to the scheme made since 1 January 2012, taking into account the poverty rates and welfare dependency of those impacted by the reforms. This is now in legislation.

Under procurement rules it is not yet possible to provide further information on the nature of the report. However, I can confirm that my Department has already liaised with the Office of Government Procurement (OGP) on the most efficient way forward. On their advice an outline of the Request for Tender (RFT) was issued in December 2016 to potential providers seeking expressions of interest by 11th January 2017. The responses received confirmed that the RFT can issue under an existing OGP framework which is the most efficient way of procuring this evaluation.

My Department is in the process of finalising the RFT and has been in discussions with the Office of Government Procurement to discuss further the RFT in relation to its design and composition and the procurement process. Once the RFT is finalised it will be issued by the OGP to relevant providers under their framework for response.

I expect that the RFT will be issued in the very near future. It is critical that the RFT fully reflects the nature and scope of the report required and so it is important to dedicate the necessary time and effort to this step. This is to ensure that the resultant tenders are of a high quality and that the end result is an effective and comprehensive evaluation.

My Department is working to the timeframe of having the report completed within 9 months of the passing of the Social Welfare Act 2016. This is to ensure that it can inform Budget 2018 discussions.

### **Rent Supplement Scheme**

346. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Social Protection if persons in receipt of rent allowance that refuse to transfer to a HAP payment for reasons including losing the time spent on the housing waiting list can have their rent allowance discontinued or be threatened with same, as in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12183/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** The person concerned received a letter from the Department under Social Welfare (Consolidation) Act 2005 Section 198 (3G) (a)(i)(1) as inserted by Section 54 (3) of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014, requesting them to apply to South Dublin County Council for social housing support which includes the housing assistance payment (HAP). All customers residing in a HAP area are obliged to register for the HAP scheme. The person concerned is required to register his interest in being considered for the HAP scheme. This requirement with the local authority is to facilitate the transfer of rent supplement to HAP. Once this registration takes place rent supplement payment will not be affected.

If a customer is offered the HAP scheme, it is open to the person concerned to contact the relevant county council within 2 weeks and request they retain their current position on the social housing list.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.



### **Disability Allowance Applications**

347. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a decision has been made on the review of a disability allowance application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12025/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The application for disability allowance, based upon the evidence submitted, was refused on medical grounds and this lady was notified in writing of this decision on 5 January 2017.

She requested a review of the decision by a deciding officer (DO) and submitted additional evidence for consideration. The review has now been concluded by a DO but the outcome is to confirm the original decision. She is being notified directly of the outcome of this review. She will also be advised of her right to appeal this decision to the independent social welfare appeals office.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Invalidity Pension Applications**

348. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a decision will issue to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12165/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** Invalidity pension (IP) is a payment for people who are permanently incapable of work because of illness or incapacity and who satisfy the pay related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions.

The Department received a claim for IP for the gentleman concerned on the 12 January 2017. Medical eligibility has been assessed and he satisfies the medical conditions for the scheme. The claim will be finalised as quickly as possible and the gentleman will be notified directly.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Carer's Allowance Appeals**

349. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a decision will issue to a person (details supplied) with regard to a carer's allowance appeal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12179/17]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 23rd January 2017. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant papers and comments by or on behalf of the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought from the Department of Social Protection. These papers were received in the Social Welfare Appeals Office on 22nd February 2017 and the case will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in

relation to social welfare entitlements.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy. If he requires any further assistance with this query he should not hesitate to contact my office.

### **Foreign Conflicts**

350. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the latest military clashes over Nagorno-Karabakh; his views on whether such incidents could lead to a dangerous escalation and possible conflict; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11285/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The situation in Nagorno-Karabakh has deteriorated significantly in the past 12 months following a serious outbreak of violence in April 2016. I am deeply concerned by the ongoing tensions and violence, including reports of a serious military escalation on 25 February which resulted in tragic loss of life.

Ireland fully supports the efforts of the OSCE Minsk Group to make progress in resolving this conflict. I would call on all those involved to engage actively with the OSCE Minsk Group with a view to reaching a peaceful solution to the conflict and avoiding potential destabilisation of the broader region. Ireland knows, from long experience, that only dialogue can deliver progress towards a peaceful outcome.

### **Emigrant Support Services**

351. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the action his Department is taking to assist returning emigrants address the obstacles they find, in particular the cost of insurance, when settling back into life here as a result of having been a number of years out of the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11318/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** Significant Government funding and support is given through the Emigrant Support Programme, administered by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, to support organisations working with citizens who wish to return to Ireland. Over the last decade over €4 million has been allocated to the Crosscare and Safehome organisations working with returning emigrants. Their 2016 funding saw an increase of €60,000 on the 2015 figure.

The Department's website also has a dedicated area specifically to assist citizens abroad who may be considering returning home by 'signposting' to information that may be of assistance to them.

In addition through my role at the Department of the Taoiseach, and through the Inter-departmental Committee on the Irish Abroad, which was established in the Government's 2015 Global Irish – Ireland's Diaspora Policy document, I am working to facilitate the cross-Governmental effort to ensure coherence in government policy and address some of those barriers that are being highlighted as potentially disproportionately impacting on returning emigrants.

The next meeting of the Inter-departmental Committee will take place on 30 March, and potential barriers for returning citizens will be discussed. In respect of insurance, this is a matter for the Departments of Finance and Health, though it should be noted that practices and procedures in individual cases are a commercial, rather than a governmental, matter.

## Departmental Expenditure

352. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the amount his Department spent on public relations consultants and all matters relating to public relations costs in 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11430/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The following table contains the information. My Department did not incur expenditure on external public relations services in 2016. The expenditure in question has rather arisen in the context of specific initiatives under Ireland's overseas development programme for which we have from time to time commissioned companies with a public relations and communications background to provide other professional services such as project management, logistics and event management. DHR Communications has been contracted to manage and administer grants to journalists reporting on international development issues under the Simon Cumbers Media Fund (SCMF) and to manage and administer annual Africa Day celebrations. The SCMF involves managing three funding rounds each year, including the annual SCMF student competition. This typically involves the following activities:

- Convening national and regional information workshops;
- Managing and administering the application process;
- Organising the judging process
- Providing detailed feedback to all applicants;
- Processing grant payments and keeping detailed administrative and financial records;
- Maintaining and updating the SCMF website.

It should be noted that expenses paid to third parties account for approximately 30% of the total paid to DHR for managing and administering the Simon Cumbers Media Fund. This includes costs associated with maintaining and updating the SCMF website, facilitating the judging process and raising awareness of the Fund among journalists.

Following a competitive tendering process, DHR was also engaged to plan, manage and execute a national Africa Day flagship event in Dublin. This includes the administration of a small grants scheme for regional events which DHR managed on behalf of the Department in partnership with a number of local authorities. DHR also worked to raise public awareness of the Africa Day events, including through the use of social media and the Africa Day website. This public awareness work represented a very minor element of the overall project and was conducted in close cooperation with my Department's communications office.

The Africa Day flagship event was hosted by my Department at the Farmleigh Estate on 29 May 2016.

In relation to the expenditure on Africa Day, expenses paid to third parties accounted for between 70% and 80% of the total costs listed below. This included expenditure on security, sanitation, venue set-up, health and safety issues and small grants to facilitate the participation of community groups.

The following table sets out the payments for project and event management in 2016.

### **Payments for Project and Event Management in 2016**

Name of Project/Event	2016
DHR Communications: SCMF	€197,438
DHR Communications: Africa Day	€206,126
Total	€403,564

### Human Rights Cases

353. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the case of a person (details supplied); his views on the fact this person is facing two separate trials in March 2017 related to their right to free speech; and if he will urgently raise his concerns regarding the case of this person with his Bahraini counterpart. [11443/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am familiar with the case of the person in question, and of his repeated imprisonment and release over the last number of years for his work as a human rights defender.

This has coincided with an overall deterioration in the human rights situation in Bahrain of late. This has manifested in particular in the targeting those who express dissent or criticism of the Bahraini Government, despite repeated statements from the Bahraini authorities of their commitment to improving the human rights situation. Ireland made specific reference to Bahrain in our Statement on human rights situations requiring attention at the Human Rights Council in Geneva last September, expressing concern about “restrictions on freedom of expression, assembly and association aimed at silencing the voice of civil society and human rights defenders in countries including Bahrain.

Ireland attaches a high priority to safeguarding human rights defenders, and has continually advocated for freedom for civil society actors to operate in a safe and enabling environment, without repression. In August 2014, officials from my Department met with the individual who is the subject of this Question, and discussed with him the situation of human rights in Bahrain. In October 2015, the Bahrain National Institution for Human Rights (BNIHR) came to Ireland on a training visit, which included meetings with Irish human rights and civil society organisations. Officials from my Department met with this group also, and set out Ireland’s support for human rights promotion across the Middle East region.

Ireland’s concerns about human rights issues in Bahrain, in particular around civil liberties, are also regularly conveyed to the Bahraini authorities. Ireland’s non-resident Ambassador to Bahrain recently met with the Bahraini Deputy Minister for International Affairs, Abdullah Bin Ahmed Al Khalifa, and they discussed human rights. The Irish Mission to the UN in Geneva supported an event by the Bahrain Center for Human Rights in early February, which provided updated information about the human rights situation in Bahrain in the context of its UPR review in May 2017 and the current session of the HRC. Officials from my Department are also due to meet this week with an official from the Bahraini Embassy in London, to discuss the human rights situation.

### Construction Industry

354. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the level of construction inflation that has been experienced by his Department in each of the past 6 years and to date in 2017 in respect of construction projects and other capital projects; the way in

which he monitors construction inflation and the mechanisms he employs to establish this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11537/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Office of Public Works provides my Department with office accommodation for its offices in Ireland. They also provide a shared service for the maintenance of these buildings and management of construction projects on the Department's behalf.

In the case of our offices abroad, the Department does undertake construction projects to maintain those properties which the State owns and, in the case of leased properties, would carry out necessary maintenance to ensure lease requirements are adhered to.

These projects would be smaller, short term and in conjunction with national procurement guidelines, openly tendered in the local market for the work as required. Therefore the cost reflects the cost of construction at the current market rate so the impact of construction inflation is not felt. Most of the construction projects overseas are on a fixed cost basis and cost control is a major element of project management.

### **Human Rights**

355. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will clarify his response to Parliamentary Question No. 155 of 22 February 2017 (details supplied). [11786/17]

356. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade further to Parliamentary Question No. 155 of 22 February 2017, his views on the fact that the office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, OHCHR, appears to have unilaterally changed these policies in order to provide confirmation to the government of China as to whether named human rights defenders, HRDs, would attend the Human Rights Council, thereby placing the HRDs and their associates based in China in danger; if the Irish delegation in Geneva will raise this issue with the High Commissioner to determine whether this practice is continuing and whether it has been expanded for other governments; and his plans to instruct the Irish delegation to raise the issue of retaliation against the Irish whistleblower in the OHCHR that reported this practice both internally and then directly to the Irish delegation in March 2016. [11787/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 355 and 356 together.

As is clear from the information provided in my reply of 22 February, Ireland has consistently advocated for the creation and maintenance of a safe and enabling environment for civil society space actors. We believe such a safe and enabling environment should be maintained in all States and indeed in international and regional organisations.

We consistently also advocate strongly for the separate but related issue of the protection of human rights defenders, including through raising greater awareness on the international standards guaranteeing that human rights defenders should be able to operate free from fear of intimidation or reprisals – including intimidation or reprisals due to cooperation with the United Nations.

These are priority issues for Ireland and receive close attention throughout my Department including its network of Embassies and Missions and in particular in the context of our work in Geneva at the Human Rights Council.

Accreditation of participants to the meetings of the Human Rights Council in Geneva is properly a matter for the UN Office in Geneva and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, not the Human Rights Council itself. This procedure is intended to ensure that decisions on civil society participation are taken independently and not determined by Governments.

Ireland's position is that procedures and modalities for the engagement of human rights defenders with international organisations, including the United Nations, should be of the highest standard and avoid placing those defenders at risk. Similarly, Ireland's position is that the protection systems for whistleblowers should equally be of the highest standard.

My Department has taken and continues to take all appropriate measures to respond to threats to civil society actors and human rights defenders and particularly in the context of our work in the Human Rights Council.

I can however assure the Deputy that the case referred to has been and continues to be the subject of the appropriate attention.

### **Passport Services**

357. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the production cost of each passport; if volume reduces the marginal cost in a given year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11882/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** In 2016 the direct current expenditure incurred by the three Passport Service offices in the State amounted to approximately €32 million.

This figure does not include rental and other accommodation costs of these Passport Offices. Nor does it capture the accommodation, operational, staffing and other current costs incurred by our Embassies and Consulates around the world, including the Embassy in London, in providing passport services to our citizens. In addition, centrally incurred headquarters-wide costs are not reallocated to the Passport Service and are therefore not included.

The cost of the Passport Reform Programme (2016-2018) – which has a combined capital and current investment budget of over €18 million – is additional. The reform programme will modernise systems, business processes and controls and will deliver a more efficient, secure, predictable and citizen-focused service in the years ahead.

The Department's accounting system does not capture the non-direct passport costs, both in Ireland and overseas, in sufficient detail to allow an accurate assignment of these costs to the production of each passport. As the production volume increases this would result in a marginal reduction in the cost of the production of a passport as the fixed costs involved are spread over a greater number of passports.

### **Passport Data**

358. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of passport applications received from Irish citizens and those entitled to Irish citizenship based in South African, United Arab Emirates, Australia and Canada in each of the years 2015 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12016/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The total number of passport applications received from Irish citizens based in the countries specified are as follows:

Country	2015	2016	2017 (up to 28 February)
South Africa	3374	3396	567
United Arab Emirates	1365	1708	373
Australia	6518	6981	1126
Canada	3096	3497	646

There were significant increases in applications from citizens based in Australia, Canada and in the United Arab Emirates in particular between 2015 and 2016. This undoubtedly reflects the growing popularity of these countries among Irish citizens as places to live and work. The overall increase in passport applications between the two years was over 9%.

### Flood Prevention Measures

359. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans in conjunction with the OPW to strengthen the engagement with the insurance industry to improve the availability of flood insurance cover in view of the State's ongoing investment in flood defence schemes as per point 70 in the action plan for rural development; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11707/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán Canney):** In March 2014, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between Insurance Ireland (II), the representative body for the insurance industry in Ireland, and the Office of Public Works (OPW). This Memorandum sets out principles of how the two organisations will work together to ensure that appropriate and relevant information on completed OPW flood defence schemes is provided to insurers to facilitate, to the greatest extent possible, the availability to the public of insurance against the risk of flooding. II members have committed to take into account all information provided by OPW when assessing exposure to flood risk within these areas.

The Memorandum came into effect on 1 June, 2014 with an initial tranche of data provided by the OPW to II in respect of 12 completed flood defence schemes and showing the design, extent and nature of the protection offered by these works. A further tranche of data was provided to II in January 2015 covering a further 4 completed flood defence schemes. OPW will continue to provide data to II as flood defence schemes are completed.

II estimates that flood cover is included as standard in 98% of household insurance policies throughout the country. II has carried out a number of surveys among its members to ascertain the extent to which flood insurance cover is available in the areas for which OPW has provided data on completed flood defence schemes. The results of the most recent survey were provided in December last year; they indicate that 83% of property insurance policies in these areas include cover against flood risk. Where the defences are permanent in nature the percentage is 90%; where demountable defences are used the percentage is 77%.

In line with Action No. 270 of the Action Plan for Rural Development, the OPW and the Department of Finance are now engaging with II on a quarterly basis. At the most recent meeting on 8 December 2016, it was decided that a sub group be established to explore the legal, technical and administrative arrangements that may allow for the further sharing of data on

flood insurance cover for those 300 areas where the OPW has mapped the flood risk through the CFRAM Programme. This sub group held its first meeting on 18 January last.

I am happy with the work of the Group thus far and am confident that it will continue to progress the issue of flood insurance.

### **Coastal Protection**

360. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when a decision will be made in respect of an application made by the local authority for coastal defences at Maghery, County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12024/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán Canney):** The application received from Donegal County Council under the Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme for funding to undertake a project comprising of coastal erosion defence repairs at Maghery Strand was not eligible for funding under the Scheme as it did not meet the criteria of the scheme for a number of reasons which were notified to the Council by the Office of Public Works.

The application overall presents complex issues of coastal erosion and Donegal County Council and the OPW will explore further the range of options available to address the problem with a view to deciding on the optimum solution in the shortest possible timeframe.

### **Public Procurement Contracts**

361. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the process in place for the public procurement of legal services; if the process is overseen by the Office of Government Procurement; the date from which the process was applicable; if the process applies to NAMA; if any analysis has been performed on whether the process has succeeded in reducing legal fees; if so, the outcome of such an analysis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11250/17]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Office of Government Procurement has been established to centralise the procurement of common goods and services across the public sector. This move is in line with best practice in the public and private sector and is part of the continuing reform programme being driven by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

OGP has taken responsibility for the procurement of Professional Services. A key category for which a sourcing strategy has been developed is Legal Services and more particularly those services which public bodies procure from Solicitors. This sourcing priority is based on the fact that the state procures a significant volume and value of legal services in any given year from Solicitors.

Service needs range from routine transactional services such as a low value conveyancing need to high end strategic advice on complex legal matters that are of national importance or unusual legal complexity such as a public private partnership or matter that involves major litigation or potential exposure to major litigation.

These range of requirements exist across all sectors within the public service and therefore it is considered appropriate that the broader OGP procurement strategy for legal services recognises the differences in service needs as well as recognising the requirements of individual sec-



tors and organisation.

OGP has already implemented five (5) key Framework Agreements/contracting arrangements and is currently examining the requirement to establish two (2) additional Framework Agreements.

The following table outlines the arrangements that OGP has put in place for the public sector and the date from which each arrangement is operable:

Title	Operable Date
National Framework for Legal Services (excluding Govt Depts)	August 2016
Sectoral Framework for Local Government Legal Services	September 2016
Sectoral Framework for Educational Training Board Legal Services	April 2017
Provision of Legal Services to HSE	April 2016
Provision of Legal Services to Tusla	Due 1st May 2017

OGP has made provision for NAMA, among others, as Framework Clients to procure legal services through National Framework for Legal Services (excluding Govt Depts).

Savings estimates have been developed for each of the arrangements put in place.

The following table outlines the estimated annual forecast secured savings for each arrangement:

Title	Forecast Secured Savings (Annual)
National Framework for Legal Services (excluding Govt Depts)	€3.4m
Sectoral Framework for Local Government Legal Services	€1.6m
Sectoral Framework for Educational Training Board Legal Services	€0.13m
Provision of Legal Services to HSE	€0.9m
Provision of Legal Services to Tusla	€2.0m
Total	€8.03m

Accessing Legal Services can be difficult for Public Sector bodies, particularly those that do not regularly need these services and may be unfamiliar with the marketplace. The procurement process itself can also involve significant time and money, both for the awarding authority and service provider.

The arrangements put in place by OGP are fully compliant with procurement regulations and reduce the time and costs associated with the procurement process by offering a facility that has already been competitively tendered.

These arrangements aims to deliver easy access to high-quality, efficient and effective services for Public Sector bodies, at the best possible price.

## **Public Sector Pensions**

362. **Deputy Michael D’Arcy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when his Department will be carrying out an actuarial valuation in respect of the accrued liability of public service occupational pensions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11299/17]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** On foot of EU Regulation (EU) 549/2013 the C.S.O. will be required to report on the gross liabilities of Irish pension schemes as part of the National Accounts.

Reporting is mandatory, commencing with an end 2015 position. This exercise is being undertaken by D/PER on behalf of the C.S.O following on from a previous exercise to determine an Accrued liability figure in respect of the National Accounts by the former Actuary in respect of 2012.

Under the 2012 exercise the accrued liability was €98bn. This represents the present value, at end December 2012, of all expected future superannuation payments to current staff and their spouses in respect of service to date, plus the full liability for all future payments to current and preserved pensioners and to their spouses.

An updated figure will be reported in 2017.

Further information regarding the accrued pension liability exercise can be found here: <http://www.per.gov.ie/en/public-service-pensions-accrued-liability/>.

## **Departmental Expenditure**

363. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the amount his Department spent on public relations consultants and all matters relating to public relations costs in 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11434/17]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** In response to the Deputy’s question, there was no expenditure on public relations by my Department during 2016.

## **Community Employment Sector Staff**

364. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform further to Parliamentary Question No. 172 of 19 January 2017, if the high level forum on the community employment sector, as referred to in the Minister’s reply, has now reconvened to examine the issue of pension entitlements for community employment scheme supervisors and assistant supervisors; if the working group has established a position in respect of agreed pension entitlement for those workers as per a 2008 Labour Court recommendation; if so, the details of its recommendations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11481/17]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The forum reconvened under a new Chair and met on Friday 24 February 2017. The work of the forum continues and the minutes of the meeting will be published on my Department’s website in due course.

## **Construction Industry**

365. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the level of construction inflation that has been experienced by his Department in each of the past 6 years and to date in 2017 in respect of construction projects and other capital projects; the way in which he monitors construction inflation and the mechanisms he employs to establish this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11541/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán Canney):** Year on year increases over the past six years are:

Year	% Increase in Price
2011	-2.12%
2012	2.96%
2013	2.68%
2014	4.38%
2015	5.54%
2016	5.92%

There are no figures available for 2017 yet

### Public Sector Staff

366. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the reason that the current interdepartmental AP higher competition is confined to specific grades working in the Civil Service when this is contrary to the guidelines and recommendations of the Commission on Public Service Appointments. [11673/17]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Circular 04/2017: Interdepartmental Competition for appointment to Assistant Principal Higher in the Civil Service issued on 22 February 2017.

The competition is in line with past AP Higher competitions in that the eligibility pool is taken from both the existing AP standard level and the top tranche of successful candidates in the AP standard competition. Equivalent grades at AP standard level are also eligible in line with the current practice to open up career opportunities. I would point out that all grades were eligible for the AP standard competitions.

### Public Sector Pensions

367. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to restore the pensions of the public sector workers who retired after March 2012 and whose pensions are above €12,000 and below €32,500, pensions which were de facto reduced as a consequence of the original FEMPI legislation and not restored as part of the FEMPI Act 2015. [11770/17]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I refer the Deputy to my reply to Parliamentary Question No. 4045/17 on 31 January 2017.

### Parliamentary Question No. 4045/17 on 31 January 2017 [Brendan Howlin]

To ask the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to similarly advance the payment date for retired public servants, in view of the advancing of the date for the next pay-

ment of pay restoration for public servants; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

**Answer**

Following the Labour Court Recommendations on Garda pay in November 2016, discussions between the Government and the Public Services Committee of ICTU under section 6 of the Lansdowne Road Agreement concluded with agreement to an increase of €1,000 in annualised salaries for the period 1 April 2017 to 31 August 2017 inclusive for:

- public servants on annualised basic salaries up to €65,000;
- who are parties to the Lansdowne Road Agreement; and
- who do not stand to benefit from the Labour Court Recommendations.

The increase was agreed to address the pay anomaly arising from the Labour Court Recommendations accepted by the Government in resolution of the pay dispute with the Garda Associations. The terms of that settlement have not impacted on pensions in payment and the current increase of €1,000 for the period 1 April to 31 August 2017 on annualised basic salaries up to €65,000 will not impact on pensions in payment also.

Reductions to public service pensions which took place by way of the Public Service Pension Reduction (PSPR) under the financial emergency legislation are being significantly reversed. This is happening in three stages under FEMPI 2015, with PSPR-affected pensioners getting pension increases via substantial restoration of the PSPR reductions on 1 January 2016, 1 January 2017 and 1 January 2018. As I have previously indicated, it will be for Government in due course to consider the issue of how to adjust the post-award value of public service pensions through appropriate pay or other linkages, as we move beyond FEMPI and PSPR restoration towards more normal pay and pension setting conditions in the public service.

### **Tribunals of Inquiry**

368. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to bring in a cap on the amount legal representatives can earn and the number of representatives any witnesses can have in the upcoming public enquiry not to impugn the rights of any representative but to ensure adequate use of taxpayers' money. [11842/17]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** My Department is very conscious that there must be careful management of costs relating to the Tribunal into protected disclosures made under the Protected Disclosures Act 2014 and certain other matters following Resolutions. This message has been conveyed to my colleague the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality and officials of our Departments are working to ensure that cost containment is suitably prioritised. This can be a challenging task given that overall expenditure on Tribunals has proven to be difficult to predict in the past. Timescale is also a key driver of total expenditure. This Tribunal is expected to complete its work on Terms of Reference (a) to (o) within one year. The Deputy will be aware that the Tribunals are vested with powers, rights and privileges of the High Court as regards attendance and examination of witnesses. Tribunals also have a significant measure of discretion as to the way in which they conduct proceedings and they generally establish their own rules in relation to the level of legal representation for witnesses. The approach of the new Tribunal to representation for witnesses will no doubt become clear in this regard as it begins to undertake its work. As Minister charged with ensuring appropriate management of public expenditure, I do welcome Mr. Justice Charleton's opening statement that acknowledged the Tribunal will be a drain on resources.

It is in all our interests that the Tribunal into protected disclosures can proceed promptly but with some reassurance about cost containment. The Dáil Resolution establishing the Tribunal also noted that it should be completed in as economical a manner as possible.

### **Brexit Issues**

369. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to establish dedicated units in each Department to deal with Brexit; when recruitment will commence to fill those units with the appropriate expertise; if the positions will be advertised and recruited by the Public Appointments Service; when he expects the Brexit units to be fully functioning; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11851/17]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Brexit issues in my Department are coordinated centrally by the Department's EU/North South/Brexit Unit. The Unit oversees Brexit work across the Department and acts as the contact point with the Department of the Taoiseach and other Government Departments. It is represented on the Inter-Departmental Group on Brexit and related groups, and supports me in my work as a member of the Cabinet Committee on Brexit. Brexit issues are also addressed by staff in relevant areas across the Department.

The arrangements for Brexit Units in other Departments are a matter for Departments themselves.

### **Public Sector Pensions**

370. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding the Civil Service pension scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11853/17]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I take it that the Deputy is referring to the Single Public Service Pension Scheme that was introduced for new entrants to the public service, including the civil service, from 1 January 2013.

There is no specific provision in the Public Service Pensions (Single Scheme and Other Provisions) Act 2012 which established the Single Pension Scheme, to provide for the purchase or transfer of additional pension benefits by Single Scheme members. Notwithstanding this, a commitment has been given that a purchase and transfer facility would be provided by way of Regulations under the Single Scheme Act.

Appropriate Regulations are being drafted and these will set out the rules of the new scheme. Consistent with the structure of the Single Scheme, it is intended that the Regulations will allow Single Scheme members to purchase additional pension and lump sum referable amounts to augment pension benefits accrued under the Scheme. Under the new facility, it is expected that each purchase agreement will be entered into and completed on an annual basis and paid for either by way of a lump-sum contribution or by periodic deductions from salary, where the Relevant Authority offers such a facility. The Regulations are also expected to provide for the transfer of pension entitlements accrued in certain other Revenue approved pension schemes to the Single Scheme. The pricing of purchased benefits will be based on the actuarially calculated cost of paying out those benefits at retirement and will operate on a cost neutral basis to the Exchequer.

The draft scheme is currently subject to detailed legal and other considerations and the intention is to bring forward Regulations on the new scheme as soon as these considerations are complete.

### **Coastal Protection**

371. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of the application of Wexford County Council to co-fund coastal protection works at Rosslare Warren Middle, County Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11960/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán Canney):** I am advised by the Commissioners of Public Works that an application for funding under the Office of Public Works' (OPW) Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme has been received from Wexford County Council for a project at the location in question. Further information has been requested from the Council in order to consider the application.

Furthermore, officials from the OPW met with officials from Wexford County Council on Tuesday 7th February to discuss how to progress issues arising at Rosslare Strand. In particular, the scope of the coastal erosion risk management study of Rosslare Strand commissioned by the Council, which formed part of the application under the Minor Works Scheme, was discussed. It was agreed that further work was required to ensure that the study and its conclusions reflected a full and balanced assessment, including cost benefit analysis, of the range of potential options for managing the risk of erosion across Rosslare Strand as a whole including environmental impacts and which would provide a sound basis for the Council to prioritise any required actions in this regard.

### **Public Sector Pensions**

372. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if persons that have given long service as temporary veterinary inspectors with the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will have public pension service entitlements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11984/17]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The issue raised by the Deputy is a matter for the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine in the first instance. However, I am advised that Temporary Veterinary Inspectors are engaged as and when required by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine to assist its permanent veterinary staff. I am further advised that they are not employees of that Department, rather they are engaged on a contract for services.

### **State Bodies**

373. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform regarding the position of CEOs of State and semi-State bodies when an initial contract expires, if there is an opportunity to reapply for the post; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11994/17]

374. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform

regarding the position of CEOs of State and semi-State bodies when an initial contact expires, if there is an opportunity to extend the contract with the relevant boards approval; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11995/17]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 373 and 374 together.

The 2016 Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies provides that the term of a contract of a CEO of a Commercial Semi State Company is normally limited to a single contract period of between five and seven years but there is no maximum length of service for CEO's.

The updated Code can be found at the following link: <http://govacc.per.gov.ie/governance-of-state-bodies/>.

Under exceptional circumstances, the Board of a Commercial State Company can request an extension of the contract of an existing CEO on terms and conditions approved by the relevant Ministers.

Any such request should be submitted in the first instance as a business case from the Board of the Commercial State Company to the parent Department. Once that Department has considered the matter, it can make a recommendation to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform which will be examined in turn.

### Flood Prevention Measures

375. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of a flood defence scheme (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11997/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán Canney):** Clare County Council commissioned Arups Engineers to carry out a coastal erosion and flood risk management study for Seafield and Clohaninchy, Quilty, Co. Clare with funding provided by the Office of Public Works (OPW) under the Minor Works scheme.

The preferred option presented in the study report for flood prevention measures for Clohaninchy was not economically viable.

The OPW met with Clare County Council and its consultants in September 2016 to explore possible alternative risk management options and measures which would be economically viable. The Council has now advised that it hopes to submit a revised proposal shortly which will comply with OPW requirements and at the same time be acceptable to the local community.

The OPW acknowledge the ongoing local community involvement and have highlighted to Clare County Council the importance of keeping the local community informed of the proposed plan.

### Flood Prevention Measures

376. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of the provision of a flood alleviation project (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12009/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán**

**Canney):** This area is part of the Shannon Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) Study. Flood maps were published for public consultation in November 2015 and were developed with information that was available at that time, including information on the flood event of November 2009. In light of the extreme flooding experienced in this area in December 2015 and January 2016, the OPW has instructed the consultants for the Shannon CFRAM Study to undertake further analysis to better understand the specifics of the flood event and to review the hydraulic modelling and flood mapping for this area. This work is almost completed and involves the review of the modelling, flood mapping, the assessment of options. The further analysis will also explore if a feasible measure can be recommended for this area.

The OPW is currently finalising dates and arrangements for a further Public Consultation Day that will provide a forum for the OPW to present the outcome of this further analysis. The OPW is planning to hold this event in March and will shortly publish the details of the local event through local newspapers.

### **Hedge Cutting Season**

377. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if her attention has been drawn to the negative impact on the welfare of the bee population, if there is an extension of licences to cut hedgerows into the month of August as proposed in the Heritage Bill 2016; if her Department conducted any study to determine the potential environmental knock-on effects of reducing the bee population due to this measure; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11212/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Regulations that I am proposing to make on the extension of hedge cutting into August will confine the extension to hedges on roads and internal fields on a farm where re-seeding or tillage is occurring. The Regulations will provide for limited managed hedge cutting, under strict criteria, during August to help tackle the impact overgrown hedges can have on road safety. With these restrictions and conditions in place, the expert advice of my officials is that the overall impact of limited, managed hedge cutting in August on the bee population will be minimal.

I understand that for most hedgerow plant species, flowering is largely over by August. The main hedgerow nectar resources will have been provided earlier in the year by species such as willow, blackthorn and hawthorn.

Furthermore, the Heritage Bill provides for a ‘sunset clause’ in that the provisions allowing hedge cutting in August are only in force for a pilot phase of 2 years and can only be extended by the Oireachtas. The National Parks and Wildlife Service of my Department will be tasked with monitoring activity under the proposed new provisions and an assessment of any impacts will be carried out before any decision is taken on continuing the measures beyond the 2 year pilot phase.

I will also be issuing guidelines on hedge management along with the proposed Regulations; and these guidelines will advise that the best practice for hedge management is a 3-year or longer cycle of cutting.

### **Leader Programmes**

378. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if she will review the policy in her Department of excluding equine-based or



equine-related projects from assistance or financial support through the Leader programme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11325/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The race and sport horse industries were deemed as ineligible activities under the 2007-2013 LEADER programme. However, ancillary activities for the provision of services to those industries were eligible for support, where this was in keeping with the Local Development Strategies developed in each area. Ancillary activities included a broad range of actions, such as equestrian centre and riding school projects.

In light of the considerable level of investment already undertaken in ancillary activities under the previous programme, it was decided that support for such activities would not be eligible under the 2014-2020 LEADER programme. However, in the period since I launched the implementation of the new LEADER Programme in July last year, it has become clear to me that there is still some demand for further investment in ancillary activities, particularly where this contributes to rural tourism.

On 28 February last I announced that I will be amending the ineligible list of activities to allow for funding of ancillary activities for the equine industry. This will be on a targeted basis, with a particular emphasis on ensuring that the supported infrastructure is widely accessible to the public.

### Departmental Expenditure

379. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the amount her Department spent on public relations consultants and all matters relating to public relations costs in 2016; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11423/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I am advised by my Department that the total expenditure on external communications and public relations services in 2016 was €22,478. This expenditure was in respect of two distinct projects, one in relation to employment opportunities for Irish speakers, the other in relation to identifying a sponsor for the Tidy Towns competition. A breakdown of these costs is given in the following table.

Company	Service Provided	Cost
Q4PR	Publicity campaign for Irish Language employment opportunities in the European Institutions	€17,000
PSG Communications Ltd	Source and identify a sponsor for the Tidy Towns competition	€5,478

Value for money is a critical consideration in assessing whether external firms should be engaged to provide public relations services or any other services.

### Special Protection Areas

380. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the reason Ireland has the very restrictive red zones on hen harrier-designated land when other EU countries do not in view of the fact that this is having a negative impact on the development of nursery businesses and the resultant loss of opportunity for job creation in these

businesses; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11456/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The term “red zone” or “red area” refers to afforested areas in Special Protection Areas where procedures are put in place to minimise the impact of forestry management on likely nesting areas of the hen harrier. The procedure is set out in Appendix 21 of the Forestry Standards Manual, published in November 2015 by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

Both Departments are committed to continue to seek further refinements to the process in order to improve its effectiveness and to reduce the burden on forest owners.

As this concerns management of existing forests, it is not directly related to the nursery business.

### **Leader Programmes Funding**

381. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the moneys spent on the Leader programme in each year since 2014, by county, in tabular form; the status of these payments versus target in each county; the payments that have been granted but not drawn down in each county; her views on the performance of the programme to date; if there will be an underspend in the programme; her plans to address this issue; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11460/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** It has not been possible, in the time available, to compile all of the information requested by the Deputy. I have asked that a response be prepared and forwarded to the Deputy in accordance with Dáil Standing Orders.

### **Leader Programmes Administration**

382. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the percentage of the Leader budget which has been spent on administration costs to date; the way this compares to each other country participating in the Leader programme, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11461/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Ireland’s LEADER programme 2014-2020 has a total budget of €250 million over the lifetime of the programme. In line with Article 35 of EU Regulation 1303/2015, up to 25% of total expenditure incurred by LEADER Local Action Groups may be claimed in respect of administration and animation costs over the duration of the 2014-2020 programme.

Approximately €1.8 million has been spent on administration and animation costs by Local Action Groups in Ireland since the commencement of the 2014-2020 LEADER programme, with most of this expenditure being incurred in 2016. In addition, approximately €1.4 million in total has been provided in preparatory support for the development of the LEADER Local Development Strategies in each LEADER area.

No project expenditure has yet been incurred under the LEADER 2014-2020 programme. However, the Local Action Groups are currently concluding calls for proposals and are working with potential applicants to develop and finalise project applications in each LEADER sub-regional area. I anticipate a significant increase in project approvals and payments over the

coming months.

Figures in relation to the administration and animation costs of LEADER Local Action Groups in other countries participating in the LEADER Programme are not available in my Department. However, the ceiling of 25% of total programme expenditure for administration and animation costs applies to all Member States.

### **Rural Development Plan**

383. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the extent to which the various towns throughout the country and in County Kildare have been selected for benefit from the recently announced Action Plan for Rural Development; if a priority list has been set out; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11482/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Action Plan for Rural Development 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.

From my own Department's perspective, I have secured funding of €12 million for an enhanced Town and Village Renewal scheme this year. This scheme will be launched shortly and towns and villages to be considered under the scheme, including in County Kildare, will be selected through an application and assessment process. The scheme will be funded by my Department and administered by Local Authorities. Full details of the scheme and the application process will be made available when the scheme is launched.

My Department will also provide funding to support towns and villages through the CLÁR programme which has a budget of €5 million this year, and through the Built Heritage Investment Scheme and the Structures at Risk Fund, which have a combined budget of €2.8 million for 2017.

The Heritage Council will be administering a Heritage and Community Grants programme of €0.7 million, along with a historic towns programme of €0.6 million to develop and expand the on-going work of the Department's Historic Towns Initiative and the Irish Walled Towns Network.

Our towns and villages are the heart of our rural communities, and through these investments and other initiatives across Government we can help to make them more attractive places in which to live and to work.

### **Rural Development Plan**

384. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if the Action Plan for Rural Development involves a commitment to provide grant assistance to persons that wish to renovate the second floor of a house into an apartment and refurbish residential and non-residential buildings in rural communities; if so, the details of the grant aid; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11507/17]

**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.

As part of Budget 2017, I have secured funding of €12 million for an enhanced Town and Village Renewal scheme this year. I intend to launch the first phase of this scheme in the coming weeks, with a focus on improving the economic development of our towns and villages. Full details of the initiative will be available when the scheme is launched.

I also intend to launch a second phase of the scheme later this year. This will be a pilot project to encourage residential occupancy in rural towns and villages.

My intention is that the scheme will be targeted at owner-occupiers and will assist with the cost of bringing buildings back into use for residential purposes only. The pilot will be launched in the second half of the year, when details of the scheme have been finalised in consultation with relevant Departments. Full details of the criteria to apply will be announced when the pilot is launched.

### Construction Industry

385. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the level of construction inflation that has been experienced by her Department in each of the past six years and to date in 2017 in respect of construction projects and other capital projects; the way in which she monitors construction inflation and the mechanisms she employs to establish this; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11530/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** My Department's capital expenditure is largely concentrated on enterprise supports, refurbishment projects in National Cultural Institutions, National Parks and our Waterways network, grant schemes for arts and heritage, and supporting the economic and sustainable development of the regions. Inflation measures are of more value in the management of multi-annual construction programmes but my Department seeks at all times to ensure value for money in the delivery of its individual capital supports. Where appropriate, my Department is sanctioning authority for certain projects as set out under the Public Spending Code and ensures value for money through a range of measures including ensuring compliance with public procurement procedures in partnership with the relevant contracting authorities and the Office of Public Procurement. Capital supports are provided in accordance with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform's Circular 13/2014 on the Management of and Accountability for Grants from Exchequer Funds, which provides guidance to Government Departments on ensuring that all Exchequer funds, regardless of the method of distribution, are accounted for and properly managed.

### Action Plan for Jobs

386. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the actions of the 2017 Action Plan for Jobs to support entrepreneurship and job creation in the Gaeltacht. [11591/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Seán Kyne):** The information sought by the Deputy was published by the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation on its website and is available at the following link: <https://www.djei.ie/en/Publications/Publication-files/Action-Plan-for-Jobs-2017-Table->

However, for ease of reference, the following table details the main actions in the 2017 Action Plan for Jobs which relate specifically to Údarás na Gaeltachta in respect of its role in supporting entrepreneurship and job creation in the Gaeltacht.

Number			
99	-	-	Support the creation of 500 new jobs in 2017 and continue to help maintain existing jobs in Údarás na Gaeltachta client companies in the Gaeltacht, including through supports for post-research and pre-commercialisation units in the life sciences, food and business support services and creative enterprises sectors, as well as for community development initiatives.
	Steps Necessary for Delivery	Timeline	Responsible body
	Commence the development of a Marine Innovation Park which will facilitate both research and commercial activities in Cill Chiaráin, Co Galway by:- Preparing and completing Full Master Plan- Undertaking and completing an Environment Impact Study- Preparing and submitting a planning application	Q1Q2 – Q4Q2 – Q4	DAHRRGA, ÚnaG
	Develop four innovation hubs (Donegal, Mayo, Galway and Kerry) by refurbishing existing buildings and investing in ancillary infrastructure which supports and develops entrepreneurship and start-up companies in the Gaeltacht Regions.	Q2 – Q4	DAHRRGA, ÚnaG
	Invest in training and skills development interventions in support of building and improving the skills-base amongst local enterprises and those seeking employment.	Ongoing	DAHRRGA, ÚnaG

Number			
	Develop advanced property solutions for new and existing innovative companies.	Ongoing	DAHRRGA, ÚnaG
147			Deliver balanced and sustainable tourism revenue, jobs growth and economic benefit to communities in the West of Ireland through the Wild Atlantic Way project.
	Steps Necessary for Delivery	Timeline	Responsible body
	Develop interpretation projects in association with local communities, the Heritage Council, Local Authorities, Údarás na Gaeltachta, the Office of Public Works and the National Wildlife and Parks Service, which highlight the distinctive Irish Culture in destinations and communities to encourage further dispersal of visitors along the Wild Atlantic Way, and encourage additional start-up tourism enterprises.	Q4	Fáilte Ireland and others

### Arts Funding

387. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if she has agreed to carry over funding for the 1916 commemoration to the general arts, culture and film programme to 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11677/17]

409. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the approach she is taking to ensure that the €50 million spent in 2017 on commemoration will be retained in the arts budget for 2017 for the benefit of the arts and culture nationally; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11702/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 387 and 409 together.

In 2016, once off funding of approximately €49 million was allocated to the Ireland 2016 Centenary Programme under my Department's Arts Division ; approximately €18 million in current funding and €31 million in capital.

This capital funded once off projects including the new visitor centre at the GPO, Richmond Barracks, the Kevin Barry Rooms at the National Concert Hall and the Athenaeum in Wexford.

As part of the 2017 Budget, I retained the majority of the €18 million current funding for 2017 which is now part of the baseline for the Arts division of the Department, meaning it will

be available for future years.

This included:

- An additional €5m for the Arts Council, an 8% increase in its annual budget;
- Boosts in funding for all of the National Cultural Institutions;
- €2m to allow for the opening of the newly restored historic wings at the National Gallery of Ireland and the opening of Killarney House on the foot of significant capital investment by the State;
- An increase of €2m for the Irish Film Board and €1m for Culture Ireland;
- Funding of €5m for the implementation of the Creative Ireland Programme 2017-2022.

I am confident that this substantial increase in funding for the arts, culture and film sectors will allow us to build on the positive legacy of the *Ireland 2016 Centenary Programme*. It also re-affirms the commitment of the Government to progressively increase funding for the arts as the economy improves and also reflects the importance attached to promoting and supporting our artistic and cultural strengths, and supporting jobs in our creative industries.

### Arts Funding

388. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if the Government will commit to the long-term goal of increasing arts funding to the European average of 0.6% of GDP. [11678/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I understand that the source of the reference quoted by the Deputy is a Council of Europe research project and that many European countries, including ten EU member states, are not included in the data.

I understand also that the data is not standardised and is not comparable across countries. For example, local authority expenditure on the arts, the artists' exemption tax relief, expenditure on public service broadcasting and the Irish language are not included in the figures for Ireland but comparable figures are included in the data for some other countries. I have previously stated that further research on this issue is warranted. The issue of a definition of culture and of capturing public expenditure on culture is an element of the draft Culture 2025 framework policy, which was sent to the Oireachtas Committee on Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs for input in July 2016.

However, this Government is committed to increasing provision for arts and culture in Ireland. The Taoiseach and I launched *the Creative Ireland Programme – Clár Éire Ildánach 2017 – 2022* on the 8 December 2016. This is a cross-Government initiative to mainstream culture and creativity in the life of the nation and to promote individual, community and national well-being.

This will focus on boosting cultural provision and participation in communities and harnessing the goodwill and engagement generated by the 2016 commemorative programme.

The core proposition of this programme is that participation in cultural activity drives personal and collective creativity, with significant implications for individual and societal wellbeing and achievement. The Creative Ireland Programme is the main implementation vehicle for

the priorities identified in *Culture 2025/Éire Ildánach*, the draft cultural policy which I published last year and which sees a vibrant cultural ecosystem as essential to society.

The programme is based on five pillars:

- Enabling the creative potential of every child
- Enabling creativity in every community
- Investing in our creative and cultural infrastructure
- Establishing Ireland as a centre of excellence in media production
- Unifying our global reputation

The Creative Ireland Programme is supported by significant additional resources which are being directed towards the arts and culture sector. In Budget 2017 I secured significant additional funding for the Arts Council and the Irish Film Board. The increase in the Arts Council's allocation in 2017 is €5 million, or 8%, and will assist the Council greatly in implementing its 10-year strategy *Making Great Art Work (2016-2025)*.

I also secured an increase of €2 million for the Irish Film Board, representing a 14% increase in its annual budget.

Budget 2017 also includes:-

- increased funding for all of the National Cultural Institutions;
- an increase of €1 million for Culture Ireland;
- an additional €1 million to the Heritage Council; and
- funding of €5m for the implementation of the Creative Ireland Programme.

I also recently announced details of more than €9 million in capital funding for existing dedicated arts and culture centres across the country. The Creative Ireland Arts and Culture Capital Scheme is the most significant investment in arts and cultural centres in a decade and will target investment at a range of different facilities, including arts centres, theatres, galleries and museums, as well as artists' studios and creative spaces. This kind of investment is at the centre of what I am trying to achieve through Creative Ireland Programme and the Action Plan for Rural Development

All of this represents real and substantial funding increases across the arts and cultural area and has been welcomed across the sector. It re-affirms the commitment of this Government to progressively increase funding for the arts as the economy improves, as set out in the Programme for a Partnership Government.

### Arts Funding

389. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs her plans to increase funding in the arts over the lifetime of the Government; and her views on whether funding for the Arts Council and Irish Film Board should be doubled. [11679/17]

408. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gael-



tacht Affairs her views on the recent comments by the outgoing artistic director of the Gate Theatre (details supplied) that the Arts Council should be getting three or four times the amount it receives from the Government; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11701/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 389 and 408 together.

The Programme for a Partnership Government contains a very important commitment to work to progressively increase funding to the arts, including the Arts Council and the Irish Film Board, as the economy continues to improve.

In Budget 2017 I secured significant additional funding for the Arts Council and the Irish Film Board. The increase in the Arts Council's allocation in 2017 is €5 million, or 8%, and will assist the Council greatly in implementing its 10-year strategy *Making Great Art Work (2016-2025)*. I also secured an increase of €2 million for the Irish Film Board, representing a 14% increase in its annual budget.

Budget 2017 also includes:-

- increased funding for all of the National Cultural Institutions;
- an increase of €1 million for Culture Ireland;
- an additional €1 million to the Heritage Council; and
- funding of €5m for the implementation of a Legacy Programme now known as the Creative Ireland Programme and the main implementation vehicle for the priorities identified in the draft framework policy *Culture 2025/Éire Ildánach* which I published in July last year.

I also recently announced details of more than €9 million in capital funding for existing dedicated arts and culture centres across the country. The Arts and Culture Capital Scheme is the most significant investment in arts and cultural centres in a decade and will target investment at a range of different facilities, including arts centres, theatres, galleries and museums, as well as artists' studios and creative spaces. This kind of investment is at the centre of what I am trying to achieve through Creative Ireland Programme and the Action Plan for Rural Development.

All of this represents real and substantial funding increases across the arts and cultural area and has been welcomed across the sector. It re-affirms the commitment of this Government to progressively increase funding for the arts as the economy improves, as set out in the Programme for a Partnership Government.

### **Arts Funding**

390. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if she will create an arts capital fund, modelled after the sports capital fund, to ensure better long term funding for Irish arts. [11680/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I recently announced details of grants of over €9 million in capital funding for arts and culture centres across the country. This capital scheme is the most significant investment in arts and cultural centres in a decade and will target investment at a range of different facilities, including arts centres, theatres, galleries and museums, as well as artists' studios and creative spaces. This kind of investment is at the centre of what I am trying to achieve through Creative Ireland and the Action Plan for Rural Development. The Arts and Culture Capital

Scheme was considerably over-subscribed. The Department received 106 applications in total under Stream 1 and 2 seeking total funding of over €20m with eligible requests for funding totalling over €14.6m. Following the assessment process, 56 projects are being funded. Seven flagship projects will receive substantial funding allocations while a further 49 projects will receive funding ranging from €20,000 to €276,000.

I will be opening a further Stream of funding under this Scheme in the coming weeks. It will provide smaller capital grants of up to €20,000 to not-for-profit organisations with a defined arts and cultural remit. While the amounts involved are relatively modest, the grants will in themselves make a huge difference to individual organisations and will be of particular benefit to local cultural centres throughout rural Ireland.

The arts and culture capital grant scheme is operated in a similar way to the sports capital grant scheme.

### **Artists' Remuneration**

391. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if she will liaise with the Minister for Social Protection to examine the supports for working artists in the social welfare system; and if the Government will relax activation rules for working artists to allow them to support themselves. [11681/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** In December, I announced that my Department in conjunction with the Department of Social Protection would devise a mechanism during 2017 to assist self-employed artists who have applied for Jobseeker's Allowance. I have been in contact with my colleague the Minister for Social Protection on the matter and officials of our two Departments have already begun working on this initiative in consultation with the Arts Council. The scheme will be a pilot scheme and is part of the *Creative Ireland Programme* launched in December. Details of the pilot scheme will be announced as soon as possible.

### **Heritage Sites**

392. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs her plans to pursue more applications for UNESCO world heritage status for more of Ireland's national landmarks (details supplied). [11682/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I refer the Deputy to my reply to Question No. 394 on 31 January 2017.

### **Irish Language**

393. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the way she will work with her colleague the Minister for Education and Skills to ensure that parents can access second level education through Irish, especially in areas with proven demand for Gaelscoileanna. [11683/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Seán Kyne):** I refer the Deputy to previous replies given to Parliamentary Questions in relation to this matter. As I mentioned in these replies, the question of access to second-level education

through Irish is primarily a matter for the Minister for Education and Skills. However, in the context of its responsibility for coordinating the implementation of the *20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030*, my Department works in close cooperation with a number of key stakeholders, including the Department of Education and Skills.

Given the critical role of education in achieving the objectives detailed in the 20-Year Strategy, I can assure the Deputy that this close co-operation will continue to be a priority and I look forward to further engagement with my colleague, Richard Bruton T.D., Minister for Education and Skills, in relation to these matters.

I should also point out that the Cabinet Committee on Arts, Irish, the Gaeltacht and the Islands is working to ensure coherence and focus in the range of activities, both ongoing and in planning, to support and promote the Irish language within the wider context of national identity, culture and creativity. I am pleased to be a member of that Committee and I look forward to working with my colleague, the Minister for Education and Skills, within that framework.

### **Irish Language**

394. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if she will provide extra funding to Gaeltacht areas to encourage greater use of the language and better economic prospects for those living in Gaeltacht areas. [11684/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Seán Kyne):** I refer the Deputy to the previous replies given to Parliamentary Questions in relation to this matter. As I mentioned in those replies, the implementation of the *20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030* is recognised as a key priority in the *Programme for a Partnership Government* insofar as it supports the maintenance and development of the Irish language as a community and household language in the Gaeltacht. Other measures outlined in the Programme include:

- A focus on job creation in the Gaeltacht through investment in jobs by Údarás na Gaeltachta;
- Encouraging the attendance by children of Irish-medium pre-schools or naíonraí in Gaeltacht areas; and,
- Increasing investment in the Irish language.

The Deputy will be aware that my Department, together with Údarás na Gaeltachta, administers a wide range of schemes, programmes and initiatives targeting language and economic development in Gaeltacht areas. Further details are available on the Údarás na Gaeltachta website [www.udaras.ie](http://www.udaras.ie).

In order to further underpin the implementation of the 20-Year Strategy and the language planning process, as set out in Acht na Gaeltachta 2012, a specific allocation of €1.25 million has also been provided in my Department's vote this year, an increase of €250,000 on the 2016 allocation. This increased allocation will further enable my Department, acting in co-operation with Údarás na Gaeltachta and relevant stakeholders at community level, to implement a range of specific and practical measures aimed at supporting both the implementation of the Strategy and of the language planning process in Gaeltacht areas.

A further increase of €1 million in current funding provided in my Department's Vote this year for the Irish Language, Gaeltacht and Islands programme area will enable my Department

to allocate extra resources to Gaeltacht support schemes such as the Irish Language Summer Colleges and community schemes funded by Údarás na Gaeltachta.

In relation to economic development, as Minister of State with responsibility for the Gaeltacht, I very much appreciate the importance of job creation in helping to retain sustainable communities in Gaeltacht areas. In this context, I wish to acknowledge the very important enterprise and employment function of Údarás na Gaeltachta as the regional economic development agency for the Gaeltacht. In its regional enterprise role in the Gaeltacht, Údarás na Gaeltachta, in conjunction with Enterprise Ireland and the IDA, will continue to work towards attracting investment to the Gaeltacht, in addition to supporting micro-enterprises and developing the skills base in the Gaeltacht. In order to enable Údarás na Gaeltachta to fulfil its job creation remit, a baseline capital funding allocation of €6.687m has been provided by the Exchequer to the organisation in 2017.

### Arts Funding

395. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the way she plans to ensure arts funding is used to ensure minority and new Irish voices are heard as part of cultural output. [11685/17]

402. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if she will work with the Minister for Health to develop and roll out an arts and health strategy across acute and children's hospitals and across the community health sector; and the other innovative approaches being considered to use the arts as a means to promote wellbeing across society. [11694/17]

403. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the action she is taking with her Government colleagues to systematically address social, geographic and economic barriers to full participation in the artistic and cultural life of the country, particularly for children and young persons. [11695/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 395, 402 and 403 together.

Under the Arts Act 2003, primary responsibility for the promotion and support of the arts, including inclusivity in the arts, throughout the country is devolved to the Arts Council. In Budget 2017, I secured significant additional funding for the Arts Council. This will see an increase in the Arts Council allocation in 2017 of €5m, or 8%, and will assist the Council in implementing its 10-year strategy *Making Great Art Work (2016-2025)*. This strategy places specific emphasis on the need to plan and provide for children and young people. The 5 high-level values of the strategy include a commitment to excellence, as well as respect for diversity of artistic practice, of public engagement, and of social and cultural traditions. The strategy also commits to working to achieve full implementation of the Arts in Education Charter. The Strategy is available on the website of the Arts Council.

The Creative Ireland Programme is the Government's Legacy Programme for Ireland 2016 and the main implementation vehicle for the priorities identified in *Culture 2025/Éire Ildánach* the draft framework policy which I published in July of last year. It is a five-year all-of-government initiative, from 2017 to 2022, which places creativity at the centre of public policy.

The Programme is built around five pillars one of which is Enabling Creativity in Every Community. The Centenary Programme demonstrated two critically important aspects of local governance: first, local authorities are the primary instruments of community engagement and

second, local authorities have a particular capacity for local programme delivery, especially in the context of citizen engagement. Further details of the Creative Ireland Programme can be accessed at the following link <http://creative.ireland.ie/>

In addition to the Creative Ireland Programme, I recently launched the Action Plan for Rural Development which is the first whole-of-government strategy aimed at people living and working in rural Ireland. It aims to unlock the potential of rural Ireland through a framework of supports at national and local level which will ensure that people who live in rural areas have increased opportunities for employment locally, and access to public services and social networks that support a high quality of life. The Plan contains 276 actions which aim to improve both the economic and social fabric of rural Ireland spread across five pillars.

The fourth pillar of the Action Plan is Fostering Culture and Creativity in Rural Communities.

The key objectives of this Pillar are to:-

- Increase access to the arts and enhance cultural facilities in rural communities ;
- Further develop and enhance culture and creativity in rural Ireland through the establishment of culture teams and creativity hubs as part of the Creative Ireland Programme;
- Promote the Irish language as a key resource in Gaeltacht and other rural communities.

These objectives will be delivered as part of the work programme across my Department, and in particular as part of the Creative Ireland Programme which was launched by the Taoiseach and I on 8th December last. All of these initiatives by my Department and its agencies will seek to address the issues set out in the questions.

### **Cultural Policy**

396. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs her plans to support the development of the creative industries sector; if she has reviewed the report from the previous Joint Committee on Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation on the hearings in relation to Examining the Potential for Job Creation, Innovation and Balanced Economic Development in the Creative Economy; and if she will implement the recommendations of the report in tandem with the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation. [11686/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I am keenly aware of the potential of the creative sector to contribute to sustainable jobs growth, as set out in the report to which the Deputy refers. My Department continues to work with other Departments, in particular with the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, across a range of areas as set out in the Action Plan for Jobs and in the context of my wider remit to promote and support Ireland's cultural and creative sectors.

I have already announced the commissioning of an economic analysis of our screen-based creative industries by my Department in partnership with the Departments of Communications, Climate Action and Environment and Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation. This study has commenced and will examine the economic impact and potential of the Irish film, TV and animation sector and analyse the scale and economic contribution of the screen-based creative industries and examine its potential to expand further. The study, when complete, will help to inform Government strategies and initiatives as we seek to enhance Ireland's reputation as a home of creative talent.

My Department will continue to promote the creative industries and economic development across its remit including, for example, through the recently published *Creative Ireland Programme* and *Action Plan for Rural Development*.

The *Creative Ireland Programme* is the Government's Legacy Programme for Ireland 2016 and the main implementation vehicle for the priorities identified in *Culture 2025/Éire Ildánach* the draft framework policy which I published in July of last year. It is a five-year initiative, from 2017 to 2022, which places creativity at the centre of public policy.

The *Action Plan for Rural Development* is the first whole-of-government strategy aimed at people living and working in rural Ireland. It aims to unlock the potential of rural Ireland through a framework of supports at national and local level which will ensure that people who live in rural areas have increased opportunities for employment locally, and access to public services and social networks that support a high quality of life. The Plan is spread across five pillars and the fourth pillar is Fostering Culture and Creativity in Rural Communities.

The key objectives of this Pillar are to:

- Increase access to the arts and enhance cultural facilities in rural communities;
- Further develop and enhance culture and creativity in rural Ireland through the establishment of culture teams and creativity hubs as part of the Creative Ireland Programme ;
- Promote the Irish language as a key resource in Gaeltacht and other rural communities.

### **Arts in Education Charter**

397. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if she has liaised with the Minister for Education and Skills on the development of contemporary art education at primary and secondary level in schools. [11688/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The *Programme for a Partnership Government* commits to the continued implementation of the *Arts in Education Charter* and my Department is working closely with the Department of Education and Skills and the Arts Council to deliver the objectives of the Charter. The work of the two Departments and the Arts Council in implementing the Charter is achieved largely through existing structures such as education centres. Good progress has been made to date in terms of launching Ireland's first *Arts in Education Portal*, holding National Arts and Education Days, and developing Teacher Artist Partnerships through the Education and Training Centres.

In terms of direct support for the arts, this is primarily a matter for the Arts Council and its ten-year strategy - *Making Great Art Work 2016-2025* – which places specific emphasis on the need to plan and provide for children and young people. The strategy also commits to working to achieve full implementation of the *Arts in Education Charter*. Arising from the significant increase of support of €5m which I secured for the Arts Council as part of Budget 2017, I am pleased to say that Arts Council funding in this area for 2017 has in turn increased from €3.1m in 2016 to €3.7m this year. This is a very clear indication that the Arts Council is prioritising arts participation by young people and children.

In addition to the Charter, the *Creative Ireland Programme*, which the Taoiseach and I launched in December, places a special focus on “Enabling the Creative Potential of Every Child”. Building on the Arts in Education Charter this will involve the development of an inte-

grated plan to enable every child in Ireland to access tuition in music, drama, art and coding by 2022. My Department will be working with relevant Departments and other stakeholders over the coming months to develop this plan.

### Cultural Policy

398. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs her plans to develop a national cultural strategy up to 2025. [11689/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Last July I published the draft framework policy *Culture 2025/Éire Ildánach*, which was submitted to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs for input. I understand that the Committee is currently preparing a report on the draft framework policy which I will consider when received. I have also received submissions from various organisations on the draft document. Following receipt of the report from the Committee it is my intention to finalise the Policy. In the meantime, as referred to in my reply to the Deputy on 29 November last, I believe that it is important to continue momentum in terms of delivery of the priorities set out in the framework policy and to build on the positive legacy of the *Ireland 2016 Centenary Programme*.

To that effect therefore, on December 8th last, the Taoiseach and I launched the *Creative Ireland Programme/Clár Éire Ildánach* as the Government's Legacy Programme arising out of the *Ireland 2016 Centenary Programme* and as the main implementation vehicle for the priorities identified in *Culture 2025*. The *Creative Ireland Programme* is a high-level, high-ambition, all-of-Government initiative to mainstream creativity in the life of the nation.

My Department is now working to implement the Creative Ireland Programme with partners across Government and other key stakeholders. This includes an ambitious Year 1 Programme to deliver 10 initiatives by the end of 2017. Details of the Programme can be found on [www.creativeireland.ie](http://www.creativeireland.ie)

### Cultural Policy

399. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs her plans to develop musical education and instruments available to young persons and the general population through facilitating schools, youth groups and libraries in enhancing their music resources and the provision of access to musical training and instruments for the benefit of local communities. [11690/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Government appreciates the importance of the cultural and creative industries to Ireland, including the music industry and a range of initiatives are in place to support music and musical education. Under the Arts Act 2003, primary responsibility for the promotion and support of the arts, including music, throughout the country is devolved to the Arts Council.

I am pleased that I secured significant additional funding for the Arts Council in Budget 2017 amounting to an increase of €5 million, or 8%. This increase will enable the Council to enhance support to artists and arts organisations around the country, including young and upcoming artists, in line with its strategy statement, *Making Great Art Work*, which prioritises support for the artist and public engagement.

In addition, my Department, through Culture Ireland, provides supports for Irish artists and musicians to travel abroad and develop their careers.

I have increased the annual baseline funding for Culture Ireland from €2.5m in 2016 to €3.5m in 2017.

My Department also provides funding for an annual scheme to assist in the purchase of musical instruments by talented individuals and groups. Under the Music Capital Scheme, which is managed by Music Network, grants are made available to groups to support the purchase of musical instruments. Further details are available on the website of Music Network at [www.musicnetwork.ie](http://www.musicnetwork.ie)

In addition to funding for the purchase of musical instruments, my Department provides funding to Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann (CCÉ) for its work in the protection and promotion of Irish traditional music and culture. In 2016, funding of €1,448,000 was provided to CCÉ by my Department. CCÉ provide weekly classes in a variety of traditional instruments, singing, and dance through its network of centres and branches all over the country as well as summer schools. CCÉ maintains a full schedule of educational events, such as lectures, exhibitions, workshops and concerts, sometimes in conjunction with the Fleadhanna Cheoil. Further information is available on the website of CCÉ at [www.comhaltas.ie](http://www.comhaltas.ie)

The Creative Ireland Programme is the Government's Legacy Programme for Ireland 2016 and the main implementation vehicle for the priorities identified in *Culture 2025/Éire Ildánach* the draft framework policy which I published in July this year. It is a five-year initiative, from 2017 to 2022, which places creativity at the centre of public policy. It is built around five pillars the first of which is Enabling the Creative Potential of Every Child. Arising out of this my Department will be working with the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs over the coming months to develop a plan so that by 2022 every child in Ireland will have access to tuition in music, drama, art and coding.

## Arts Funding

400. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if she has examined proposals to facilitate on a national basis the use of vacant retail premises by exhibiting artists, based on successful schemes such as (details supplied) which uses empty retail units to support local artists. [11691/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I am aware of the issue regarding the provision of affordable studio space, particularly as a result of the changing property market. In general, I would consider that local approaches driven by artists, local arts officers and the owners of vacant buildings are best suited to respond to the specific local circumstances involved and provide the most effective outcomes.

However, my Department is in discussion with the Arts Council, Dublin City Council and the OPW to consider some possible short-term and longer-term approaches to the issue, both in relation to specific issues in Dublin and to wider national approaches. In addition, as part of the Government's initiative on the North East Inner City, I awarded a grant of €35,000 this year to Fire Station Artists' Studios, Buckingham Street, to assist in providing additional facilities in conjunction with Dublin City Council.

In terms of investment by my Department, I recently announced details of more than €9 million in capital funding for 56 arts and culture centres across the country. This capital scheme



is the most significant investment in arts and cultural centres in a decade and will target investment at a range of different facilities, including arts centres, theatres, galleries and museums, as well as artists' studios and creative spaces.

Eight of the grants relate to artist studios and creative spaces amounting to a total of €850,000. A full list of full list of organisations to benefit from funding under Stream 1 and 2 of the Creative Ireland Arts and Cultural Capital Scheme 2016-2018 is available on my Department's website.

Furthermore, I will be announcing a new small capital grants Scheme in the coming weeks which will be geared towards providing grants of up to €20,000 to not-for-profit organisations with a defined arts and cultural remit. Organisations with artists' studios will also be eligible to apply under this new scheme.

### **Heritage Promotion**

401. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if her Department will examine a nationwide plan for the development of village design statements that would ensure all future planning and development takes full cognisance of the historic character and protect the character and heritage of villages. [11692/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I refer to my previous reply to Question No. 403 of 31 January 2017 in this regard and note the position remains unchanged.

*Questions Nos. 402 and 403 answered with Question No. 395.*

### **Arts in Education Charter**

404. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs her plans in place to ensure the better integration of the arts into education and broadening the focus on science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) into science, technology, engineering, arts and maths (STEAM); and if she will expand the ambition and resourcing of the Arts and Education Charter and continue to work with the Department of Education and Skills to further enhance the position of arts subjects within the curriculum at primary and secondary level. [11696/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** While the content of the school curriculum is primarily a matter for the Department of Education and Skills, I am firmly committed to continuing the work of the ongoing partnership between that Department, my own Department and the Arts Council, in line with the *Arts in Education Charter*. In this regard, I am pleased that the *Programme for a Partnership Government* commits to the continued implementation of the *Arts in Education Charter* and my Department is working closely with the Department of Education and Skills and the Arts Council to deliver the objectives of the Charter.

The work of the two Departments and the Arts Council in implementing the Charter is achieved largely through existing structures such as education centres. Good progress has been made to date in terms of launching Ireland's first *Arts in Education Portal*, holding National Arts and Education Days and developing Teacher Artist Partnerships through the Education and

Training Centres.

In addition, the *Creative Ireland* Programme is the Government's Legacy Programme for Ireland 2016 and the main implementation vehicle for the priorities identified in *Culture 2025/Éire Ildánach* the draft framework policy which I published in July this year. It is a five-year initiative, from 2017 to 2022, which places creativity at the centre of public policy. It is built around five pillars the first of which is the Enabling the Creative Potential of Every Child. Arising out of this my Department will be working with the Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, the Arts Council and other stakeholders over the coming months to develop a plan so that by 2022 every child in Ireland will have access to tuition in music, drama, art and coding.

### Cultural Policy

405. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if she will begin preparation of the global arts forum for Ireland, similar to the structure of the global Irish economic forum, which would highlight indigenous talent and map a strong and healthy future for arts and culture at home and abroad. [11697/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** My Department through Culture Ireland supports Irish artists to present their work worldwide. This serves to raise the global awareness of the strong reputation of the Irish arts sector, generate new career opportunities for Irish artists and develop new audiences abroad for Irish artists. My Department continues to work with the Global Irish Network, which has to date made many significant achievements in relation to highlighting Ireland's creativity on the world stage. I consider that this is the most appropriate vehicle in which to highlight the achievement of Irish creativity as part of a wider cross-sectoral partnership. Most notable in terms of this collaborative approach have been *Irish Design 2015*, with which my Department had a significant engagement in relation to the international programme, and the *Imagine Ireland* programme in 2011.

This model of supporting major arts initiatives internationally continued last year with the *I am Ireland* programme – the international arts element of the Ireland 2016 Centenary Programme, which included over 550 separate performances and exhibitions with a special focus in key territories - United States, Great Britain, Canada and Australia. This programme reflected that interest in Irish artistic excellence continues to grow internationally and recognises that this centenary year offered a unique opportunity to build on Ireland's cultural connections and share the talents of Irish artists through many special and diverse events around the world.

In addition to Culture Ireland the *Creative Ireland Programme*, which the Taoiseach and I launched on the 8th of December 2016, places a special emphasis on unifying our Global reputation. Pillar 5 of the Programme - *Unifying our Global Reputation* - is about presenting a coherent representation of Ireland to the world as a creative people. This will seek to capture the overarching narrative of Ireland's unique creativity and cultural heritage. The Government's intentions in this regard were welcomed when I launched the *Creative Ireland Programme* on the international stage in New York and London recently.

### Departmental Functions

406. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if Arts, Heritage and Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs is the title of her De-

partment and if she anticipates there will be any further changes to the name of her Department or her Department's functions; the sections of staff which have been assigned or transferred between Departments as a consequence of changes to her ministerial and departmental structure; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11698/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs was established on 9th June 2016 with responsibility for all functions that previously came within the remit of the former Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, alongside a range of new responsibilities in relation to regional development and rural affairs. Reflecting the importance of regional development and rural affairs in the *Programme for a Partnership Government*, a new Regional Development and Rural Affairs Division was established within my Department, with a key focus on the delivery of the EU co-funded Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 (LEADER) which transferred from the former Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government along with sections managing Rural Development Schemes, the Western Development Commission, the Dormant Accounts Fund and social enterprise.

In addition sections dealing with the rollout of rural broadband and supporting the rural post office network transferred to my Department from the former Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources.

The configuration of Departments generally is a matter for Government, in the context of the Programme for Government and other emerging priorities. There are no proposals for any further changes to the structure of my Department at this time.

### **Brexit Issues**

407. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the role she will have in the Government's post-Brexit strategy, in view of her responsibility for regional affairs and the potential negative impact of Brexit on the Border area; if she has a specific unit in her Department to deal with the impact of Brexit on the Border region; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11700/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I am acutely aware of the challenges arising from Brexit for Rural Ireland and for the border area in particular. I hosted a productive public forum on Brexit in Monaghan last November which was attended by a range of interests from the Border region. I also hosted a Sectoral Dialogue on Brexit in Cavan on 6th February which was attended by over 100 stakeholders from across the arts, culture, film, heritage, Irish language, regional and rural affairs sectors. This Sectoral Dialogue meeting focused on the impacts of Brexit on the sectors served by my Department, with particular attention being given to the impacts on Rural and Border communities. This event was part of the ongoing engagement with civil society initiated through the series of All-Island Civic Dialogues hosted by the Taoiseach.

The actions set out in *Realising our Rural Potential*, the Government's Action Plan for Rural Development launched in January, will also assist in supporting rural communities, including those in border areas, to meet the challenges posed by Brexit and to position themselves to avail of the opportunities which also may arise. The Action Plan contains over 270 actions to be delivered by a range of Government Departments, State agencies and other bodies and sets out to support sustainable communities, support enterprise and employment, maximise our rural and recreation potential, foster culture and creativity, and improve rural connectivity.

The plan sets out a number of actions which will address the effects of Brexit in particular. For example, a specific piece of research will be commissioned on the impact of Brexit on rural areas, and particularly rural areas in the Border region. Also, InterTradeIreland will fund the development of a programme of initiatives to increase the awareness and capacity of SMEs to deal with the practical consequences of Brexit for cross border trade.

The Government has put in place a number of structural and other arrangements to address issues relating to Brexit. These include an inter-Departmental Group that was formed in April 2016. My Department has been represented on the Inter-Departmental Group since its establishment. In addition, a Working Group, chaired at Assistant Secretary level and composed of officials from across the Department was established within my Department to deal with Brexit issues. This Working Group is supported by the Department's EU Coordination Unit which is also responsible for managing those issues relating to Brexit that fall within my Department's remit. These arrangements are being kept under review and will be enhanced if required in the coming period.

*Question No. 408 answered with Question No. 389.*

*Question No. 409 answered with Question No. 387.*

### **Arts Promotion**

410. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if she will appoint an expert panel of artists and cultural managers to advise her as proposed by the National Campaign for the Arts; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11703/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** My Department will continue to work closely with those involved in arts and culture in Ireland. For example, the Department consulted widely with the arts and culture sector in preparing Ireland's first draft framework policy *Culture 2025/Éire Ildánach* which I published in July last year. The preparation of this document was supported by a steering group and wider expert group drawn from the sector. The draft document was submitted to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs for input. I understand that the Committee is currently preparing a report on the draft framework policy which I will consider when received.

In the meantime, I believe that it is important to continue momentum in terms of delivery of the priorities set out in the framework policy and to build on the positive legacy of the Ireland 2016 Centenary Programme.

To that effect therefore, on December 8th last, the Taoiseach and I launched the *Creative Ireland Programme/Clár Éire Ildánach* as the Government's Legacy Programme arising out of the Ireland 2016 Centenary Programme and as the main implementation vehicle for the priorities identified in *Culture 2025*.

The Creative Ireland Programme is a high-level, high-ambition, all-of-Government initiative to mainstream creativity in the life of the nation.

My Department is now working to implement the *Creative Ireland Programme* with partners across Government and other key stakeholders including those working in the sector. I will continue to keep the process and structures for consultation under review as we work

through the implementation phase.

It should also be noted that under the Arts Act 2003, the Arts Council also has a function of advising and providing information on the arts to the Minister and the Government.

### **Cultural Policy**

411. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs her views on proposals that would mandate all local authorities to publish individual arts plans and cultural strategies and for local authority arts spending to be mandatory and ringfenced on an annual basis; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11704/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Taoiseach and I launched the *Creative Ireland Programme/Clár Éire Ildánach 2017 – 2022* on the 8 December 2016 as the Government Legacy Programme for Ireland 2016 and as the main implementation vehicle for the priorities identified in Culture 2025/Éire Ildánach, the draft cultural policy which I published in July 2016. This is a cross-Government initiative to mainstream culture and creativity in the life of the nation and to promote individual, community and national wellbeing.

The second pillar of the Programme – *Enabling creativity in every community* – will be implemented primarily through our local authorities as they are the primary instruments of local community engagement.

Each local authority has now established a Culture Team bringing together arts officers, librarians, heritage officers, museum curators, archivists and other relevant personnel led by a Director of Services, with a nominated person as ‘Creative Ireland Co-ordinator’.

A dedicated budget of €1m from the overall Creative Ireland Programme budget of €5m has been allocated to the local authorities towards the implementation of initiatives under Pillar Two including the aforementioned culture teams, the publication of a Culture and Creativity Plan for each county - reflecting at local level the overall structure and aims of the national programme - and the implementation of Cruinniú na Cásca, a programme of arts activities and events on Easter Monday.

I understand that additional support will also be made available to the local authorities for these initiatives by the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government.

I am confident that these initiatives together with the funding referred to above will go a long way towards enhancing culture and creativity in every community.

### **Rural Development Plan**

412. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs her plans to deliver on action point 250 of the Action Plan for Rural Development to work with island communities to assess and implement improvements to island piers and harbours as necessary [11706/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Seán Kyne) (Deputy Seán Kyne):** Action point 250 of the Action Plan for Rural Development states that my Department, in cooperation with local authorities, will continue investment in island piers and harbours in the period 2017-2019. In this regard, I have

asked my officials to seek proposals for island capital works programmes, to include the maintenance and development of piers and harbours, from relevant local authorities with a view to progressing same in 2017.

In addition, my Department is actively engaging with Galway County Council with regard to progressing planning work this year for the development of Inis Oírr pier on the Aran Islands. This development will involve a major investment in that island's infrastructure – an investment which will benefit the island community and visitors for years to come.

### **Post Office Network**

413. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the way she proposes to oversee and monitor the implementation of actions to support the post office network, arising out of the report of the Post Office Renewal Board and the Post Office Hub Working Group, as outlined in point 20 of the Action Plan for Rural Development; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11709/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Michael Ring) (Deputy Michael Ring):** The Post Office Renewal Implementation Group and the Post Office Hub Working Group were established last year to progress the recommendations in the earlier report of the Post Office Network Business Development Group which was published in January 2016. The Network Renewal Group examined, on behalf of An Post, a number of issues relating to the post office network, including the number and spatial distribution of post offices, branch modernisation, the streamlining of products and services, and postmaster contracts. Arising out of the Group's work, a report was submitted to An Post for their consideration on 23 December 2016.

The role of the Post Office Hub Working Group, which I chaired, was to identify potential models under which the post offices could act as community hubs, especially in rural areas. This Group has completed its work and I will report to Government shortly on its findings.

The implementation of any of the recommendations or proposals which have emerged from this process will require the agreement and input of An Post.

The actions will be monitored on an ongoing basis by my Department through its direct engagement in the delivery of the relevant measures, as well as through the processes which are being put in place to monitor the implementation of the Action Plan for Rural Development as a whole. A Monitoring Committee, which will be chaired by Minister Humphreys, will meet regularly to monitor the progress of each of the actions in the Plan. The Committee will include the key stakeholders from relevant public bodies as well as business and rural interests. Progress reports will be published every six months.

### **Rural Development Plan**

414. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if the investment of €37.5 million as outlined in point 50 of the Action Plan for Rural Development to implement the social inclusion and community activation programme is in addition to the funds previously committed by the Department of Social Protection to the programme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11710/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather**

**Humphreys):** The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) falls under the remit of the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government and I have no function in relation to the matter. The relevant commitment in the Action Plan for Rural Development is assigned to the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government for delivery.

### **Irish Language**

415. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs her plans to increase the number of Irish speakers across the Civil Service. [11769/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Seán Kyne) (Deputy Seán Kyne):** As the Deputy is aware, in 2014 the Government approved the introduction of a new approach to support Irish language proficiency in the civil service. Arrangements were put in place by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, in the context of replacing the policy of awarding bonus marks for Irish language proficiency in civil service recruitment and promotion competitions which was not meeting the Government's objectives for Irish language proficiency in the civil service. Under the current approach measures are in place to increase the cohort of functional bilinguals in the civil service in order to reflect a more competency-based approach to recruitment and, where appropriate, promotion competitions. In the context of Workforce Planning frameworks, Departments are requested to identify the posts/areas of work requiring functional bilinguals and to include these in their workforce action plans. Having regard to the implementation of the Gaeltacht Act 2012, Departments will be asked to pay particular attention to posts that are located in, or that are serving, Gaeltacht areas. This process will be central to ensuring that future recruitment and interdepartmental promotion competitions run by the Public Appointments Service make sufficient provision for appointments to posts requiring functional bilinguals. In the case of Departmental recruitment and promotion competitions, an assessment will be made of the requirement for functional bilinguals and, where necessary and appropriate, a sub-panel of functional bilinguals will be put in place.

The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform's Implementation Plan for the 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030 includes measures aimed at building capacity in the provision of Irish language services in the civil service. In this context, Foras na Gaeilge currently has a contract in place with Gaelchultúr Teo. for the provision of Irish language training to the public service. From 2011 to date, I understand that in the region of 1,200 public servants from over 80 state bodies have attended courses run by Gaelchultúr Teo. In addition to this, over 400 government employees from more than 20 public service bodies have undertaken Gaelchultúr's Certificate in Professional Irish.

In October 2014, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform announced an end to the Moratorium on recruitment in the public service, to be replaced with new delegated management arrangements to be phased in during 2015 and 2016. Open recruitment competitions have now recommenced and my Department is monitoring early outcomes regarding the bilingual element.

Given that it is the responsibility of each Department to identify and address its Irish language needs, I recently asked my officials to open a discussion with their counterparts in other Departments and in the main public bodies, including the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, in order to examine their requirements for functioning bilinguals. These discussions are currently underway.

## Commemorative Events

416. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs her plans to reconvene the all-party consultation group for the decade of centenaries programme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11771/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Government will continue to mark significant events throughout the Decade of Centenaries based on the inclusive, open and consultative approach that has worked so well for last year's 1916 Rising centenary commemorations. At all times, the Government has been supported in its plans by the guidance and advice of the Expert Advisory Group on Commemorations and the Oireachtas All-Party Consultation Group on Commemorations.

I am currently considering the steps necessary to re-establish the Oireachtas All-Party Consultation Group on Commemorations and I am committed to ensuring that we will be able to reflect appropriately and respectfully on all of the major historical events to be commemorated over the remainder of the Decade.

## National Heritage Plan

417. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs when she is planning on publishing a national heritage plan; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11799/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The National Heritage Plan 2002-2007 was the first integrated plan that sought to conserve and protect all aspects of our national heritage. Over the course of more recent years, my Department's responsibilities for the protection and promotion of our built and natural heritage have been met by a range of policy developments, that sought to respond to the challenges arising in different sectoral areas within my heritage remit. The *Programme for a Partnership Government* envisages the development and publication of an updated National Heritage Plan. I am currently considering how best to approach its development in the context of on-going policy priorities across the heritage sector, both built and natural. I intend to deploy a framework similar to the one used successfully in the context of Culture 2025 and my officials are currently working on developing that approach.

Work has been initiated by my Department regarding the scope and terms of reference for the process. As the Deputy will be aware, the heritage sector is composed of many different sub-sectors with differing needs. It is intended that a formal engagement with key stakeholders and implementation partners will play a central role to the development of such a policy given the many strands of our national heritage.

Finally and in the context of the above, my Department is currently drafting Ireland's 3rd National Biodiversity Action Plan 2017-2021. The Plan is being developed in cooperation with an interdepartmental Biodiversity Working Group, and the Biodiversity Forum which represents various interested sectors of Irish society. I invited views of the public on the draft Plan on 21 December 2016. The consultation window was closed on 9 February 2017. Some 90 submissions were received, and these will be published on the Department's website, with a summary of the views provided and with comment on the main strands of the submissions made.

## Arts Funding



418. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if she has announced the breakdown of funding that will be given to support the various initiatives outlined in the Creative Ireland plan. [11800/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** In Budget 2017, I secured funding of €5m to commence the implementation of the Creative Ireland programme which includes delivering ten major initiatives by the end of this year. To date €1m has been allocated to the local authorities towards the implementation of initiatives under Pillar Two of the Creative Ireland Programme including setting up a culture team in each authority, the publication of a Culture and Creativity Plan for each county. A significant allocation will also be made towards the delivery of Cruinniú na Cásca, a programme of arts activities and events on Easter Monday. I will make further announcements on the breakdown in due course. It should be noted that the substantial increases which I obtained for the arts and cultural sector in Budget 2017 will also contribute to the implementation of the Creative Ireland Programme across Government, local authorities and cultural agencies and institutions.

### Arts Funding

419. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the amount of funding that will be delivered under pillar 2 of the Creative Ireland plan; and her views on whether this is sufficient. [11801/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Taoiseach and I launched the *Creative Ireland Programme/Clár Éire Ildánach 2017 – 2022* on the 8 December 2016 as the Government Legacy Programme for Ireland 2016 and as the main implementation vehicle for the priorities identified in *Culture 2025/Éire Ildánach*, the draft cultural policy which I published in July 2016. This is a cross-Government initiative to mainstream culture and creativity in the life of the nation and to promote individual, community and national wellbeing.

The second pillar of the Programme – *Enabling creativity in every community* – will be implemented primarily through our local authorities as they are the primary instruments of local community engagement.

Each local authority has now established a Culture Team bringing together arts officers, librarians, heritage officers, museum curators, archivists and other relevant personnel led by a Director of Services, with a nominated person as ‘Creative Ireland Co-ordinator’.

A dedicated budget of €1m from the overall Creative Ireland Programme budget of €5m has been allocated to the local authorities towards the implementation of initiatives under Pillar Two including the aforementioned culture teams, the publication of a Culture and Creativity Plan for each county - reflecting at local level the overall structure and aims of the national programme - and the implementation of Cruinniú na Cásca, a programme of arts activities and events on Easter Monday.

I understand that additional support will also be made available to the local authorities for these initiatives by the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government.

This funding is in addition to the other significant additional resources that I secured under Budget 2017 for the arts and culture sector including €5m extra funding for the Arts Council and an additional €1 million to the Heritage Council. I also recently announced details of more than €9 million in capital funding for existing dedicated arts and culture centres across the

country.

All of this represents real and substantial funding increases across the arts and cultural area and has been welcomed across the sector. It re-affirms the commitment of this Government to progressively increase funding for the arts as the economy improves, as set out in the *Programme for a Partnership Government*.

### Museum Projects

420. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if she has implemented any of the recommendations outlined in the Irish Museums Survey Report 2016; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11802/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Irish Museum Survey, which I launched in November 2016, provides very useful research on the spread of museums across the country, and underlines the important role which museums play in interpreting, educating and providing enjoyment to all citizens. The recommendations contained therein will require careful and coordinated consideration by my Department, the Irish Museums Association, the Heritage Council, Local Authorities and other key stakeholders across the sector. That process is now underway.

### Deer Culls

421. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if her attention has been drawn to the fact that there has been considerable controversy and concern by deer hunters in County Wicklow, an organisation (detail supplied) and deer management experts over misleading claims that a deer cull of 50,000 or any increase in the existing cull is required in County Wicklow; her views on the recommendation of her advisory group, the Irish Deer Management Forum, and that such claims of deer culls are contrary to conservation of wild deer; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11813/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** My Department is aware of recent media reports of suggestions that it is necessary to cull up to 50,000 wild deer in Co. Wicklow. I am neither aware of the source of this figure nor of any sound basis for such a figure.

### Deer Hunting

422. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if her attention has been drawn to the fact that a survey of deer hunters and those involved in deer management carried out by an organisation (details supplied) shows that the overwhelming majority view the current open hunting season for wild deer as adequate or should be reduced due to declining deer numbers and on 8 December 2016 her advisory group, the Irish Deer Management Forum, also reached a consensus that the current open hunting seasons for wild deer are adequate in all counties; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11840/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** There is an annual open season during which deer can be legally shot under licence. The open season for deer operates generally from 1 September to 28 February, depend-

ing on the species and gender of deer. I have no plans to adjust this season.

### **Deer Hunting**

423. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if her attention has been drawn to the fact that a report (details supplied) supported by her Department confirmed only ten deer were culled by 15 hunters over an area of 69,283 hectares during the period of 6 January 2016 to 31 July 2016 in County Wicklow and during the same period just two minor road traffic accidents involving deer were recorded in the same area, her views on whether the findings of this report suggest recent claims of out of control deer numbers and calls for additional deer culls are misleading; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11846/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** My Department is aware of a recent report referred to by the Deputy which I understand is an interim report. There is an annual open season during which deer can be legally shot under licence. The open season for deer operates generally from 1 September to 28 February, depending on the species and gender of deer. The period referred to by the Deputy is largely outside the open season.

My Department carries out localised annual deer counts on State lands such as Wicklow National Park. Where appropriate, and depending on the annual count and instances of damage caused by deer to habitats, especially woodland, culls may be carried out to ensure that deer populations do not reach levels that would have negative ecological consequences.

Control of deer on private property is the responsibility of landowners, who may apply to my Department for a permission under section 42 of the Wildlife Acts to cull deer where this is necessary outside the annual open seasons. These permissions offer a facility whereby a person can obtain a permit, on a case by case basis, to prevent serious damage caused by individual deer on specific lands. Permissions are only issued where there is evidence of such damage.

My Department is aware that there are cases around the country of road accidents involving deer. In relation to preventing such road accidents my Department is of the view that improving sight lines for motorists as well as improved (and possibly larger) signage is likely to be the most effective measure to assist motorists to be vigilant when driving through areas where populations of deer can be expected.

In 2015 my Department, together with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, published *Deer Management in Ireland – A Framework for Action*, which recommends a series of actions on deer management and conservation in a number of areas, including addressing the impact of deer in places where they are widespread. An Irish Deer Management Forum has been established to implement the various actions listed in the Report. The Forum itself comprises representatives from the main stakeholder areas such as landowners, forestry, hunting and conservation organisations, as well as representatives from both Departments. It is my understanding that the situation relating to the wild deer in Co Wicklow has been discussed at various meetings of the Forum.

### **Animal Diseases**

424. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if her attention has been drawn to the fact that her advisory group, the Irish

Deer Management Forum, stated on 30 January 2017, there is presently no conclusive evidence of a link between the strain of bovine TB in cattle and the strain in the wild deer herd and that the testing methodology used in County Wicklow for testing TB levels in wild deer was far more detailed than that used for livestock so levels cannot be compared directly; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11848/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** This is an animal health issue and a matter in the first instance, for my colleague the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

### Deer Culls

425. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the number of female, male and juvenile red deer and sika deer respectively that will be culled during the current cull in Killarney National Park up to March 2017; the details of the deer management qualifications those undertaking the cull in Killarney National Park hold; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11849/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Michael Ring):** There is a significant challenge in attempting to balance the demands of agriculture, forestry and conservation with the need to ensure that deer populations occupying the same land resources are managed at sustainable levels, and in a responsible and ethical manner. With regard to deer in Killarney National Park (KNP), as part of its regular on-going management operations, my Department carries out localised annual deer culls on State lands, if required. My Department commissioned a comprehensive survey and report in the winter of 2016 on the distribution, population density and population structure of red deer and sika deer in KNP. The study found that the total estimated red deer density over the entire study area of 13.64km<sup>2</sup> was some 708 deer. On foot of the recent report, personnel from the National Parks and Wildlife Service of my Department are currently undertaking a cull of deer in the National Park, which will be concluded by the end of March. The proposed cull is at a similar level to that which was undertaken in previous years. It is anticipated that up to 80 deer will be culled as part of this exercise, which will be completed by the end of March 2017. The aim is to cull approximately 20% males and 80% females. By the end of February 18 red hinds and 5 red yearlings had been culled.

As has been the case previously, this work is undertaken by experienced, relevantly qualified and competent National Parks and Wildlife Service personnel of my Department. The remains will be processed and disposed of in full compliance with the applicable Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine guidelines, and with the involvement, as appropriate, of officials from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

### Turf Cutting

426. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs her plans to put a preservation order in place to prevent the extraction of peat from the Moyne Bog, Coole, County Westmeath, at which an ancient road structure has been discovered. [11854/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I am advised that my Department's National Monuments Service considers that the prospect of preservation *in situ* of toghers (ancient trackways) that traverse an open work-

ing bog and that have been dissected along their length by approximately 45 open drains is severely limited. These ancient features only come to light during peat extraction. Once a bog has been drained to facilitate such extraction, the conditions that ensured the preservation of the wooden toghers are no longer present with the result that they will inevitably decay slowly over time. Considering the nature of the toghers, the circumstances of their discovery, their already compromised condition, as well as the co-operation of the landowner, it is not evident that the conditions that would normally be considered appropriate to the making of a Preservation Order are present in this case. My Department will instead continue to focus its efforts on seeking detailed information on the toghers through appropriate methods of recording.

It is also the case that the toghers extend beyond the area currently being worked into an area of 'high bog' where significant elements may still be preserved. This area of 'high bog' is currently being examined as a more meaningful opportunity to attain preservation *in situ*.

### Seirbhísí Oileán

427. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Ealaíon, Oidhreacht, Gnóthaí Réigiúnacha, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta an bhfuil sé i gceist aici fóram a bhúnú ar a mbeidh ionadaithe ó na hoileáin amach ón gcósta agus páirtithe leasmhara eile, lena n-áirítear a Roinn féin, le hionchur níos fearr a thabhairt do phobail na n-oileán ar chinntí a bhaineann go díreach le caighdeán maireachtála na bpobal sin; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [11907/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Seán Kyne):** Is féidir liom a dheimhniú don Teachta go bhfuil freagracht ar mo Roinn i dtaobh chomhordú pholasaí an Rialtais maidir leis na h-oileáin. Sa chomhthéacs sin, tionóltar cruinnithe idir mo Roinn agus eagrais stáit eile ó am go chéile chun saincheistanna a bhaineann leis na hoileáin a phlé. Ó mo thaithí fhéin, baintear níos mó amach chun leasa phobail na n-oileán tríd na cruinnithe déthaobhacha seo seachas tríd ollchruinnithe de na Ranna stáit uile a bhfuil plé acu leis na hoileáin. Is féidir liom a dheimhniú don Teachta gur cheadaigh mé le gairid, maoiniú suntasach a chumasóidh don eagraíocht Comhdháil Oileáin na hÉireann beartais nua oileánda a fhorbairt agus plean cuimsitheach gníomhaíochta a fheidhmiú. Measaim go gclúdóidh scáth eagraíocht gníomhach mar seo ábhair thábhachtacha atá lánach do shaol pobail ár n-oileáin sa todhchaí. Ar ndóigh, beidh mo Roinn ag comhoibriú leis an gComhdháil ar bhonn leanúnach chun mianta na n-oileánach a bhaint amach.

Anuas air seo, tá iarrtha agam ar oifigigh mo Roinne le déanaí teagmháil a dhéanamh leis na húdaráis áitiúla a bhfuil oileáin ina gceantair feidhme acu féachaint an féidir a gcuid Coistí Oileánda a athnuachan áit nach bhfuil siad ag feidhmiú faoi láthair.

Leis na fóraim seo uile, sílim go mbeidh freastal maith ar phobail na n-oileán agus go mbeidh meicníocht shásúil i bhfeidhm chun na deacrachtaí atá ag na pobail sin a aithint agus a réiteach.

### Natural Heritage Areas Designation

428. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs when the designation of various bogs as national heritage area bogs will be lifted or be in effect de-designated in accordance with the Governments Long Term Plan for Ireland's Peatlands published in January 2014; the number and name of bogs in which this NHA order remains in place, despite assurances that all such bogs would be de-designated by 2016; if she will now guarantee that these bogs will now be de-designated without any further delay;

and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11917/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Review of Raised Bog Natural Heritage Area Network was published in January 2014 and is available to download from my Department's website at <https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/general/Final%20NHA%20Review%2017%20January%202014.pdf>. It concluded that Ireland could more effectively achieve conservation of threatened raised bog habitat through focused protection and restoration of a reconfigured network. This will entail:

- The cessation from 1 January 2017 of turf-cutting on 36 existing natural heritage areas, which will remain designated - this includes 7 sites to be divided, with part to be conserved and part de-designated.

- The complete de-designation of 46 natural heritage areas - including the relevant areas of the 7 sites to be divided - where it has been judged that their contribution to the attainment of the national conservation objective for raised bog is expected to be marginal and/or restoration would be prohibitively expensive for the conservation benefits achieved. Domestic turf cutting may continue on these sites, while larger scale or commercial turf cutting will continue to be regulated through other consent systems.

- The designation as natural heritage areas of 25 currently undesignated raised bogs, that are in public ownership or in respect of which there is reduced turf cutting pressure, so as to compensate for the loss of habitat within the sites where it is provided that turf cutting may continue.

The purpose of the Wildlife (Amendment) Bill 2016 is to provide for the implementation of this reconfiguration. The Bill has been presented to Dáil Éireann and has completed Committee Stage in that House.

### **Rural Development Plan**

429. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs when the grants for refurbishing old buildings in rural communities that were announced in the Action Plan for Rural Development will be available; the details of the scheme; the grant assistance which will be available; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11922/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Action Plan for Rural Development, which was launched on 23 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. As part of Budget 2017, I have secured funding of €12 million for an enhanced Town and Village Renewal scheme this year. I intend to launch the first phase of this scheme in the coming weeks, with a focus on improving the economic development of our towns and villages. Full details of the initiative will be available when the scheme is launched.

I also intend to launch a second phase of the scheme later this year. This will be a pilot project to encourage residential occupancy in rural towns and villages. My intention is that the scheme will be targeted at owner-occupiers and will assist with the cost of bringing buildings back into use for residential purposes only. The pilot will be launched in the second half of the year, when details of the scheme have been finalised in consultation with relevant Departments. Full details of the criteria to apply will be announced when the pilot is launched.

## Public Procurement Contracts

430. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if she has considered re-evaluating the criteria for tendering and consider the regionalisation of tenders to allow booksellers and local library sellers a chance to compete (details supplied). [11928/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** This is a matter for my colleague the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government.

## CLÁR Programme

431. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if additional money for the CLÁR programme will be provided for all roads outside national schools in south Monaghan that are substandard; and if money will be provided to tar outside all the schools in order that the money from CLÁR is spent effectively. [11929/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Michael Ring) (Deputy Michael Ring):** CLÁR is a targeted investment programme which provides funding for small scale infrastructural projects in rural areas which have suffered the greatest levels of population decline. In 2016, the CLÁR programme provided funding to over 650 projects around the country, including for safety measures such as pedestrian crossings and safety lights close to schools in CLÁR areas in Co. Monaghan. However, the programme is not intended to displace mainstream funding resources which are available to bodies such as the Local Authorities for matters such as general road improvements.

I have secured an allocation of €5 million for CLÁR for 2017 and details of the particular measures to be funded will be announced shortly. My objective for the 2017 programme will be to maximise the impact of the funding which is available, for the benefit of communities in CLÁR areas.

## Scéimeanna Tacaíochta Gaeilge

432. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** den Aire Ealaíon, Oidhreachta, Gnóthaí Réigiúnaíochta, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta an aontaíonn sí go bhfuil sárobair á déanamh ag an eagraíocht Tuismitheoirí na Gaeltachta chun tacaíocht a thabhairt do thuismitheoirí sa Ghaeltacht a bpáistí a thógáil le Gaeilge; an mbeidh sí sásta maoiniú a chur ar fáil don eagraíocht ionas gur féidir leo obair na heagraíochta a leathnú amach chuig gach ceantar Gaeltachta; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [12008/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Seán Kyne):** Tá cúnadh reatha ar fiú €120,000 in iomlán ceadaithe don eagraíocht Tuismitheoirí na Gaeltachta ó Bhealtaine 2014 i leith chun cabhrú léi seirbhísí éagsúla a sholáthar do theaghlaigh sa Ghaeltacht atá ag tógáil clainne le Gaeilge. Is faoi réimse gnímh na Straitéise 20-Bliain don Ghaeilge atá dírithe ar an Ghaeltacht agus an Teaghlach a cuireadh an cúnadh seo ar fáil. Tá iarratas ón eagraíocht ar chúnadh i leith na bliana reatha á bhreithniú faoi láthair i gcomhthéacs thosaíochtaí mo Roinne maidir le feidhmiú na Straitéise agus forbairt an phróisis pleanála teanga araon.

## Turf Cutting

433. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the extent to which discussions are ongoing with representatives of traditional turf cutters with a view to resolving difficulties in respect of the implementation of SACs and NHAs; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12138/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Ireland, like all EU Member States, is bound by the requirements of the EU Habitats Directive and the Birds Directive. These Directives aim to ensure the protection of habitats and species which have been selected for conservation within special areas of conservation and special protection areas. Significant efforts have been made by the State to resolve the issue of the protection of Ireland's raised bog special areas of conservation within the framework of the Habitats Directive. This has included intense and on-going engagement with turf cutting interests, the farming community, non-governmental organisations and with the European Commission, as well as the establishment of a long-term compensation scheme for affected turf cutters.

The National Raised Bog SAC Management Plan will set out how the raised bog special areas of conservation are to be managed into the future and how the needs of turf cutters are to be addressed including exploring the options in terms of certain provisions of article 6 of the Habitats Directive. It is intended that the Plan will be published in the coming period, subject to Government approval.

11,593 annual payments and 901 deliveries of turf have been made in respect of applications received under the cessation of turf cutting compensation scheme for raised bog special areas of conservation. In addition, 1,707 once-off incentive payments of €500 have been made.

The Review of Raised Bog Natural Heritage Area Network, published in January 2014, concluded that Ireland could more effectively achieve conservation of threatened raised bog habitat through focused protection and restoration of a reconfigured network. Arising from this review, the Wildlife (Amendment) Bill 2016 has been presented to Dáil Éireann and is currently proceeding through the necessary stages in the Houses of the Oireachtas. Its purpose is to provide for the implementation of a reconfiguration of the natural heritage area network arising from the 2014 Review.

Final resolution of all issues in relation to the protection of Ireland's protected raised bogs will only be brought about by everyone working together, within the law, with my Department and with the Peatlands Council, which was established for the purpose of ensuring the input from all stakeholders.

## Film Industry Promotion

434. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the extent to which she continues to encourage internationally the use of Ireland as a film location with obvious beneficial economic implications; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12139/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** My Department will continue to promote economic development of Ireland across its full remit, including for example, under the recently published *Action Plan for Rural Development* and *Creative Ireland Programme*. In this regard, the Irish Film Board continues to support the Irish screen industries at major international markets and festivals, promotes



inward investment, promotes the use of Ireland as a location for international production and provides support for companies filming in Ireland. The Board liaises with IDA Ireland and Tourism Ireland to maximise joint opportunities for promotion of Ireland as a location for film productions.

The *Creative Ireland Programme* is a five-year all-of-government initiative, from 2017 to 2022, which places creativity at the centre of public policy and aims to improve access to cultural and creative activity in every county across the country.

Under Pillar 2 of the Programme - Enabling Culture and Creativity in Every Community - each local authority will be asked to develop a Culture and Creativity Plan, reflecting the overall structure and aims of the national strategy for culture and creativity. Each local authority has now established a Culture Team bringing together arts officers, librarians, heritage officers, museum curators, archivists and other relevant personnel led by a Director of Services, with a nominated person as 'Creative Ireland Co-ordinator'.

The overarching, long-term objective of Pillar 4 - Ireland: A Centre of Excellence in Media Production - is to elevate the creative industries (including media, architecture, design, digital technology, fashion, food and crafts) drawing together, on an all-of-government basis, State agencies, industry partners and those engaged in fostering innovation in enterprise. As an initial project, the key focus will be on Ireland's potential to be a global leader in film production, TV drama, documentary, children's storytelling, and animation for the screen.

In this regard, my Department has commissioned an economic analysis of our screen based creative industries, in partnership with the Departments of Communications, Climate Action and Environment and Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation. This study will examine the economic impact including employment and the potential of the Irish film, TV and animation sector. The commissioning of the study is a commitment to in the Action Plan for Jobs 2016 and its recommendations will inform the development of policy in this area under the Creative Ireland Programme.

### **Arts Promotion**

435. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the extent to which she continues to encourage the development and promotion of the arts with particular reference to the maximisation of employment opportunities arising therefrom; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12140/17]

443. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the extent to which her support for the arts sector continues to result in continued activity and employment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12148/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 435 and 443 together.

The nature of employment within the arts and heritage sectors encompasses a wide range of activities, from theatre and music to archaeology and tourism. It may also embody the industrial creative sectors, including audio-visual production.

My primary role is to support artists and the creative industries in Ireland using the mechanisms available to me across Government on common initiatives such as the Action Plan for Jobs.

For example, the Taoiseach and I launched the *Creative Ireland Programme – Clár Éire Ildánach 2017 – 2022* on the 8 December 2016. This is a cross-Government initiative to mainstream culture and creativity in the life of the nation and to promote individual, community and national wellbeing. This will focus on boosting cultural provision and participation in communities and harnessing the goodwill and engagement generated by the 2016 commemorative programme.

The core proposition of this programme is that participation in cultural activity drives personal and collective creativity, with significant implications for individual and societal wellbeing and achievement. The *Creative Ireland Programme* is the main implementation vehicle for the priorities identified in *Culture 2025/Éire Ildánach*, the draft cultural policy which I published last year and which sees a vibrant cultural ecosystem as essential to society.

The programme is based on five pillars:

- Enabling the creative potential of every child
- Enabling creativity in every community
- Investing in our creative and cultural infrastructure
- Establishing Ireland as a centre of excellence in media production
- Unifying our global reputation

The *Creative Ireland Programme* is supported by significant additional resources which are being directed towards the arts and culture sector. In Budget 2017 I secured significant additional funding for the Arts Council and the Irish Film Board. The increase in the Arts Council's allocation in 2017 is €5 million, or 8%, and will assist the Council greatly in implementing its 10-year strategy *Making Great Art Work (2016-2025)*.

I also secured an increase of €2 million for the Irish Film Board, representing a 14% increase in its annual budget.

Budget 2017 also includes:-

- increased funding for all of the National Cultural Institutions;
- an increase of €1 million for Culture Ireland;
- an additional €1 million to the Heritage Council; and
- funding of €5m for the implementation of the *Creative Ireland Programme*.

I also recently announced details of more than €9 million in capital funding for existing dedicated arts and culture centres across the country.

The Creative Ireland Arts and Culture Capital Scheme is the most significant investment in arts and cultural centres in a decade and will target investment at a range of different facilities, including arts centres, theatres, galleries and museums, as well as artists' studios and creative spaces. This kind of investment is at the centre of what I am trying to achieve through *Creative Ireland Programme* and the *Action Plan for Rural Development*.

My Department has also commissioned an economic analysis of our screen based creative industries, in partnership with the Departments of Communications, Climate Action and Environment and Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation. This study will examine the economic impact including employment and the potential of the Irish film, TV and animation sector. The com-

missioning of the study is a commitment to in the Action Plan for Jobs 2016 and its recommendations will inform the development of policy in this area under the Creative Ireland Programme.

All of this represents real and substantial funding increases across the arts and cultural area and has been welcomed across the sector. It re-affirms the commitment of this Government to progressively increase funding for the arts as the economy improves, as set out in *the Programme for a Partnership Government*.

### Philanthropy Initiatives

436. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the extent to which the sector continues to attract support from philanthropists; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12141/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Private support for the arts is an important funding source and the Government continues to support this through tax incentives and other initiatives. The *Programme for a Partnership Government* contains a commitment to encourage strong, mutually beneficial links between the business community and the arts community to assist arts organisations to capitalise on sponsorship opportunities and to develop business partnerships and fundraising skills. In this regard, I recognise the important work carried out by Business to Arts for which my Department provides a small amount of assistance. In addition, the Arts Council operates the RAISE programme, which seeks to enhance fund-raising skills in arts organisations with a view to diversifying the sector's sources of funding. It is designed to assist the sector in securing philanthropic contributions to the arts in Ireland.

In terms of other capital investment requiring co-funding, I have announced a new €9 million investment scheme for arts and cultural centres to run over the next three years, focussed on upgrading the existing stock of such centres around the country. The funding, which is being made available as part of the *Capital Investment Framework 2016-2021*, is dependent on matching funding being secured by project promoters and therefore provides an opportunity for philanthropists to involve themselves in the arts.

The Deputy may also wish to know that, on December 8 last, the Taoiseach and I launched the *Creative Ireland Programme/Clár Éire Ildánach* as the Government's Legacy Programme arising out of the *Ireland 2016 Centenary Programme* and as the main implementation vehicle for the priorities identified in *Culture 2025*. The *Creative Ireland Programme* is a high-level, high-ambition, all-of-Government initiative to mainstream creativity in the life of the nation.

My Department is now working to implement the Creative Ireland Programme with partners across Government and other key stakeholders. This includes delivery on an ambitious Year 1 Programme to deliver 10 initiatives by the end of 2017. Details of the Programme can be found on [www.creative.ireland.ie](http://www.creative.ireland.ie). It is hoped that this initiative will further stimulate private support for the arts.

### Waterways Ireland

437. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the extent to which she either by direction or through Waterways Ireland has reached agreement with traditional canal dwellers and canal recreational users with regard

to draft proposals to increase the costs to traditional users; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12142/17]

438. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the extent to which she expects to achieve an amicable resolution of issues between Irish Waterways and traditional dwellers and recreational users of the Grand Canal, County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12143/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 437 and 438 together.

As I stated in my reply to Question No. 440 from the Deputy on 31 January 2017, Waterways Ireland continues to work closely with boat owners using the canals, canal users, land owners and representative groups. Contact is on-going between Waterways Ireland and the canal users groups, and local communities who support the efforts of Waterways Ireland in the maintenance and operation of the canals.

As the Deputy may be aware, provisions to amend the Canals Act 1986 in order to allow for the subsequent making of bye laws to regulate boating on the canals and to manage the use of the canals are contained in the Heritage Bill 2016. The proposed changes would allow Waterways Ireland to proactively manage the Royal and Grand Canals and the Barrow Navigation. As the Deputy will be aware, the 1988 Canal Bye Laws have been in force for almost 30 years and need to be revised to reflect changes in the use of the canals over the intervening years.

The Heritage Bill 2016 is now at Committee Stage in Seanad Éireann, most recently on 9 March 2017. Deputies and Senators will have the opportunity to consider the Bill as it passes through the various stages of enactment.

### **Heritage Sites**

439. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the extent to which various at risk heritage sites and buildings continue to be protected; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12144/17]

440. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the extent to which she is engaged in restoration of major historical or cultural sites throughout the country at present; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12145/17]

444. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the extent to which a full audit of all historical buildings, including those of architectural and cultural interest exists; the degree to which alterations have been made in recent years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12149/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 439, 440 and 444 together.

My role, as Minister, with regard to the protection and management of our architectural heritage, is set out in the provisions of relevant legislation, as are the roles of local authorities and the responsibilities of owners as regards heritage assets.

Part IV of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, provides for the protection of architectural heritage. The Act gives primary responsibility to planning authorities to

identify and protect the architectural heritage by including relevant structures on the Record of Protected Structures. Inclusion on the Record of Protected Structures places a duty of care on the owners and occupiers of protected structures and also gives planning authorities powers to deal with development proposals affecting them and to seek to safeguard their future.

I also have a role, as Minister, in terms of being a prescribed body under the Planning and Development Regulations 2001-2015, whereby development proposals that may impact on our built heritage are referred by planning authorities to my Department so that recommendations can be made as appropriate to avoid or mitigate any such impacts.

My Department has a number of measures at its disposal to facilitate the maintenance and restoration of major historical or cultural sites. As Minister, I am the owner or guardian under the National Monuments Acts 1930-2014 of approximately 1,000 national monuments located at approximately 750 sites and in such cases there is a statutory duty to maintain the national monument. Such maintenance is undertaken by the Office of Public Works (OPW). Local authorities are responsible under the National Monuments Acts for maintaining the national monuments of which they are owners or guardians.

My Department is also providing €350,000 of funding to the OPW in 2017 to assist in the conservation and presentation of historic buildings and national monuments in State ownership. My Department's National Monuments Service works in close collaboration with the OPW on survey, excavation and research work to optimise the protection, management, interpretation and presentation of national monuments in State care.

Under the provisions of the National Monuments Acts, my Department has established and maintains the Record of Monuments and Places, which affords legal protection to over 120,000 recorded archaeological sites and monuments in the State. Anyone proposing works to a monument that is included in the Record of Monument and Places must give my Department two months prior notice before works can start.

I launched a €2 million scheme - the Built Heritage Investment Scheme - for the repair and conservation of protected structures on 21 October 2015. This scheme operated in 2016, via the local authorities, on the same model as the very successful Built Heritage Jobs Leverage Scheme, which ran in 2014. It is operating again this year and is expected to support in excess of 330 projects across the country in 2017 and to create employment in the conservation and construction industries, while helping to regenerate urban and rural areas.

The Structures at Risk Fund enables conservation works to heritage structures, in both private and public ownership, which are protected under the Planning and Development Acts and are deemed to be at significant risk of deterioration. This fund, administered through the local authorities, supported 57 projects nationally in 2016. It seeks to encourage the regeneration and reuse of heritage properties and to help to secure the preservation of protected structures which might otherwise be lost. The scheme is operating again in 2017.

Receipt of applications for both the Built Heritage Investment Scheme and Structures at Risk are now closed, however on-going queries can be addressed to all respective local authorities who are implementing both schemes throughout 2017.

The National Inventory of Architectural Heritage is a state initiative to identify, record, and evaluate the post-1700 built heritage of Ireland, uniformly and consistently as an aid to its protection and conservation. The NIAH building surveys provide the basis for my recommendations, as Minister for Arts, Heritage Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, to the planning authorities for the inclusion of particular structures in their Record of Protected Structures. The published surveys are a source of information on the selected structures for relevant planning

authorities. They are also a research and educational resource.

In view of the broad range of measures in place across the various areas of our built heritage which I have outlined above which involve my Department, Local Government and the OPW I do not consider that a further audit is required.

### Arts Funding

441. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the extent to which she continues to provide funding for the arts at local and community level, directly or indirectly; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12146/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Funding for the arts at all levels is primarily a matter for the Arts Council. In this regard, I secured significant additional funding for the Arts Council in Budget 2017. The increase in the Arts Council's allocation in 2017 is €5 million, or 8%, and will assist the Council greatly in implementing its 10-year strategy Making Great Art Work (2016-2025). In addition, the Taoiseach and I launched the *Creative Ireland Programme – Clár Éire Ildánach 2017 – 2022* on the 8 December 2016.

This is a cross-Government initiative to mainstream culture and creativity in the life of the nation and to promote individual, community and national wellbeing. This will focus on boosting cultural provision and participation in communities and harnessing the goodwill and engagement generated by the 2016 commemorative programme.

The core proposition of this programme is that participation in cultural activity drives personal and collective creativity, with significant implications for individual and societal wellbeing and achievement. The *Creative Ireland Programme* is the main implementation vehicle for the priorities identified in *Culture 2025/Éire Ildánach*, the draft cultural policy which I published last year and which sees a vibrant cultural ecosystem as essential to society.

The programme is based on five pillars:

- Enabling the creative potential of every child
- Enabling creativity in every community
- Investing in our creative and cultural infrastructure
- Establishing Ireland as a centre of excellence in media production
- Unifying our global reputation

Under the second Pillar *Enabling creativity in every community* - each local authority is being asked to develop a Culture and Creativity Plan, reflecting the overall structure and aims of the national strategy for culture and creativity. Each local authority has now established a Culture Team bringing together arts officers, librarians, heritage officers, museum curators, archivists and other relevant personnel led by a Director of Services, with a nominated person as 'Creative Ireland Co-ordinator'.

'Cruinniú na Cásca', an annual programme of arts activities and cultural reflection to be held on Easter Monday, will be developed – across the island, locally, with our Diaspora, curated by the national broadcaster and delivered primarily by the local authorities. Beginning in

2018, there will also be an annual County of Culture award. The Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government will be a key partner in this pillar.

In addition, the *Action Plan for Rural Development*, which I launched with the Taoiseach last month, is the first whole-of-government strategy aimed at people living and working in rural Ireland. It aims to unlock the potential of rural Ireland through a framework of supports at national and local level which will ensure that people who live in rural areas have increased opportunities for employment locally, and access to public services and social networks that support a high quality of life.

The Action Plan is an overarching structure for the co-ordination and implementation of initiatives right across Government which will benefit rural Ireland. It takes a cohesive and coordinated approach across the whole of Government to the implementation of both economic and social policies that impact on rural communities.

The Plan contains 276 actions which aim to improve both the economic and social fabric of rural Ireland spread across five pillars.

Arts and Heritage are covered under the fourth pillar of the plan - Fostering Culture and Creativity in Rural Communities.

The key objectives of this Pillar are to;-

- Increase access to the arts and enhance cultural facilities in rural communities.
- Further develop and enhance culture and creativity in rural Ireland through the establishment of culture teams and creativity hubs as part of the *Creative Ireland Programme*.
- Promote the Irish language as a key resource in Gaeltacht and other rural communities.

These policy initiatives are supported by significant additional resources which are being directed towards the arts and culture sector. In addition to the increase in funding for the Arts Council, I also secured an increase of €2 million for the Irish Film Board, representing a 14% increase in its annual budget.

Budget 2017 also includes:-

- increased funding for all of the National Cultural Institutions;
- an increase of €1 million for Culture Ireland;
- an additional €1 million to the Heritage Council; and
- funding of €5m for the implementation of the *Creative Ireland Programme*.

I also recently announced details of more than €9 million in capital funding for existing dedicated arts and culture centres across the country. The Arts and Culture Capital Scheme is the most significant investment in arts and cultural centres in a decade and will target investment at a range of different facilities, including arts centres, theatres, galleries and museums, as well as artists' studios and creative spaces. This kind of investment is at the centre of what I am trying to achieve through *Creative Ireland Programme* and the *Action Plan for Rural Development*.

All of this represents real and substantial funding increases across the arts and cultural area and has been welcomed across the sector. It re-affirms the commitment of this Government to progressively increase funding for the arts as the economy improves, as set out in *the Programme for a Partnership Government*.

## EU Funding

442. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the extent to which local community-based festivals have benefited from EU grant aid directly or indirectly with particular reference to the specific grant aid for festivals; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12147/17]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Creative Europe 2014 - 2020 is the European Union's funding programme to support the audiovisual, cultural and creative sectors. It consists of MEDIA and CULTURE sub-programmes as well as a Cross-sectoral strand. The Creative Europe - Culture sub-programme has granted over €13 million in project funding to projects with Irish partners in its first three years. The majority of the funding available under the Culture sub-programme is via the co-operation projects strand.

To date, at the mid-way point of the Programme, under the co-operation projects strand there have been four Irish festivals involved as partners in projects with a total project grant allocation of just under €3 million:

- Babóro Galway International Children's Festival (*Small Size, Performing Arts for Early Years*)

- Photo Ireland Festival Ltd (*Flaneur – New Urban Narratives*)

- First Fortnight Ltd (Networking European Festivals for Mental Life Enhancement)

- Cuirt – Galway Arts Centre (*Sharing the Wor(l)D*)

The Culture sub-programme also funds EU networks and platforms via operating grants for the lead organisations. Below is a summary of Irish festivals which are members of Creative Europe supported platforms and networks:

- Dublin Dance Festival is a member of the Aerowaves Platform

- Galway Early Music Festival is a member of the European Early Music Network,

Galway Film Fleadh has received €162,750 for the period 2014 - 2016 under the Access to Markets support scheme for the Galway Film Fair – the industry market which runs parallel to the Festival.

A complete list of funding results is published on the Education, Audio-Visual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) website: [http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/creative-europe/selection-results\\_en](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/creative-europe/selection-results_en).

*Question No. 443 answered with Question No. 435.*

*Question No. 444 answered with Question No. 439.*

## Census of Population Data

445. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs when the 1926 census figures will be made available for the public; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12178/17]



**Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Current legislative provisions, as contained in the Statistics Act 1993, require that census data must be withheld for 100 years. Accordingly, it is not possible at this time to release 1926 Census returns before the statutory period has elapsed in 2026. If the records were to be released before the expiry of 100 years, a major change in legislation and policy would be required to allow for such an early release. This is not currently being proposed.

### **Brexit Issues**

446. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health if he has raised the future status of the UK as a member of the European Food Safety Authority with his UK and EU counterparts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11353/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I have not had specific contact with my UK or EU counterparts about the future status of the UK as a member of the European Food Safety Authority post Brexit. Work is ongoing to deepen analysis of the potential implications of Brexit. However, this is challenging as it is not yet known what new arrangements may emerge as regards the UK's future relationship with the EU. It is also important to state that until the UK formally withdraws from the European Union, it remains a full member, with all of its existing rights and obligations.

### **Hospitals Building Programme**

447. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the details of any analysis of the national paediatric hospital project that has been carried out by his Department as per its guidelines for the appraisal and management of capital expenditure proposals in the public sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11457/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The National Paediatric Hospital Development Board (NPHDB) was appointed in 2013 to design, build and equip the new children's hospital. An internationally recognised design team supported by an experienced Board and Project Team are in place, and have followed best international design, planning and procurement process at each stage of the project. The Definitive Business Case for the new children's hospital has been prepared in accordance with the Public Spending Code which requires that projects are properly appraised, including the requirement for a Cost Benefit Analysis.

### **Mental Health Services Provision**

448. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the resources that continue to be made available to children or their families at risk through self-harm or symptoms of suicidality; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11511/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee):** The HSE Mental Health Division has a multifaceted response to people at risk of self-harm or who have had a self-harm episode. This includes referral by GP to Community Mental Health Teams for the appropriate service; liaison psychiatry services onsite in Model 3 and 4 and acute hospitals; a comprehensive mental health on-call service in Emergency Departments in the acute hospitals for people presenting in crisis during the on-call period; and self-harm clinical specialist nurses in a number of Emergency Departments. In addition, the Suicide Crisis Assessment Nurse (SCAN) initiative enables GPs to refer directly to SCAN Nurses for assessment and advice on

management of their patients who attend their surgeries with suicidal ideation.

In each of these settings, a comprehensive biopsychosocial assessment is carried out together with an assessment of mental state and a risk assessment for suicide. On the basis of this, a care plan is drawn up and the next steps depend on the psychosocial stresses identified together with the presence or absence of a mental illness such as depression. The progression of the development of a clinical programme for the assessment and management of self-harm presentations in Emergency Departments is one of the HSE's National Service Plan priorities for 2017.

Community Child and Adolescent Mental Health teams are the first line of specialist mental health services for children and young people. There are currently 67 Child and Adolescent Community Mental Health Teams and 3 liaison services nationally. The multidisciplinary team, under the clinical direction of a Consultant Child & Adolescent psychiatrist, includes junior medical staff, psychologists, social workers, nurses, speech & language therapist, occupational therapist and child care workers. The assessment and intervention provided by such teams is determined by the severity and complexity of the presenting problem(s). This range of disciplines and skills offer a care and treatment package geared to individual needs.

The HSE's National Office for Suicide Prevention (NOSP) helps to support a wide array of work in communities, in partnership with the voluntary sector, across the country that focus on promoting positive mental health and reducing suicide and self-harm by providing significant grant funding each year, as well as by assisting in coordinating and giving strategic direction to the work undertaken in this area. NOSP supports a range of services for teenagers and young people including Pieta House, SpunOut.ie, ReachOut.com/Inspire Ireland, and BeLongTo. The 24-hour call services provided by the Samaritans and Childline are available to any young person in distress and are also funded by the NOSP. In addition, NOSP also worked closely with the Department of Education and Skills in the development of Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Well-Being in Primary and Post Primary Schools.

### **Mental Health Services Data**

449. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the number of children availing of beds in adult residential settings; the number in receipt of CAMHS-related services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11512/17]

**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.

### **Food Safety Authority of Ireland Reports**

450. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Health his views on the report published by the Food Safety Authority of Ireland that showed an increase in the number of food alerts for 2016 which was the highest in a decade; the actions his department will take to tackle the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11944/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) is responsible for the enforcement of food laws and the protection of consumers' health and interests. It monitors food incidents – that is events when food or food contact materials may pose a risk to human health – with other official agencies with which it holds contracts. These include the Health Service Executive; the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine; the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority; and the National Standards Authority of Ireland.

Food business operators, when they are aware of foods posing such risks which are no longer under their control, are obliged by law to notify the FSAI or the other relevant official agencies. The central objective is to ensure that foods, food ingredients or food contact materials which pose a danger to health are identified, traced, removed from sale and that, where appropriate, the public and/or the relevant business are informed without delay.

The FSAI and the contracted official agencies have protocols in place to deal with food incidents. The identification of a food incident can arise for a number of reasons such as checks by a food inspector; a complaint from a consumer; the food business informing the FSAI that it has identified a potential risk with a particular food; laboratory results; or notifications from other Member States through the European Commission's network – known as the Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF).

In 2016, the FSAI dealt with 554 food incidents which resulted in 67 food alerts and food allergen alerts being issued. The growth in incidents is the result of improving vigilance and co-operation on the part of the food control authorities within Ireland and the EU and a responsible attitude on the part of food business operators in informing the authorities of potential risks.

Managing food incidents and quickly informing all relevant stakeholders, including the public is vital. It is reassuring to know that Ireland has systems in place to identify, manage and deal with such food incidents and resulting food alerts when they arise.

### **General Practitioner Services Provision**

451. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if he will address the lack of out-of-hours general practitioner cover for an area (details supplied) in County Cork. [11179/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

### **Services for People with Disabilities**

452. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of the case of a person (details supplied) who is awaiting full-time residential care; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11180/17]

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

As the Deputy’s question relates to an individual case, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

### **General Medical Services Scheme**

453. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Health the commitment required of a

GMS doctor to fulfil a full GMS contract in regard to surgery hours and availability; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11189/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The terms and conditions in relation to the availability requirements for GPs under the current GMS contract are set out in paragraph 10 of that contract.

Paragraph 10 states: “The medical practitioner shall be routinely available for consultation by eligible persons at his approved surgery or surgeries and for domiciliary visiting for a total of 40 hours each week on five days or more in the week by agreement with the Health Service Executive. His/her hours of availability shall have regard to his/her patients’ needs in the locality and he/she shall not amend them without the agreement of the Health Service Executive.”

GPs contracted under the GMS scheme must also make suitable arrangements to enable contact to be made with them, or a locum/deputy, outside normal practice hours for urgent cases.

### **Medicinal Products Prices**

454. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE has removed the subsidy for blood test strips; if so, the reason; the way it is expected that diabetics will be able to afford the strips without subsidisation. [11192/17]

**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.

### **Medicinal Products Reimbursement**

455. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the timeframe for a final decision on the reimbursement of translarna in view of the fact that it was originally submitted for health technology assessment in October 2015 and is now available in most European countries; if its reimbursement will require approval from his Department or the Cabinet; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11193/17]

456. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the status of the drug translarna for the treatment of Duchenne muscular dystrophy, which is currently available to 80% of eligible persons across the EU, including in Northern Ireland, Scotland, England, Wales and the Isle of Man; the details of the engagement between the HSE and the manufacturer to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11194/17]

457. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the way in which a decision on the reimbursement of translarna will be communicated to families (details supplied). [11195/17]

507. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health his plans to reimburse persons for a treatment (details supplied); the reason for the delay in making a determination in regard to this treatment to date; when a decision will be made in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11373/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 455 to 457, inclusive, and 507 together.

The HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines in the community drugs schemes, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013.

I am informed that HSE Leadership has taken a proposed decision not to reimburse Translarna and informed the company of this decision by letter in January of this year. Under the HSE statutory assessment process, the HSE is legally required to provide at least a 28 day period (from the formal written notice of proposal), to enable the pharmaceutical company to consider any such proposal not to reimburse and to make representations to the HSE if it wishes to do so. The HSE is required to consider any such representations in advance of a formal decision.

As HSE Leadership has taken a proposed decision not to reimburse Translarna, there is no requirement for the reimbursement of the drug to be considered by the Department of Health or Cabinet.

I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputies on the matters raised regarding communication to the families, engagement between the HSE and the company to date and timeframes around the decision-making process.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

458. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Health if he will schedule a person (details supplied) for a procedure without further delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11198/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

### **Hospital Appointments Delays**

459. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the delay in receiving treatment in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11200/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and

the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

460. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an assessment appointment in CUH in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11201/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

### **Hospital Waiting Lists**

461. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the lack of focus on diagnostic waiting lists, such as those for MRI, resulting in the huge deficit in MRI capacity across the Saolta University Health Care Group; if he will make a decision on the proposal for a second MRI scanner in Galway to alleviate the situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11202/17]

**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.

### **Home Help Service**

462. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the status in law and practice of an EU directive that recognises travel time as payable work time for those engaged in the provision of home help and caring support in the home of the service recipient; his plans towards such a clear and undeniable entitlement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11204/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I expect that the Deputy is referring to a ruling made in September 2015 by the European Court of Justice (CJEU) in the Tyco case. The decision made in the Tyco case was based on a set of facts relating to the particular circumstances of peripatetic workers in the context of a pre-existing arrangement in respect of those journeys.

In the Tyco case, the employer made a decision to abolish its regional offices and directed all regional workers to remotely report to its head office in Madrid. This decision to abolish the regional offices put these workers at a disadvantage compared to their previous working arrangements. The CJEU found that the fact that the journeys of the workers, at the beginning

and end of each day to and from customers, had been regarded by Tyco as working time before the abolition of the regional offices, showed that the work consisting of driving a vehicle from a regional office to the first customer and from the last customer to that office was previously considered to be working time by the employer. The Court noted that the nature of those journeys had not changed since the abolition of the regional offices and it was only the departure point of the journeys that had changed. It is these distinct facts pertaining to the circumstances of these workers that informed the decision of the Court.

In relation to how this ruling affects employees in the Irish Health Service, I will be guided by how our national court interprets this ruling in the context of the provision of home help and home support services.

### **Health Services Provision**

463. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the additional supports in place for persons not in possession of, and who do not qualify for, a medical card while in receipt of illness benefit and who have regular medical expenses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11210/17]

**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.

For persons that do not qualify for the medical card there are specific situations where they may be entitled to financial aid under the Long Term Illness (LTI) Scheme or the Drugs Payment Scheme (DPS):

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.

Further details on the LTI can be found at: <http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/1/schemes/lti/>.

The cost of medicines for conditions not covered under the LTI Scheme may be reduced under the Drug Payment Scheme (DPS). The DPS provides protection from excessive ongoing expenditure on medicines. Under this scheme, an individual or family pays up to the first €144 each month for approved prescription items, with any cost above that threshold paid by the State. There is no prescription charge under the DPS.

Anybody who lives in Ireland and has a personal public service number is entitled to join the DPS. You can register at <http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/1/schemes/> or at any community pharmacy.

You may also be able to may claim tax relief on the cost of certain medical expenses. This includes medicines prescribed by a doctor, dentist, or consultant. Relief is at the standard tax rate of 20%. Details on how to claim are at <http://www.revenue.ie/en/tax/it/leaflets/it6.html>.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

464. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be issued with a date for an orthopaedic operation; the reason for the delay in issuing a date for surgery in view of the fact that this is an extremely urgent case; if the person will be able to undergo this surgery in another hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11217/17]

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

The National Waiting List Management Policy, A standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care.

This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

### **Health Services Provision**

465. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if he will arrange for an emergency treatment place for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11219/17]

**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 Appointments Status**

466. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive a date for surgery. [11220/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.



### **Hospital Appointments Status**

467. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the status of the case of a person (details supplied); and when the person can expect an appointment at Our Lady's Children's Hospital. [11221/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

### **Hospital Appointments Delays**

468. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the delay in a hip operation in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11225/17]

**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.

### **Services for People with Disabilities**

469. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will have a diagnosis for their condition. [11226/17]

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

people with disabilities.

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

### **Mental Health Services Provision**

470. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) has been seen only once in two and a half years by CAMHS in Sligo. [11227/17]

471. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Health when a person (detail supplied) will be assessed by CAMHS and receive a diagnosis. [11228/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 470 and 471 together.

As these are service issues, I am referring these questions to the HSE for direct reply.

### **Ambulance Service Provision**

472. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the lack of ambulance cover in the town of Millstreet, County Cork, at night; the action he will take to ensure that there is 24-hour ambulance provision in Millstreet; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11233/17]

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

### **Autism Support Services**

473. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) had to privately seek a diagnosis of autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and sensory processing disorder. [11235/17]

474. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) is not receiving the appropriate therapy and treatment for autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and the sensory processing disorder associated issues they are experiencing. [11236/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 473 and 474 together.

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

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

## Vaccination Programme

475. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Minister for Health the current position regarding the shortage of the BCG vaccine here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11240/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** There is currently a worldwide shortage of BCG vaccine. The vaccine has not been available in Ireland since the end of April 2015. Consequently, BCG vaccination clinics in HSE Clinics and Maternity hospitals have been postponed.

There is only one licensed supplier of BCG vaccine to Ireland and to other countries within the EU. The manufacturer has had difficulties in the production of the BCG vaccine. Since this problem became apparent, the HSE National Immunisation Office has been in regular contact with the manufacturer of BCG vaccine to ascertain when the vaccine might be available. The HSE has also asked the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA), which licenses and regulates all human medicines in Ireland, to source an alternate supplier of the BCG vaccine. Efforts have been made to find a company who can provide the vaccine for use in Ireland which satisfies all the HPRA requirements on safety and efficacy. There has been a worldwide shortage for over two years and to date no suitable alternative BCG product has been found. Therefore the HSE has been unable to procure the BCG vaccine from any other source and still awaits the product from the HPRA licensed supplier of the vaccine.

The supplier has indicated that supplies of the vaccine are not expected to be delivered into Ireland later in 2017. When there is confirmation of the date of new supply, the HSE will be guided by the recommendations of the National Immunisation Advisory Committee on its administration.

## Medical Card Administration

476. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the current status of medical cards being issued to children in receipt of the domiciliary care allowance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11241/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Health (Amendment) Bill 2017 was published last Thursday 2nd March 2017. This bill will enable the granting of full eligibility for general practitioner and other health services to all children in respect of whom a Domiciliary Care Allowance (DCA) is paid. Granting a medical card to all children in respect of whom a DCA payment is made will benefit approximately 9,800 children in this cohort who do not currently qualify for a medical card. The legislation is scheduled to enter the Dail tomorrow, Wednesday, 8th March 2017, and it is hoped to complete all stages before the end of March.

The HSE is also finalising the administration processes that need to be in place so that the proposal can be implemented in a smooth and efficient manner.

## Medicinal Products Availability

477. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Health the status of an application by a company (details supplied) for the FreeStyle Libre to be considered by the HSE for inclusion on the long-term illness scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11242/17]

**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.

### **Medical Products**

478. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Health if he will review a matter (details supplied) regarding the removal of the subsidy for blood test strips; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11246/17]

**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.

### **Nursing Homes Support Scheme Eligibility**

479. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the difficulties experienced by persons applying to the nursing home support scheme who have transferred assets within the past five years in view of the fact that these assets would have been transferred long before there was any need for nursing home care; if there are any exemptions to the five year rule in these situations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11247/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee):** The Nursing Homes Support Scheme (NHSS) is a system of financial support for those in need of long-term nursing home care. Participants contribute to the cost of their care according to their income and assets while the State pays the balance of the cost. The Scheme aims to ensure that long-term nursing home care is accessible and affordable for everyone and that people are cared for in the most appropriate settings.

In order to determine how much an applicant will contribute to the cost of their care, a financial assessment is carried out by the HSE which takes account of a person's income and assets. As part of this assessment, the HSE identifies any income or assets that the applicant and his/her partner may have deprived themselves of in the five years leading up to their application, or at any time on or subsequent to the date on which the application for financial support under the Scheme is first made. Such assets are defined in the Nursing Homes Support Scheme Act, 2009 as 'transferred assets' and 'transferred income'. Under the legislation there are no exemptions in relation to transferred assets.

It should be noted that a person's principal private residence is only included in the financial assessment for the first three years of the applicant's time in care.

### **Hospital Waiting Lists**

480. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11255/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its be-

half, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

### **Hospital Waiting Lists**

481. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11272/17]

**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.

### **Disabilities Assessments**

482. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the details of the care plans, including the weekly hours allocated, which have been identified as being required by each child that was formally assessed as part of a service user evaluation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11273/17]

483. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the details of the method employed to evaluate care needs, including details of the scoring scale used, as part of a formal testing (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11274/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 482 and 483 together.

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

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

### **Hospital Services**

484. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health when a response will issue to an interim reply (details supplied) regarding urology; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11284/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** With regard to the specific complaint raised by the Deputy, the Quality and Safety Department at University Hospital Galway are responding to the patient concerned directly. A detailed response to the Deputy will be issued as soon as possible.

With regard to urology services at Letterkenny University Hospital, the Saolta University Healthcare Group advises that the Urology Specialty Lead at University Hospital Galway (UHG) is currently providing services in LUH, with 2 outpatient sessions per month, supported by a Urology Locum who provides 50% day surgery and 50% intermediate surgery sessions, including day-case cystoscopy, on 4 days per month in total. All complex or Urgent Urology cases are referred to Galway.

As part of its Strategic Plan, Saolta envisages operating a hub and spoke urology service model, with a sub-hub in the North West that will provide the majority of urology care locally, as a component of a Group-wide department.

With regard to urology services at UHG, there are a number of measures that are being taken by the Hospital, and at national level, which are intended to reduce current pressure and improve timely access to services at UHG. The UHG Urology Service is provided by 7.5 whole time equivalent Consultant Surgeons and has grown significantly in recent years.

However, Saolta advises that the non-cancer elective and emergency workload has been impacted by limited access to diagnostics, in-patient beds and operating room time; due in part to challenges associated with demand for unscheduled care and shortages of theatre nurses, both of which are currently being addressed. GUH has reinstated the Surgical Day Ward, which will facilitate the provision of day case treatment, including urology day cases.

Also, University Hospital Galway is one of the two national Patient Flow Project pilot sites; this project is assisting with improvements in patient flow, access and efficiency.

In terms of general capacity expansion in UHG, funding has been provided in the 2017 Capital Plan to progress the design of a new ED, as outlined in the Programme for a Partnership Government.

New Development and Winter Initiative funding have also been allocated, such that 28 beds in the new ward block have already been opened in early January in order to alleviate seasonal congestion. Recruitment is on-going in order to facilitate the timely opening of further capacity within the new ward block.

### **Medicinal Products Availability**

485. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health if he will order a review of the decision made by the NCPE not to fund a licensed drug which targets a genetic disorder (details

supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11290/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines in the community drugs schemes, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013.

In reaching its decision, the HSE examines all the evidence which may be relevant, in its view, for the decision (including information submitted by the company) and will take into account such expert opinions and recommendations which it may have sought at its sole discretion, for example from the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE).

In considering an application, the HSE will also have regard to Part 1 and Part 3 of Schedule 3 of the 2013 Act. Part 3 requires the HSE to have regard to the following criteria.

1. The health needs of the public.
2. The cost-effectiveness of meeting health needs by supplying the item concerned rather than providing other health services.
3. The availability and suitability of items for supply or reimbursement.
4. The proposed costs, benefits and risks of the item or listed item relative to therapeutically similar items or listed items provided in other health service settings and the level of certainty in relation to the evidence of those costs, benefits and risks.
5. The potential or actual budget impact of the item or listed item.
6. The clinical need for the item or listed item.
7. The appropriate level of clinical supervision required in relation to the item to ensure patient safety.
8. The efficacy (performance in trial), effectiveness (performance in real situations) and added therapeutic benefit against existing standards of treatment (how much better it treats a condition than existing therapies).
9. The resources available to the HSE.

I am informed that the HSE received a request and economic dossier from the manufacturer of Respreeza, for reimbursement of maintenance treatment of emphysema in adults with documented severe alpha1-proteinase inhibitor deficiency.

In June last year, the HSE asked the NCPE to carry out a health technology assessment on the cost effectiveness of this treatment. The NCPE completed its assessment and made a recommendation on 9 December 2016. The NCPE determined that the manufacturer failed to demonstrate cost-effectiveness of the drug and did not recommend it for reimbursement.

A summary of the health technology assessment has been published on the NCPE website and is available at: [http://www.ncpe.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/NCPE-website-summary\\_Final.pdf](http://www.ncpe.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/NCPE-website-summary_Final.pdf) .

The HSE considers the NCPE assessment, and other expert advice, as part of its decision-making process for reimbursement, which is made on objective, scientific and economic grounds by the HSE in line with the 2013 Act.

The HSE has confirmed that the drug Respreeza was considered by the HSE Drugs Group, which did not make a recommendation for reimbursement on clinical grounds. The HSE Lead-

ership team has accepted the Drugs Group recommendation of non-reimbursement.

Under the HSE statutory assessment process, the HSE is required to set out a notice of any proposed decision to an applicant company. The HSE is legally required to provide at least a 28 day period (from the formal written notice of proposal), to enable the pharmaceutical company to consider any such proposal not to reimburse and to make representations to the HSE if it wishes to do so. The HSE is required to consider any such representations in advance of a formal decision.

Therefore, as the statutory process is still ongoing, the company has an opportunity to have further discussions with the HSE.

In relation to the compassionate access scheme operated by the manufacturer, CSL Behring, I note the decision of the Company to extend the scheme by a further two months. However it is important to point out that the operation of such compassionate schemes is at the discretion of manufacturers. I as Minister for Health have no role in the operation of these schemes. There is no provision in Irish legislation for the approval of compassionate use programmes for specific groups of patients with an unmet medical need.

I have previously said that any attempts by manufacturers to link continued access for patients already being treated with a new medicine with decisions under the statutory reimbursement process is both inappropriate and unethical. Manufacturers should operate such schemes in a compassionate and not a commercially-motivated manner. There should be no link between compassionate use schemes and reimbursement decisions and manufacturers should be up-front with patients and clinicians from the outset.

### **Medicinal Products Availability**

486. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if the FreeStyle Libre glucose monitoring system will be approved under the GMS and long-term illness schemes for use by diabetics; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11295/17]

**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.

### **General Practitioner Services Provision**

487. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health his plans to extend free general practitioner care, especially to children over six years of age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11296/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Universal GP care without fees for all children under the age of 6 years was successfully introduced in 2015. Shortly afterwards, the second phase implemented universal GP care without fees for all people aged 70 years and over. This has resulted in approximately 800,000 people now being eligible for GP care without fees, without having to undergo a means test and represents a major step forward in improving access, quality and affordability of health care in Ireland. The under-6s GP service contract, which includes age-based preventive checks focused on health and well-being and a cycle of care for children with asthma, underlines the Government's commitment to enhancing primary



care and keeping people well in their own community.

The Programme for Government commits to extending in phases, and subject to negotiation with GPs, free GP care to all children under 18 years of age. Legislative changes will be required for any such extension of GP care without fees to further cohorts of the population.

The extension of GP care without fees to children aged 6-11 years is one of the actions listed in the HSE's National Service Plan 2017, however the timetable is subject to the outcome of discussions with GP representatives on this and other contractual matters.

The next phase of discussions on a new GP contract is under way and engagement with GP representative bodies has commenced. As with any negotiation-type process, and given the range and complexity of the issues to be discussed, the engagement may take some time. While I am of course anxious to see good progress made, it is not my intention to set a deadline for completion of discussions.

### **Autism Support Services**

488. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) is not receiving autism services. [11308/17]

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

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

### **Pension Provisions**

489. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address an issue regarding a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11312/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

### **Medical Card Data**

490. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health the expected number of additional persons who are currently in receipt of the domiciliary care allowance who will receive a medical card once the necessary legislative changes are made, by county, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11324/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Health (Amendment) Bill 2017 was published last Thursday 2nd March 2017. This bill will enable the granting of full eligibility for general practitioner and other health services to all children in respect of whom a Domicili-

ary Care Allowance (DCA) is paid. Granting a medical card to all children in respect of whom a DCA payment is made will benefit approximately 9,800 children in this cohort who do not currently qualify for a medical card. At present the HSE have not collated the breakdown of number by county. The legislation is scheduled to enter the Dail tomorrow, Wednesday, 8th March 2017, and it is hoped to complete all stages before the end of March.

### **Home Help Service Data**

491. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health the total number of home help hours provided during 2016, by county, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11328/17]

**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**

492. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11332/17]

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

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

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

### **Hospital Facilities**

493. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health if any renovations or upgrading works were carried out at the acute psychiatric department at UHW; if so, the nature and cost of such works; the unit bed size; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11333/17]

**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.

### **Mental Health Services Provision**

494. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health his plans to re-open psychiatric services at Wexford General Hospital, in view of capacity issues at UHW as identified by the

Mental Health Commission; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11334/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee):** As this is a service issues, I am referring this questions to the HSE for direct reply.

### **Mental Health Services Provision**

495. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the way in which UHW will provide additional therapies at the acute psychiatric ward at the hospital, as identified by the Mental Health Commission; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11335/17]

496. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the way in which UHW will provide additional recreational facilities at the acute psychiatric ward at the hospital, as identified by the Mental Health Commission; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11336/17]

497. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the way in which UHW will provide additional dining space at the acute psychiatric ward at the hospital, as identified by the Mental Health Commission; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11337/17]

498. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the way in which UHW will provide additional staff at the acute psychiatric ward at the hospital, as identified by the Mental Health Commission; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11338/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 495 to 498, inclusive, together.

As these are service issues, I am referring these questions to the HSE for direct reply.

### **Hospital Facilities**

499. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the way in which UHW and the South/Southwest Hospital Group will provide both planned and emergency PPCI work at the cardiac unit at UHW with one laboratory; if this goes against the recommendation of the Herity report; his views on whether it is possible and safe to provide both planned and emergency work for the effective population with a single laboratory; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11339/17]

500. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health his views on comments made by a person (details supplied) at the Oireachtas Committee on Health that in hospitals that provide PPCI work, it is done on a 24/7 basis or not at all; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11340/17]

501. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health his views on another to acknowledge that the Herity report into cardiac services at UHW is not being implemented in full and that in view of the decision to retain five day a week PPCI work this justifies the need for a second catheterisation laboratory; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11341/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 499 to 501, inclusive, together.

The Deputy will be aware that in his review of cath lab services in UHW, Dr Niall Herity recommended that the UHW cath lab should operate as an elective lab which provides all

specialised cardiac services except interventional treatment for patients who are having heart attacks (PPCI). Dr. Herity recommended that the current 9 to 5 provision of these services should cease in order to allow the hospital to focus on the much larger volume of planned cath lab work.

I accept Dr Herity's findings and recommendations. However, as Minister for Health, I want to be sure that any services changes which we implement, will result in improved services for patients using that service. Therefore, I have asked my Department to address the implications of this recommendation by undertaking a national review of all PPCI services with the aim to ensure that as many patients as possible have access, on a 24/7 basis, to safe and sustainable emergency interventions following a heart attack.

The Deputy will also be aware that Dr Herity concluded that the needs of the effective UHW catchment population could be accommodated from a single cath lab. However, he recommended investment to enhance cardiac services at the hospital and to provide an additional 8 hours cath lab activity per week to address waiting times and to provide improved access for patients. At the time of the report's publication, I committed to providing the additional resources to UHW as recommended. I am pleased therefore to confirm that an additional €500,000 has been allocated to the hospital for 2017.

### **HIQA Reports**

502. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health if he has examined a report from HIQA into medication safety arrangements in hospitals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11342/17]

503. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health his views on the absence of governance arrangements at UHW for medication safety; the action he and his Department will take to remedy this situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11343/17]

504. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health his views on a HIQA finding that medication related clinical incidents were likely to be under-reported at UHW; the actions the HSE will take on foot of this finding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11344/17]

505. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health his views on a HIQA finding that there was outdated and potentially conflicting reference information for using intravenous medication in clinical areas at UHW; the actions he will take on foot of these findings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11345/17]

506. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health when a medicine safety pharmacist was appointed in Waterford; the nature of the role; the duration of the contract; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11346/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 502 to 506, inclusive, together.

I welcome the publication of the HIQA Medication Safety Reports. The reports provide evidence that a number of the hospitals inspected have robust and effective governance systems in place for medicines management. When taken together, these reports improve visibility of current medication management practice, identify variation in practice, where present, and identify system requirements to reduce risks. This in turn provides a clear opportunity for improvement and further development of these systems.

Individual hospitals, including University Hospital Waterford, now have direction in terms of their requirements for improvement. As Hospital Groups continue to develop their governance structures, they are well placed to provide leadership and support to enable individual hospitals to address the findings of the HIQA reports. Hospital Group CEOs have an important role to play to ensure that medication safety is prioritised and to ensure that smaller hospitals are supported in terms of the development, application and evaluation of Group protocols, processes and practices, to promote and ensure medication safety. This approach will also ensure that resources required to underpin medication safety are optimised and maximised and that learning and expertise is shared across all hospitals and the system in general.

I have asked the HSE to reply to you directly in relation to your specific queries regarding University Hospital Waterford.

*Question No. 507 answered with Question No. 455.*

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

508. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied). [11376/17]

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

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

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

### **Hospital Beds Data**

509. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health if he will ensure that the necessary resources are provided to have the full complement of beds utilised in Monaghan General Hospital; the number of beds in use and the number unused at present; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11386/17]

**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.

### **Occupational Therapy**

510. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the average waiting time for children who have been queried by their schools as potentially having dyspraxia to be assessed by the HSE's occupational therapy teams. [11387/17]

**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**

511. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of children in each county currently on the waiting list for an occupational therapy assessment. [11388/17]

**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**

512. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the waiting times for occupational therapy for children who have been diagnosed with dyspraxia and recommended for occupational therapy, by county. [11389/17]

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

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

### **Occupational Therapy**

513. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the procedure for accessing occupational therapy sessions where a child's school has recommended an occupational therapy assessment, the child's parents opt to pay for a private assessment and that assessment recommends individual occupational therapy sessions. [11390/17]

**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**

514. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the way in which a person (details supplied) in County Louth who has been privately assessed and diagnosed as meeting the DSM V diagnostic criteria of developmental co-ordination disorder, dyspraxia, can access the occupational therapy supports which his assessment recommends. [11391/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath) (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 indepen-

dence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

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

### **Hospital Procedures**

515. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide information on the HSE action plan for scoliosis that was to be prepared by the end of February 2017 (details supplied); the number of scoliosis procedures to be undertaken, by month, in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11400/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** A draft Waiting List Action Plan for Scoliosis has been submitted by the HSE to my Department. The draft action plan for Scoliosis includes both measures to increase capacity for scoliosis treatments in the children's hospitals and proposals for the outsourcing of procedures. Officials are currently reviewing and evaluating the plan and engagement is ongoing with the HSE and the NTPF towards its finalisation. I expect to make known the details of the HSE's Waiting List Action Plan including the Action Plan for Scoliosis in the coming weeks.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

516. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal can expect to receive a date for an appointment at Sligo University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11408/17]

**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.

### **HSE Data**

517. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the number of official complaints lodged to the HSE about access delays or unsatisfactory services from early intervention

teams across the country; the number of complaints relating to the early intervention services in County Tipperary; the reason for said complaints; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11417/17]

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

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

### Public Relations Contracts Expenditure

518. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Health the amount his Department spent on public relations consultants and all matters relating to public relations in 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11431/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Please see the following table which has the information in respect of Public Relations expenditure by my Department in 2016.

Year	Amount - €	Companies
2016	€50,572	RPS Consulting Engineers Ltd (1)DHR Communications (2)

(1) contract for public consultation process to inform the Development of the National Drugs Strategy. This has been included here because it has a public relations dimension as it involves a range of public activities and events to publicise the consultation process to optimise public participation.

(2) contract for Development of Strategy to support communication for the Healthy Ireland Framework and toolkit for Healthy Ireland Council.

### Respite Care Services Availability

519. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health his plans to provide respite services in Mullingar, in view of the fact Mullingar currently has no respite services available. [11448/17]

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

The Programme for Partnership Government states that the Government wishes to provide more accessible respite care to facilitate full support for people with a disability.



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

### **Hospital Accommodation Provision**

520. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Health of the number of portacabins planned to be used at hospitals; the location of each one; the costs involved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11451/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The HSE has put in place a National Framework for the provision of temporary alternative accommodation, as just one part of a broad range of measures undertaken under the Winter Initiative Plan 2016-2017. Under the Framework, the HSE has advised that consideration will also be given to managed temporary patient accommodation solutions which are staffed. The next stage will be for a mini-tender to be coordinated in the coming weeks to request proposals in relation to temporary patient accommodation solutions.

Decisions in relation to the opening of temporary alternative accommodation in specific locations and information on associated costs will be made based on the outcome of this procurement process and the submissions made by hospitals and hospital groups.

### **Medicinal Products Reimbursement**

521. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if he will ensure that the subsidy for blood testing strips remains in place; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that persons suffering from diabetes who require very frequent blood testing on a daily basis require these strips; if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that to remove this subsidy will result in many diabetics not being able to afford the test strips, which cost €70 per perscription, and will result in more hospitalisation when hyperglycemia or hypoglycemia sets in; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11464/17]

**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.

### **Home Care Packages Funding**

522. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the detail of the distribution of funding for home care packages, which will be divided between hospital and community sectors under the supervision of the head of social care with the responsibility for administering the funds for Galway city and county. [11470/17]

**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.

### **Blood Donations**

523. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Health his views on correspondence that was

recently submitted to his office by a person (details supplied) in County Cork regarding the Irish Blood Transfusion Service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11479/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The remit of the (IBTS) is to provide a safe, reliable and robust blood service to the Irish health system and, in this context, they have a range of measures in place to protect both the recipients and the donors of blood and blood products. The practice of not accepting donors who present after clinic closing times is in place to ensure the effective working of the clinic. As well as facilitating the appropriate processing of the blood donations received at each clinic, this practice ensures that the welfare of people who present on time to give blood is not compromised and that donors are dealt with in a courteous and efficient manner.

Given that the practice of the IBTS of not taking blood donations from people who arrive outside the allocated clinic times is centred on the safety of the blood supply for transfusion; providing the appropriate duty of care to blood donors; as well as ensuring the effective working of the donor clinic and its staff, I am satisfied that the current arrangements are justified.

### **National Children's Hospital**

524. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if plans for the new National Children's Hospital will be reviewed in view of the fact that the hospital will be the most expensive children's hospital in the world, according to international data; and if alternative sites will be considered and costed. [11480/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Government decision in 2012 to locate the hospital on St James's Hospital campus was made in the best interests of children from a clinical perspective. St. James's has the broadest range of national specialties of all our acute hospitals, in addition to a strong and well-established research and education infrastructure, making it the hospital that best meets the criteria to enable the children's hospital achieve our vision of excellence in modern paediatric practice. A major milestone was achieved in this long awaited, much needed project when An Bord Pleánála granted planning permission in April 2016 to build a state of the art hospital on a campus shared with St. James's Hospital, together with two Paediatric Outpatients and Urgent Care centres at Tallaght Hospital and Connolly Hospital. The first phase of construction (site clearing works) on the site of the new children's hospital began in August 2016 and will be substantially completed within a matter of weeks. The new children's hospital will open and provide services to children and young people in Ireland in 2021, and the Urgent Care Centres at Tallaght Hospital and Connolly Hospital will open on a phased basis from 2018.

The National Paediatric Hospital Development Board (NPHDB) was appointed in 2013 to design, build and equip the new children's hospital for children, young people and families in Ireland. An internationally recognised design team supported by an experienced Board and Project Team are in place, have followed best international design, planning and procurement process at each stage of the project. The Project Team, during the design, planning and tendering phases, has constantly monitored the external environment – tracking construction inflation and market costs. The cost estimate for the core construction elements of the new children's hospital and the Paediatric Outpatients and Urgent Care centres at Tallaght and Connolly Hospitals was prepared in early 2014. This estimate, prepared at a time when annual construction inflation predicted at 3% per annum, was €650m. The recently concluded tendering process for the main construction works determined the actual market cost of the construction elements of the project. Due to annual construction inflation rising from 3% in 2013 to more than 9% in 2017 and the lengthened project timeline in the planning, design and procurement process, the

cost of the core construction of the hospital and Paediatric Outpatients and Urgent Care Centres has increased from the original estimate. The increase reflects the increasing volume of activity in the Irish construction industry which is having a significant impact on construction inflation.

The Final Project Brief sets out the costs and funding proposals for the construction of the core hospital and satellite centres, including VAT provision, risk provision, all fees, decant, external works, enabling costs and project management costs. Importantly, it also includes commercial spaces (underground carpark and retail space), higher education facilities, the Children's Research and Innovation Centre, and equipment.

While I am not in a position to comment on cost at this stage, I understand that the final construction elements of the project compare favourably to the costs of international projects of a similar size and scale. I intend to bring a Memorandum to Government in the coming weeks on the new children's hospital. Full details of the costs will be set out in the Memorandum for Government and will form the basis upon which the approval decision will be made. The costs and funding will span the period up to and including 2021 in line with project requirements.

The NPHDB and the Children's Hospital Group Board continue to work closely with the HSE and the Department of Health to deliver this much-needed world-class hospital. My priority, as I have stated before, is to make progress on the new hospital as soon as possible so we can ensure children, young people and their families have the facilities they need and deserve.

### **Health Insurance Community Rating**

525. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health the reason previous health insurance cover taken out in other countries, for example the UK, is not taken into consideration with respect to the lifetime community rating that is applied; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11487/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Our health insurance system is voluntary and community-rated, which means that people who are old or sick do not have to pay more for health insurance than the young and healthy. Since 1 May 2015, young people are encouraged to join the private health insurance market at an earlier age and thus avoid late entry loadings of 2% per annum which may apply at age 35 and older.

Previous periods of health insurance cover in Ireland are taken into account in calculating the loading that may apply to individuals, whereby the level of loading is reduced by the relevant credited period(s). These credited periods apply to community-rated health insurance cover with registered health insurers in this country.

Periods of cover on health insurance plans held outside the State (including the UK) are not taken into account when calculating loadings, as such plans do not comply with private health insurance legislation in Ireland.

### **Medicinal Products Reimbursement**

526. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the reason the ten Irish sufferers of MPS IVA morquio disease cannot receive the medication Vimizin for treatment through local hospital based care or home care, similar to children in the UK with this condition and many others on mainland Europe. [11490/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The HSE has statutory responsibility for

decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines in the community drugs schemes, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013.

In reaching its decision, the HSE examines all the evidence which may be relevant, in its view, for the decision (including information submitted by the company). It will take into account such expert opinions and recommendations which it may have sought at its sole discretion, for example from the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE).

In considering an application, the HSE will also have regard to Part 1 and Part 3 of Schedule 3 of the 2013 Act. Part 3 requires the HSE to have regard to the following criteria.

1. The health needs of the public.
2. The cost-effectiveness of meeting health needs by supplying the item concerned rather than providing other health services.
3. The availability and suitability of items for supply or reimbursement.
4. The proposed costs, benefits and risks of the item or listed item relative to therapeutically similar items or listed items provided in other health service settings and the level of certainty in relation to the evidence of those costs, benefits and risks.
5. The potential or actual budget impact of the item or listed item.
6. The clinical need for the item or listed item.
7. The appropriate level of clinical supervision required in relation to the item to ensure patient safety.
8. The efficacy (performance in trial), effectiveness (performance in real situations) and added therapeutic benefit against existing standards of treatment (how much better it treats a condition than existing therapies).
9. The resources available to the HSE.

The HSE asked the NCPE to carry out a health technology assessment on the cost effectiveness of this treatment. The NCPE completed its assessment and made a recommendation on 8 December 2016. The NCPE determined that the manufacturer failed to demonstrate cost-effectiveness of the drug and did not recommend it for reimbursement.

A summary of the health technology assessment has been published on the NCPE website and is available at: <http://www.ncpe.ie/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Web-summary-07-12-2016.pdf>. The statutory process is on-going.

### **Commissions of Investigation**

**527. Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health if he will extend the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes to hospitals in which infant deaths occurred and in which the circumstances of the child's death, post mortem and burial were not clarified with the parents; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11494/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Commission of Investigation (Mother and Baby Homes and certain related Matters) comes within the remit of my colleague, the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs.

The Commission of Investigation was established by the Government to provide a full account of the experiences of women and children who lived in Mother and Baby Homes over the period 1922-1998. This followed the establishment of an Inter-Departmental Group by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs in response to the revelations and public controversy regarding conditions in Mother and Baby Homes.

Communication between a hospital and bereaved parents following the death of a child is a hospital service issue. This is a devastating time for parents. The development of appropriate bereavement care is an important step in the overall development of quality maternity services, and this is recognised in the National Maternity Strategy - Creating a Better Future Together 2016-2026. In that regard, the Deputy may wish to note, that in August 2016, I launched the HSE National Standards for Bereavement Care following Pregnancy Loss and Perinatal Death. These standards seek to ensure that clinical and counselling services are in place to support women and their families in all pregnancy loss situations, from early pregnancy loss to perinatal death. The standards underline the important role that healthcare professionals play in providing a caring and compassionate response to parents, including that of the bereavement specialist teams which will be established in each maternity unit. The HSE National Service Plan 2017 prioritises the implementation of a range of improvement actions across all maternity units, based on the new Standards.

In regard to past post mortem practices, the Deputy will be aware of two Reports by Dr Deirdre Madden published by my Department in 2006. The first of these reports "Post Mortem Practice and Procedures" inquired into the policies and practices relating to the removal, retention and disposal of organs from children who had undergone post-mortem examination in the State since 1970. In her report, Dr Madden set out the general facts in relation to paediatric post-mortem practice in Ireland from 1970 to 2000, the way in which information was communicated to parents of deceased children in relation to post-mortem examinations and how these practices might be improved upon for the future.

The second report "Working Group on Post Mortem Practice" considered the application of the recommendations of the first Report to (a) babies who died before or during birth, (b) minors and (c) adults.

Since that time, in March 2012, the Health Service Executive published "Standards and Recommended Practices for Post Mortem Examination Services" and these were circulated to all relevant hospital staff. The overall aim of the standards and recommended practices for post-mortem examinations is to drive high quality services based on best professional practice and current legal requirements.

### **Nursing Staff**

528. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health his plans to encourage more nurses to work for the HSE as opposed to working for private care companies or emigrating. [11497/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** During recent engagement between this Department, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, the HSE, INMO and SIPTU to avert the proposed industrial action scheduled by the INMO for the 7th March, the management side supplied a joint proposal document setting out a number of specific measures to attract and retain nursing staff. This was done in the context of HSE management having developed a fully funded workforce plan for an additional 1,208 nursing/midwifery posts in 2017. The proposal includes extensive education and personal development opportunities for nurses and midwives to upskill, and a pilot pre-retirement initiative as a method of retaining the expertise of experienced nursing/midwifery staff. It also includes 127 promotional posts for staff nurses/mid-

wives to Clinical Nurse/Midwife Manager 1. The management side is also positively disposed to a proposal from the union side for the restoration of a number of allowances for new entrant nurses and this consideration will be concluded in the upcoming pay talks in the summer.

The above is in addition to the many other initiatives currently underway to improve nursing and midwifery staffing levels throughout the country. The number of nursing and midwifery staff increased by 1,650 whole time equivalents between December 2013 and December 2016, notwithstanding intense global competition for our nurses and midwives. The HSE has offered permanent posts to 2016 degree programme graduates in order to retain its graduates. The HSE is also offering full time permanent contracts to those in temporary posts and is also focused on converting posts filled by agency staffing to permanent posts. Its National Recruitment Service is actively operating rolling nursing recruitment campaigns. The HSE ran a 3 day open recruitment event over the Christmas holiday period in Dr Steevens' Hospital for nurses and midwives from all disciplines interested in working in the Irish Public Health Service. A further event is scheduled for 31 March 2017. A relocation package of up to €1,500 continues to be available to nurses who return from overseas.

### **Food Safety Authority of Ireland**

529. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to recent studies both in France and the United States that cast doubt over the safety of the food additive titanium dioxide, E171, in nano particle size; if he has requested the Food Safety Authority of Ireland, FSAI, to re-evaluate the use of this food additive, especially in view of its use in many foods, including confectionary, eaten by young children; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11498/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) is an independent statutory body which was established under the Food Safety Authority of Ireland Act 1998. The Authority works under the aegis of the Department of Health.

The Authority's key remit is the enforcement of food safety legislation which is carried out on behalf of the FSAI by a network of official agencies through the service contracts programme. The FSAI monitors and reports on these activities and seeks continuous improvement and accountability through a programme of regular audits. The Authority supports Ministers in the development of a well-functioning, robust and proportionate food regulatory framework and provides the best independent scientific advice to underpin policy and risk analysis in respect of food safety.

The use of additives in Irish food is strictly controlled by European Union (EU) legislation which requires that only authorised food additives may be used in the manufacture or preparation of foodstuffs. At European level all additives approved for use in current legislation have been evaluated by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) or previously by the Scientific Committee on Food (SCF). All approvals of food additives are kept under review by the regulatory authorities as and when scientific and medical information becomes available on possible adverse effects, not previously recognised or reported.

The FSAI has advised my Department that it is aware of a number of scientific studies linking the ingestion of Titanium Dioxide nanoparticles to potentially negative health effects. The recently reported studies carried out in France and the USA raising concerns about Titanium Dioxide have been brought to the attention of the European Commission and EFSA.

Titanium Dioxide's use as a food additive (E171) was last evaluated by EFSA in June 2016.

Taking all available evidence and data into account, EFSA experts concluded that titanium dioxide in food does not indicate health concerns for consumers, though further studies were recommended to bridge any data gaps on possible effects on the reproductive system in order to enable them to set an Acceptable Daily Intake (ADI).

The European Commission is currently calling for scientific and technical data needed to address issues identified by EFSA in the re-evaluation of the safety of titanium dioxide as a food additive. Once this data becomes available it will be assessed by EFSA.

### **Medical Card Administration**

530. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) had a medical card revoked subsequent to having gained employment following the requisite period of unemployment and despite having engaged with the relevant authorities and having returned documentation and information to the medical card section; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11500/17]

**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 Beds Data**

531. **Deputy Michael D'Arcy** asked the Minister for Health the number and proportion of public ward beds occupied by persons with private health insurance in each of the years 2014 to 2016; the number or the proportion of these persons who opted to be treated in a private capacity, incurring the new private bed charge of €813 versus the statutory charge of €80 per night; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11510/17]

**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.

### **Long-Term Illness Scheme**

532. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health if SuperCheck test strips, as used with the SuperCheck two glucometer, are available free of charge under the long-term illness scheme; if not, his plans to make them available under the long-term illness scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11516/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Services for People with Disabilities**

533. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the number of children waiting for access to early intervention services in County Tipperary; the average waiting times for assessment of needs; the reason the HSE will not accept a diagnosis obtained from a private practitioner due to the delays in obtaining an assessment of needs from the HSE; the number of staff working with the early intervention teams in County Tipperary; the number of vacant posts associated with the early intervention team in County Tipperary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11517/17]

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

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

### **Health Services Data**

534. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting to see a paediatrician or a geriatrician in counties Meath and Louth both publicly and privately; and the average and longest wait for all four categories. [11518/17]

**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 Facilities**

535. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Health if the five new operating theatres and emergency departments will be fully equipped and commissioned to function as per planning permission when the phase two building at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital is complete in November 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11519/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The project underway at OLOL is a phased project. The full fit out of two ward floors which will provide 58 beds and the Clinical Decision Unit will be completed by November 2017.

Any future investment must be considered within the overall acute hospital infrastructure programme, the prioritised needs of the Hospital Groups and within the overall capital envelope available to the health service.



My Department is working with the HSE and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to conduct a mid-term review of the capital programme. The HSE will continue to apply the available funding for infrastructure development in the most effective way possible to meet current and future needs, having regard to the level of commitments and the costs to completion already in place.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

536. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11520/17]

**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.

### **Pharmaceutical Sector**

537. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an update on the consultation process regarding temporary absence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11525/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Pharmaceutical Assistants (PAs) are registered with the pharmacy regulator, the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (PSI), and under section 30(1) of the Pharmacy Act 2007 may perform the same functions as a pharmacist, in the temporary absence of a pharmacist, with the exception of functions that are restricted to pharmacists under specific medicines legislation, such as vaccination services.

Section 30(2) of the Act provides for the PSI Council to make rules (with the consent of the Minister) defining temporary absence and also what may or may not be done by a pharmaceutical assistant when acting on behalf of a registered pharmacist.

In 2013, the PSI Council directed that a policy position be developed to enable and facilitate the drafting of rules relating to the circumstances in which a registered PA may act in the temporary absence of a registered pharmacist. The PSI Registration and Qualification Recognition Committee (RQR) was assigned responsibility to progress this work. A Pharmaceutical Assistant was sought to join this Committee and was appointed by the PSI Council in March 2014.

The PSI developed the draft Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (Regulation of Temporary Absence Cover by Pharmaceutical Assistants) Rules 2016 following debate and engagement with interested parties including the PAA who it has met on numerous occasions.

The draft Rules were issued for consultation on 8 February 2016, ending on 7 March 2016 and circa 700 submissions were received. An analysis of the submissions received has been

concluded. The matter is to be considered further by the PSI Council at its next meeting on 23 March 2017.

These draft Rules have yet to be formally submitted to me. If the PSI Council decides to submit them I will then give consideration to the Rules.

### **Health Care Infrastructure Provision**

538. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Health the level of construction inflation that has been experienced by his Department in each of the past six years and to date in 2017 in respect of construction projects and other capital projects; the way in which he monitors construction inflation and the mechanisms he employs to establish this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11538/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The HSE is responsible for the delivery of health care infrastructure projects. Therefore, the Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in relation to construction inflation. There are a number of smaller agencies such as the Health Research Board, Health Information and Quality Authority, CORU and the National Cancer Registry which receive capital funding from my Department, the annual capital allocation is €14.527m. The bulk of this annual funding, circa €10m, is allocated to the HRB for health research and the remainder is allocated for office equipment, ICT, refurbishment and office fit-out. Inflation is not monitored in relation to instances of office fit-out.

### **Hardship Grant Scheme Applications**

539. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if required support will issue under the hardship scheme for shoes in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11582/17]

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

### **Medical Card Applications**

540. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when a full medical card will issue in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11583/17]

**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 Appointments Status

541. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if a hospital appointment can be scheduled for a person (details supplied). [11601/17]

**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.

## Services for People with Disabilities

542. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full-year cost of providing an additional 1.5 million personal assistant hours for persons with disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11620/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The Government is committed to providing services and supports to 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. The commitment is outlined in the Programme for a Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles, equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

The Health Service Executive (HSE) is committed to protecting the level of Personal Assistant services available to people with disabilities. In their National Service Plan for 2016, the HSE exceeded the expected activity level for Personal Assistant hours which was 1.3 million hours, by approximately 200,000 hours. This reflects the responsive nature of the service provided and takes account of assessed need over time, as individual needs change. I understand that in 2017, the HSE expects to deliver 1.4 million Personal Assistance hours, an increase of 100,000 hours, to 2,357 adults with a physical and/or sensory disability.

As the Deputy's query relates to a service matter, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the HSE for a more detailed direct reply to the Deputy.

## Home Care Packages

543. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full-year cost of providing an additional 200 intensive home-care packages for persons with dementia; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11621/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee):** As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

### **Medical Card Expenditure**

544. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full-year cost of increasing the weekly income limits for the GP-visit card by 25%, 50%, 75% and 100% respectively. [11622/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I can advise the Deputy that to estimate the costs of any of these measures would require information on the income position of the cohort of the population who do not currently qualify for a GP visit card. As this information is not held by the Department, it is not possible to assess the effect of any of the adjustments suggested.

As the Deputy will be aware, from mid 2015, the Government ensured that all children aged 5 and under and persons aged 70 or older can access a GP service without charges .

### **General Medical Services Scheme Expenditure**

545. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health his Department's current estimated full-year cost of providing free general practitioner care to all the population. [11623/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Deputy will be aware of the ongoing review of the GMS and other publicly funded contracts involving GPs, and that the next phase of discussions to progress this work is underway. Initial engagement with GP representative bodies began in January. As with any negotiation-type process, and given the range and complexity of the issues to be discussed, the engagement may take some time.

The estimated cost of extending free GP care to all citizens will vary depending on the outcome of these negotiations and any implications they may have for the future scope and content of the general practitioner service, and the relevant fees and payments to GPs. It would be premature, in advance of substantive progress being made on the development of a new contract, to make statements in relation to funding.

However, the Deputy may be aware that the HSE has recently published the Primary Care Reimbursement Service Statistical Analysis of Claims and Payments 2015, which indicates that the average GP cost per eligible person is €226.07. The extension of free GP care to all citizens not currently covered by a medical card or GP visit card would encompass a further 2.6 million people approximately.

### **Hospital Beds Data**

546. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the full-year cost of increasing the number of critical care beds to 579, as recommended by a 2009 report; and the number of additional beds this would entail. [11624/17]

**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 Beds Data**

547. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the estimated cost of providing an additional 150 inpatient rehabilitation beds. [11625/17]

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

### **Occupational Therapy**

548. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health further to parliamentary question number 427 of 14 February 2017, if he will provide additional resources to occupational therapy services in counties Longford and Westmeath in order to reduce the current eight month waiting list. [11636/17]

**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.

### **Nursing Staff Data**

549. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of nurses newly recruited in 2016 in public and voluntary hospitals; the number of nurses newly recruited to date in 2017; the full-year cost of their recruitment in each timeframe; and the net increase in nursing numbers resulting from this recruitment. [11637/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

### **Health Services Staff Recruitment**

550. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of speech and language therapists recruited in 2016; the number recruited to date in 2017; the sectors of the health service under which they have been recruited, that is, primary care, acute and disability services; the full-year cost of their recruitment; and the net increase in speech and language therapists numbers resulting from this recruitment. [11638/17]

551. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of occupational therapists newly recruited in 2016; the number recruited to date in 2017; the sectors of the health service under which they have been recruited, that is, primary care, acute and disability services; the full-year cost of their recruitment; and the net increase in occupational therapists numbers resulting from this recruitment. [11639/17]

552. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of physiotherapists newly recruited in 2016; the number recruited to date in 2017; the sectors of the health service under which they have been recruited, that is, primary care, acute and disability services; the full-year cost of their recruitment; and the net increase in physiotherapists numbers resulting from this recruitment. [11640/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 550 to 552, inclusive, together.

I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

### **Health Services Staff Data**

553. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of speech and language therapists currently employed in each CHO, in tabular form; and the equivalent figures for the same date in 2015 and 2016. [11641/17]

554. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of occupational therapists currently employed in each CHO, in tabular form; and the equivalent figures for the same date in 2015 and 2016. [11642/17]

555. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of physiotherapists currently employed in each CHO, in tabular form; and the equivalent figures for the same date in 2015 and 2016. [11643/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 553 to 555, inclusive, together.

I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

### **Hospital Staff Data**

556. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of approved consultant posts currently in each public and voluntary hospital; and the equivalent figures for the same date in 2015 and 2016. [11644/17]

557. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of approved senior house officer posts currently in each public and voluntary hospital; and the equivalent figures for the same date in 2015 and 2016. [11645/17]

558. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of approved registrar posts currently in each public and voluntary hospital; and the equivalent figures for the same date in 2015 and 2016. [11646/17]

559. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of approved senior registrar posts currently in each public and voluntary hospital; and the equivalent figures for the same date in 2015 and 2016. [11647/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 556 to 559, inclusive, together.

I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

### **Health Services Staff Data**

560. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the current number of approved clinical dental surgeon posts currently employed by the HSE; and the equivalent figures for the same date in 2015 and 2016. [11648/17]

561. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the current number of approved general dental surgeon posts currently employed by the HSE; and the equivalent figures for the same date in 2015 and 2016. [11649/17]

562. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the current number of approved senior dental surgeon posts currently employed by the HSE; and the equivalent figures for the same date in 2015 and 2016. [11650/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 560 to 562, inclusive, together.

I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

### **Nursing Staff Data**

563. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the current number of approved registered intellectual disability nurse posts currently employed by the HSE; and the equivalent figures for the same date in 2015 and 2016. [11651/17]

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

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

### **Hospital Beds Data**

564. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year running costs of providing an additional 500 extra acute hospital beds, 1,000 extra acute hospital beds and 2,000 extra acute hospital beds. [11652/17]

**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.

### **Health Services Data**

565. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year running costs of opening all medical assessment units on a seven day basis. [11653/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** There is a commitment in the Program for Partnership Government to build the capacity for our Emergency and Acute Services. The Government has agreed to a timely review of the management, operation and funding of Medical Assessment Units (MAUs) which provide a safe and local alternative to EDs, but usually operate within limited hours and 5 days a week. This review will be conducted with a view to extending their hours of opening and weekend opening.

In relation to costings requested by the Deputy, as this is a service matter, I have asked the

HSE to respond to you directly.

### **Health Services Staff Data**

566. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year cost of recruiting an extra 500 hospital consultants, including an average estimate for any support staff required per consultant. [11654/17]

567. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year cost of recruiting an additional 4,000 nursing staff. [11655/17]

575. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year cost of recruiting an additional 200 speech and language therapists. [11663/17]

576. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year cost of recruiting an additional 200 occupational therapists. [11664/17]

577. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year cost of recruiting an additional 200 physiotherapists. [11665/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 566, 567 and 575 to 577, inclusive, together.

I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

### **Prescriptions Charges**

568. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year cost of abolishing prescription charges. [11656/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I am informed by the HSE that the estimated full year cost of abolishing prescription charges is €120m. The estimated full year cost of reducing the charge for the over 70s is €12m. Therefore, taking account of the reduction in the charge for over 70s which has been introduced on an administrative basis from 1 March, the additional cost of abolishing the charge is approximately €108m in a full year.

### **General Practitioner Data**

569. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year cost of increasing the general practitioner rural practice allowance to €25,000. [11657/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Regulations were signed on 5th May 2016 which provide for the introduction of the new Rural Practice Support Framework (RPSF), which includes improved qualifying criteria for rural support and an increase in the financial allowance from €16,216.07 to €20,000 per annum. The Regulations also revise the list of Special Items of Service, which are made available to patients under the General Medical Services (GMS) scheme.

Under the new Framework, if two practice units are providing general practitioner services in the same qualifying area, both practices may qualify for a modified allowance of €10,000. GPs holding a permanent GMS contract who received the Rural Practice Allowance of €16,216.07 immediately prior to the introduction of the new Regulations who do not meet the new quali-



ying criteria continue to receive the payment on a personal basis, provided they retain their contractual commitment to the remote rural area.

As at 1st February 2017, there are 252 practice units in receipt of rural supports under the RPSF. 177 practices receive the financial allowance of €20,000 and 19 practices receive the modified allowance of €10,000. The full year cost of increasing the existing allowance to €25,000 and the corresponding modified allowance to €12,500 for these practices would amount to nearly €1 million. Any increase in the financial allowance under the new RPSF would only apply to those practices that qualify under the new criteria, therefore these calculations have excluded the 56 GPs who currently receive the old financial allowance of €16,216.07.

### Health Services Data

570. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year cost of implementing the national maternity strategy. [11658/17]

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

### Health Services Data

571. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year cost of providing an additional 2.2 million home help hours. [11659/17]

572. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year cost of providing an additional 5,000 home care packages. [11660/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 571 and 572 together.

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

### Mental Health Services Data

573. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year cost of completing the recruitment required for the full implementation of A Vision for Change. [11661/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee):** A Vision For Change, our national Mental Health Policy, was introduced in 2006. Among its recommendations were that approximately 10,650 Mental Health Whole Time Equivalentents were required to fully implement the policy.

This figure was based on Ireland's then population of 3.917 million, as indicated in the 2002 census. The population of Ireland today, based on the most recent confirmed Census figures in 2011, is 4.499 million. Taking into account this demographic change, the required number of Mental Health Whole Time Equivalentents is now 12,240.

As of November 2016, there were 9,576 Mental Health Whole Time Equivalentents employed, a gap of 2,664. Using an average figure of €66,000 per Whole Time Equivalentent, the additional resources required to fill the gap would be €175.8 million per annum.

Since 2012, around €115 million has been added to the HSE Mental Health Budget, which totalled €826 million in 2016. Budget 2017 made allowance for an additional €35 million for services to be initiated in 2017. Recognising the time lag in new staff taking up posts and the completion of preparations for the introduction of these services, it is estimated that the revenue spend in 2017 associated with this increased allocation will be some €15 million. There will also be a further additional spend of €9.5 million in mental health associated with increased pay rates. With other minor adjustments the total budget for mental health in 2017 will be €853.1 million.

Recruitment to meet the needs of our mental health services is therefore underpinned by the increased Budget Allocations in the National Service Plans of recent years, which have progressed the implementation of A Vision For Change. 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 recently commissioned an expert evidence review and analysis of national and international best practice in the development and delivery of mental health services. This review of evidence will inform the parameters of a review of A Vision for Change, by identifying sites of best practice and outlining how these models can apply to the Irish context. The evidence review has now been completed and will inform the ongoing review of mental health policy. Consideration is currently being given to establishing an appropriate oversight structure for the mental health policy review process, based on the outcome of the expert review.

### **Drugs Payment Scheme Data**

574. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the full year cost of reducing the drug payment threshold from €144 to €100. [11662/17]

**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.

*Questions Nos. 575 to 577, inclusive, answered with Question No. 566.*

### **Health Services Data**

578. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year cost of recruiting an additional 50 dental surgeons. [11666/17]

**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 Data**

579. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the estimated capital cost of providing an additional emergency ambulance fleet; and the estimated full year costs of additional personnel required for its staffing. [11667/17]

580. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the estimated capital cost of providing an additional emergency ambulance; and the estimated full year costs of additional

personnel required for its staffing. [11668/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 579 and 580 together.

As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

### **Health Services Data**

581. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the details of the State's subsidy to the gay health network since 2005 in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11669/17]

582. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the details of the State's subsidy to the gay HIV strategies and expenditure since 2005 in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11670/17]

583. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the details of the State's subsidy to a group (details supplied) and expenditure since 2005 in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11671/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 581 to 583, inclusive, together.

As these are operational matters, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to you.

### **Health Services Data**

584. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons who were recipients of post-exposure prophylaxis, PEP, through the HSE in each of the past ten years in tabular form; the locations they have accessed it; if it was for occupational or non-occupational exposure; the rate of completion of regimen; the number of repeat users; the State expenditure for PEP; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11672/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Long-Term Illness Scheme Coverage**

585. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health if the diabetes flash monitoring device, the Freestyle Libre, will be added to the long-term illness scheme. [11725/17]

**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.

### **Medical Card Eligibility**

586. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health if consideration will be

given in cases of persons with mental health conditions who are taking up employment for rehabilitative purposes to letters from a relevant medical practitioner confirming the rehabilitative nature of the employment and letters from the employer or employment agency will be sufficient evidence for medical card entitlement or assessment, rather than the existing requirements which are extremely difficult especially for self-employment whereby the Revenue Commissioners request such persons to set themselves up as companies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11727/17]

**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 Appointments Status**

587. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health the length of time a person (details supplied) can expect to wait for an appointment with a consultant at Tullamore Hospital. [11728/17]

**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.

### **Drugs Payment Scheme Coverage**

588. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the status of his negotiations regarding the provision of the drug Orkambi; if there is a timeframe for its introduction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11730/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines in the community drugs schemes, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013.

In reaching its decision, the HSE examines all the evidence which may be relevant, in its view, for the decision (including information submitted by the company). It will take into account such expert opinions and recommendations which it may have sought at its sole discre-

tion, for example from the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE).

In considering an application, the HSE will also have regard to Part 1 and Part 3 of Schedule 3 of the 2013 Act. Part 3 requires the HSE to have regard to the following criteria.

1. The health needs of the public.
2. The cost-effectiveness of meeting health needs by supplying the item concerned rather than providing other health services.
3. The availability and suitability of items for supply or reimbursement.
4. The proposed costs, benefits and risks of the item or listed item relative to therapeutically similar items or listed items provided in other health service settings and the level of certainty in relation to the evidence of those costs, benefits and risks.
5. The potential or actual budget impact of the item or listed item.
6. The clinical need for the item or listed item.
7. The appropriate level of clinical supervision required in relation to the item to ensure patient safety.
8. The efficacy (performance in trial), effectiveness (performance in real situations) and added therapeutic benefit against existing standards of treatment (how much better it treats a condition than existing therapies).
9. The resources available to the HSE.

I am informed that, following a request from the HSE, the NCPE carried out an assessment of the manufacturer's economic dossier submitted in March 2016 on the cost effectiveness of Orkambi. This dossier included details on all relevant costs and relevant cost offsets, including those associated with hospitalisation, disease management, intravenous antibiotics, adverse events and any additional costs arising for patients not taking Orkambi.

The NCPE has completed its health technology assessment and this is available on its website. It was submitted to the HSE in June 2016. The NCPE determined, following an evaluation of the economic dossier, that the manufacturer failed to demonstrate cost-effectiveness or value for money from using the drug. The NCPE has confirmed that all relevant costs were included in the analysis. In line with the HSE's assessment process, the HSE Drugs Committee considered the NCPE recommendation, the manufacturer's submissions and commercial and other information. Following this consideration, the Drugs Committee did not recommend reimbursement at the current price. The HSE Directorate considered the Drugs Committee's recommendation in December and the Directorate took the decision not to reimburse at the current price offered by the company.

The HSE has since re-entered negotiations with the manufacturer of Orkambi and Kalydeco. Meetings were held in December and in early January.

This process is now reaching a crucial stage, and it is expected that this will be concluded in a period of weeks. However, given the scale of the investment and the potential benefits for Irish patients I continue to call on all parties to support the HSE in their engagement and to provide the space for this process to be concluded.

I am acutely aware of how difficult this is for CF patients and their families, there is no doubt that the last number of months have been a stressful and worrying time and I understand

that people feel they don't have time to wait. However, the Government's priority is to achieve the best outcome for Irish CF patients and the health system overall.

### **National Maternity Hospital**

589. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the details of the ownership of the National Maternity Hospital building and site; the plans for the use of the existing building once the hospital moves to the proposed new location; if it is to be sold, the areas that the proceeds of such a sale would go to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11731/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** In relation to the particular queries raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

### **Vaccination Programme Data**

590. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if he will report on the uptake rates for the infant vaccination and screening programmes by health office. [11732/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The national immunisation uptake statistics are published on annual and quarterly bases on the HSE Health Protection Surveillance Centre website

*<http://www.hpsc.ie/A-Z/VaccinePreventable/Vaccination/ImmunisationUptakeStatistics/>*

These statistics give the uptake rates at 12 and 24 months for each Community Healthcare Organisation and Local Health Office for all vaccines in the Primary Childhood Immunisation Programme. The report for Quarter 3 2016 was published in January 2017, and the Annual Report for 2015 was published in April 2016.

The uptake rates for child health developmental screening are published quarterly and can be found at

*<http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/publications/performance-reports/>*

### **Orthodontic Services Provision**

591. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Kerry will receive an appointment to have braces fitted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11734/17]

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

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

592. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health the length of time a person (details supplied) can expect to wait to have an MRI scan carried out. [11738/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its be-

half, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

### **Health Services**

593. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health his views on whether it is acceptable that on 15 February 2017 an incident (details supplied) took place. [11739/17]

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

### **Medicinal Products Reimbursement**

594. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Health the reason medication (details supplied) is not available to medical card holders when it is necessary on medical need; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11774/17]

**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.

### **Mental Health Services Staff**

595. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health when a consultant in child and adolescent psychiatry will be appointed to the north Lee area in Cork; the reason there has been such a delay; the additional assistance which will be provided to deal with the backlog of cases; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11775/17]

**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.

### **Maternity Services**

596. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Health the status of the proposed move of the Rotunda Hospital to a site at Connolly Hospital, Dublin 15; the amount this will cost; if there is a timeline for the potential move in place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11782/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The model of stand-alone maternity hospitals is not the norm internationally. Government policy is therefore to co-locate all remaining maternity hospitals with adult acute services in order to provide optimal clinical outcomes. Co-location of maternity services with adult services provides mothers with access to a full range

of medical and support services should the need arise. The availability of these services helps ensure the delivery of an optimum, safe service, particularly for high risk mothers and babies.

With regard to the redevelopment of the Rotunda Hospital on the Connolly Hospital campus, I understand that the Rotunda has engaged consultants to work on a preliminary design brief. I am also aware that a Masterplan is currently being developed for the Connolly campus and this will take account of, and support, the colocation of the Rotunda and Connolly hospitals.

As the Rotunda redevelopment project is at a very early development stage, it would be premature to provide any indicative timeframes for completion, or cost estimates, at this point.

### **Hospital Waiting Lists**

597. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health when a medical assessment appointment will be provided for a person (details supplied); the reason for the delay in issuing a date for this appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11798/17]

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

The National Waiting List Management Policy, A standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care.

This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

### **Hospital Beds Data**

598. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health when the bed capacity review is starting or if it has started; the detail of its terms of reference; the stakeholders that have been consulted; if they will be liaised with during the review; and if the review will be directed to have a particular model of care in mind in making any recommendations of bed capacity. [11804/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** My Department has commenced a capacity review in line with the commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government. I would like to assure the Deputy that this is a priority action for me and my Department.

As I have previously advised, my intention is that the review will have a wider scope than previous exercises and will examine key elements of primary and community care infrastructure in addition to hospital facilities.

Assessing capacity requirements is a complex task and cannot be divorced from considerations on the underlying model of care we want to develop for the Irish health service. It is widely acknowledged that primary care can provide more appropriate and effective manage-



ment and treatment of some illnesses and conditions, especially chronic diseases. Similarly, the availability of non-acute beds and services in the community can mitigate the need for acute hospital admission, or facilitate earlier discharge. These factors directly contribute to the demands on the acute hospital system. It is important that it is within this context that the review is undertaken.

Draft terms of reference for the review have been developed, these are as follows:

- To consider current capacity in the health system and benchmark with international comparators;

- to determine drivers of future demand for healthcare including demographic and epidemiological trends;

- to analyse how reforms to the model of care will impact on future capacity requirements across the system; and

- to provide an overall assessment of current and future capacity requirements for each year for the period 2017-2030.

The review is being led by my Department and will be overseen by a Steering Group. The Steering Group is now in place and includes senior officials from my Department and the Departments of the Taoiseach and Public Expenditure and Reform, the HSE, and experts with a clinical and academic background. It will hold its first meeting this month, at which I expect it to consider the terms of reference for the review and to begin discussions on issues such as the review process, external expertise requirements and stakeholder consultations.

An independent peer group of international health experts will also be established to review and validate the review methodology and findings.

It is essential that this review is progressed sufficiently to enable it to feed into the mid-term review of the capital programme, which will take place later in the year. While the review will consider capacity requirements over the next decade or so, I am also anxious that it have a short-term focus and determine how capital investment over the coming years can be best targeted, given the current pressures being experienced within our hospital services.

The mechanisms for the review are now in place, and I look forward to the emerging findings later in the year.

### **Audiology Services Provision**

599. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Health the audiology cover currently available to patients in areas (details supplied); if there is to be increased cover provided to reduce waiting times; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11806/17]

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

### **Injecting Facilities**

600. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Health if Merchants Quay in Dublin 8 has been selected as the location for an injecting facility pilot scheme; and if not, the procedures for selection and timeframe for decision. [11808/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne):** The Government approved the publication of the Misuse of Drugs (Supervised Injecting Facilities) Bill 2017 on 7th February 2017. It is important to note that the Bill will not establish the location of the supervised injecting facility. However, it is envisaged that the first such facility would be established in Dublin city centre, where there is a significant, recognised problem of public injecting. In line with the experience in other countries which have established such facilities, it is expected that the location will be carefully selected to address, most effectively, the requirements and concerns of the service users and the wider community. The HSE has established a working group to support the implementation of the Misuse of Drugs (Supervised Injection Facilities) Legislation. Its main purpose is to make recommendations on programme design and governance structures to inform an appropriate procurement process being organised by the HSE. It is intended that the pilot centre will be set up before the end of 2017.

### **Services for People with Disabilities**

601. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Health the number of service users who are currently on the waiting list to access full-time adult residential care places in County Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11810/17]

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

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

### **Orthodontic Services Waiting Lists**

602. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Galway will be issued with a date for an orthodontic appointment; the reason for the delay in issuing this appointment in view of the fact that this person has been on the waiting list for three years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11844/17]

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

### **Medicinal Products Licensing**

603. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 455 of 24 January 2017, the number of exemptions sought to date in 2017 from the law on the usage of cannabis for medicinal purposes. [11852/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** To date I have received two licence applications for cannabis-based products containing Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC). THC is a psychoactive substance derived from cannabis and as such is controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Acts.

### **Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland**

604. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the delay in the provision of a nursing pin for a person (details supplied) from the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11861/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I have received a report from the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland (NMBI) on this issue.

I understand that the applicant applied for registration in the General Nurse Division of the Register on 19th September, 2016. As part of the application process the applicant was required to furnish certain documentation with her completed application form. The application was reviewed in the Registration Department of the NMBI on 26th September 2016. Following this review an email was sent to the applicant on 27th September 2016, however no response was received. A further email was sent on 27th January 2017. A response was received and the application was reviewed on 27th February 2017. I understand that a decision will issue to the applicant in the coming days.

### **Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland**

605. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Health the average waiting time for the provision of nursing pins to new nurses from the Nursing and Midwifery Board; his views on whether the current waiting times for the provision of nursing pins are an issue for young nurses taking up employment here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11862/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I have received a report from the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland (NMBI) on this issue.

An overseas application for registration with the NMBI is active for a six month period on receipt of a request for an application pack. An applicant has this specified period of time in which to ensure all required documents are received by the NMBI in order to consider their application. I understand from the NMBI that it is difficult to determine an exact processing timeframe for overseas applications as it will vary depending on how quickly required documents are received from the applicant. The NMBI has indicated that upon receipt of all the required documents the following timelines apply:

15 working day period for the NMBI Registration Department to review/assess an EU/Non-EU File

If the application requires an educational assessment the file will be assessed within a 10 working day timeframe.

The decisions reached may be to recommend registration, to undergo an adaptation/aptitude test, to refuse the application or to seek further information from the applicant.

I have been advised by the NMBI that a review has taken place of the current processes relating to overseas applications. Recommendations from the process review involve full revision of the current application form. In addition, a dedicated EU registration team has been established to focus on improving all aspects of the registration process.

It is important to note, however, that many applications received in NMBI are incomplete and a decision on the application cannot be reached until all required documentation is received.

It may be of interest to the Deputy to note that during 2016 a total of 3,788 individuals were registered with the NMBI. During 2016 the NMBI issued a total of 4,323 application packs to individuals who trained outside Ireland compared to 2,534 application packs issued during 2015. Any undue delays in registration of nurses are obviously of concern to both the NMBI and myself as Minister for Health. The NMBI is very much aware of the importance of providing an efficient, high quality registration service. The Board will continue to make improvements in this regard, however this will in part depend on the applicants providing all the required documentation.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

606. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite an appointment for an angiogram for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11863/17]

**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.

### **Medical Card Applications**

607. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if he will reverse a decision to cancel a medical card application in respect of a person (details supplied); if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the documentation submitted by the person's employers was not seen by them; and if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that there are complications in this case. [11868/17]

**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 members.

### **Dental Services Provision**

608. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Health the details of the HSE's plans

for the transfer of dental patients to Dundalk, Navan and Ardee for treatment due to the lack of dental services for primary school children in Drogheda and south County Louth (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11870/17]

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

### **Medical Card Administration**

609. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Health if he will review the application and appeal forms for medical cards for elderly persons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11880/17]

**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.

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.

### **Cross-Border Health Services Provision**

610. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding eye cataract surgery for a person (details supplied) in Dublin; if this person would be entitled to the cross border health care scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11883/17]

**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 Directive on Patients' Rights in Cross Border Healthcare provides rules for the reimbursements to patients of the cost of receiving treatment abroad, where the patient would be entitled to such treatment in their home Member State, and supplements the rights that patients already have at EU level. Public patients may access the healthcare they require in either the public or private healthcare system of another Member State under the Cross-Border Directive (CBD). Access to healthcare abroad is based on patients following public patient pathways, i.e. they must demonstrate they have followed the equivalent public patient pathways that a patient would follow if accessing public healthcare in Ireland. It is important to note that reimbursement is confined to the costs of the care itself and that the rates of reimbursement cannot exceed the cost of provision of the care if it were provided in the Irish public health service. Referral for care under the CBD may be made by a GP, a hospital consultant and certain other HSE clinicians. The CBD excludes certain health services, e.g. services of public health, long-term care, organ transplantation, etc. All persons on public waiting lists, other than for such exempt health services, are eligible for the Scheme. Full details are available on the HSE website.

## **Hospitals Expenditure**

611. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the costs incurred to construct the purpose built maternity theatre at Letterkenny University Hospital's obstetrics unit; the number of occasions, per year, since its completion that the theatre has been used to perform surgeries, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11909/17]

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

## **Hospitals Data**

612. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the number of births which have taken place at the maternity unit at Letterkenny University Hospital for each of the years 2011 to date, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11910/17]

**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.

## **Medicinal Products Reimbursement**

613. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health if will ensure access to cysteamine bitartrate, otherwise known as procysbi, to all patients here; the stage at which the process is at and the efforts he and HSE is making to be proactive in order to expedite the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11911/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines in the community drugs schemes, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013.

In reaching its decision, the HSE examines all the evidence which may be relevant, in its view, for the decision (including information submitted by the company) and will take into account such expert opinions and recommendations which it may have sought at its sole discretion, for example, from the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE).

In considering an application, the HSE will also have regard to Part 1 and Part 3 of Schedule 3 of the 2013 Act. Part 3 requires the HSE to have regard to the following criteria.

1. The health needs of the public.
2. The cost-effectiveness of meeting health needs by supplying the item concerned rather than providing other health services.
3. The availability and suitability of items for supply or reimbursement.
4. The proposed costs, benefits and risks of the item or listed item relative to therapeutically similar items or listed items provided in other health service settings and the level of certainty in relation to the evidence of those costs, benefits and risks.
5. The potential or actual budget impact of the item or listed item.
6. The clinical need for the item or listed item.

7. The appropriate level of clinical supervision required in relation to the item to ensure patient safety.

8. The efficacy (performance in trial), effectiveness (performance in real situations) and added therapeutic benefit against existing standards of treatment (how much better it treats a condition than existing therapies).

9. The resources available to the HSE.

I am informed that the manufacturer has submitted an application to the HSE for reimbursement of Procysbi. As far back as December 2015, the manufacturer was requested to submit a dossier for a health technology assessment to assist in decision making. That dossier is awaited.

The NCPE recommendation in relation to the need for a full health technology assessment is published online at: <http://www.ncpe.ie/drugs/cysteamine-bitartrate-procysbi/>.

The NCPE reviewed the medicine again in January 2017, following some revisions by the manufacturer, and recommended that a HTA dossier would still be required to assist decision making.

The HSE informed the manufacturer of this ongoing requirement again on 31 January 2017.

### **Disability Support Services Provision**

614. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE will make funds available for a nursing package for a school (details supplied), in view of the admission of two children with life limiting conditions this academic year 2016/2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11913/17]

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

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

### **Long-Term Illness Scheme Coverage**

615. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if the new medication freestyle libre system from a company (details supplied) has been approved for persons with type 1 diabetes; if this will be included on the long-term illness scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11919/17]

**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

### **Ambulance Service Data**

616. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the number of phone calls to the ambulance service that were made from the Killarney district, in 2014, 2015 and 2016, by month, in tabular form; the number of these calls which were responded to by ambulances from outside Killarney; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11921/17]

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

### **Home Help Service Expenditure**

617. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the amount of funding provided in 2016 for the provision of home help hours in County Kildare; the amount of funding allocated to County Kildare in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11936/17]

**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.

### **National Treatment Purchase Fund**

618. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health if additional funding will be made available to County Kildare for 2017 in view of the fact that funding is being exhausted in catering for existing clients while new clients are being left on long waiting lists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11937/17]

**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 2,000 daycases will be managed through this process and outsourcing of treatment will commence from March.

In addition to this Daycase Initiative, the NTPF has been working closely with my Department and the HSE to agree an approach to the remaining 2017 allocation. The HSE is currently developing a 2017 Waiting List Action Plans for Inpatient/Daycase procedures and Outpatient appointments to ensure that no patient is waiting more than 15 months by the end of October. The Inpatient/Day case Plan is being developed in conjunction with the NTPF's approach to the utilisation of its remaining €10m funding for patient treatment in 2017.

The HSE has now submitted Draft Waiting List Action Plans for Inpatient Daycases and Scoliosis. My Department is currently reviewing and evaluating these plans and engagement is ongoing with the HSE and the NTPF towards the finalisation of the former. The Outpatients Plan has been significantly progressed and I expect that it will be submitted by mid-March.

### **Nursing Homes Support Scheme Data**

619. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** 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. [11938/17]

**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.

### **Organ Donation**

620. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding and timeframe for the proposed organ transplant opt-out scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11939/17]

**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 work will be progressed as quickly as possible in the context of competing legislative priorities.

### **Hospital Waiting Lists**

621. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) can expect to have a cataract operation at Cork University Hospital. [11956/17]

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

### **Treatment Abroad Scheme**

622. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health if he will sanction funding through the treatment abroad scheme for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11958/17]

**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 HSE operates the Treatment Abroad Scheme (TAS) for persons entitled to treatment in another EU/EEA Member State or Switzerland under EU Regulation (EC) No. 883/2004, as per the procedures set out in EU Regulations (EC) No. 987/2009, and in accordance with Department of Health Guidelines. Patients apply to the HSE TAS seeking access to public healthcare outside the State through model form E112. Subject to the EU Regulations and Guidelines, the TAS provides for the cost of approved treatments in another EU/EEA member state or Switzerland through the issue of form E112 (IE) where the treatment is:

- Among the benefits provided for by Irish legislation,
- Not available in Ireland,
- Not available within the time normally necessary for obtaining it in Ireland, taking account of the patient's current state of health and the probable course of the disease.

Applications to TAS are processed and a determination is given in accordance with the statutory framework prior to a patient travelling to avail of treatment. The statutory framework stipulates the patient must be a public patient and is required to have followed public patient pathways. GPs refer patients to consultants for acute care and it is the treating consultant who, having exhausted all treatment options including tertiary care within the country, refers the patient abroad under the terms of the TAS. The consultant must specify the specific treatment and in making the referral accepts clinical responsibility in relation to the physician and facility abroad where the patient will attend.

Each application is reviewed individually and a decision is made in accordance with the legislation and guidelines and on the basis of a review by clinical experts. Each application is given a formal written decision and where a decision is one of decline, the reason for that decision is clearly outlined and the option of an appeal is afforded. Previous approvals or declines are not used as an influencing factor on subsequent applications. The appeals process is outlined in each decline letter without exception. Where on appeal a decline decision is upheld, the appeal decision letter advises that the applicant can make a further appeal to the Office of the Ombudsman.

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

### **Disability Support Services**

623. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding a nursing package; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11967/17]

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

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

### **Hospitals Funding**

624. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the provision of funding to a hospital (details supplied) in County Cork. [11974/17]

**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.

### **HSE Reports**

625. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Health the information the HSE has in respect of a foster care home (details supplied); if any follow-up interviews were conducted; if there are any matters of concern outstanding; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[11975/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The reports in question relate to an allegation of abuse concerning a person with an intellectual disability who resided in a foster home in the South East for a period of 20 years from 1989 to 2009. Two reviews were commissioned by the HSE into the case. The HSE procured the services of Conal Devine to investigate the case and the services of Resilience Ireland to conduct a tracing and looking-back exercise in relation to all clients who had contact with the foster family concerned. Both reports were published in a redacted format by the HSE on the 28th February last. As part of the inquiry process, the assessed needs of all those affected have been reviewed and will continue to be reviewed on an ongoing basis.

Following consideration of the seriousness of the matters raised and public interest in the outcome of the reviews, the Government decided to establish a Commission of Investigation to investigate these matters further.

The HSE has also put in place a number of changes to take account of the service and management deficiencies identified. This includes the publication, in December 2014, of its national policy: *Safeguarding Vulnerable Persons at Risk of Abuse – National Policy and Procedures*. The implementation of the National Policy on Safeguarding Vulnerable People and the system-wide change programme across social care services is led by a National Task Force which is focused on ensuring quality and safety of all services through empowering and safeguarding vulnerable people.

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

### **Medical Card Eligibility**

626. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) has been refused a discretionary medical card despite the fact that they have provided extensive medical documentation to the primary care reimbursement service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11982/17]

**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 Appointments Status**

627. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health if he will review the medical case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11993/17]

**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.

### **Vaccination Programme**

628. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health his views on Gardasil; if treatment plans have been worked out for the cohort of girls affected by adverse reactions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12000/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The immunisation programme in Ireland is based on the advice of the National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC). NIAC is a committee of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland comprising of experts in a number of specialties including infectious diseases, paediatrics and public health. The committee's recommendations are informed by public health advice and international best practice. The Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) and the European Medicines Agency (EMA) in Europe continually monitor adverse events to vaccination. All relevant and appropriate information is taken into account when deciding to make changes to the State's immunisation programmes.

Each year in Ireland around 300 women are diagnosed with cervical cancer. The HPV vaccine protects against two high risk types of HPV (16 & 18) that cause 73% of all cervical cancers. Vaccinated women and girls will still be at risk from other high risk types of HPV that can cause cervical cancer and will therefore need to continue to have regular cervical smear tests. NIAC recommended that the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine be given to all girls aged 12-13 in 2009 and in September 2010 the HPV vaccination programme was introduced for all girls in first year of second level schools.

Gardasil is the HPV vaccine used in Ireland in the context of the HSE schools immunisation programme. In Ireland more than 660,000 doses of Gardasil have been administered and almost 250,000 girls have been vaccinated against HPV. Over 205 million doses of the HPV vaccine Gardasil have been distributed worldwide, either as part of national immunisation programmes or by private doctors. Gardasil is currently used in over 25 European countries, the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

I am aware of claims of an association between HPV vaccination and a number of conditions experienced by a group of young women. An illness that occurs around the time a vaccine is given and is already known to be common in adolescence does not imply the vaccine caused the problem. It appears that some girls first suffered symptoms around the time they received the HPV vaccine, and understandably some parents have connected the vaccine to their daughter's condition. It is important to reassure people that anyone who is suffering ill health is eligible to seek medical attention, and to access appropriate health and social care services, irrespective of the cause of their symptoms. The individual nature of the needs of some children may require access to specialist services and the HSE are currently working to put in place a clinical care pathway appropriate to the medical needs of this group. As there is no scientific evidence that the vaccine causes long term illnesses, the HPV vaccine cannot be held responsible for these

illnesses.

The focus for the HPV programme in 2017 is to counter misinformation in relation to the safety of the HPV vaccine, and to increase the uptake rate in girls as part of the schools immunisation programme. The benefits of HPV vaccines outweigh the known side effects. The safety of these vaccines, as with all medicines, will continue to be carefully monitored and will take into account any future new evidence of side effects that becomes available. I encourage the parents of all eligible girls to ensure that their daughters receive this important cancer-preventing vaccine.

### **Dental Services**

629. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the number of claims under the dental treatment service scheme in each of the years 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12014/17]

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

### **Chronic Disease Management Programme**

630. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the intense struggle endured by many persons suffering from chronic Lyme disease; his plans to adequately support the affected persons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12021/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Lyme disease (also known as Lyme borreliosis or LB) is an infection caused by a spiral-shaped bacterium called *Borrelia burgdorferi* that is transmitted to humans by bites from ticks infected with the bacteria. The infection is generally mild affecting only the skin, but can occasionally be more severe. Lyme disease is the commonest cause of tick-borne infection in Europe.

Lyme borreliosis can be asymptomatic or have a range of clinical presentations. Current best advice is that diagnosis should be made only after careful examination of the patient's clinical history, physical findings, laboratory evidence and exposure risk evaluation. Exposure to ticks prior to disease manifestations is necessary for the diagnosis of Lyme borreliosis. Since an awareness or recollection of a tick-bite is not always present, however, this should not exclude the diagnosis of Lyme borreliosis. Later stages require the use of antibody detection tests (or advanced DNA detection techniques). Testing for Lyme Disease is undertaken in most of the larger hospitals in Ireland. In undertaking Lyme testing, it is essential that the results are interpreted in the light of the clinical condition of the patient. If the result of this initial screen is equivocal, the patient's samples are referred to the U.K.'s Public Health England Porton Down facility which uses a two-tier system recommended by American and European authorities. This involves a screening serological test followed by a confirmatory serological test.

Lyme disease can be very successfully treated using common antibiotics. These antibiotics are effective at clearing the rash and helping to prevent the development of complications. Antibiotics are generally given for up to three weeks. If complications develop, intravenous antibiotics may be considered. In Ireland, treatment by most clinicians is based on that laid out in evidence-based guidelines for the management of patients with Lyme disease, human granulocytic anaplasmosis (formerly known as human granulocytic ehrlichiosis), and babesio-

sis published by the Infectious Diseases Society of America (IDSA) in 2006.

This pharmacological regime can be summarised thus:

- Doxycycline, amoxicillin or cefuroxime for the treatment of adults with early localized or early disseminated Lyme disease associated with erythema migrans, in the absence of specific neurologic manifestations (ceftriaxone in early Lyme disease for adults with acute neurologic disease manifested by meningitis or radiculopathy);

- Doxycycline, amoxicillin, or cefuroxime for adults with Lyme arthritis but without clinical evidence of neurologic disease;

- For late neurological disease in adults - intravenous ceftriaxone, cefotaxime or Penicillin G.

Since 2013, the HPSC has held an annual ‘Lyme Awareness Week’ at the beginning of the tick biting season, the purpose of which is to draw attention - particularly in the media - to Lyme disease and the ticks that can spread this disease. Lyme cases tend to appear in Ireland with greater frequency after April, hence the choice of this time of year for Lyme Awareness Week. Both the Health Protection Surveillance Centre and Tick Talk Ireland provide guidance on protection against contracting Lyme borelliosis. The best protection is to prevent tick bites, when walking in grassy, bushy or woodland areas, particularly between May and October. Further advice can be obtained from the HPSC website ([www.hpsc.ie](http://www.hpsc.ie)) and the HPSC produced a leaflet on “*Protecting Yourself Against Tick Bites and Lyme Disease*” which is available for the public to download.

My colleague, Minister of State Corcoran Kennedy, who has responsibility for health protection, met with representatives from Tick Talk last summer, and listened to their experiences and the impact of this condition. Their stories showed the need for additional awareness of Lyme disease, both by the public and the health services.

A Lyme Borreliosis Sub-Committee of the Scientific Advisory Committee of the HPSC has been established to look at methods of raising awareness especially in those areas (including recreation areas) where Lyme-carrying ticks can be most expected to be found. The aim of this Sub-Committee is to develop strategies to undertake primary prevention in order to minimise the harm caused by Lyme Borreliosis in Ireland. In addition to staff from the HPSC, the membership of the Sub-Committee includes specialists in Public Health Medicine, Consultants in Infectious Diseases, Clinical Microbiology, Occupational Health an Entomologist from the Parks and Wildlife Service, a representative from the Local Government Management Agency, an Environmental Health Officer, and member of Tick Talk has been invited to be the patient representative on the Sub-Committee. The initial involves a survey of laboratory methods for the diagnosis of Lyme borreliosis in Ireland, the development of Lyme borreliosis guidance for general practitioners, the publication of medical media articles to highlight diagnostics and laboratory methods relating to Lyme borreliosis available in Ireland for general practitioners, and ongoing work in drawing together the Final Report of the Sub-Committee.

## Disease Management

631. **Deputy Louise O’Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the difficulties encountered by persons living with Ménière’s disease; if his attention has been further drawn to the growing evidence of the role that upper cervical chiropractic treatment can play in mitigating the vertigo and other debilitating symptoms endured by the affected persons; and if he will ensure that supports will be provided for the affected persons to avail of this treat-

ment. [12022/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy):** Ménière's disease is an inner ear disorder with symptoms of vertigo, tinnitus and hearing loss. The cause may be unclear and there are a variety of treatments to reduce symptoms. These include medications, diet, physical therapy, counselling and sometimes surgery. Such treatments are available in the primary care or hospital settings and the issue of the most appropriate treatment is a clinical matter.

### **Vaccination Programme**

632. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health his plans to introduce a vaccination programme for children born before 1 October 2016 to receive meningitis B and rotavirus immunisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12137/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The HSE Service Plan included additional funding of €2.5 million for the expansion of the Primary Childhood Immunisation Schedule in 2016. Two changes were made to the Primary Childhood Immunisation Schedule with the introduction of Men B and Rotavirus for all babies born on or after 1 October, 2016. As the first doses of these vaccines are administered to children when they reach two months, the changes to the immunisation schedule took effect from 1 December, 2016. All vaccines administered through the Primary Childhood Immunisation Schedule are provided free of charge. However, there are no plans at this stage to introduce a catch-up programme for older children. Ireland is the second country in Europe to make the vaccine available free of charge as part of its national immunisation programme.

### **Patient Transport**

633. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health the options available to a person (details supplied) who must be transported by ambulance for treatment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12156/17]

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

### **Hospital Staff Recruitment**

634. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 415 of 6 May 2015, if he will provide an update on the appointment of an orthopaedic surgeon, anaesthetist and support staff to maximise utilisation of available theatre sessions in Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin; when the second theatre will be in operation for surgery; the staff levels required to run the two theatres; and if staff levels are in place to run the two theatres. [12158/17]

**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 reply to you directly.

### **Maternity Services Provision**

635. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the reason the maternity theatre at Letterkenny University Hospital has gone unused and uncommissioned since its construction

over a decade ago; the measures required to make the facility operational; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12159/17]

**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 Appointments Delays**

636. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite an appointment for corrective spinal surgery for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12162/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

### **Hospital Waiting Lists**

637. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons who have been on the waiting lists for scoliosis surgery in Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin, for six, 12, 18 and 24 months. [12167/17]

**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.

### **Medicinal Products Regulation**

638. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health his plans for paediatric neurologists here to have access to training and prescribing medicinal cannabis products; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12176/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** In November 2016 I initiated a review of policy on the use of cannabis for medical purposes and asked the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) to provide expert advice on the matter. On 10th February I published the HPRA's report 'Cannabis for Medical Use – A Scientific Review' and announced my decision to establish an access programme for cannabis-based treatments for the following conditions:

- Spasticity associated with multiple sclerosis resistant to all standard therapies and interventions;

- Intractable nausea and vomiting associated with chemotherapy, despite the use of standard anti-emetic regimes;



- Severe, refractory (treatment-resistant) epilepsy that has failed to respond to standard anticonvulsant medications.

My Department is now progressing the establishment of this access programme as a priority. However, it is important to understand that patients accessing cannabis through this programme will need to be recommended for it by their medical consultant.

The next steps being taken to implement this decision are:

- The report has been referred to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Health for consideration;

- Officials from my Department and the HPRa will consult with stakeholders on how the access programme will operate.

- Department of Health officials are examining legislative changes that will be required to underpin the access programme.

Until such time as the necessary legislative amendments have been made to facilitate the implementation of the Cannabis Access Programme, it is within my power to grant a licence for access to cannabis for a named patient once the application is supported by relevant clinicians involved in the patient's care. One such application has been granted. The application process remains open and I have asked my officials to treat any and all applications with the utmost priority.

### **Disabilities Assessments**

639. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Cork will have an assessment of need carried out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12181/17]

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

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

### **Mental Health Services Provision**

640. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the difficulty many parents are having in accessing child and adolescent mental health services for their children even when in severe and urgent circumstances; and his plans to ensure services are in place to avoid further use of adult services for children. [12182/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee):** Improving access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health services, including maximising placements in age-appropriate acute units, are priorities for improvement under the HSE Service Plan 2017.

Additional resources over recent years mean that we now have 67 CAMHS teams, and 3 Paediatric Liason Teams, supported by 66 operational CAMHS beds across the country. A lack of funding for the mental health care programme is not a difficulty at present for the HSE, but there are acknowledged staff recruitment and retention difficulties across the health care system, including CAMHS, that the Executive is addressing. A new Standard Operating Procedures introduced in June 2015 has provided greater clarity and consistency on how this specialist mental health service for children should be delivered nationally. Despite increasing demands overall on CAMHS, irrespective of the source of referrals, individual cases professionally assessed as requiring urgent access to services receive priority.

The HSE Service Plan 2017 provides for further development of the CAMHS service, including better out-of-hours liaison and seven-day response cover, against a background where the population of children is expected to increase by around 8,500 over 2016-17. Around 18,500 children will attend the HSE CAMHS service this year, including around 14,000 referrals. Detailed activity data on access to CAMHS, and also on age-appropriate admissions to care units, is published by the Executive in its monthly Performance Reports available on the HSE website. This shows, for example, 68% of children referred are seen within twelve weeks.

In regard to admission of child and adolescent cases to adult units, there has been significant progress on age appropriate admissions since 2008 when there were 247 such admissions to adult units in that year. This declined to 68 admissions in 2016, despite increasing demands overall. The number of admissions does not necessarily equate to the actual number of children involved, as an individual child may be admitted on more than one occasion in any given year. Performance generally continues to be above the HSE Service Plan target figure of 95%, and indications also are that where a child has been admitted to an adult acute in-patient unit, the length of stay has been kept to a minimum. There has to be some operational flexibility surrounding emergency placements in Adult Units, particularly where very short-term placements occur, and where full account is taken of all relevant factors such as the preferences of all those involved, or geographical factors relating to access or visiting. The HSE closely monitors on a weekly basis all child admissions to adult units, with a view to minimising these.

Work is underway by the HSE to review existing levels of service provision generally, and to examine international models of best practice on the most appropriate models of delivery for use in the Irish context in order to enhance access to mental health care, including CAMHS. My objective, and that of the HSE, is to further improve all aspects of mental health care nationally for those under age 18, including those relating to access and age-appropriate care settings.

### **Industrial Disputes**

641. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Health if his Department will support a settlement with nurses and other health care workers who are due to take industrial action on 7 March 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10625/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I am pleased to confirm that industrial action by support staff grades scheduled for today (7th March) was averted following an agreement reached between SIPTU and the HSE on 24th February, with the support of my Department.

I can also confirm that the INMO Executive Council decided on Saturday 4th March to ballot all members on expanded proposals which emerged following extensive engagement with officials from the HSE, my Department and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform at the Workplace Relations Commission. The industrial action due to commence today has been deferred by the INMO to facilitate the ballot. I respect the process the INMO is now un-

dertaking and I understand that the result of the ballot will be known by the end of this month.

### **Disabilities Assessments**

642. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the delays in assessments for children attending school who have developmental issues and may require specialised support; the efforts being taken by him to clear this backlog; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10128/17]

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

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

### **Home Care Packages Funding**

643. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health the level of funding for home care packages; the additional funding that is required which would help alleviate pressures on hospitals by allowing patients to return home in a timely manner; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11905/17]

**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 Administration**

644. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health his views on a situation whereby a person (details supplied) was subject to a set of circumstances; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11794/17]

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

### **Hospitals Discharges**

645. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the measures he is taking to ensure that beds are not being taken up at weekends by persons who are physically fit to go home on a Friday but due to the lack of consultants on site over the weekend to sign them fit to leave are being kept in hospital beds until Monday morning; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11831/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** In September 2016, the HSE launched the 'Winter Initiative Plan 2016-2017' which provided €40 million of additional funding for winter

preparedness and to assist hospitals to deal with increased demand.

A key element of the Winter Initiative is to support hospitals to improve process in relation to patient flow. This includes supporting hospitals through access to social care and community measures to discharge patients, when deemed clinically appropriate, to return home or to a more appropriate community setting. Since the start of the Winter Initiative delayed discharges have reduced nationally from 638 to 517, freeing up hospitals beds to alleviate ED pressures. In addition under the Initiative, since October: over 4,260 patients have availed of aids and appliances; over 1,050 additional homecare packages and 615 additional transitional care beds have been provided, enabling patients to be discharged from hospital sooner.

The Special Delivery Unit in the HSE works with individual hospitals to drive process improvements and support hospitals in ensuring that effective discharge procedures are put in place. Within this context hospitals are required to ensure that a predicted date of discharge is assigned to every patient and that regular ward rounds are conducted by senior clinical decision-makers, including at weekends as appropriate, to enable discharge of patients fit to go home. Also a number of hospitals have established discharge lounges to support early discharging. Further, the Winter Initiative supported the expansion of Community Intervention Teams, including where possible the provision of a 7 day service to enable discharge home over the weekends.

As part of this oversight role, the HSE works with hospitals to ensure that appropriate senior cover, at management and consultant level, is provided at all times including at weekends and during public holidays.

### **Electronic Cigarettes**

646. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health his Department's position on vaping; if there are any measures to introduce regulation of vaping in public places; if so, the details of these measures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11832/17]

**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 introduction of the workplace smoking ban was based on clear and unequivocal evidence that second hand smoke is harmful to non-smokers. That evidence base does not exist for the aerosol generated from e-cigarettes. However, individual organisations/companies are free to introduce an e-cigarette free policy if they so choose.

My Department will continue to monitor the emerging research on these products, so as to inform decisions around any future additional regulation in this area.

### **HSE Reports**

647. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the reason there has been such a significant delay in the publication of the external review into mental health services in County Roscommon, in view of the fact that the report was commissioned over two years ago and the services are in crisis mode without a clear service plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11833/17]

**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.

### **Cancer Services Funding**

648. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if he will source some level of State funding towards the remuneration of a centre manager and full-time office administrator for a vital cancer support centre (details supplied) in County Galway, in view of the fact that over 140 persons a week use the centre and a range of vital therapies and support is provided on an entirely voluntary basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11836/17]

649. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the reason a vital cancer support centre (details supplied) in County Galway did not receive funding under the National Lottery grant scheme despite the fact that a full-time service is run on an entirely voluntary basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11837/17]

650. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the alternative avenues of funding applicable to a cancer support centre (details supplied) in County Galway, apart from the National Lottery grant scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11838/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 648 to 650, inclusive, together.

The Department of Health no longer operates a National Lottery Fund. However, the HSE operates a National Lottery funded scheme under which it provides grants to health agencies and other organisations. Details of the scheme are available on the HSE website at: <http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/1/schemes/natlotterygrants/>.

### **Legislative Process**

651. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health if he will treat with urgency the outstanding issues preventing the Misuse of Drugs (Amendment) Act, relating to tablets, from being implemented and thus enforced by gardaí. [7646/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne):** The Misuse of Drugs (Amendment) Act 2016 was passed by the Oireachtas on the 27th July 2016. Controlling the substances in the Act was part one of a two-step process and Regulations and various Orders are also required to allow legitimate users (e.g. patients with a prescription, health professionals) to possess the substances.

Drafting of the Misuse of Drugs Regulations and Orders is complex and technical in nature and involved consultation with a number of State Agencies. However, since Autumn 2016 significant resources in the Medicines, Controlled Drugs and Pharmacy Unit within the Department have had to be allocated to drafting of the Misuse of Drugs (Supervised Injecting Facilities) Bill and also dealing with various issues in relation to the use of cannabis for medicinal purposes.

It was also necessary to notify to the European Commission under the Technical Standards Directive. Under this Directive Member States are required to inform the Commission of any new regulations or standards which may create a barrier to the free movement of goods. Since these draft Regulations have the potential to affect trade, in particular because of the introduction of a requirement for import licences, they must be notified to the EU whilst they are in draft

form and before they are adopted in national law. This process has now been completed.

It is therefore expected that various sections of the 2016 Act will be commenced in the coming weeks when the drafting of the various Regulations and Orders is complete.

### **Hospital Waiting Lists**

652. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which he remains satisfied that the various initiatives taken to address overcrowding at accident and emergency departments throughout the country are adequate and sufficient to address the issue now and in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12040/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Recent data from the HSE indicates that in 2016 there was a circa 5% increase in Emergency Department attendances nationally. In addition, early January 2017 saw continued significant pressure on our EDs due to high demand, increased incidence of flu mainly affecting older people, as well as ongoing bed capacity constraints due to staff shortages.

The Emergency Department Taskforce (EDTF) was convened in December 2014 to provide focus and momentum in dealing with the challenges presented by ED overcrowding. The EDTF Implementation Oversight Group has met seven times over the course of 2016 and into 2017, most recently on the 6th January 2017.

As the Deputy may be aware, in September 2016, the HSE launched the ‘Winter Initiative Plan 2016-2017’ which provided €40 million of additional funding for winter preparedness and to assist hospitals to deal with increased demand. In January 2017, in response to significant pressures in our EDs in the early New Year, a series of enhanced measures were added to this Initiative.

So far, the Initiative has delivered 90 newly-opened additional beds. Also, as of 28 February, delayed discharges have reduced nationally to 517, freeing up hospital beds to alleviate ED pressures. In addition under the Initiative, since October: over 4,260 patients have availed of aids and appliances; over 1,050 additional homecare packages and 615 additional transitional care beds have been provided, enabling patients to be discharged from hospital sooner. The work of the EDTF and Implementation of the Winter Initiative is supported by the work of the Special Delivery Unit (SDU) of the HSE on the ground supporting process improvement and the delivery of key targets at sites throughout the country.

A key element of the Winter Initiative has been for the HSE to work with hospitals to develop key improvement actions and Winter Plans at each site aimed at preparing for the expected increased demand during the winter period. This essential work continues and there are indications that some of our larger hospitals have harnessed Winter Initiative measures and improved processes, to decrease the number of patients waiting on trolleys, whilst contending with increased demand. Learning from this Winter Initiative will be used to improve planning for future years and along with my Department, every week, I meet with senior officials from the HSE, including the Director General, to monitor progress on the Winter Initiative and ED Performance.

### **Mental Health Services**

653. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health if his Department has carried or will consider carrying out a review of mental health services and supports for children

and young persons in view of the fact that Ireland has the fourth highest rate of child and adolescent suicide in the European Union; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7036/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee):** In 2015 the Government launched ‘Connecting for Life’, our national strategy to reduce suicide for the period 2015 – 2020. A large part of the Strategy is focused on youth mental health, and sets out a vision where fewer lives are lost through suicide, and where communities and individuals are empowered to improve their mental health and well-being. The National Office for Suicide Prevention (NOSP) oversees the implementation of this strategy. The Strategy assigns specific responsibility to NOSP as a statutory agency to fulfil a number of tasks, including the development and provision of suicide prevention training and education programmes, increasing national awareness about suicide prevention and setting out a national suicide research and prevention programme. In this way there is on-going oversight of the supports that are in place across the country for children and young people.

The Department of Health is currently leading the review of A Vision for Change with a view to the development of a successor policy which will complete the process of modernising mental health services and effectively promoting mental health, for both adults and children. In the first instance, an expert review and analysis of international evidence and best practice in the development of mental health services, including a review of current delivery of services in Ireland, has recently been completed. This expert review will provide evidence to determine the policy direction for a revision of ‘A Vision for Change’. An Oversight Committee will also be established within three months of completion of the expert review to oversee the development of a new policy, informed by the expert review.

In addition, I have convened and Chair the National Taskforce on Youth Mental Health. This group is considering how best to introduce and teach resilience and coping mechanisms to children and young people. The aim of the Taskforce is to provide national leadership on youth mental health and wellbeing in order to enhance how the public, private and voluntary and community sectors work together to improve; emotional literacy in the population; awareness of services and supports; accessibility to services and supports at different times and in different areas; and alignment of services and supports across different providers (public organisations, private organisations, community organisations, voluntary organisations, etc.).

The Taskforce is a small, diverse group of 18 leading national figures that represent a number of different sectors. It is an action-focused group, has met monthly since September 2016 and will work for 12-18 months. It has visited frontline services, and met with service users, parents and staff. As part of my commitment to ensuring that the voices of children and young people are at the core of the work of the Taskforce, a series of consultations with young people has commenced.

### **Medicinal Products**

654. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Health the advice he has received from the Chief Medical Officer, as referred to in Dáil Éireann on 28 February 2017, with regard to compassionate access to cannabis based medicine; if he will publish this advice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12071/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Misuse of Drugs Acts and the Regulations made thereunder, the manufacture, production, preparation, sale, supply, distribution and possession of cannabis is currently unlawful except under licence.

Following the recent publication of the Health Products Regulatory Authority’s report *Can-*

*nabis for Medical Use – A Scientific Review* a process is currently underway to establish an access programme for cannabis-based treatments in Ireland.

For the period during which this access programme is being established, it remains open to me as the Minister for Health to provide a licence for access to cannabis for medical purposes in individual cases. The granting of such a licence must, however, be premised on an appropriate application being submitted to the Department of Health by a Consultant who is responsible for the management of the patient and who makes the clinical decision to prescribe the treatment and monitor its effects over time.

I have been advised that the granting of an individual licence for the use of cannabis for medical purposes by the Department of Health sets aside the usual regulatory processes which are in place to protect the public. These processes are in place in order to ensure that only those medications which have been found to be both effective and safe are made available to the public. Therefore, it is crucial that the granting of any such licence takes due care and consideration of the potential unintended consequences associated with the prescription of cannabis for medical purposes, and that its use is endorsed by a Consultant who is familiar with and responsible for the care of the individual for whom the licence application is being made.

As I noted in the Dáil on the 31 January, the appropriateness of any particular treatment is a matter between the patient and their doctor. I, as Minister for Health, can have no role in the patient-doctor relationship and any involvement or interference in that regard by myself or my Department would be wholly inappropriate.

The professional role of doctors and pharmacists is integral to the safe and effective use of all drugs which are prescribed. In establishing an access programme for medical cannabis, it is therefore critical that the expert views of these professionals, through their professional bodies, are considered. Efforts are underway to ensure that, prior to its establishment, the planned access programme reflects this expert input in order to assure clarity of the roles and responsibilities of doctors and pharmacists in prescribing and dispensing cannabis for medical purposes in the interests of safe and effective practice.

### **Mental Health Services Provision**

**655. Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health his views on whether the deadline regarding action 1.15 of Rebuilding Ireland, which commits to providing mental health services to those in homeless services by Q4 2016, has been attained; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8950/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne):** In line with Action 1.15 of Rebuilding Ireland, €2m in funding was made available in 2016 from the mental health budget for enhanced care and case management programmes to link homeless people with complex needs within the Dublin region into mental health and addiction services. This allocation will continue in 2017.

In addition, the HSE Service Plan 2017 has earmarked a further €1.5m to expand services introduced in 2016 and to provide additional health care supports to improve the ability of those in homeless services to sustain a normal tenancy, in line with the Housing First approach. These services will be phased in during 2017 resulting in a full year cost of €4m, but actual expenditure of €1.5m.

It is envisaged that the total package of services and supports for this vulnerable group will result in expenditure of €6m in 2018, thus fulfilling the commitment in Action 1.15.



### **Hospital Waiting Lists**

656. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Health the progress of the commitments he made in respect of reducing surgery waiting times for children suffering from scoliosis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12066/17]

657. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Health if he has received an action plan on scoliosis from the HSE. [12106/17]

658. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Health if he has received an action plan on scoliosis from the HSE. [12107/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 656 to 658, inclusive, together.

A draft Waiting List Action Plan for Scoliosis has been submitted by the HSE to my Department. The draft action plan for Scoliosis includes both measures to increase capacity for scoliosis treatments in the children's hospitals and proposals for the outsourcing of procedures. Officials are currently reviewing and evaluating the plan and engagement is ongoing with the HSE and the NTPF towards its finalisation. I expect to make known the details of the HSE's Waiting List Action Plan including the Action Plan for Scoliosis in the coming weeks.

In addition to the action plan, efforts have been made to improve access to scoliosis services. Our Lady's Children's Hospital Crumlin has undertaken an aggressive recruitment drive to attract new theatre nurses with the necessary paediatric training. As a result, four new nurses will be in place by April, and a further 16 international nurses have been offered posts and have commenced the registration process.

The recruitment of these nurses means that the new theatre will be used to provide the additional capacity for scoliosis procedures in Crumlin from April. This will allow an additional day of procedures to be carried out in the medium term.

In addition I am advised by the hospital that an orthopaedic surgeon post in Crumlin Hospital will be filled by June. This means that from July, the hospital expects that the theatre use will be further increased.

### **Hospital Waiting Lists**

659. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the action that will be taken to reduce waiting times for orthopaedic appointments in Waterford University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12090/17]

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

### **Home Care Packages Data**

660. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the number of intensive home care packages provided for persons with dementia in 2015, 2016 and the number currently in place in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12091/17]

**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**

661. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health the action that will be taken to address the delays in ophthalmology appointments in Cork University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12120/17]

662. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health the action that will be taken to address the delays in ophthalmology appointments in Cork University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12121/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 661 and 662 together.

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

### **Hospital Beds Data**

663. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health his plans to increase the acute bed capacity of Sligo University Hospital. [12087/17]

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

### **Nursing Home Services**

664. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health the procedures in place for transporting private and non-private nursing home residents by ambulance for emergency and non-emergency treatment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12042/17]

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

### **Mental Health Services Provision**

665. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide additional acute psychiatric beds in Roscommon County Hospital, in view of the fact it is operating at maximum capacity; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11835/17]

**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.

### **Mental Health Services Provision**

666. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health when full-time psychiatrist posts will be made available in County Roscommon, in view of the fact there are currently only

locum psychiatrists providing a disjointed service which is impacting negatively on patients and staff; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11834/17]

**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.

### **Food Exports**

667. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the ban on a product (details supplied) in the US state of Wisconsin; his further views on whether this could have wider implications for beef and dairy exports to the US; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11874/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** I am aware of this issue which relates to the implementation of local laws in the state of Wisconsin. Officials in my Department, including our Agricultural Attaché at the Irish Embassy in Washington, have kept in close contact with the company concerned on the matter and I understand that a solution to the problem is now close to finalisation.

Once the technical steps are completed it should see the resumption of the sale of the product concerned again. I do not envisage this issue having wider ramifications for Irish beef and dairy exports to the US.

### **State Bodies**

668. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of an issue (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11996/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The Irish National Stud Company Limited is a commercial State Body. The appointment of a Chief Executive officer is a matter for the Board of the Irish National Stud, subject to the consent of the relevant Ministers. I understand a recruitment competition is currently underway.

The current CEO has announced that he is stepping down from the position. I am aware that he has done an excellent job as CEO of the INS and I want to add my voice to the many tributes that are being paid to him. I understand that the INS Board wishes to extend the current CEO's contract for a limited period to facilitate a smooth transition to a new CEO and I am open to considering this taking into account with Government policy and guidelines.

### **Bord na gCon**

669. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the details of the financial arrangement with a State agency (details supplied) in the interests of transparency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11196/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Bord na gCon is a commercial State body, established under the Greyhound Industry Act, 1958, chiefly to control greyhound racing and to improve and develop the greyhound industry.

Matters relating to the operation of a particular stadium are operational matters for that or-

ganisation. Bord na gCon has informed me that the agreement between Bord na gCon and SIS involving Mullingar Greyhound Stadium is considered commercially sensitive.

I understand that in order to support the race schedule in Mullingar, Bord na gCon provided prize money grant assistance of €342,881.25 in 2016 which accounted for 1083 races over 107 meetings.

### **GLAS Applications**

670. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a GLAS 3 application by a person (details supplied); when the person will receive confirmation of acceptance into the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11271/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** An application to the third Tranche of GLAS (GLAS 3) for the person named was received in my Department on the 14 December 2016. The application is one of almost 14,000 applications submitted as part of this third Tranche of the GLAS scheme.

During the pre-approval validation checking process an issue was identified in relation to the documentation submitted for the Rare Breed action. Department officials are examining this issue with a view to finalising the pre approval validation process as soon as possible. The person named will be notified in writing of the outcome of their GLAS 3 application.

### **GLAS Payments**

671. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason for the delay in payment of GLAS 2 for a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary; when payment will issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11291/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The person named was approved into GLAS 2 with a contract commencement date of 1 January 2016.

During the 2016 prepayment checking process an issue presented on the computerised crosscheck of Department databases. Department officials are actively working to resolve this issue with a view to further processing the application for the 2016 payment as soon as possible.

### **Farm Retirement Scheme**

672. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to reintroduce the farm retirement scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11301/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The Farmers' Early Retirement Scheme was suspended in 2008. It was reopened briefly in September 2009, with limited additional funding, to accommodate farmers who had applications completed or close to completion at the time of suspension. There are no plans to re-open this scheme or introduce another similar scheme at this time.

In terms of encouraging generational change, my Department's focus under the 2014 -2020 Rural Development Programme (RDP) is for an enhanced capital investment scheme for young

trained farmers. This new Scheme provides grant aid at a rate of 60% of the cost of the investment, compared to the standard grant rate of 40%, and is an important support and encouragement to young farmers starting in agriculture for the first time. These incentives under the RDP are designed to complement the other incentives under Pillar I of the Common Agricultural Policy, namely the Young Farmer Scheme and the National Reserve. Separately, the Government has also introduced a range of taxation measures aimed at young farmers. These measures are designed to assist with farm succession and increase land mobility.

### **Agriculture Scheme Appeals**

673. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when an appeal will be held for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11309/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The person named submitted an application under the 2015 National Reserve 'Old Young Farmer' category to my Department. This application was not successful as the person named was deemed to have commenced his agricultural activity prior to the eligible period of 1 January 2008 to 31st December 2009 as required under the 'Old Young Farmer' category of the 2015 National Reserve. The person named was notified of this decision in writing and offered the opportunity to submit an appeal of this decision.

The person named subsequently submitted an appeal. This appeal was considered on the basis of the information provided and the records held by my Department. The outcome of the appeal was that the original decision was upheld. The person named was notified of this decision in writing on 4th July 2016 and was offered the opportunity to submit a further appeal to the Basic Payment Scheme Appeals Committee.

The person named submitted this further appeal. The Agricultural Appeals Office is currently dealing with National Reserve appeals cases and will be in direct contact with the person named regarding his appeal.

### **GLAS Applications**

674. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason with regard to a GLAS 3 application by a person (details supplied), protection of watercourses was not an option; if adjoining landowners using the river in question qualified for this option; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11317/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The person named was approved for participation into GLAS 3 with a contract commencement date of 1 January 2017.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is the competent authority in defining water courses. The EPA provided spatial datasets to my Department and these datasets were built into the GLAS online system which allowed for watercourses to be identified on the holdings of farmers. Watercourses were presented on this basis on the GLAS online system at the time of preparing GLAS applications.

The GLAS 3 application of the person named was assessed based on the actions submitted to my Department.

## **Laboratory Facilities**

675. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his Department is accepting submissions from the public on the network of regional veterinary laboratories; if so, the date from which the consultation has been open to submissions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11320/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** My Department commissioned a Working Group led by Prof. Alan Reilly to undertake a comprehensive review of the Department's Laboratories. The Group has presented a report to the Department, which makes various recommendations for the strategic development of the laboratories. This includes options for the future development of the Department's Regional Laboratories – with a view to improving disease investigative and surveillance capability but with the overriding imperative of maintaining and enhancing services to farmers.

My Department is currently consulting with all relevant stakeholders. An initial round of internal consultation with staff and their representative bodies concluded last week. Consultative meetings with local representatives of the main farming organisations were held to coincide with meetings with staff at each of the regional laboratories. At national level, the Department has written to each of the main farming organisations, other relevant representative bodies and state agencies (who avail of the services and expertise provided by the Department's Laboratories) - providing each with copy of the Working Group Report, inviting comments and offering to meet to discuss their views. It is hoped to convene these consultative meetings over the next few weeks.

A decision on any of the recommendations will await the outcome of this consultative process. In the case of the Regional Veterinary Laboratories, any decision will also be informed by a cost benefit analysis of the various options that have been proposed for their future development.

## **Agriculture Scheme Payments**

676. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the total CAP payments made to persons during 2016, by county, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11329/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The information requested is not yet available but is currently being compiled. It will be forwarded to the Deputy directly as soon as it is finalised.

## **Agriculture Schemes**

677. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will address matters with regard to the low cost loans facilitated through €150 million in EU finance under the auspices of the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland and being underwritten and administered by a bank (details supplied). [11349/17]

694. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide an update on the €150 million in EU funds being made available as low cost finance to farmers through the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland; the application process and criteria; the number of applications that have been received to date and the value; the

number of applicants that have been approved and the value; the number of applications that have been declined and the value; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11545/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 677 and 694 together.

One of my priorities has been to address the impact of the change in the sterling exchange rate and lower commodity prices in some agriculture sectors, which have caused cash flow difficulties for farmers. Therefore I was pleased to facilitate the “Agriculture Cashflow Support Loan Scheme”, which was developed by my Department in co-operation with the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) and makes €150 million available to farmers throughout Ireland at interest rates of 2.95%. Distributed and administered through AIB, Bank of Ireland and Ulster Bank, the Scheme provides farmers with a low cost, flexible source of working capital and will allow them to pay down more expensive forms of short-term debt, ensuring the ongoing financial sustainability of viable farming enterprises.

The participating banks will report to the SBCI on a regular basis although no returns have been made as yet. Very strong interest has been reported and it is anticipated that official figures will be available shortly.

My Department is contributing €25million in total, including €11 million from the EU’s ‘exceptional adjustment aid for milk and other livestock farmers’ and €14 million in national funding. SBCI uses the €25 million to leverage the fund, i.e. the other €125 million is being provided by the ‘finance providers’ (AIB, Bank of Ireland and Ulster Bank). SBCI are not providing funding but, along with the European Investment Fund’s ‘COSME’ (the EU programme for the Competitiveness of Enterprises and SMEs), is providing the guarantee required to underpin the loan’s flexibility and lower the cost of the loans.

The public money is used primarily for two purposes, an interest rate subsidy and a guarantee. Approximately an equal amount of money goes towards both. The interest rate subsidy is paid to the finance providers and the guarantee amount is retained by the SBCI to be used in the event of defaults. Defaults in the agriculture sector are traditionally low and any unused guarantee funds will be repaid to the Department.

### **Harbours and Piers Funding**

678. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the level of investment in a project (details supplied) from commencement date of the project to 2011, inclusive, by year, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11372/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Greencastle Harbour is owned by Donegal County Council and responsibility for its development, repair and maintenance rests with that Local Authority in the first instance and its parent Department, the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government.

A project to construct a breakwater in Greencastle Harbour commenced in 2007 and was jointly funded by my Department (contributing 75% funding), Donegal County Council (contributing 12.5% funding), and the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (contributing 12.5% funding).

From 2006 to 2011, funding of €6.675m was invested in this project by my Department through the Local Authority element of its Fishery Harbour and Coastal Infrastructure Develop-

ment Programme, see the following table.

Year	Expenditure €m
2006	€0.061m
2007	€1.153m
2008	€3.797m
2009	€1.203m
2010	€0.064m
2011	€0.397m
Total	€6.675m

On the 10th February 2012 my Department officially handed back the Greencastle Harbour Project to Donegal County Council following completion of the works to safeguard the break-water works undertaken.

My Department continues to provide limited funding for the development and repair of Local Authority owned piers, harbours and slipways around our coastline under the annual Fishery Harbour and Coastal Infrastructure Development Programme subject to available Exchequer funding and overall national priorities.

In recent years Local Authority projects under this programme are capped at a total project expenditure of €150,000 to ensure an appropriate geographic spread of funding for works across all the coastal Counties. The total funding available for Local Authority projects under the 2017 programme is €2.5m

I am happy to advise the Deputy that since 2011 a further €0.214m in funds has been made available for developments at Greencastle, and any application submitted by Donegal County Council in respect of Greencastle Harbour under future Local Authority capital programmes, will be given consideration in the context of the criteria set out, available Exchequer funding and overall national priorities.

### **Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Payments**

679. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the payments that are outstanding to a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; the reason for the delay in payments being issued; when he expects that payments will be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11377/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** An application under the 2016 Areas of Natural Constraints Scheme was received from the person named on 27 April 2016.

The Terms and Conditions of the 2016 ANC scheme state that under EU Regulation 21/2004, all flock owners/sheep keepers are obliged to count the sheep in their flock on their holding, record this number in the flock register and thereafter are obliged to return this number to my Department via the annual Sheep/Goat Census return by the closing date of 29 January 2016 and before 16 May 2016 for ANC purposes.

The relevant sheep/goat census in this case was not received in my department until 23 May 2016.



An official from my Department has been in direct contact with the nominated agent for the person named regarding this matter and we are currently awaiting the submission of additional information.

### **Livestock Inspections**

680. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if all valuers that are on his Department's approved list of valuers in respect of the depopulation of part or full herds due to disease are experienced in the cattle trade and in the sale and purchase of animals and up to date with livestock valuations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11378/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Following a competitive tender process, my department issued contracts to 73 valuers from 1 November 2016. Tenders were evaluated on the technical and professional abilities identified by the candidates in their application, and on a demonstration of their expertise in the area of bovine livestock evaluation and assessment. Valuers also undertook training before the start of their contract and are required under the Terms and Conditions of their contract to keep up to date with market prices and trends in livestock breeding. I am satisfied that all these factors combine to ensure that valuers are qualified to carry out their role under the On Farm Market Valuation Scheme.

### **Livestock Inspections**

681. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the average time in having cattle removed from a farm following positive tests that necessitate partial or full depopulation of herds; the timeframe his Department adheres to in having a second valuation carried out when the person refuses to accept the first valuation; if there have been incidents of diseased animals remaining on farms for undue periods due to delays on his Department's part in finalising valuations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11379/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** In 2016 the average number of days for reactors to be removed was 27.9 days which is below the legal requirement of 30 days set down in EU legislation. My Department endeavours to have reactors removed from a holding as quickly as possible and, indeed, it provides a fully State funded reactor removal service to facilitate this. However, there are many factors beyond the control of my Department which may delay the removal of reactors. These include delays on the part of the herdowner in accepting a valuation, the need to comply with EU regulations prohibiting the transport of animals in late stages of pregnancy or having recently calved, the medication of animals shortly before the skin test etc. My Department does not believe that such delays constitute a risk to other animals in the herds because farmers are required by law to segregate reactors from the rest of the herd and to take other biosecurity precautions thereby mitigating the risk of the spread of disease.

### **TAMS Applications**

682. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding a TAMS II application in respect of persons (details supplied). [11410/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The persons named are in a Registered Farm Partnership and they applied for grant-aid under the Young

Farmers Capital Investment Scheme in TAMS II. Approval issued from the local office on 6 December 2016. A further copy of the approval letter has been sent for their information.

### **GLAS Applications**

683. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if an application under a specific scheme has been accepted in respect of a person (details supplied). [11414/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** An application to the third Tranche of GLAS (GLAS 3) for the person named was received in my Department on the 15 December 2016. The application is one of almost 14,000 applications submitted as part of this third Tranche of the GLAS scheme.

During the pre-approval validation checking process an issue was identified in relation to the Low-Input Permanent Pasture action. Department officials are examining this issue with a view to finalising the pre-approval validation process as soon as possible. The person named will be notified in writing of the outcome of their GLAS 3 application.

### **Departmental Expenditure**

684. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the amount his Department spent on public relations consultants and all matters relating to public relations costs in 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11422/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** My Department does not employ External Public Relations firms. Public Relations advice is provided by my Department’s Press Office.

### **TAMS Administration**

685. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 508 of 7 February 2017, the progress that has been made on the upgrade of his Department’s Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Schemes, TAMS, information technology systems to allow the deletion of overclaims; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11441/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The facility for the correction of obvious errors on payment claims submitted to the TAMS II online payment system is currently undergoing final testing.

The work required to deal with over claims and resultant penalties is in progress.

### **Agriculture Industry**

686. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide, based on the latest information available, the annual amount of fertiliser used by farmers in County Donegal; the annual amount of animal feed used by primary producers in County Donegal; the annual amount of seed potatoes grown in county Donegal; and if he

will make a statement on the matter. [11454/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** My Department does not gather or collate information on the usage of either fertiliser or animal feed by primary producers/farmers on a county-by-county basis.

Rather my Department compiles information on the amount of compound animal feed produced on a national basis based on the annual production figures from all business operators involved in the manufacture of animal feed. Similarly, my Department collects data on the quantity of fertilisers sold on a quarterly basis through-out the year from fertiliser manufacturers/blenders.

With regard to seed potatoes, the total area of seed potatoes that was entered for certification in Donegal under the 2016 Seed Potato Certification Scheme was 53.06 hectares.

### **Organic Farming**

687. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 251 of 15 February 2017, his plans to investigate the organic status of the fish produced at those fish farms under investigation by his Department for overstocking. [11503/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** From an organic regulatory perspective, my Department has initiated an investigation into one such case. Pending completion of the investigations by my Department for overstocking in similar cases, the appropriate action will be decided on a case by case basis.

### **Departmental Functions**

688. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 250 of 15 February 2017, the way he can claim that his Department's regulatory function is separate from its industry development function when both functions operate within the fisheries and marine section of his Department. [11504/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Parliamentary question no. 250 of 15 February 2015 asked which division of my department has responsibility for governance of the Marine Institute and the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority.

The answer provided was that the Sea-fisheries Policy and Management Division of the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine has responsibility for oversight of Corporate Governance of the Marine Institute & The Sea Fisheries Protection Authority.

The Marine Institute and the SFPA operate completely in accordance with the legislation under which they were established. My Department equally operates completely within its responsibilities under law. If the Deputy thinks otherwise I will, of course, address any query she may have.

### **Aquaculture Licence Data**

689. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to

his decision not to revoke the aquaculture licence held by a company (details supplied) for its Lough Altan site in view of the serious commercial consequences for the company and in order to provide a proportionate response from his Department, the specific sections of the 1997 Act that allowed these considerations to inform his decision. [11505/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The decision not to revoke the aquaculture licence in the case referred to by the Deputy was taken in accordance with Section 68 of the 1997 Fisheries (Amendment) Act and followed detailed examination of the key issues of the case.

### **Aquaculture Licence Data**

690. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to his decision not to revoke the aquaculture licence held by a company (details supplied) for its Inishforward site in view of the fact his Department cannot provide a definition of a smolt, if all smolt licences issued by his Department are now void. [11506/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Applications for aquaculture licences are assessed under the provisions of the 1997 Fisheries (Amendment) Act which provides for extensive consultation with stakeholders and also a period of general public consultation. Licence decisions in each case are made following detailed advice from my Department's scientific and technical advisers.

An appropriate amendment in the case of Inishfarnard is, as previously advised under consideration by my Department at present.

### **GLAS Payments**

691. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason for the delay in green, low-carbon agriculture scheme, GLAS, payments to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11521/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The person named was approved into GLAS 1 with a contract commencement date of 1 October 2015 and has received full entitlements in respect of the 2015 scheme year.

During the 2016 prepayment checking process an issue presented on the computerised crosscheck of Department databases. Department officials are actively working to resolve this issue with a view to further processing the application for the 2016 payment as soon as possible.

### **GLAS Payments**

692. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a green, low-carbon agriculture scheme, GLAS, payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11526/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The person named was approved into GLAS 1 with a contract commencement date of 1 October 2015 and

has received a first payment instalment in respect of the 2015 scheme year.

During the 2015 balancing prepayment checking process an issue presented on the computerised crosscheck of Department databases. Department officials are actively working to resolve this issue with a view to further processing the application for the 2015 balancing payment as soon as possible.

Following the issue of payment in respect of the 2015 scheme year, the 2016 scheme year payment will be processed.

### Construction Industry

693. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the level of construction inflation that has been experienced by his Department in each of the past six years and to date in 2017 in respect of construction projects and other capital projects; the way in which he monitors construction inflation and the mechanisms he employs to establish this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11529/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine is responsible for the six Fishery Harbour Centres located at Howth, Dunmore East, Castletownbere, Dingle, Ros an Mhíl and Killybegs. This Department is also responsible for North Harbour at Cape Clear Island and for maintaining a range of piers, lights and beacons around the coast in accordance with the 1902 ex-congested Districts Board Piers, Lights and Beacons Act. The Fishery Harbour and Coastal Infrastructure Development Programme which the Department administers on an annual basis provides for works relating to the maintenance and development of the above located harbour infrastructure.

From 2011 to 2016 the Department has invested €52.8m in capital developments on this marine infrastructure. See the following table for details.

YEAR	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Total
EXPENDITURE €m	8.1	4.4	5.7	6.6	15.7	12.3	52.8

Capital works and works related services, are generally commissioned by means of an open competitive tendering process achieving best value for money based on prevailing market rates.

Other construction related services and materials are acquired having first considered what is available under the Office of Government Procurement Framework.

My Department is informed in its' management functions by the relevant bodies who monitor inflationary impacts on construction projects.

Grant aid for capital work on farms usually involves construction of farm buildings. On-farm investment schemes such as Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme (TAMS) are designed so that the construction work is paid for by the applicant and the Department then pays the applicant the appropriate level of aid. The Department operates a system of reference costs for farm construction to deal with construction inflation. Reference costs for various types of building work are set periodically by the Department and these act as a cap on the amount of grant aid payable. Reference costs are published by the Department and are freely available to applicants and builders. They are reviewed periodically.

## Beef Data and Genomics Programme

695. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a reply, as promised in reply to Parliamentary Question No. 226 of 9 February 2017, will issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11558/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The previous parliamentary question from the Deputy had sought costings on the approximate additional annual increase in funding needed for the Beef Data and Genomics Programme if compensation were to be fixed at €200 for the first 10 animals, first 20 animals and first 30 animals in each participating herd (and the balance at the current rate of €80). This data has now been compiled by my Department and is set out in the table.

At current participation rates of 24,500 herds, the additional cost in each of the above scenarios is set out in the following table.

Payment Rate	Additional cost per annum
€200 for first ten animals in each herd with the balance at €80	€23m
€200 for first 20 twenty animals with the balance at €80	€40m
€200 for first thirty animals in the herd with the balance at €80	€49.1m

It must be remembered of course that compensation is only payable on the basis of costs incurred or income foregone. It would therefore not be possible to increase the level of funding without requiring farmers to undertake additional actions which would increase the burden on the farmer, necessitate an amendment to Ireland's Rural Development Programme and require additional national funding to be made available. In addition the above figures only cover existing participating herds and do not cover any new entrants to a revised scheme.

## Agrifood Sector

696. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will immediately implement recommendation 21 and review Food Wise 2025 following the publication of the all party report by the Joint Oireachtas Committee for Agriculture, Food and the Marine on the effect of Brexit on Irish agriculture and fisheries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11559/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Food Wise 2025, the ten year strategy for the agri-food sector published in July 2015 identifies the opportunities and challenges facing the sector and provides an enabling strategy that will allow the sector to grow and prosper. Food Wise includes more than 400 specific recommendations, spread across the cross-cutting themes of sustainability, innovation, human capital, market development and competitiveness; as well as specific sectoral recommendations.

If these recommendations are implemented, the expert committee which drew up the Food Wise 2025 Strategy believed that ambitious growth projections were achievable by 2025; including

- increasing the value of agri-food exports by 85% to €19 billion; and

- the creation of 23,000 additional jobs in the agri-food sector, all along the supply chain from primary production to high value added product development.

With regard to the Oireachtas Committee's recommendation to review the strategy in the light of Brexit, it is important to understand that Food Wise 2025 is a living and evolving strategy. I chair quarterly meetings of the High Level Implementation Committee (HLIC), with high level representatives from all the relevant Departments and State agencies. The committee reviews progress on detailed actions on a quarterly basis, in order to identify and solve problems quickly. Brexit has now been included as a standard item on the agenda of each meeting of the HLIC. It is clear that driving the implementation of the Food Wise recommendations, particularly those related to market development, competitiveness and innovation, will assume even greater importance in the light of the UK decision.

### **Beef Data and Genomics Programme**

697. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the additional actions required by participants if current funding levels were increased over the amount which has been ringfenced for the 2014-2020 rural development programme window under the beef data and genomics programme in order to increase payment rates; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11560/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The BDGP was agreed with the Commission as part of Ireland's RDP (2014-2020) alongside a number of other schemes such as ANCs, GLAS and TAMS, which also benefit suckler farmers. I am very conscious of the positive effect that the programme is having on the Irish suckler herd. It will help to improve productivity, profitability and carbon efficiency in the national herd.

The BDGP was introduced under Article 28 (Agri-Environment Climate measures) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council on support for rural development. Any actions paid under this measure can only be paid, in accordance with the regulation, on agri-environment climate commitments. Furthermore payments may only be paid on the basis of income foregone or costs incurred.

As can be seen from the foregoing it is not simply a matter of saying that farmers would have to complete action X or action Y if the current funding levels for the BDGP were increased over the amount which has been ringfenced for the 2014-2020 RDP window under the BDGP to increase payment rates. Any additional actions which participants would be required to undertake would have to be designed taking into account both their environmental impact the costs incurred or income foregone as a result of carrying out those actions.

In relation to any possible reopening of the scheme, this is currently being considered in the context of an assessment of budgetary priorities, the operation of the RDP and the potential impact upon the scheme itself and other schemes. Even if it were possible to reallocate resources from within the RDP, any increase in the level of payment to scheme participants would require the Department to submit an amendment of the RDP to the Commission, and an evaluation and approval by the relevant Directorates General.

The Department will continue to keep expenditure under the RDP under review on an ongoing basis. As with all such programmes, there are inevitably issues of timing around the scheduling of payments. Savings in one year do not necessarily imply savings over the lifetime of the programme.

The suckler sector is a vital component of Ireland's rural economy and the provision of

support for the suckler sector is critically important. The range of supports as currently configured represents a balance between direct income support for the sector and rural development measures designed to improve its competitiveness and sustainability. I believe that it is entirely appropriate to maintain this balance of developmental and income supports into the future.

### GLAS Data

698. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the total number of persons per county that have enrolled to date in the green, low-carbon agriculture scheme, GLAS 3; if he will provide a breakdown between tier 1, 2 and 3 per county, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11561/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Almost 14,000 applications were submitted to the third tranche of the GLAS scheme (GLAS 3). To date some 12,600 of these applications have been approved into the Scheme and the breakdown these cases requested by the Deputy is set out in the following table. The remaining 1,400 GLAS 3 applications are currently being reviewed by my Department and decisions on these applications will be made shortly.

County	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3	Total
Carlow	61	65	3	129
Cavan	148	361	13	522
Clare	407	294	82	783
Cork	517	309	62	888
Donegal	942	286	95	1,323
Dublin	18	12	2	32
Galway	785	653	39	1,477
Kerry	502	197	31	730
Kildare	43	68	3	114
Kilkenny	85	86	8	179
Laois	107	93	6	206
Leitrim	181	257	63	501
Limerick	164	171	29	364
Longford	53	273	3	329
Louth	39	59	5	103
Mayo	982	493	47	1,522
Meath	77	159	5	241
Monaghan	60	280	14	354
Offaly	153	104	4	261
Roscommon	173	448	19	640
Sligo	232	210	45	487
Tipperary	234	243	22	499
Waterford	64	43	6	113
Westmeath	75	200	16	291
Wexford	162	150	8	320
Wicklow	103	61	4	168
Grand Total	6,367	5,575	634	12,576



### **TAMS Administration**

699. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when the targeted agricultural modernisation scheme, TAMS, IT system will process payments to participants that have incurred a penalty under the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11562/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The facility for the correction of obvious errors on payment claims submitted to the TAMS II online payment system is currently undergoing final testing.

The work required to deal with penalties is in progress.

### **TAMS Eligibility**

700. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to introduce a targeted agricultural modernisation scheme, TAMS, grant for underpasses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11563/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Underpasses are not currently included in the Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme (TAMS II). This investment item will be kept under review.

### **Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme**

701. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to amend the 2014 to 2020 rural development programme in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11564/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Article 32 of EU Regulation 1305/2013 requires all member states to implement a new system for designating eligible areas under the Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) scheme and in line with this an amendment to the RDP will be submitted in 2017.

In order to include a Financial Instrument as a measure in the RDP an Ex-Ante Assessment is compulsory under EU regulation. This assessment is underway and a final report is expected shortly. Once received, it will be considered in detail by my Department and if an investment strategy is agreed upon, a new measure description will be inserted into the RDP by way of an amendment.

Finally, the standard annual amendment will be used to change minor details currently contained in the RDP. These will be identified and developed as the year progresses.

### **TAMS Administration**

702. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the total amount of expenditure incurred to date under the targeted agricultural modernisation scheme, TAMS, 2 scheme since it was launched; the total annual amount of funding originally allocated for each respective year, in tabular form, on an annual basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11565/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The total budget for TAMS II for the period of the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 is €395m.

The budget allocated in 2016 for TAMS measures was €35.8m and the budget allocation in 2017 is €50m. The budgets for the future years of the programme will be finalised as part of the annual budgetary process.

The total amount of expenditure incurred to date is €7.38m.

### **GLAS Administration**

703. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 383 of 23 February 2017, the timescale for the processing of the 1,400 applications that require further investigation under green, low-carbon agriculture scheme, GLAS, 3; his plans to reopen GLAS again for further applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11566/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The necessary checks on the remaining GLAS 3 applications are on-going and I expect further letters of approval to issue by the end of March. I am satisfied that the GLAS Scheme's target participation level of 50,000 farmers will be exceeded when remaining applications are fully processed. There are no plans to reopen the scheme.

### **Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme**

704. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the timeframe to produce maps and for discussions with stakeholders and the European Commission in relation to the areas of natural constraint review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11567/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Under the Rural Development Regulation each Member State must designate areas eligible for payments under the Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) scheme. The ANC scheme replaces the previous Disadvantaged Areas Scheme / Less Favoured Areas Scheme. The designation of eligible areas under these schemes to date has been based on a range of socio-economic factors. From 2018 eligible areas must instead be designated using a set list of bio-physical criteria. In cases where a Member State does not introduce this new system for payment, the old scheme remains in place but payments must phase out on a digressive basis.

Under the new system of designation which as I have said must be introduced in 2018, eligible areas will have to be designated on the basis of biophysical criteria. The criteria set out in the legislation are:

- Low temperature
- Dryness
- Excess soil moisture
- Limited soil drainage
- Unfavourable texture and stoniness

- Shallow rooting depth
- Poor chemical properties
- Steep slope.

My Department has commenced work on this project, and relevant technical experts are currently working on sourcing and analysing the data in relation to the new criteria. Department officials have also been in contact with the Joint Research Centre (JRC) and DG Agri in the EU Commission in relation to technical issues arising. Over the coming months this analysis will identify areas deemed to be facing natural constraints, which will in parallel be subjected to a refinement process. It is envisaged that stakeholders will be consulted as this process develops.

### **Knowledge Transfer Programme**

705. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a review is envisaged in relation to the knowledge transfer group scheme to take account of concerns with regard to veterinary fees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11568/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The Knowledge Transfer Programme is included in Ireland's Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020. The costs associated for the veterinary input into animal health measures featured in the negotiation of the Programme with the EU Commission. Veterinary costs are not eligible under the articles of the Rural Development Regulation on which the Knowledge Transfer Programme is based. However, costings for the farmers' time in completing the animal health measures in conjunction with a veterinary practitioner are included in the payments to farmers.

### **GLAS Payments**

706. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a green, low-carbon agriculture scheme payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11619/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The person named was approved into GLAS 1 with a contract commencement date of 1 January 2016.

During the 2016 prepayment checking process an issue presented on the computerised crosscheck of Department databases. Department officials are actively working to resolve this issue with a view to further processing the application for the 2016 payment as soon as possible.

### **Dairy Equipment Scheme Applications**

707. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 548 of 21 February 2017, if he will address an issue (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11635/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The application in question has been reviewed by the local office and approval has issued as requested for the water heaters required. The change requested has been allowed.

*Questions - Written Answers*  
**Agriculture Scheme Data**

708. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the details of the approximate additional annual increase in funding needed for the sheep welfare scheme to attain compensation at amounts per ewe (details supplied), in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11735/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The details requested by the Deputy are based on the number of approved breeding ewes under the Scheme. These details are not available as yet as the figures from the 2016 Sheep Census returns are still being collated. However, based on the assumption of the figure of some 2.5m breeding ewes (which is the number returned in the 2015 census), the figures requested by the Deputy are outlined in the following tables.

County	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3	Total
Carlow	61	65	3	129
Cavan	148	361	13	522
Clare	407	294	82	783
Cork	517	309	62	888
Donegal	942	286	95	1,323
Dublin	18	12	2	32
Galway	785	653	39	1,477
Kerry	502	197	31	730
Kildare	43	68	3	114
Kilkenny	85	86	8	179
Laois	107	93	6	206
Leitrim	181	257	63	501
Limerick	164	171	29	364
Longford	53	273	3	329
Louth	39	59	5	103
Mayo	982	493	47	1,522
Meath	77	159	5	241
Monaghan	60	280	14	354
Offaly	153	104	4	261
Roscommon	173	448	19	640
Sligo	232	210	45	487
Tipperary	234	243	22	499
Waterford	64	43	6	113
Westmeath	75	200	16	291
Wexford	162	150	8	320
Wicklow	103	61	4	168
Grand Total	6,367	5,575	634	12,576

Rate per Ewe	Total Payable
€10.00	25,000,000.00
€10.50	26,250,000.00
€11.00	27,500,000.00

Rate per Ewe	Total Payable
€11.50	28,750,000.00
€12.00	30,000,000.00
€12.50	31,250,000.00
€13.00	32,500,000.00
€13.50	33,750,000.00
€14.00	35,000,000.00
€14.50	36,250,000.00
€15.00	37,500,000.00
€15.50	38,750,000.00
€16.00	40,000,000.00
€16.50	41,250,000.00
€17.00	42,500,000.00
€17.50	43,750,000.00
€18.00	45,000,000.00
€18.50	46,250,000.00
€19.00	47,500,000.00
€19.50	48,750,000.00
€20.00	50,000,000.00

### **Rural Development Programme Funding**

709. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the total amount of moneys allocated and expended under the pilot waste processing facilities scheme of the Rural Development Programme 2000-2006; the total number of participants; the specific criteria that were down for grant aid; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11736/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The Pilot Waste Processing Facilities Scheme came into operation in June 2006 and provided funding of €4m in order to grant aid the installation of anaerobic digestors on ten Irish farms. Two applicants have been paid a total of €800,000 under the Scheme.

The main criteria were laid down in the Terms and Conditions of the Scheme and included that grant aid would not be approved for investments that increase the level of production on a holding, the minimum amount of investment eligible of €60,000 per project and the facilities that would be considered eligible for grant aid - fluidised bed combustion systems for the processing of livestock manure/slurry/poultry litter/mushroom compost, treatment plants comprising of anaerobic digestion systems, and other systems for the processing of livestock manure which could be of significant environmental benefit and have the potential to act as a demonstration project.

### **Rural Development Programme Funding**

710. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if additional actions would be required by participants if current funding levels were increased over the amount that has been ringfenced over the 2014-2020 Rural Development Programme for the sheep welfare scheme in order to increase payment rates; and if he will make a

statement on the matter. [11737/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The new Sheep Welfare Scheme is part of Ireland's Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 and provides for funding of €25million per annum for eligible sheep farmers to undertake actions which contribute to the welfare of the national flock.

The scheme provides support of €10 per ewe to farmers with breeding ewes flocks. Applicants are required to undertake two actions in each year of the scheme, with actions to be chosen from a menu of actions linked to lowland and hill type flocks.

Under the Rural Development Programme payments across schemes are made in recognition of income foregone and costs incurred in undertaking the agreed actions and the payments are agreed with the EU Commission on the basis of costings on this basis. Thus, any changes to payment levels would be linked to the actions required under the scheme.

### **Deer Culls**

711. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his attention has been drawn to the fact that there has been considerable controversy and concern by deer hunters in County Wicklow, an organisation (detail supplied) and deer management experts over misleading claims that a deer cull of 50,000 or any increase in the existing cull is required in County Wicklow; his views on the recommendation of his advisory group, the Irish Deer Management Forum, and that such claims of deer culls are contrary to conservation of wild deer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11812/17]

716. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his attention has been drawn to the fact that his advisory group, the Irish Deer Management Forum, stated on 30 January 2017, there is presently no conclusive evidence of a link between the strain of bovine tuberculosis in cattle and the strain in the wild deer herd and that the testing methodology used in County Wicklow for testing tuberculosis levels in wild deer was far more detailed than that used for livestock so levels cannot be compared directly; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11847/17]

729. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his attention has been drawn to concerns raised regarding decisions relating to the conservation and management of wild deer in County Wicklow and beyond (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11966/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 711, 716 and 729 together.

Responsibility for and the management of wild deer on public lands and the issuing of hunting licences to hunters and others lies with my colleague, the Minister for the Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs under the Wildlife Acts.

With regard to the need for a reduction in the density of deer in the Wicklow area, the position is that the Irish Deer Management Forum, which was established for the purpose of implementation of short and long-term deer management objectives, has recommended that, in the interest of deer welfare, a programme to reduce deer density should be designed and undertaken in the Calary Area in Wicklow within prescribed seasons and measures. On foot of this recommendation and in conjunction with the National Parks and Wildlife Service of the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, my Department is currently

co-funding a limited density reduction programme in this area. The project is being organised by a Steering Group comprised of representatives of local farmers, the Irish Deer Management Forum (IDMF), the Wicklow Deer Management Partnership (WDMP), Coillte and both Government Departments.

Whilst there is as yet no conclusive evidence that the strain of TB in cattle and deer in Co. Wicklow are one and the same, my officials are of the view that this is highly likely. To investigate this view, the results of an analysis (known as “strain typing”) of samples known taken from deer infected with TB and culled in the Calary area of Co. Wicklow in 2015 are currently awaited. Previous studies have shown that some strains of TB are common to both species and indeed badgers in the area. While it is the case that deer do not normally spread TB to cattle, my Department accepts that the relatively high density of deer and the high incidence of TB in the deer in the area poses a risk to cattle, as well as, indeed to pasture and forestry.

I do not accept that, as alleged, there was bias in the Calary project. It is the case that the testing methodology used in Co Wicklow for testing TB levels in wild deer was more detailed than that used for cattle generally but a similar methodology was used in the past in the case of badgers with a view to establishing the true incidence of the disease in the species.

I should point out, however, that cattle that react to the bovine TB test on farms are examined in abattoirs as part of the normal post mortem examination procedures carried out on all cattle that are processed in meat factories. I would add that my Department is undertaking a wider study to commence in 2017 of Co. Wicklow as a whole to determine the strains of TB in deer with a view to identifying the direction of transmission between cattle, deer and other wildlife species.

Finally, I should explain that any decision on culling deer in the Wicklow area will have regard to the need to conserve deer in the area as well as the need to minimise the damage done by wild deer to farming in the area.

### **Deer Hunting**

712. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his attention has been drawn to the fact that a survey of deer hunters and those involved in deer management carried out by an organisation (details supplied) shows that the overwhelming majority view the current open hunting season for wild deer as adequate or should be reduced due to declining deer numbers and on 8 December 2016 his advisory group, the Irish Deer Management Forum, also reached a consensus that the current open hunting seasons for wild deer are adequate in all counties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11814/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Under the Wildlife Acts responsibility for and the management of wild deer on public lands and the issuing of hunting licences to hunters and others lies with the Minister for the Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.

### **Horse and Greyhound Fund**

713. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the allocation of public moneys to the horse and greyhound fund will be scrutinised as part of his Department’s 2017 expenditure review, announced on budget day 2016. [10506/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The forthcoming Spending Review will be undertaken on a targeted basis operating in parallel to the Estimates process for 2018. Rather than a comprehensive review of all of the Departments expenditure this review has been designed by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to be a system of rolling selective reviews. All current Departmental expenditure - with the exception of pay rates - will be examined over a three year period. In addition, where appropriate, capital grants will also be included in the Review process.

The allocation to the Horse and Greyhound Racing Fund has not been selected for review in 2017.

### **Deer Hunting**

714. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his attention has been drawn to the fact that reported incidents of the illegal killing of wild deer in Cork North-West are currently at unprecedented levels and the highest nationally (details supplied); if he will hold an urgent meeting with the relevant experts to discuss this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11841/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Responsibility for the management of wild deer on public lands lies with my colleague, the Minister for the Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs under the Wildlife Acts. I am not in a position to comment on speculation that the crimes alluded to have their origins in reports regarding wild deer and TB in cattle.

### **Deer Culls**

715. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his attention has been drawn to the fact that a report (details supplied) supported by his Department confirmed only ten deer were culled by 15 hunters over an area of 69,283 hectares during the period of 6 January 2016 to 31 July 2016 in County Wicklow and during the same period just two minor road traffic accidents involving deer were recorded in the same area, his views on whether the findings of this report suggest recent claims of out of control deer numbers and calls for additional deer culls are misleading; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11845/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Under the Wildlife Acts responsibility for and the management of wild deer on public lands and the issuing of hunting licences to hunters and others lies with the Minister for the Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.

The report referred to, which is an interim report, actually records 12 deer as being shot for the period mentioned. The figures are qualified in the report which states that, to establish an accurate estimate of deer densities, requires substantial resources over a protracted period and that there is substantial anecdotal evidence of deer sightings as well as clear evidence of adverse impacts. It goes on to say that the results rely on levels of observance townland by townland accurately noting of deer events as well as a commitment to keep records and that the data in Appendix L does not cover extensive sightings without dates.

With regard to whether additional culls are necessary, I should point out that the Irish Deer Management Forum, which was established for the purpose of implementation of short and long-term deer management objectives, has recommended that, in the interest of deer welfare,



7 March 2017

a programme to reduce deer density should be designed and undertaken in the Calary Area in Wicklow within prescribed seasons and measures.

*Question No. 716 answered with Question No. 711.*

### **Young Farmers Scheme**

717. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the young farmers scheme is currently open for applications; if not, his plans to reopen the scheme for young farmers in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11855/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The Young Farmers Scheme was introduced in 2015 as a measure to support young farmers under the reformed Common Agricultural Policy. The Young Farmer's Scheme will operate each year from 2015 to 2019.

Details in relation to the application process for the Young Farmer's Scheme 2017 will be available in the coming weeks and will be widely advertised in the farming media and on my Department's website. The closing date for applications under the Scheme will be 15th May 2017.

### **Teagasc Courses**

718. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a green cert course can be completed online; the process involved with applying for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11856/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Teagasc deliver the Green Cert on a full-time, part-time and distance education (online) basis.

I am advised that the distance education option extends over a minimum of 15-18 months and is offered at Teagasc Regional Education Centres and Agricultural Colleges as a distance learning option. To be eligible for the distance education option, an applicant must be the holder of a Level 6 or Higher Major Award in a non-agricultural discipline, have continuous access to a commercial farm in the Republic of Ireland for the duration of the course and have access to all farm details including financial details.

In order to facilitate planning of courses, people who wish to register an interest in completing the distance education option can do so by contacting their local Teagasc office or Agricultural College.

*Question No. 719 withdrawn.*

### **Greyhound Industry**

720. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of appointments he directly makes to the board of Bord na gCon; if in the course of making such appointments he takes appropriate steps to ensure that they are familiar with or part of the greyhound industry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11915/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** From the 1st November 2014 all appointments are made through the Public Appointments Service (PAS). Public Appointments Service advertise the positions based on job descriptions which address the need for specific skills on the board. Candidates are shortlisted by PAS based on an assessment of suitability for the post advertised, with the final decision on appointment made by the relevant Minister.

Recent appointments to the board of Bord na gCon have included individuals with veterinary, legal and financial experience as well as experience in the greyhound sector. My view is that boards are best served by a mix of appropriate skills and expertise.

### **Greyhound Industry**

721. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the impact the closure of Harold's Cross Greyhound Stadium is having across the wider greyhound industry; if he has sought to meet the board of the Irish Greyhound Board, IGB, to clarify the rationale for their decision; the reason a stadium which whilst showing an operating loss of just €53,000 is in fact extremely profitable when the track's tote return of €330,000 is included, was actually closed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11916/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Bord na gCon has statutory responsibility for the development of the greyhound racing industry. In that context, it runs commercial operations in a number of greyhound stadia, including Harold's Cross.

In 2014, against the background of reducing income for the organisation through the recession and a significant debt burden, my department commissioned an independent report into certain matters relating to Bord na gCon, including its financial performance and prospects. That report provided a road map for the sustainable development of the greyhound sector, and in that context recommended a number of asset disposals, including Harold's Cross, in order to reduce the debt burden.

Bord na gCon has informed my Department that having considered the matter, and having regard to the recommendations in the Indecon Report, it has decided to cease racing at Harold's Cross and initiate the sale of the Stadium in order to reduce its debt levels and increase its capacity to provide support and assistance to the industry.

Greyhound racing has been part of the Dublin landscape for many years and Bord na gCon inform me that it is their intention that this continues to be the case and that it is further developed.

Shelbourne Park has been operating 3 nights per week, which is limited use for a property in this location and with the facilities on offer. There is sufficient capacity in Shelbourne Park to accommodate the Harold's Cross racing schedule there. One cannot lose sight of the fact that Shelbourne Park is located only 2.2 miles from the Harold's Cross site.

While the closure of Harold's Cross Stadium is very regrettable, its view is that there is no other option if the burden of debt on the organisation is to be reduced in any meaningful way.

### **Fishing Industry**

722. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason he has failed to consult with representatives of the fishing industry that have serious is-

sues to address in the context of the Sea-Fisheries (Amendment) Bill 2017 which seeks to deal with a decision of the supreme court in relation to the voisinage arrangements; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that under the provisions of the common fisheries policy he is obliged to consult with fishery interests and group representatives on policy matters; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11918/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The Government approved the publication of the Sea-Fisheries (Amendment) Bill to address the issues raised by the Supreme Court judgment of 27 October 2016 and the Bill was published on 13 February 2017. The Bill is available on the Oireachtas website.

The Supreme Court judgment found that fishing by Northern Ireland vessels within the 0 to 6 nautical mile zone of the territorial waters of the State under the Voisinage arrangements is not currently provided for in domestic law. The voisinage arrangements are long-standing reciprocal arrangements which allow fishing boats from Northern Ireland access to fish within the 0 to 6 nautical mile zone of the territorial waters of the State and vice versa.

It is important to note that the Supreme Court upheld the High Court finding that the voisinage arrangements are not invalid but that, as it stands, there is insufficient provision in domestic law for them. The Supreme Court in fact noted that the arrangements were a sensible recognition at official level of practice and tradition, where fishing boats traditionally fished neighbouring waters.

Voisinage arrangements were in place prior to the London Fisheries Convention 1964 and were continued under the terms of the Convention. The arrangements are compliant with the Common Fisheries Policy, as Article 5 of EU Regulation 1380/2013 recognises and permits neighbourhood arrangements (such as the voisinage arrangements) which existed before the Common Fisheries Policy came into force.

The purpose of the Bill is not to change long-standing fishing access arrangements but to take account of the Court's judgment and provide for arrangements that existed prior to 27 October to be reinstated within a legislative framework. Access continues to be accommodated for Irish sea-fishing boats to fish within the Northern Ireland 0 to 6 nautical mile zone. The Bill will fulfill Ireland's obligations and give the voisinage arrangements a proper legal footing.

### **Nitrates Action Programme Implementation**

723. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to extend the transitional arrangements for the nitrates directive, in order that their eventual discontinuation can be negotiated within the scope of the full review on the basis of introducing additional measures to encourage the use of organic fertilisers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11920/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** My Department has been liaising with the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government which is the lead Department with respect to these regulations.

The transitional provisions of 'The Good Agricultural Practice for Protection of Water Regulations 2014' or 'Nitrates Regulations' had provided for phosphorus levels in excess of the maximum fertilisation rate, where pig manure, poultry manure or spent mushroom compost is applied. This provision ended on 31 December 2016 having been introduced over 10 years ago.

In order to assist the pig sector with the ending of the transitional provisions the following

immediate action has been taken –

- My Department has contacted Teagasc who are continuing to promote the use of livestock manures as valuable fertilisers.

- Pig manure imported onto a holding in the closed period in 2017 will be treated as inventory for application in 2018, rather than being considered as applied in the year of importation.

- My Department is contacting all intensive pig farmers in order to request their permission to make their details available to agricultural advisors to highlight to farmers local to them the availability and value of pig manure.

Through the implementation of these activities it is expected that the impact of the ending of the transitional provisions will be minimised. A public consultation period for the Nitrates Regulations has commenced led by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government and assisted by my Department. This is an opportune time for the industry to bring forward suggestions to make best use of organic fertiliser while maintaining water quality standards.

### Agriculture Industry

724. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the waiting times for agricultural appeals; if extra staff have been drafted in to deal with the backlog; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11932/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Appeal files are generally dealt with chronologically, based on date of receipt. The average processing time for appeals in 2016 from the date of receipt of the Department file was 103 days. The target turnaround time for appeals in 2017 is 90 days. The time taken to finalise appeals can vary depending on a number of matters such as the complexity of an appeal case, availability of appellants and of Department officials for appeal oral hearings, and where necessary the need to obtain legal advice before finalising a case. Staff requirements are monitored on an on-going basis to determine if additional resources are required.

### Forestry Management

725. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the percentage of lands in counties Cavan and Monaghan used for forestry or involved in the State forestry and planting programme; the way in which this is monitored; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11940/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The National Forest Inventory (NFI) is the principal means of monitoring national forest cover in Ireland. The NFI records and assesses the extent and nature of Ireland's forests, both public and private, in a timely, accurate and reproducible manner. The NFI is a detailed periodic survey of permanent forest sample plots based on a randomised systematic grid sample design. The exercise is repeated every 5 years with the most recent NFI available for 2012. Work on the next NFI is currently underway.

According to the National Forest Inventory (NFI) 2012 total forest cover in Counties Cavan and Monaghan is 8.7% and 4.3% respectively. The total area of forest for the country according to the NFI is estimated to be 731,650 ha or 10.5% of the total land area of Ireland. Further information is available at [www.agriculture.gov.ie/nfi/](http://www.agriculture.gov.ie/nfi/).

## Agriculture Industry

726. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the average age of those persons working in the farming sector; the initiatives that are being taken on board by his Department in this area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11941/17]

727. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will address the number of farmers leaving farming due to lack of supports by the Government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11942/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 726 and 727 together.

The CSO's 2013 Farm Structures Survey indicated that approximately 37,700 or 27% of Irish farmers are over 65 years and 8,200 (6%) aged under 35. A full age breakdown can be found as follows. These figures compare with Eurostat data for 2013, which showed that 31% of all EU farm holders were over 65 and 6% are aged under 35.

### Age of Farm Holder

2013	Number	% of farmers
< 35	8,200	6%
35 - 44	22,800	16%
45 - 54	34,800	25%
55 - 64	35,600	26%
> 65	37,700	27%
Total	139,100	100%

Source: Farm Structures Survey, 2013. CSO

The CSO's 2010 Census of Agriculture shows that in 2010 there were 139,860 farms in Ireland. This figure is compared to 141,527 farms in 2000, a decrease of 1.2% in ten years. The 2013 Farm Structures Survey also carried out by the CSO puts the number of farms in Ireland at 139,600, a reduction of just 260 from the 2010 figures.

There are a number of tax measures specifically aimed at young farmers, specifically '100% Stock Relief on Income Tax for Certain Young Trained Farmers' and 'Stamp Duty Exemption on Transfers of Land to Young Trained Farmers'. The Agri-taxation Review was published as part of Budget 2015 and set out the main policy objectives for continuing support through agri-taxation measures including:

- Increasing land mobility and the productive use of land
- Assisting succession and the transfer of farms.

Both objectives are especially relevant to young farmers and Budget 2015 included a number of new measures in this regard, as well as measures to enhance and strengthen the existing supports.

In addition I recently announced that the 'Succession Farm Partnership Scheme' has been approved and administrative arrangements are being finalised for its commencement this year. The Scheme provides for a €25,000 tax credit over five years to assist with the transfers of farms within a partnership structure and will promote the earlier inter-generational transfer of family farms. It will encourage and support important conversations within farm families about succession planning.

## **Young Farmers Scheme**

728. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the incentives there are for young farmers who are considering working in their home farm after completing their agricultural courses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11943/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The National Reserve and Young Farmers Scheme were introduced under the reform of Direct Payments in 2015. These schemes were designed to provide financial support to young farmers and new entrants to farming during the crucial early years immediately following the setting up of a farming enterprise.

The National Reserve provides for an allocation of entitlements at the national average level or a top-up on existing entitlements that are below the national average to two mandatory categories of ‘young farmer’ and ‘new entrant to farming’. The Young Farmers Scheme is a separate scheme that provides for an additional payment to young farmers based on activated entitlements. Successful applicants under both schemes are required to meet agricultural educational qualification standard at FETAC Level 6 or equivalent.

The Young Farmer’s Scheme will operate from 2015 to 2019. EU Regulations set down the definition of a ‘young farmer’ for the purposes of eligibility for the National Reserve and the Young Farmers Scheme as follows:

- S/he is participating in the Basic Payment Scheme in the year in which s/he submits an application;
- S/he is no more than 40 years of age at any time during the calendar year in which s/he first submits and application under the Basic Payment Scheme;
- S/he is setting up an agricultural holding for the first time or has set up such a holding during the five years preceding the first submission of the the Basic Payment Scheme application.

In 2015 the National Reserve fund was based on a 3% cut to the Basic Payment Scheme financial ceiling and provided some €24 million. Some 6,260 applicants were allocated entitlements under the 2015 National Reserve. I recently announced that funding of just over €5 million will be made available to fund a National Reserve in 2017. Full details in relation to the application process for the National Reserve and the Young Farmer’s Scheme in 2017 will be available in the coming weeks and will be widely advertised in the farming media and on my Department’s website. The closing date for applications under both schemes will be 15th May 2017.

The Young Farmer Capital Investment Scheme of TAMS II provides grant aid for a range of investments aimed at facilitating the entry of farmers and generational renewal. The TAMS Scheme specifically targets support at young farmers by offering them a greater rate of aid intensity at 60% compared to the standard grant aid rate of 40%. In addition, support is being provided for grant aid for dairy buildings specifically for qualifying young farmers.

There are a number of tax measures specifically aimed at young farmers, specifically ‘100% Stock Relief on Income Tax for Certain Young Trained Farmers’ and ‘Stamp Duty Exemption on Transfers of Land to Young Trained Farmers’. The Agri-taxation Review was published as part of Budget 2015 and set out the main policy objectives for continuing support through agri-taxation measures including:

- Increasing land mobility and the productive use of land

- Assisting succession and the transfer of farms.

Both objectives are especially relevant to young farmers and Budget 2015 included a number of new measures in this regard, as well as measures to enhance and strengthen the existing supports.

In addition I recently announced that the 'Succession Farm Partnership Scheme' has been approved and administrative arrangements are being finalised for its commencement this year. The Scheme provides for a €25,000 tax credit over five years to assist with the transfers of farms within a partnership structure and will promote the earlier inter-generational transfer of family farms. It will encourage and support important conversations within farm families about succession planning.

*Question No. 729 answered with Question No. 711.*

### **Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments**

730. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) will receive their AEOS 2 payment. [12002/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The person named commenced their AEOS 2 contract on 1 September 2011. Payment issued in respect of the 2011-2015 Scheme years.

Under the EU Regulations governing the Scheme and other area-based payment schemes, a comprehensive administrative check, including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System must take place. As 2016 is the final scheme-year of payment for the person named, re-checks on payments made for all scheme years must be completed before final payment can be processed. Payment will be processed as soon as possible following successful completion of these checks.

### **GLAS Payments**

731. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person, (details supplied) will received their GLAS payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12003/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The person named was approved into GLAS 1 with a contract commencement date of 1 October 2015 and has received full entitlements in respect of the 2015 scheme year.

A Department official is in contact with the person named regarding these issues in relation to the Protection of Watercourses from Bovines action with a view to resolving and further processing the application for the 2016 scheme year payment.

### **Young Farmers Scheme**

732. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) will receive a young farmers payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12004/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The person named submitted an application to my Department under the 2016 Young Farmers Scheme. Processing of Young Farmers Scheme applications is being finalised which involves administrative and on farm checks and verification of land details submitted under the Basic Payment Scheme application. These checks are required under EU Regulations and no further action is required from the person named at this time in relation to his application.

When all checks have been completed and processing of applications has been finalised, the Department will correspond directly with the person named to advise him of the outcome of his application.

### **GLAS Payments**

733. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) will receive a 2016 GLAS payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12005/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The person named was approved into GLAS 1 with a contract commencement date of 1 October 2015 and has received full entitlements in respect of the 2015 scheme year.

During the 2016 prepayment checking process an issue was identified in relation to the Protection of Watercourses from Bovines action. A department official has been in contact with the person named regarding this issue and the application is now being further processed for the 2016 scheme year payment.

### **GLAS Applications**

734. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a GLAS application was received on behalf of a person (details supplied); the date this application was received; the date that correspondence issued to this person regarding this application for GLAS; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12006/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** My Department has no record of a GLAS 1, 2 or 3 application being submitted on the GLAS online system for the person named.

### **GLAS Payments**

735. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the current status regarding altering IT inputs for a person (details supplied) that is awaiting GLAS 2 payment; when payment will issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12017/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** An application from the person named under Tranche 1 of GLAS (GLAS 1) was received in my Department on the 13 May 2015.

Following the Departments pre-approval validation checks the application of the person named was unsuccessful and therefore was not selected for admission to the scheme.

My Department has since carried out a comprehensive examination of the application and



found that the person named did not fulfil the scheme requirements in relation to the Low-Input Permanent Pasture action and as a result of this the minimum required score for entry to GLAS 1 was not achieved. The initial assessment of the application deeming it unsuccessful for entry to GLAS 1 is correct. My Department issued a letter dated 7 March 2017 to the person named informing them of this decision. This letter also advised the person named of the option of appealing this decision to the Agriculture Appeals Office within the statutory 3 month deadline.

### **Harbours and Piers Development**

736. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he has received a request from a local authority for funding to develop a pier (details supplied) in County Donegal; if he will give consideration to such a request; if his attention has been drawn to the difficulties experienced by harbour users and all those using the pier to carry out either commercial or recreational marine based activities due to the lack of investment and development of the facility over a number of years; if his attention has been further drawn to the many potential benefits which such a development may yield for the local economy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12161/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The pier at Port Inver is owned by Donegal County Council and responsibility for the maintenance and development of the pier rests with that Local Authority in the first instance and its parent Department, the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government thereafter.

However, under the annual Fishery Harbour & Coastal Infrastructure Development Programme, my Department has in previous years provided limited funding to assist Local Authorities for small scale developments and repair of Local Authority owned harbours, piers and slipways, subject to available Exchequer funding and overall national priorities.

I am happy to inform the Deputy that funding of circa €14k and €4k was provided to Donegal County Council in 2014 and 2015 respectively for works at Port Inver.

This year I have approved funding of €2.5m for the Local Authority element of the 2017 Capital Programme. On the 3rd February 2017, coastal Local Authorities were invited to submit prioritised lists of projects for consideration, the closing date for these submissions was the 17 February. Donegal County Council submitted a proposal with regard to a project at Port Inver, for which further details have been sought.

Decisions on the final suite of projects that will attract funding in 2017 will be made having taken account of the overall funds available, the criteria set out, priorities placed by the Councils and the need for a broad geographical spread. It is expected that these decisions will be notified to the Local Authorities before the end of March.

### **GLAS Payments**

737. **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. [12164/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The person named was approved into GLAS 1 with a contract commencement date of 1 October 2015 and has received a first payment instalment in respect of the 2015 scheme year.

During the 2015 balancing prepayment checking process an issue presented on the computerised crosscheck of Department databases. Department officials are actively working to resolve this issue with a view to further processing the application for the 2015 balancing payment as soon as possible.

Following the issue of payment in respect of the 2015 scheme year, the 2016 scheme year payment will be processed.

### **Air Quality**

738. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the reason there is no air pollution monitoring in County Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11197/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** To protect our environment with regard to air quality, a number of EU Directives set out standards for a wide variety of pollutants. The current standards are contained in the 2008 Clean Air for Europe (CAFE) Directive (Directive 2008/50/EC) and the Fourth Daughter Directive (Directive 2004/107/EC of 15 December 2004). These Directives also include rules on how Member States should monitor, assess and manage ambient air quality. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is tasked with co-ordinating and managing the monitoring programme. Under the Directives, EU Member States must designate “Zones” for the purpose of managing air quality. For Ireland, four zones were defined in the Air Quality Standards Regulations, 2011. The zones in place in Ireland in 2017 are Zone A: the Dublin conurbation, Zone B: the Cork conurbation, Zone C: comprising 23 large towns in Ireland with a population of more than 15,000 and Zone D: the remaining area of Ireland.

Ireland currently has a nationwide network of 31 monitoring stations which measure levels of air pollutants in the four zones. This information is delivered to the public in near real-time at [www.airquality.epa.ie](http://www.airquality.epa.ie). The numbers and locations of the monitoring equipment for each pollutant are determined by the requirements of the Directives for ambient air monitoring in each zone. There is one monitoring station in County Limerick, located on the Shannon Estuary near Askeaton.

Following a comprehensive review of the current status of ambient air quality monitoring in Ireland, the EPA is developing a new national ambient air quality monitoring programme under Section 65 of the EPA Act. My Department will provide the required funding to the Agency for this development which will strengthen the capacity and capability of the monitoring network to provide more comprehensive, localised air quality information linked to public health advice. The development of the expanded national ambient air monitoring network has included a review of the adequacy of the current network for both determining compliance with European and national standards for air quality, and for the provision of information to the public about local air quality. I note that the programme proposes an additional monitoring site in Limerick City, and an indicative monitoring site in Abbeyfeale. I welcome the proposed expansion of the network and look forward to working with the EPA to develop its capacity to meet the future air quality needs of Irish citizens.

### **National Broadband Plan Implementation**

739. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his role in the implementation of the national broadband plan; the number of

homes in each county he expects to have with 30 Mbps broadband speed by 2020; the number of businesses in each county which will be affected by the plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11699/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** The Government considers the NBP to be one of the most significant investments in rural Ireland for decades, and one which will transform society, akin to rural electrification in the last century. The strategy for broadband roll out, the National Broadband Plan (NBP), which is a key priority for my Department, aims to deliver high speed broadband services to every city, town, village and individual premises in Ireland. This is being achieved through a combination of commercial investment by the telecommunications sector and a State Intervention in those areas where commercial investment has not been fully demonstrated.

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

There has been significant progress in relation to broadband roll out 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](http://www.broadband.gov.ie) shows the current extent of the State Intervention area:

- The areas marked BLUE represent those areas where commercial telecommunications providers are either currently delivering or have previously indicated plans to deliver high speed broadband services;

- The areas marked AMBER on the High Speed Broadband Map represent the target areas for the State Intervention, which are the subject of the current procurement process. It is intended that premises within this area will have access to services of at least 30 megabits per second when the procurement process is completed and the network rolled out.

The map provides information on a county by county basis. It also provides an analysis of county coverage with a breakdown of coverage across the townlands in every county in Ireland. 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 roll out services to particular locations.

A formal procurement process is now in train to select a company or companies who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network within the State Intervention Area. The Depart-

ment will also shortly update the High Speed Broadband map and finalise this Intervention Area for bidders, taking into account any industry investments that have not materialised and potential other new investments.

The procurement process is being intensively managed, to ensure an outcome that delivers a future-proofed network that serves homes and businesses across Ireland, for at least 25 years. Intensive dialogue with bidders is continuing and the three bidders have indicated that they are proposing a predominantly fibre-to-the-home solution. This provides for a future proofed solution for the 25 years of the contract and beyond. A fibre-to-the-home solution means that householders and businesses may get speeds not just of 30 Megabits per second but much higher, potentially up to 1000 Megabits per second.

The timeframe for the procurement continues to be dependent on a range of factors including the complexities that may be encountered by the procurement team and bidders, during the procurement process. During the Department's extensive stakeholder consultations in 2015, telecommunications service providers indicated a 3-5 year timeline to 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 at the following link: <http://www.dccae.gov.ie/communications/en-ie/Pages/Publication/Report-of-the-Mobile-Phone-and-Broadband-Taskforce.aspx>.

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

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

These investments should assist in significantly improving the coverage and quality of broadband and mobile voice and data services throughout the country.

### **Metropolitan Area Networks Programme**

740. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the percentage of commercial customers that have availed of the of the metropolitan area networks, MANs, installed in rural areas; the actions to be taken as per action point 240 in the Action Plan for Rural Development (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on

the matter. [11705/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** The State invested in the construction of 88 Metropolitan Area Networks (MANs), covering 94 regional cities. This MANs infrastructure provides a link between national back-haul networks and the “last mile” access networks that deliver telecommunications services to citizens and businesses. These wholesale, open access fibre networks are operated and managed in a commercial manner, on behalf of the State, by a Managed Services Entity (MSE), enet. Currently, over 65 operators use the MANs infrastructure, and there are some 2,500 connections to the MANs. It is estimated that in excess of 600,000 business users and individuals are benefitting from the MANs, including industrial estates, multinationals, SMEs, State entities, educational institutions, together with fixed and mobile customers outside Dublin. It is not possible to provide information relating to the percentage of commercial customers, since data relating to end customers is a matter for each individual service provider.

With reference to the Action Plan for Rural Development, the MSE continues to actively encourage licensed operators to utilise the MANs infrastructure. My Department is currently making arrangements to carry out an independent evaluation of the operations of the MANs, including pricing of the MANs products and services to ensure that they are within market norms. Recommendations are also being sought as to proposals to boost further uptake of the MANs.

### Alternative Energy Projects

741. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the amount it would cost to create feed in tariffs for community and farm based solar, wind and biomass electricity generation. [11184/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** The Energy White Paper ‘Ireland’s Transition to a Low Carbon Energy Future 2015-2030’ sets out a high-level framework for Ireland’s energy transition to a low carbon economy and sets out a number of actions to support this aim. My Department is currently developing a new Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) which will be designed to assist us meeting these RES-E targets. The renewable technologies under consideration were identified following a public consultation engagement in 2015, which received over 800 responses, and includes Solar Photovoltaic (PV), Wind and Biomass for electricity generation. The development of the new renewable electricity support scheme also requires detailed economic analysis on the viability and cost effectiveness of supporting these renewable technologies at various scales, including at the community level. This analysis and assessment is currently underway and a second public consultation will be published in Q2 2017 outlining various scheme design options. Specifically relating to small scale and community led projects, there are commitments made in the Energy White Paper to support community led initiatives and the engagement of citizens in the energy transition. How these community schemes are appropriately structured and funded will be assessed as part of the analysis currently under way to support the development of the new scheme.

Before any new scheme is introduced, it will need to secure Government approval and State aid clearance from the European Commission.

### Postal Codes

742. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action

and Environment the reason the website for the Irish national postcode is hosted in the UK by a company (details supplied); and the reason the site which is national infrastructure is not hosted here by an Irish Internet service provider. [11382/17]

743. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the reason the Eircode business name is registered as being owned by a company (details supplied) rather than the State. [11383/17]

744. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the reason the trademark for Eircode is registered in London and owned by a company (details supplied) rather than the State. [11384/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 742 to 744, inclusive, together.

Capita Business Support Services Ireland, trading as Eircode, was awarded a 10 year contract in December 2013 to develop, implement, maintain and promote the National Postcode System “Eircode”.

Capita with the approval and on behalf of the Minister have developed the Eircode brand name, trademarks and website. The Eircode business name and domain name are registered under Capita Business Support Services Ireland, a company registered in Ireland. The trademark is registered at a European level and is operated by Capita Business Support Services Ireland.

All Intellectual Property (IP) relating to National Postcode System, “Eircode”, including the website, branding and associated trademarks remain in the ownership of the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment.

### **Carbon Budget**

745. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the steps he is taking to ensure that Ireland’s views on the European emissions trading scheme are represented in EU level negotiations on this scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11401/17]

746. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if representatives from his Department are in attendance at the European Environmental Council discussion of the ETS scheme. [11402/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 745 and 746 together.

The Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) is one of the main policies of the European Union to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in a cost-effective manner. Emissions Trading is a “cap and trade” scheme, whereby an EU wide cap or limit is set for participating installations. This cap is reduced over time so that total emissions are reduced. Within this cap, “allowances” for emissions are auctioned or allocated for free. Individual installations must report on their emissions on an annual basis and surrender sufficient allowances to cover their emissions, purchasing additional allowances if necessary. The ETS includes 11,000 installations (98 in Ireland) and accounts for roughly 45% of EU emissions (25% of Irish emissions). The ETS was launched in 2005 and is currently in its third phase, covering the period 2013 to 2020. Negotiations are currently under way regarding the design of the ETS for the post-2020 (Phase IV) period. On the basis of European Commission proposals, Member States in the Council,

including Ireland, have been engaged in negotiations to ensure that the reformed ETS is able to meet its GHG reduction objectives in a cost-effective manner. At a meeting of the Environment Council on 28 February, which I attended, agreement was reached on a general approach on the revised ETS proposal, a position Ireland was able to support. This will now enable the Council to begin negotiations with the European Parliament on the proposal. It is currently anticipated that this process will reach a conclusion later this year.

### **Greenhouse Gas Emissions**

747. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the steps he is taking to ensure that Ireland's views on the European non ETS carbon emission scheme are represented in EU level negotiations on this scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11403/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** The Paris Agreement, which entered into force in November 2016, aims to limit global average temperature rise to well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, with an ambition of 1.5 degrees Celsius. The Agreement is designed to meet this objective through Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) submitted by all parties to the agreement. In this regard, the European Union submitted an NDC committing to a reduction of at least 40% in EU-wide emissions by 2030 compared with 1990 levels, which will be met through reductions of 43% in the Emission Trading System (ETS) and 30% in the non-ETS sector compared with 2005 levels. A proposal on the non-ETS targets for individual Member States, the Effort Sharing Regulation (ESR), was published by the European Commission in July 2016. Targets have been proposed for Member States based on GDP per capita and the cost-effectiveness of domestic emissions reductions within individual Member States.

In the case of Ireland a target of 39% has been proposed, which has been adjusted downwards to 30% to reflect cost-effectiveness of measures within the Irish economy. The European Commission proposals are the subject of ongoing negotiations in the Council of Ministers and in the European Parliament. The outcome of these negotiations will determine Ireland's contribution to the overall EU 2030 effort. It is, nevertheless, already clear that meeting the proposed targets for Ireland will present an enormous challenge, requiring very substantial public and private investment in addition to a board suite of non-financial policy interventions.

I will shortly be publishing a draft of Ireland's first National Mitigation Plan for public consultation which will set out a series of options for additional measures towards meeting the proposed targets for Ireland for 2030 as well as to put Ireland on a pathway towards transitioning to a low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by 2050.

### **Public Relations Contracts Expenditure**

748. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the amount his Department spent on public relations consultants and all matters relating to public relations costs in 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11425/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** My Departmental remit includes complex policy areas, oversight of State regulation and service provision across key strategic services such as energy and public broadcasting, and regulation of sectors such as mining and hydrocarbon exploration. Given the technical

complexity, economic significance and community interest in these areas, there is a requirement to disseminate information and to address specific issues as they arise. The Department therefore necessarily incurs some expenditure on public relations from time to time. In procuring these services, my Department always seeks to ensure value for money and the keeping of expenditure to the minimum necessary.

My Department's spend on public relations consultancy in 2016 was €44,460.

### **Rural Broadband Scheme**

749. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if the roll-out of high speed broadband under the rural broadband scheme will include a village (details supplied) in County Mayo; the timeframe for the upgrading of broadband lines in this area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11449/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** The National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to deliver high speed broadband services to every city, town, village and individual premises in Ireland. The Programme for Government commits to the delivery of the NBP as a matter of priority. This is being achieved through a combination of commercial investment by the telecommunications sector and a State Intervention in those areas where commercial investment has not been fully demonstrated. A key principle of the NBP is to support and stimulate commercial investment through policy and regulatory measures. Commercial investment since the publication of the NBP has considerably exceeded expectations. To date, the commercial telecommunications sector has invested over €2.5 bn 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](http://www.broadband.gov.ie) shows the current extent of the State Intervention area:

- The areas marked BLUE represent those areas where commercial telecommunications providers are either currently delivering or have previously indicated plans to deliver high speed broadband services,

- The areas marked AMBER on the High Speed Broadband Map represent the target areas for the State Intervention, which are the subject of the current procurement process. It is intended that premises within this area will have access to services of at least 30 megabits per second when the procurement process is completed and the network rolled out.

The maps shows that 100% of the townland of Srah, including Shraigh, and 64% of the townland of Bunnahowen falls within the AMBER area and will therefore be included in the State intervention procurement process. The remaining 36% of the townland of Bunnahowen is included in the BLUE area where commercial providers are either currently delivering or previously indicated that they have plans to deliver high speed broadband services.

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. Individuals can also check whether their area is in a BLUE or AMBER area by accessing the county and townland information



at <http://www.dccae.gov.ie/communications/en-ie/Broadband/Pages/County-and-Townland-Maps.aspx>.

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 Procurement 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, I and Minister Humphreys established a Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce in July 2016. The findings of this Taskforce recommends practical actions that can be taken to remove barriers to and improve mobile phone and broadband access in Ireland. The Taskforce report is available at the following link:<http://www.dccae.gov.ie/communications/en-ie/Pages/Publication/Report-of-the-Mobile-Phone-and-Broadband-Taskforce.aspx>.

Minister Humphreys has established two regional action groups, working with Local Authorities, Local Enterprise Offices and other relevant agencies to unlock barriers to investment in mobile and broadband services. Since July, there has been significant progress made in discussions with the key stakeholders including local authority management representation, Government Departments and State agencies, as well as interaction with ComReg and telecoms operators.

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 €8 million 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 including County Mayo.

### **Renewable Energy Incentives**

750. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the date by which he anticipates the renewable heat incentive scheme will be opened; if he has considered grandfathering in existing installations that meet the terms of the RHI scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11496/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** The introduction of a Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) is a commitment in the Programme for Government and Energy White Paper, and will be the primary support mechanism in the heating sector designed to meet Ireland's renewable energy obligations. During 2016, my Department undertook a detailed economic assessment on the design and cost of the RHI for heat users the industrial and commercial sector. This assessment included a range of renewable energy technologies and focused on the approximately 3,000 large commercial and industrial heat users in the non-Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) in Ireland.

In order to support on-going investment in the renewable heating sector, my Department is seeking clearance from the European Commission that RHI support can apply to RHI applicants who meet the criteria of the scheme and were completed and first commissioned between the Government announcement on the RHI in July 2014 and the start date of the RHI.

If permission is granted for this grandfathering decision by the European Commission the successful applicants will be eligible to apply for support but will have to meet all the terms and condition of the new scheme. A final decision on grandfathering will form part of the state aid clearance notification for the RHI Scheme.

The public consultation on the design and implementation of the new RHI scheme was conducted on the Department's website recently, and I am encouraged by the large number of submissions received to this consultation. The information provided will help to inform the final design of the new scheme.

Before the RHI scheme is introduced, the overall costs and technologies to be supported will be subject to Government approval and State aid clearance from the European Commission. It is expected that the RHI will be open for applications before the end of the year.

### **Construction Industry**

751. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the level of construction inflation that has been experienced by his Department in each of the past six years and to date in 2017 in respect of construction projects and other capital projects; the way in which he monitors construction inflation and the mechanisms he employs to establish this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11532/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** My Department does not engage directly in any construction projects and accordingly does not directly monitor construction inflation. In relation to other types of capital expenditure, all projects operate within agreed budgets and must adhere to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform's Public Spending Code. All procurements for capital projects in my Department must comply with National and EU procurement rules.

### **Mobile Telephony Services**

752. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his attention has been drawn to the derogation that has been given to mobile phone operators which allows them to preclude data costs from the EU roaming directives; his views on whether this is against the spirit and intention of the proposal; if he has had any discussions with ComReg on the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11722/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** EU “Roam Like at Home” (RLAH) will give Irish and EU consumers the ability to use their mobile devices, within other EU countries, at domestic rates, subject to Fair Use Policy, from 15 June 2017. Throughout negotiations at EU level on this initiative, Ireland has been fully supportive of the Roam Like at Home principle, and, in particular, the importance of obtaining a sustainable agreement for business and consumers alike. I would expect all mobile operators to be fully compliant with Irish EU legislation, including RLAH from 15 June 2017.

The Irish Commission for Communications Regulation, ComReg, is the competent statutorily independent regulatory authority for Telecoms and as such will be the authority which will regulate the Roam Like At Home regime in Ireland from 15 June 2017. ComReg has informed me that it has not issued any derogations in the manner referred to by the Deputy nor do they have the power to do so under existing legislation. The new EU rules clearly cover data services, along with voice and SMS. There is no exemption for the data services, only exceptional limits in cases of unlimited or very competitive offers.

It would be inappropriate for me to comment any further on matters which are independently regulated by ComReg. ComReg will have a role in scrutinising all existing and new mobile market offerings to ensure full legal and regulatory compliance.

### **Mobile Telephony Services**

753. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he has had contact with ComReg regarding the decision by some mobile phone companies not to make available to their customers all the benefits that should accrue with the new EU roaming charges regime with effect from June 2017, with particular reference to data; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11723/17]

754. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will raise at the EU Council of Ministers the need for all mobile phone companies to provide to all their customers all the benefits that should accrue from the new roaming charges regime with effect from June 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11724/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 753 and 754 together.

EU “Roam Like at Home” (RLAH) will give Irish and EU consumers the ability to use their mobile devices, within other EU countries, at domestic rates, subject to Fair Use Policy, from 15 June 2017.

Throughout negotiations at EU level on this initiative, including at the EU Council of Ministers, Ireland has been fully supportive of the Roam Like at Home principle, and, in particular, the importance of obtaining a sustainable agreement for business and consumers alike.

The new EU rules clearly cover data services, along voice and SMS. There is no exemption for the data services, only exceptional limits in case of unlimited or very competitive offers.

I would expect all mobile operators to be fully compliant with Irish and EU legislation, including RLAH from 15 June 2017. The European Commission is currently collaborating with National Regulatory Authorities to provide detailed guidance on how Roam Like at Home (RLAH) can be introduced at retail level and is also working closely with consumer organisations across the EU (BEUC). I have every faith in this process.

The Irish Commission for Communications Regulation, ComReg, is the competent statutorily independent regulatory authority for Telecoms and as such will be the authority which will regulate the Roam Like At Home regime in Ireland from 15 June 2017. ComReg will have a role in scrutinising all existing and new mobile market offerings to ensure full legal and regulatory compliance.

As ComReg are statutorily independent in the exercise of its functions, I have no authority to intervene in those functions.

### **Telecommunications Infrastructure**

755. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the action local authorities can take when companies (details supplied) leave redundant telecoms boxes in villages and towns such as Athy and in which the local authority cannot get in touch with them due to change of ownership of the company. [11772/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** I have no role or function in the matter raised by the Deputy. The provision of telecoms boxes is a decision for private operators and as such I have no function in this area. Ordinarily those operators pay for the removal of telecoms boxes which are no longer in use.

The issue raised is one for the relevant independent local authority who examine such matters on a case by case basis. Accordingly I would encourage the Deputy to bring this matter directly to their attention.

### **North-South Interconnector**

756. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the skills of the implementation of a motion that was passed by Dáil Éireann regarding the North-South interconnector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11930/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** On 21 December 2016 An Bord Pleanála granted planning permission for the North-South Interconnector project in Ireland. The decision concluded a lengthy planning process which included an Oral Hearing completed over eleven weeks from March to May last year. The planning process in Northern Ireland is ongoing, with the planning inquiry concluding on 27 February 2017. The North-South Interconnector is important to the efficient operation of the Single Electricity Market and the increased security of electricity supply across the island of Ireland.

I am well aware of views that have been raised by communities across Cavan, Meath and Monaghan that the transmission lines should be laid underground, rather than built overhead. However, all evidence available to me indicates that developing the project underground would

cost substantially more and deliver less. In particular I would highlight the Independent Expert Commission report of 2012 that estimated the cost of building the project underground would be three times the cost of the overhead solution.

In light of the motions passed by Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann, I have requested officials in my Department to prepare a proposal for an updated independent report that would consider any changes in cost and technology in the five years since the 2012 report by the Independent Expert Commission. I intend that such a report would be completed this year in advance of the scheduled commencement of construction of the North-South Interconnector in 2018.

I would like to reemphasise the Government's continued strong support for this project.

### **Brexit Issues**

**757. Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he or his officials have discussed the impact of Brexit on Ireland's energy security with his UK and EU counterparts. [11971/17]

**758. Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if there have been meetings between his Department's energy policy division and their EU and UK counterparts regarding the impact of Brexit on Ireland's energy supply. [11972/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 757 and 758 together.

As the Deputy is aware the EU has stated that there will be no negotiation without Article 50 notification. However, Ministers and officials, across Government Departments, take every opportunity to discuss the potential impacts of Brexit with our EU and UK colleagues. I have previously outlined meetings in relation to my own Department in answers to Parliamentary Question 275, answered on 19 January 2017, and Parliamentary Questions 40 and 45, answered on 6 December 2016.

More recently, I have attended two EU Council meetings - the Energy Council on 27 February and the Environment Council on 28 February. I used this opportunity to hold further bilateral discussions on the potential impacts of Brexit on the Irish and European energy sectors with the UK Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Energy, Mr Jesse Norman and the Belgian Minister of Energy, Environment, and Sustainable Development, Ms Marie-Christine Marghem.

In addition, officials from my Department have discussed the potential impacts of Brexit on the Irish energy sector with their EU and UK counterparts. This includes meetings with the European Commission task force and officials from the UK's Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. At these meetings, my officials have presented on Ireland's key Brexit priorities in relation to the energy sector.

These priorities were also presented at the recent All-Island Brexit Civic Dialogue on Energy held on 6 February in Boyle County Roscommon. This provided an opportunity for business, civic and political representatives to discuss and provide feedback on the priorities identified. I am arranging to have a copy of that presentation to be made available on my Department's website.

## **Overseas Development Aid Expenditure**

759. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the expenditure from the overseas development aid budget spent on the green climate fund from 2014 to 2016; if any of the expenditure announced in budget 2017 will go towards the green climate fund; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12001/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** In line with a commitment in the Programme for Partnership Government, and a pledge given by the Taoiseach to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to scale up climate finance, my Department made an initial contribution of €2 million to the Green Climate Fund in 2016. The Government has also committed to building up its support to the Green Climate Fund in the coming years. This contribution forms part of Ireland's wider commitment to the Paris Climate Change Conference in November 2015 to provide least €175 million in public funding on climate action between 2016 and 2020.

In addition to the Green Climate Fund, Ireland's public funding for climate action also includes on-going support for mitigation and adaptation action in developing countries, mainly through bilateral assistance to Ireland's key partner countries in sub-Saharan Africa and also through funding for the Least Developed Countries Fund, both of which are supported through the Official Development Assistance budget, managed by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

## **Energy Efficiency**

760. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will provide a detailed breakdown and report of the areas of expenditure of the energy efficiency fund since 2014; the audit measures in place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12007/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** The Energy Efficiency Fund (EEF) is a commercial fund, established in 2014, to provide specialist financial expertise and appropriately structured funding for large scale energy efficiency projects in the private and public sectors. A sum of €35m in seed capital was provided by the Government with a view to the establishment of a leveraged fund of €70m. That target has been exceeded with commitments by private sector institutional investors bringing the fund to its present total of €78.8m. The Government remains a minority shareholder.

As a commercial, regulated, entity the fund is subject to full regulatory scrutiny by the Central Bank. The fund is authorised and regulated by the Central Bank as a qualifying investor fund ("QIF") in accordance with the Alternative Investment Fund Managers Directive (Directive 2011/61/EU) ("AIFMD"). The governance framework for the Government's capital commitment was established by the European Union (Energy Efficiency Obligation) Regulations, Statutory Instrument (SI) 131 of 2014.

The EEF is managed by Sustainable Development Capital LLP (SDCL) following a tender process carried out in 2013. SDCL also has investments in energy efficiency projects in the UK, the United States, Hong Kong and Singapore. To date €3,190,800 of the Government capital commitment has been drawn down. Three projects have been completed to date in the retail, hospitality and social housing sectors. A pipeline of projects is being progressed across sectors such as financial services, communications and healthcare.

The last full audit of Ireland Energy Efficiency Investments plc conducted by KPMG was for the year ended 31 March 2016. In this audit, KPMG gave an unqualified audit opinion and noted that the financial statements had been properly prepared in keeping with the International Financial Reporting Standards as adopted by the European Union and complied with the requirements of the Companies Act 2014. Should the Deputy wish I am happy to furnish him with a copy of these accounts.

### **Rural Broadband Scheme**

761. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to upgrade the broadband telecommunications infrastructure in an area (details supplied); if the requests of local residents and local business to have an adequate and modern broadband service provided in that area without further delay will be given consideration; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12033/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** The National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to deliver high speed broadband services to every city, town, village and individual premises in Ireland. The Programme for Government commits to the delivery of the NBP as a matter of priority. This is being achieved through a combination of commercial investment by the telecommunications sector and a State Intervention in those areas where commercial investment has not been fully demonstrated. A key principle of the NBP is to support and stimulate commercial investment through policy and regulatory measures. Commercial investment since the publication of the NBP has considerably exceeded expectations. To date, the commercial telecommunications sector has invested over €2.5bn in upgrading and modernising networks which support the provision of high speed broadband and mobile telecoms services.

There has been significant progress in relation to broadband roll-out 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](http://www.broadband.gov.ie) shows the current extent of the State Intervention area:

- The areas marked BLUE represent those areas where commercial telecommunications providers are either currently delivering or have previously indicated plans to deliver high speed broadband services,

- The areas marked AMBER on the High Speed Broadband Map represent the target areas for the State Intervention, which are the subject of the current procurement process. It is intended that premises within this area will have access to services of at least 30 megabits per second when the procurement process is completed and the network rolled out.

The maps shows that 9% of the townland of Doohamlat, Co Monaghan falls within the AMBER area and will therefore be included in the State intervention procurement process. The remaining 91% of Doohamlat is included in the BLUE area where commercial providers are either currently delivering or previously indicated that they have plans to deliver high speed broadband services.

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. Individuals can also check whether their area is in a BLUE or AMBER area by accessing the county and townland information

at <http://www.dccae.gov.ie/communications/en-ie/Broadband/Pages/County-and-Townland-Maps.aspx>.

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 Procurement 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 1,000 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 from contract award 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, I and Minister Humphreys established a Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce in July 2016. The findings of this Taskforce recommends practical actions that can be taken to remove barriers to and improve mobile phone and broadband access in Ireland. The Taskforce report is available at the following link:

<http://www.dccae.gov.ie/communications/en-ie/Pages/Publication/Report-of-the-Mobile-Phone-and-Broadband-Taskforce.aspx>.

Minister Humphreys has established two regional action groups, working with Local Authorities, Local Enterprise Offices and other relevant agencies to unlock barriers to investment in mobile and broadband services. Since July, there has been significant progress made in discussions with the key stakeholders including local authority management representation, Government Departments and State agencies, as well as interaction with ComReg and telecoms operators.

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 including County Monaghan.

### **Education and Training Provision**

762. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated cost to re-establish CERT; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11556/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan):** There are no plans to establish a dedicated training organisation for the tourism and hospitality sector. I am not aware of any estimate having been conducted as to the cost of establishing such a body. In line with provision for other sectors, education and training for this sector is primarily funded and delivered through the higher, further education, and training bodies namely the Institutes of Technology and the Education and Training Boards with complementary training and business supports provided by Failte Ireland.

### **Regional Airports**

763. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the work his Department has carried out to date regarding the investment of €10 million in regional airports in particular Waterford Airport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11708/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The Programme for Government commitment is to provide an additional €10 million over the lifetime of the Capital Plan to support the four regional airports which of course includes Waterford Airport, along with the airports in Donegal, Ireland West Airport Knock and Kerry. This commitment, together with other Programme for Government commitments of a capital nature, is currently part of the mid-term review of the Capital Plan which was commenced in January and my Department will make a submission to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform shortly.

### **Alternative Energy Projects**

764. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has considered installing hydrogen refuelling stations for vehicles. [11973/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Over the coming years, a transition to alternatively-fuelled vehicles will be required to effect a substantial reduction in Ireland's overall transport emissions. My Department recently developed a draft national policy framework for alternative fuels infrastructure - in line with the Alternative Fuels Infrastructure Directive (2014/94/EU) - and carried out a public consultation from 27 October to 23 November 2016 on this draft framework to support the deployment of alternative fuels in Ireland. Following consideration of submissions received from the consultation process, I expect to finalise and publish the National Policy Framework in the coming weeks. As the draft Framework indicates, there is no hydrogen refuelling infrastructure in operation in Ireland with few commercial organisations capable of constructing or bearing the cost of a stand-alone hydrogen project. Coupled with the lack of right-hand drive hydrogen vehicles currently available for use on the Irish market, the rate of infrastructure development is expected to remain low. There are no immediate plans to establish a hydrogen refuelling network. Hydrogen is not expected to deliver mass-market uptake before 2030 as the costs of the refuelling infrastructure

and associated vehicles are likely to remain prohibitive until the middle of the next decade. Consequently, the cost of the infrastructure is greatly disproportionate to current demand.

However, the feasibility of establishing a hydrogen refuelling network will be regularly assessed to take account of changes in technological development and market uptake.

The Deputy will also be aware that work is very advanced on the development of the National Climate Change Mitigation Plan which is being prepared by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (DCCAE), working in close co-operation with other Departments including my own and the Department of Agriculture. Transport has an important role to play in helping to achieve our national emission and decarbonisation targets. The mitigation measures under consideration for transport will be wide-ranging and the movement to alternative fuels will form part of this plan. The draft Mitigation Plan will be available for extensive public consultation shortly before it is finalised and put to Government for approval.

### **National Transport Authority**

765. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans in conjunction with the NTA to deliver on action points 251 to 254 of the Action Plan for Rural Development to work with rural communities to assess and implement improvements to existing rural transport routes and develop new rural transport routes as necessary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11706/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As I advised the Deputy in response to her Question of 31 January 2017, (Ref No: 4108/17, Proof:427), my Department provides funding for the Rural Transport Programme (RTP) to the National Transport Authority (NTA) which has national responsibility for integrated local and rural transport, including management of the RTP.

The review of public transport policy, including the rural transport dimension to ensure it meets the needs of rural communities, under action no. 251 of the Action Plan will be initiated shortly by my Department and will be conducted in consultation with the NTA and other key stakeholders.

Actions nos. 252 to 254 of the Action Plan fall to the NTA to implement, given its responsibility for management of the RTP, and I have referred this aspect of your question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

### **Road Network**

766. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the proposed M20 Cork to Limerick motorway; his views on whether this is a critical piece of infrastructure for the region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11207/17]

**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 (TII) under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. As I have indicated previously, I have agreed that TII can proceed with some early activities related to restarting planning for the upgrade of the Cork to Limerick link. As Minister I have to work within the capital budgets

available to my Department and in this context additional funding will be needed if the project is to be progressed further.

I will review the scope for advancing work on the Cork to Limerick link once the planned Review of the Capital Plan is completed.

### **Road Signage**

767. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if funding will be provided for replacement warning signage on regional roads in County Galway in 2017; if so, when this funding is likely to be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11224/17]

**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 this case Galway County Council), 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. I announced the 2017 regional and local road grant allocations on 24 January and while there is no specific grant for signage, it is open to the Council to charge replacement warning signage to its Discretionary grant. Galway County Council were allocated €4,816,031 under this grant category in 2017.

### **Sports Capital Programme Applications**

768. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of an application by a group (details supplied) for a sports capital grant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11229/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan):** I can confirm that an application has been submitted by the organisation referred to by the Deputy under the 2017 Sports Capital Programme. All of the 2320 applications received under the 2017 Sports Capital Programme will be assessed by officials in my Department over the coming months. An announcement regarding allocations will be made later this year.

### **Road Improvement Schemes**

769. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if funding will be provided in 2017 towards the provision of necessary road improvement works on a national route (details supplied). [11248/17]

**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 (formerly known as the NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Noting the above position, I have referred your question to TII for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

## Driver Licences

770. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to recognise the driving licences of other EU countries; and his further plans to develop a system whereby holders of EU licences can be punished for driving offences here. [11321/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I am pleased to advise the Deputy that there is already mutual recognition of driving licences across the EU, and a licence from another Member State can be exchanged for an Irish one if the holder takes up residence here. There is no cross-border mechanism at present for the mutual recognition of penalties for road traffic offences for such licence holders. However, the Road Traffic Act 2016 provides for mutual recognition of disqualified drivers between Ireland and the UK. I expect that actual recognition of driving disqualifications of UK residents and persons holding UK driving licences who have been disqualified here for relevant road traffic offences and *vice versa* will commence by June 2017. By that time all the necessary administrative arrangements including the necessary parliamentary procedures in the UK should be in place so that the consequences of relevant serious driving offences worthy of driving disqualification will follow the offender back to their own jurisdiction.

## Brexit Issues

771. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has raised the status of the UK's future membership of the European Aviation Safety Agency with his UK and EU counterparts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11352/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I am very concerned about the potential impacts of Brexit on Irish aviation and these concerns have been conveyed to the European Commission's chief negotiator, Michel Barnier, and his team. The Department of the Taoiseach remains in constant contact with the Barnier team and will continue to engage with them on these and other Irish concerns. There will be no negotiations with the UK until Article 50 has been triggered. This includes any discussion with regard to the UK's future membership of the European Aviation Safety Agency. However, in preparing for those negotiations, all possible steps are being taken with the aim of ensuring that aviation will remain a top negotiation priority for Ireland.

## Sports Injuries Guidelines

772. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to implement a national concussion strategy; and if his attention has been drawn to publications (details supplied) that both state that such a strategy needs to be developed in view of the ever increasing number of concussion and concussive brain injuries which are associated with certain sports. [11416/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I am aware of the recently published research on this matter and I fully recognise the seriousness of concussion and head injuries in sport and the importance of ensuring the safety of players. The Deputy should be aware that neither I nor Sport Ireland have a statutory role or remit with regard to monitoring or reviewing the safety standards in use by, or applicable to, National Governing Bodies of Sport (NGBs). It is the expectation, however, that NGBs would abide by existing legislation and have regard to guidance issued by relevant statutory agencies. The safety of

all those involved in sport is of paramount importance, whether as participants, competitors, spectators, volunteers or workers. In that regard, the Deputy will be interested to note that various NGBs in Ireland such as the FAI, GAA and IRFU all have concussion and head injury guidelines in place for their sports, which stress the importance of ensuring the health and well-being of the players. I have asked Sport Ireland, the statutory body with responsibility for the promotion, development and co-ordination of sport, to reply directly to the Deputy with further information on the concussion and head injury guidelines in place by the NGBs. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a reply is not received within ten days.

### **Departmental Expenditure**

773. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount his Department spent on public relations consultants and all matters relating to public relations costs in 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11437/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The information requested by the Deputy is available on my Department's website at the following link: Expenditure on External Services . Expenditure for the latter part of 2016 will be available on the website shortly.

### **Sports Funding**

774. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if, other than the sports capital grant, there are other sources of grants available to a club (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11450/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan):** The Sports Capital Programme is the Government's primary vehicle for supporting the development of sports facilities and the purchase of non-personal sports equipment. The 2017 round of the Programme closed for applications on 24 February and I understand that the organisation referred to by the Deputy has submitted an application for funding. In addition, it may be possible for the organisation referred to by the Deputy to raise funds via the 'Tax Relief for Donations to Certain Sports Bodies' scheme (section 847A of the Taxes Consolidation Act, 1997). This is a Revenue Commissioners operated scheme which offers tax benefits to individuals or companies who make donations to sports clubs. Further details on this scheme and how it operates can be found on the Revenue website at [www.revenue.ie](http://www.revenue.ie).

Furthermore, Sport Ireland, which is funded by my Department, is the statutory body with responsibility for the promotion, development and co-ordination of sport, including the allocation of funding to sports bodies. It does not provide direct funding for clubs or individuals but channels the funding through the relevant National Governing Body of Sport, in this case, Athletics Ireland. Accordingly, the Club may also wish to contact Athletics Ireland to see if they can assist in any way.

### **Sports Funding**

775. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the funding or grants available for a GAA club (details supplied) for the development of a club house; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11455/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick**

**O'Donovan):** The Sports Capital Programme is the Government's primary vehicle for supporting the development of sports facilities and the purchase of non-personal sports equipment. The 2017 round of the Programme closed for applications on 24 February. While I understand the club referred to by the Deputy did not make an application under the 2017 round of the Programme, my Department is currently engaged with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to secure funding to undertake annual rounds of the Sports Capital Programme in the future. In addition, it may be possible for the organisation referred to by the Deputy to raise funds via the 'Tax Relief for Donations to Certain Sports Bodies' scheme (section 847A of the Taxes Consolidation Act, 1997). This is a Revenue Commissioners operated scheme which offers tax benefits to individuals or companies who make donations to sports clubs. Further details on this scheme and how it operates can be found on the Revenue website at [www.revenue.ie](http://www.revenue.ie).

### **Regional Road Network**

776. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the details of the submissions he received from Mayo County Council in relation to funding applications for the 2017 regional roads programme; the details of the proposal received regarding the R312; his plans for the future development of this road; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11459/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads in Mayo is the statutory responsibility of Mayo County Council, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from the Council's own resources supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is also a matter for the local authority. My Department received an application in 2015 in respect of the R312 under the Strategic Grant Programme. As a result of the substantial cutbacks in grant funding for roads during the financial crisis, the Strategic Grant Programme had to be curtailed in order to protect funding for road maintenance and repair and Mayo County Council was, therefore, notified in July 2015 that the Department was not in a position to provide an allocation for the proposed major upgrade scheme. Further contacts between my Department and Mayo County Council officials last year resulted in a number of targeted measures to address issues with specific sections of the R312. These measures covered rehabilitation and resurfacing works together with a specific project to address the bottleneck at Glenisland Bridge. My Department allocated €100,000 as part of the 2017 Regional and Local Road Allocations for the continuation of the Glenisland bridge project in 2017.

### **Public Service Vehicles**

777. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will address the anomaly in relation to the age of a taxi whereby a car being used as a taxi must be taken out of service at ten years of age despite it passing the NCT and despite the fact that the same car can then be designated as a limousine and trade commercially (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11473/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The regulation of the small public service vehicle (SPSV) industry, including issues pertaining to vehicle standards, is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the provisions of the Taxi Regulation Act 2013. I have therefore referred your question to the NTA for direct reply to you. Please

advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

### **Road Traffic Legislation**

778. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the penalties in place if a manufacturer produces a five axle 39 tonne vehicle after 1 March 2017; the law under which action be taken; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11492/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** National statutory weight limits for vehicles are set out in the Road Traffic (Construction and Use of Vehicles) Regulations as amended. The Regulations contain the individual axle and bogey limits with which all vehicles (including five axle rigid vehicles) must comply. These Regulations currently do not specify a weight limit for rigid vehicles with five (or more) axles. The DTTAS are currently working with the RSA to amend current regulations to implement a National weight limit of 36 Tonne for five axle rigid vehicles. In that regard the previously announced date for implementation of this limit of 1st March 2017 has now been suspended until 1st October 2017. Individuals engaged in the supply of mechanically propelled vehicles have a legal responsibility to ensure that vehicles and their components comply with all applicable requirements set out in Road Traffic legislation, which includes the fitment of a weights and dimensions plate specifying the maximum permitted laden weight for the vehicle and individual axles. Therefore the plating of five (or more) axle rigid vehicles must be completed in accordance with the aforementioned limits whilst also taking into consideration the design specifications for the vehicle in question.

It is an offence to carry a load on a vehicle which would cause the manufacturer's design weights or the limits specified in our national legislation (i.e. the plated weights) to be exceeded. On conviction, courts can impose a class C fine (up to €2,500), a prison sentence or both on both the person who commits the offence and on the owner of the vehicle.

### **Driver Licences**

779. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the assistance given to persons that apply for a HGV licence at certificate of professional competence stage and onwards, who cannot read or write; the supports currently in place; the material available for such persons in preparation for the test; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11527/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The Road Safety Authority has responsibility for driver licensing and I have therefore forwarded your question to it for direct reply. Please contact my office if a response has not been received within 10 days. Literacy supports are a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Department of Education and Skills.

### **Transport Costs**

780. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the level of construction inflation that has been experienced by his Department in each of the past six years and to date in 2017 in respect of construction projects and other capital projects; the way in which he monitors construction inflation and the mechanisms he employs to establish this; and

if he will make a statement on the matter. [11544/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The construction of projects in the transport sector is the responsibility of a range of organisations including both non-commercial and commercial semi-state agencies. It is the responsibility of individual organisations (as sponsoring bodies) to operate within agreed budgets and to comply with this Department's Capital Appraisal Guidelines and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform's (DPER) Public Spending Code. Procurement of projects must comply with DPER's procurement requirements and contracts must be in accordance with DPER's Public Works Contracts. Within this context it is the responsibility of Agencies to manage projects and ensure value for money including in relation to increases in anticipated costs over the life of projects. The Department does not separately monitor this aspect of agencies project management.

### **National Transport Authority Data**

781. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of applications for a variance to a license agreement between the National Transport Authority and Bus Éireann in respect of the Expressway service that were made since 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11573/17]

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

### **Search and Rescue Service Provision**

782. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of contracts in place in relation to search and rescue helicopter services; if such contracts were put in place as a result of a competitive tendering process; the value and the duration of the contracts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11574/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** There is currently one contract in place and one tender process in progress which relate primarily to the search and rescue helicopter service. In July 2009 a request for tenders was issued for the provision of Search and Rescue Helicopter services for the Irish Coast Guard. On 22nd July 2010 an agreement was signed between the Minister for Transport and CHC Ireland Ltd for the supply of helicopters and fully qualified crews and personnel. CHCI provide five helicopters at four bases located in Dublin, Waterford, Shannon and Sligo. These Helicopters respond to emergencies at sea, inland waterways, offshore islands and mountains.

The helicopter service contract commenced on 1st July 2012 for a period of 10 years. The annual total cost for these services is in the region of €65m meaning a total for the duration of the contract of approx. €650m. An exact figure is not available as there are yearly varying factors including the number of flying hours and the cost of fuel.

The Irish Coast Guard has also contracted external aviation expertise to advise on certain aspects of the management of the helicopter contract. Following a Request for Tender process in October 2011, an agreement was signed with aviation consultancy firm Consultavia. The average cost of this contract has been approx €33k per year over the past five years. This contract expired in December 2016 and a new Request for Tender process is currently underway with a



deadline for applications of 24 March 2017.

### Regional Airports

783. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the capital and non-capital support given to regional airports since 2008, broken down by year and by airport, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11575/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Details of the capital and non-capital support provided to regional airports since 2008 is set out in the following tables:

#### Capital

Area	2016 €m	2015 €m	2014 €m	2013 €m	2012 €m	2011 €m	2010 €m	2009 €m	2008 €m
Donegal	0.45	0.4	0.43	0.34	0	2.11	0.35	0.03	0.99
Waterford	0.02	0.78	0.53	0.36	1.33	0.79	0.02	0.22	1.9
Kerry	0.31	0.4	0.13	0.74	1.63	0.4	0	0.05	0.34
IWAK	1.96	0.56	1.93	2.01	0.7	0.23	0.82	3.87	4.63
Sligo*	0	0	0	0	0	0.24	0	0.08	0.11
Galway*	0	0	0	0	0	0.23	0.09	0.45	1.05
Derry**	0	0	0	0	0.34	0.75	0.14	2.50	5.06
TOTAL	2.74	2.14	3.02	3.45	4.0	4.75	1.42	7.2	14.08

#### Non-Capital

Area	2016 €m	2015 €m	2014 €m	2013 €m	2012 €m	2011 €m	2010 €m	2009 €m	2008 €m
Donegal	0.35	0.23	0	0	0.11	0.04	0.28	0.13	0
Waterford	1.02	1.14	1.03	1.12	1.23	1.27	1.58	1.49	1.54
Kerry	0.63	0.31	0.51	0.44	0.55	0.95	0	0	0
IWAK	0.97	0.59	0.55	0.65	0.59	0.43	0.76	0.45	0
Sligo*	0	0	0	0	0	0.39	0.39	0.31	0
Galway*	0	0	0	0	0	2.3	1.8	0.96	1.2
TOTAL	2.97	2.27	2.09	2.21	2.48	5.38	4.81	3.34	2.74

\*Funding for Galway and Sligo airports ceased in 2011.

\*\*Payments under an agreement with the UK government to co-fund a proportion of runway safety works at City of Derry Airport.

### Regional Airports

784. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the formula used to determine capital and non-capital funding for regional airports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11576/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As is the case for any Departmental expenditure, the overall funding available for the Regional Airports Programme is determined each year in the context of the annual budgetary process and the Capital Plan having regard *inter alia* to anticipated resources available to the Exchequer. The overall annual funding for the Regional Airports Programme in recent years has been in the region €12-€13 million. Of this, the current PSO contract governing air services between Dublin and the airports in Donegal and Kerry requires approximately €7.6 million.

Support for safety and security related capital and operating costs at the four regional air-

ports is also funded from the Programme. The airports are invited to submit their applications for capital support at the beginning of each year and these are assessed, against the criteria set out in the Programme by an Assessment Panel comprising officials of my Department and the Irish Aviation Authority. While the Department would have a reasonably good, high level, understanding of the overall scope of the airports' requirements, the actual amount of capital support required in any year only crystallises once we receive these applications from each of the airports. In the past couple of years, there has been more than sufficient provision in the capital allocation of the Regional Airports Programme to meet the airports' requirements in that area. Any unused amounts were used to supplement the non-capital provision to the airports for operational supports for safety and security activities.

My Department is, however, taking the opportunity to reflect on likely future capital requirements in the areas of safety and security at the regional airports in the context of the mid-term review of the Capital Plan which was commenced recently by my colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

### **Road Tolls**

785. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount paid in each of the years 2008 to 2016 in respect of public private partnership, PPP, operational payments as compensation to PPP companies for toll income payments being less than expected; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11577/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (formerly known as the NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the relevant local authority. More specifically, the statutory power to levy tolls on national roads, to make toll bye-laws, to enter into toll agreements, and for the operation of concessions with private investors in respect of national roads is vested in TII under the Roads Act 1993 (as amended by the Planning and Development Act 2000 and the Roads Act 2007). Noting the above position, I have referred the matters to TII for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

### **Swimming Pool Programme Data**

786. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his Department compiles information in relation to the condition and age profile of the stock of public swimming pools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11578/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan):** My Department does not compile information in relation to the condition and age profile of the stock of public swimming pools. The Local Authority Swimming Pool Programme (LASPP), which is administered by my Department, provides grant aid to a maximum of €3.8 million to local authorities towards the capital costs of new swimming pools or the refurbishment of existing pools. There are five projects in the current programme and the priority in 2017 is on progressing these projects to the next stages, as appropriate.

In relation to future priorities, my Department is currently undertaking a review of national sports policy which includes a specific focus on how Government should fund sports facilities.

Future public funding support for swimming pools will be considered in this context.

### **Rail Services Provision**

787. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to increase capacity on commuter trains from all regions surrounding Dublin; if he has satisfied himself that Irish Rail are utilising their full complement of rolling stock at peak times; his plans to increase the amount of rolling stock available to Irish Rail; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11600/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The day-to-day operation of the heavy rail network, including capacity issues and rolling stock requirements and utilisation, is a matter for Iarnród Éireann. I understand that Iarnród Éireann is currently considering future fleet requirements and my Department is liaising with the company in that regard in the context of the mid-term review of the Capital Plan.

In light of Iarnród Éireann's responsibility for the operation of the heavy rail network, I have referred the Deputy's question to the company for a more detailed reply in relation to capacity and fleet utilisation. Please advise my office if you have not received a reply within 10 working days.

### **Cycling Facilities Funding**

788. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the current programmes which are directly funded by his Department and which provide in whole or in part cycle infrastructure or cycle promotion; if he will quantify funding provision for same in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11603/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** €9.3m has been allocated for 2017 for *Smarter Travel* initiatives. Over recent years my Department has funded a number of behavioural change programmes under *Smarter Travel* including the Green Schools programme, Bike Week and the Smarter Travel Workplaces and Smarter Travel Campuses programmes. Funding of these behavioural change programmes will continue in 2017 and this year the Department will also fund the roll-out of the new national cycle training standard - Cycle Right.

My Department has also funded a number of infrastructural programmes under *Smarter Travel* including the National Cycle Network, Smarter Travel Towns and Active Travel areas programmes. These infrastructural programmes were multi-annual funding programmes that ran until the end 2016. Some grants awarded under these programmes were not fully drawn down by end 2016 so there is some carry-over of funding for those projects in 2017.

My Department will now undertake an evaluation of the *Smarter Travel* infrastructural programmes to establish what worked and what did not work in the Smarter Travel Area, Active Travel Towns and National Cycle Network programmes. The knowledge gained from this review will determine the best way of using the remaining funding available for *Smarter Travel* under the remaining period of the Capital Plan. My Department is also developing a new Greenways Strategy to inform future investment in greenways.

### **Aviation Issues**

789. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the operating conditions of an Irish Aviation Authority, IAA, facility (details supplied); if he is satisfied that all good practice is adhered to; if there is any aspect of the facility that gives rise to health concerns, in particular, emission levels from radar equipment within the facility; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11675/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The issues raised are operational matters for the Irish Aviation Authority (IAA). I have referred the Deputy's question to the IAA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

### **Aviation Issues**

790. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the damage caused to a facility (details supplied) in County Mayo during recent storms; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11676/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The issues raised are operational matters for the Irish Aviation Authority (IAA). I have referred the Deputy's question to the IAA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

### **Taxi Regulations**

791. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the names and corresponding categories of the members of the Taxi Advisory Committee; the vacancies there are; when it is expected that these vacancies will be filled; the criteria for regional representation that are considered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11726/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The Taxi Regulation Act 2013 provides that the Taxi Advisory Committee (TAC) shall consist of a Chairperson and 17 ordinary members. The 2013 Act also sets out requirements with regard to categories of representation.

There are currently four vacancies on the TAC. In relation to three of those vacancies which are in the special interest/expertise category, applications for these vacancies submitted to me from the Public Appointments Service (PAS) are currently being reviewed in line with recently approved new principles and procedures relating to State Board appointments under my Department's remit. I expect to make those three appointments shortly. The process to fill the fourth vacancy which is in the consumer interest category, will be initiated shortly with PAS.

There is no specific category relating to geographical location. However, the 2013 Act does provide that in appointing the Chairperson and ordinary members of the TAC the Minister shall, in so far as is practicable, ensure both urban and rural representation.

Details of current membership are as follows:

Taxi Advisory Committee - March 2017

-	Board Member	Agency/Organisation	Category under the 2013 Act	Date of Expiry of appointment
1.	Pat Byrne	Chair	Chairperson	31/07/2018
2.	Gerard Macken	Taxi Alliance of Ireland	Small Public Service Vehicle (SPSV) Sector	31/07/2018
3.	Martin Plummer	National Chauffeur Drivers Association of Ireland	SPSV Sector	31/07/2018
4.	Robert Lynch	Allied Cork Taxi Council	SPSV Sector	31/07/2018
5.	Joe Herron	Irish Taxi Drivers Federation	SPSV Sector	31/07/2018
6.	David Mc Guinness	Tiománaí Tascáí na hÉireann	SPSV Sector	31/07/2018
7.	Mary Henchy	Dún Laoghaire Rathdown Co.Co.	Local Authorities	31/07/2018
8.	Cornelius O'Donohue	Garda National Traffic Bureau of An Garda Síochána	An Garda Síochána	31/07/2018
9.	Michael Kilcoyne	Consumer Association of Ireland	Consumer interest	31/07/2018
10.	VACANCY		Consumer interest	31/07/2018
11.	Niamh Fawl	National Disability Authority	Persons with disabilities interest	31/07/2018
12.	Mike Jones	Chambers Ireland	Business interest	31/07/2018
13.	Mairead Hayes	Irish Senior Citizens Parliament	Older persons interest	31/07/2018
14.	Al Ryan	Irish Hotel Federation	Tourism interest	31/07/2018
15.	Stephen Cluskey	N/A	Special interest/expertise	31/07/2018
16.	VACANCY		Special interest/expertise	31/07/2018
17.	VACANCY		Special interest/expertise	31/07/2018
18.	VACANCY		Special interest/expertise	31/07/2018

### Driver Licensing Exchange Agreements

792. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 614 of 21 February 2017, and in view of the fact that the licence exchange agreement is already fully in place in British Columbia as it has accepted Irish licences since early 2016, the reason a timeframe for an agreement from the Irish side in regard to accepting British Columbian licences, which is affecting Canadians' ability to drive here, cannot be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11729/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Further to my response to PQ number 614 of 21 February 2017, an agreement with British Columbia is not

yet in place. Until such an agreement is in place it is not possible for Ireland to commence the licence exchange agreement with that Canadian province. I cannot speak for the British Columbian authorities and their acceptance or not of Irish driving licences for exchange.

### **Sports Facilities Provision**

793. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans for the provision of a velodrome at the National Sports Campus in Abbotstown; if funding has been identified for this; if a timeframe is in place to deliver it; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11843/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Any proposal to proceed with the development of a velodrome at the National Sports Campus will be subject in the normal way to the availability of capital funding and the outcome of an appropriate financial appraisal, in accordance with the Public Spending Code. A financial appraisal for the project has been submitted to my Department by Sport Ireland and is currently being reviewed. The availability of capital funding for the project will be determined in the Mid Term Review of the Capital Plan.

### **Sports Capital Programme Applications**

794. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the allocation of funds for the sports capital programme will be announced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11933/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan):** A record 2,320 applications were received under the 2017 Sports Capital Programme and these applications are seeking a total of €155m. All of the applications received will be assessed by officials in my Department over the coming months. Given the number of applications received and the detailed information submitted, it will take a number of months to complete this process and I expect that allocations will be made in August or September.

### **Bus Éireann**

795. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the current state of Busáras; if he will support greater investment in improving Busáras for bus passengers; his position on the way Busáras could be enhanced to become a first class bus transport facility; or if a new bus station will be built in Dublin if it is planned to have a new hub for private bus operators in the inner city; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11999/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area.

In accordance with Dublin Transport Authority Act 2008, as amended, the NTA has statutory responsibility for securing the provision of or providing bus stops, bus shelters, bus stations, stands and bus fleets in the State. Accordingly, I have referred your question to the NTA for reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

## Maritime Training

796. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Marine Notice No. 06 of 2017, the reason he will not recognise under EU mutual recognition rules training certificates issued in respect of training provided here by the competent authorities of other EU member states; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12026/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I refer to my previous reply to Deputy McGrath on 29 September 2016. In that reply I confirmed that the mutual recognition of IMO STCW certificates validly issued by other EU Member States is fully supported and accepted by my Department. Particular issues had arisen in relation to IMO STCW certifications under the authority of the United Kingdom which were the subject of correspondence between my Department and, inter alia, the UK authorities.

That correspondence has now concluded and it has been clarified that the sole competent authority for the designation of bodies to provide statutory training and for the issue of IMO STCW certificates in respect of such training in Ireland is the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport.

Only IMO STCW certificates issued in Ireland by or under the authority of the competent authority in Ireland are valid for the purposes of the relevant EU legislation and are therefore properly the subject of mutual recognition. Training cannot validly be provided under EU law in this jurisdiction under the authority of another EU Member State and the purpose of Marine Notice No. 06 of 2017 was to make this position clear to seafarers, students, Training Providers and other interested parties.

## Brexit Issues

797. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if she has raised the future status of the UK as a member of the European Chemicals Agency with her UK and EU counterparts; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11354/17]

**Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor):** European chemicals legislation has undergone much change in recent years with the introduction of key EU Regulations such as the “REACH” Regulation 1907/2006 (governing the Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals) and the “CLP” Regulation 1272/2008 (Classification, Labelling and Packaging of hazardous chemicals). The aim of REACH is to protect both human health and the environment.

The European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) ensures the consistent implementation of the “REACH” and “CLP” Regulations (together with EU Regulations governing biocides and the export/import of hazardous chemicals) across the European Union and the countries in the European Economic Area.

There are a number of Government Departments and Agencies involved in the regulation of chemicals in Ireland. The Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation has the lead responsibility for chemicals policy and for developing the enforcement regime associated with REACH. An agency of my Department, the Health and Safety Authority (HSA), is the principal competent authority under the Chemicals Acts 2008 and 2010. In addition, other bodies have also been designated as competent authorities with responsibility under these Acts for particular aspects of REACH, including the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

The UK Government has not yet indicated how it envisages the future of chemicals regulation in the UK after the Referendum result. In the United Kingdom, the Minister responsible for chemicals policy is the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. I am not aware that the topic of the future status of the UK as a member of the European Chemicals Agency has arisen at any of the series of regular contacts that have taken place between the UK Minister and her Irish and other EU counterparts.

My Department is monitoring developments closely in conjunction with the other relevant Government Departments and Agencies, including the HSA, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine; the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment; and the EPA. My Department is also following work being undertaken by the UK House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee which is conducting an inquiry into the future of environmental law and policy following the result of the EU Referendum. That parliamentary inquiry will focus on the future of REACH and will consider, for instance, whether administrative and enforcement responsibilities, which are currently discharged by the European Commission or ECHA, will need to be transferred to national authorities in the UK.

The UK's decision to leave the European Union will impact significantly on policy fields across all Government Departments. However as negotiations on the UK's exit have not yet commenced it is not possible to pre-empt the outcome at this stage. That said, the Government's preparation remains extensive and ongoing across all key issues and sectors. Both risks and opportunities arising from Brexit are being analysed and considered.

### **Copyright Legislation Review**

798. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if she will undertake a full review of the rights of artists here, including a thorough examination of existing copyright laws and the current competition Acts. [11687/17]

**Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor):** In response to Parliamentary Question No. 739 put down by the Deputy on 31 January 2017, I informed the Deputy that Government had approved the General Scheme of a Copyright Bill, the main purpose of which is to respond to certain of the recommendations contained in the Report of the Copyright Review Committee entitled "Modernising Copyright", which was published in October 2013. Formal drafting of the Bill with the office of Parliamentary Counsel is currently in progress.

Artists who are employees in Ireland have the same rights as all other employees. In cases of self-employed artists, as with other self-employed workers, the application of competition law would only be a consideration if there are allegations of anti-competitive behaviour.

### **Personal Injury Claims**

799. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if consideration will be given to a consultation process to amend the injuriesboard.ie book of quantum in an effort to tackle high compensation payments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11879/17]

**Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor):** The Personal Injuries Assessment Board (PIAB) is an independent statutory agency charged with assessing claims for compensation arising from personal injuries sustained as a result of a mo-



tor, workplace or public liability accident and where both parties, claimant and respondent, consent to an assessment. It is a matter for the parties concerned whether or not they wish to accept the assessment. I have no direct function in relation to the day to day operational matters of PIAB.

Section 54 of the Personal Injuries Assessment Board Act 2003 sets out the principal functions of the Board. Section 54(1)(b) states: ‘to prepare and publish a document (which shall be known as the “Book of Quantum”) containing general guidelines as to the amounts that may be awarded or assessed in respect of specified types of injury’.

The revised Book of Quantum was published on 5 October 2016. The Book was compiled by independent consultants and commissioned by the Personal Injuries Assessment Board (PIAB).

The Book isn’t a recommendation for compensation levels but rather a reflection of the prevailing level of awards, i.e.:

- compensation values awarded by the courts
- settlements agreed by the Insurance Industry
- settlements agreed by the State Claims Agency; and
- settlements agreed through the PIAB process.

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

One of the recommendations in the Cost of Insurance Working Group Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance published on 10 January 2017 by the Minister for Finance, Mr Michael Noonan T.D., and the Minister of State for Financial Services, Mr Eoghan Murphy T.D. is to explore with the judiciary how future reviews of the Book of Quantum/guidelines might involve appropriate judicial involvement in its compilation or adoption.

### **Construction Industry**

800. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the measures her Department has put in place to combat bogus self-employment in the construction industry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11249/17]

**Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O’Connor):** Apart from significant losses to the Exchequer that can arise from cases of so-called bogus self-employment, the practice has serious implications from an employment rights perspective. In this respect, it is important that individuals are correctly designated regarding their employment status so that those who ought to be designated as employees are not deprived of their employment rights. This is particularly the case for vulnerable workers who may not feel in a position to object to certain arrangements.

Ireland has a well-resourced labour inspectorate, which forms part of the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) and there are existing mechanisms in place to determine the employ-

ment status of individuals or groups.

WRC Inspections are undertaken on the basis of risk analysis which identifies certain sectors, as a result of complaints received and on a routine basis. Where the WRC inspection service discover or issues are raised in relation to bogus self-employment or bogus sub-contracting, they are forwarded to the Revenue Commissioners and/or the Department of Social Protection (Scope Section) for investigation either solely by the recipient, or jointly with the Workplace Relations Commission. In this respect, the Deputy will be aware of a case reported in the media earlier this year about a number of construction workers who sought clarification of their employment status from the Department of Social Protection.

In most cases it will be clear whether an individual is employed or self-employed. Where there is doubt in relation to the employment status of an individual the relevant Departments and Agencies will have regard to the Code of Practice for Determining Employment or Self-Employment Status of Individuals. This Code was drawn up and agreed in 2007 by the relevant Government Departments with ICTU and IBEC.

Where an individual believes they are being deprived of employment rights applicable to employees they may refer a complaint to the WRC where the matter can be dealt with by way of mediation or adjudication leading to a decision that is enforceable through the District Court. Complaints can be made on a single complaint form available at the WRC's website [www.workplacerelations.ie](http://www.workplacerelations.ie).

WRC inspectors can also be asked to investigate certain breaches. The WRC's Customer Service Section, which provides information to both employers and employees in relation to employment and industrial relations rights and obligations, can be contacted at Lo-call: 1890 80 80 90 or 059-9178990.

### **Brexit Issues**

801. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if she has raised the UK's future membership of the European Space Agency with her UK or EU counterparts; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11350/17]

**Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor):** The European Space Agency is an international organisation with 22 Member States from both within and outside the European Union. The Agency operates independently of the European Union and the United Kingdom's membership of ESA is not dependent on its EU membership. The UK Government's White Paper on Brexit notes that the United Kingdom was a founding member of ESA and that it recently committed €1.4 billion to research and development in this sector. The United Kingdom's policy is to continue to be a member of ESA after it leaves the European Union. I have not, therefore, raised the issue of the UK's future membership of ESA in any forum.

### **Jobs Data**

802. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the cost per job in taxpayer support of jobs created by IDA Ireland and ConnectIreland respectively. [11405/17]

803. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation

the reason a review is being conducted into ConnectIreland; and the reason the programme is being shut down before the results of that review are published. [11406/17]

**Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 802 and 803 together.

The contract underpinning the Succeed-in-Ireland initiative, which has been operated by Connect Ireland since March 2012, is set to conclude on 26 March 2017. This had been due to expire in March 2016 but was extended for a further 12 months last year. The purpose of that extension, which was jointly agreed by Connect Ireland and IDA Ireland, was to facilitate both parties in effecting an orderly wind down of the original contract.

A review of the initiative's performance and operation will shortly be commissioned by my Department. This will allow us to better understand its contribution to employment generation in the State. As I have said before in the Dáil, I believe it is in the interests of good governance that this review be undertaken before a determination is made on the long-term future of the programme.

As regards the cost to the exchequer of IDA Ireland client company jobs, the most recent available figures cover the period between 2009-2015. These indicate an average cost of €10,553 per position.

I understand, from the IDA, that the Succeed-in-Ireland initiative has created 527 jobs on the ground. IDA Ireland has paid €2,069,000 to Connect Ireland as a financial reward for those 527 positions. The Agency has also provided Connect Ireland with a further €150,000 for marketing support for the operation of the programme. My understanding is that the remainder of Connect Ireland's operating costs are met by the company itself.

### Departmental Expenditure

804. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the amount her Department spent on public relations consultants and all matters relating to public relations costs in 2016; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11432/17]

**Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor):** Details of expenditure by my Department on public relations in 2016 are set out as follows:-

PR Company	Purpose of Contract	Amount Spent in 2016
Fuzion Communications	Provision of communications services to the Workplace Relations Commission.	€643.64
Keatings and Associates	Provision of communications services to the Workplace Relations Commission.	€3321.00

### Community Enterprise Centres

805. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the details of the 2017 plans for the Enterprise Ireland community enterprise centre initiative; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11462/17]

**Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor):** In

2015, the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, in conjunction with Enterprise Ireland, began a new approach to supporting job creation initiatives through competitive funding schemes. These schemes support of the Regional Action Plans for Jobs at local and regional level.

Enterprise Ireland launched the Community Enterprise Initiatives Fund, the first of these competitive calls, in 2015. It focused on community-driven enterprise initiatives and how all the local players, public and private, can work together to maximise job creation.

The Fund was open to existing Community Enterprise Centres (CECs) and also to any other organisation or groups of organisations with innovative ideas to create jobs, promote entrepreneurship, boost innovation or enhance exports. In June 2016 €3m was awarded to 32 projects to work together at regional level.

To continue to stimulate regional growth, as detailed in the Action Plan for Jobs 2017, the Government will provide further investment of up to €60 million across 2017 – 2020 to support collaborative approaches to boost enterprise and job creation throughout the country.

As part of this commitment, Enterprise Ireland will announce a new competitive fund in the near term. This competitive funding will support major new collaborative and innovative initiatives that can make a significant impact on enterprise development in a region, across regions, or nationally, to build on unique regional capabilities and drive balanced regional enterprise development throughout Ireland.

Eligible applicants will be not for profit entities that comprise national/regional, county and local stakeholders, with a purpose of benefitting the wider needs of the community and region/nation. CECs will be eligible to apply for this competitive funding.

### **Construction Industry**

806. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the level of construction inflation that has been experienced by her Department in each of the past six years and to date in 2017 in respect of construction projects and other capital projects; the way in which she monitors construction inflation and the mechanisms she employs to establish this; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11539/17]

**Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor):** My Department does not have any role in tracking or monitoring inflation levels in the construction sector and therefore does not employ any mechanisms to establish these.

### **EU Funding**

807. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation further to Parliamentary Question No. 332 of 1 February 2017, if she will provide a list of projects put forward by her Department in November 2014 to the Department of Finance for inclusion in the submission to the task force established to develop an EU investment project pipeline for the European Funding for Strategic Investment. [11550/17]

**Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor):** In response to the request for submissions from the EU Task Force on Investment of potential investment projects as part of its scoping exercise, a joint proposal was submitted by agencies operating under the auspices of the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation. The agen-

cies (Enterprise Ireland, the Local Enterprise Offices, IDA Ireland and Science Foundation Ireland) put forward a proposal related to the Knowledge and Digital Economy sector, entitled “Regional Enterprise Infrastructure Solutions”.

The proposal was a regionally focused enterprise funding package with 3 strands:

(1) Regional Enterprise (€50m) funding innovation infrastructure and competitive collaboration. The purpose of this funding is to stimulate the enhancement of the local and regional enterprise eco-system by competitively offering to co-finance projects proposed by local/regional alliances.

(2) Enhance enterprise innovative capacity within the regions (€200m) via four Research, Development and Innovation hubs:

(3) Improve infrastructural supports (€30m) to the regional enterprise base in order to increase employment opportunities and promote economic growth and social inclusion.

### Exports Data

808. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the total annual number of exporting firms broken down between Enterprise Ireland client companies and IDA supported companies over the 2014-2016 period, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11553/17]

**Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O’Connor):** Exports by Enterprise Ireland client companies totalled a record €20.6bn in 2015. The Enterprise Ireland Strategy 2017-2020 is to Build Scale and Expand Reach.

The strategic aims are to:

- Assist clients to create 60,000 new jobs and to sustain the existing record of new jobs by 2020; and

- Grow annual exports by €5 billion to €26 billion per annum by 2020. Within this, Enterprise Ireland is seeking to increase the diversification of client company exports into new markets, with 2/3 of exports going beyond the UK. This includes a major focus on the Eurozone where the agency is targeting a 50 per cent increase in exports.

IDA Ireland has a client base of 1,318 companies which export 96% of everything they produce in Ireland. Exports by IDA client companies totalled €149bn in 2015.

Enterprise Ireland and IDA records client exports as part of the annual ABR survey. The latest available data is for 2015. The 2016 exports figures will be available in Q2. 2017.

**Table 1** as follows presents the number of EI and IDA client companies that reported export sales in the 2014 and 2015 ABR survey.

No of clients that reported export sales in the ABR survey.	2014	2015	2016
Enterprise Ireland clients	1,740	1,740	Not available yet
IDA clients	1,242	1,290	Not available yet

Source: Annual Business Review (ABR)

## **EU Directives**

809. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the position regarding the transposition of the EU Accounting Directive into law; his views on the fact that the application of section 1A of FRS 102 and FRS 105 is not yet in place here; if his attention has been drawn to the consequences for SMEs; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11869/17]

**Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor):** The Companies (Accounting) Bill 2016 will transpose Directive 2013/34/EU (the EU Accounting Directive) into Irish legislation. That Bill is expected to be scheduled for Report Stage in the Dáil later this month.

Clearly, the timing of enactment thereafter will depend on the availability of parliamentary time.

Section 1A of FRS 102 sets out the information that shall be presented and disclosed in the financial statements of a small entity that chooses to apply the small entities regime, while FRS 105 is the Financial Reporting Standard applicable to the Micro-entities Regime. The Bill introduces new provisions for small companies and for a new category of micro company, which is a subset of the category of small company. Accordingly, Section 1A of FRS 102 and FRS 105 will be available to small and micro companies, respectively, once the Bill is enacted and commenced.

## **Gender Equality**

810. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation her views on the latest report which showed that the gender pay gap has widened by 6.5% in the past five years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11873/17]

**Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor):** Policy responsibility for gender equality in employment remains with my colleagues the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality, Frances Fitzgerald TD and her colleague David Stanton TD, Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality with special responsibility for Equality, Immigration and Integration. To that end Minister of State Stanton is chairing a Strategy Committee to advise the Department of Justice and Equality on the preparation of the new National Women's Strategy. In public consultation the gender pay has emerged as an issue of concern to many respondents.

Under Section 10 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014, the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHERC) has a statutory role to 'keep under review the adequacy and effectiveness of law and practice in the State in relation to the protection of human rights and equality'.

With regards to my Department, in 2015 Ministers Richard Bruton and Ged Nash (then Minister for Jobs Enterprise and Innovation and Minister for Business and Employment, respectively) wrote to the Low Pay Commission (LPC) asking it to report on the preponderance of women on the national minimum wage.

The LPC report found only 5% of employees are on the National Minimum Wage. It is self-evident that men and women on the National Minimum Wage receive the same remuneration per hour - €9.25 per hour. However, 64.7% of employees on the National Minimum Wage

are women. Reasons suggested by the report for this are: women tend to work part-time more often than men because of caring responsibilities, the cost of childcare and women are over-represented in the Accommodation and Food sector, which carries the greatest risk factor of being on the National Minimum Wage. The report was brought to Government and published in October 2016.

### **Skills Development**

811. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if the State has adopted the European Commission's Quality Framework on Traineeships, which was a key element of the youth guarantee; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11945/17]

**Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor):** My Department does not have responsibility for the development or delivery of traineeship schemes. Solas, which is under the remit of the Department of Education and Skills, delivers the National Traineeship Programme, which is tailored to the needs of Irish industry and offers participants occupationally relevant training and industry recognised qualifications.

I am informed by my colleague the Minister for Social Protection that the Quality Framework on Traineeships was adopted by the Department of Social Protection when implementing the JobBridge scheme, which has now closed.

### **Industrial Development**

812. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if his attention has been drawn to the fact that a facility (details supplied) is up for sale in Carrickmacross; if any State agencies has plans to buy this property to create jobs in the town; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11961/17]

**Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor):** I am informed by IDA Ireland that the Agency is aware that the facility is on the market, but has no plans to purchase it at this time.

IDA Ireland has had frequent engagement with relevant local authorities about the facility in question. The Agency will continue to pursue all opportunities to attract foreign direct investment (FDI) to Monaghan and will bring the facility to the attention of prospective investors as part of this process.

As well as exploring FDI opportunities, following a series of meetings between myself, the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs and Monaghan County Council, I have asked IDA and Enterprise Ireland to work together to progress the development of a masterplan to enhance the value proposition for indigenous enterprise at IDA Ireland owned lands in Knockaconny, Co. Monaghan.

### **Employment Data**

813. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of persons employed in total in two industrial estates (details supplied). [11970/17]

**Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor):** IDA

Ireland collates its employment data on an annual basis by region and by county. I am informed by the Agency that it supported 696 client companies in Co. Dublin in 2016, employing 86,622 people.

The following table sets out details relating to Poppintree Industrial Estate, including the amount of land available for marketing and number of tenants. The Agency does not track the number of people employed in the park. IDA Ireland does not own Ballymun Business Park and consequently does not hold any details in relation to its occupancy.

#### **Poppintree Industrial Estate Details**

County	Town	Business Park/Site Name	Total Size	Available for marketing (size)	No of tenants
Dublin 11	Poppintree	Poppintree Industrial Estate	c. 20.6 ha / c. 51 acres	c. 3.78 ha / c. 9 acres	6

*Question No. 814 withdrawn.*

#### **Job Creation Data**

815. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the total number of job announcements for the south east for each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017, by county; the total number of IDA site visits for south east for each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017, by county; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12013/17]

**Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor):** There were 24 job announcements by IDA Ireland client companies in the South East region from 2011 to date. It is important to realise that the number of announcements does not necessarily reflect the level of FDI activity in the region because not all IDA clients choose to publicly announce investments. In the same period IDA supported companies in the South East created 4,630 jobs, bringing total employment in the region to 13,369 at the end of 2016.

IDA Ireland carried out 176 site visits to the region from 2011 until the end of 2016, with 2015 and 2016 figures more than double those of the previous two years. Site visit data is collated at quarterly intervals on a county basis. Data for the first quarter of 2017 will not be available until next month.

Details of the job announcements and the breakdown of site visits for the region are set out in the following tables.

#### **IDA Ireland Client Company Job Announcements South East 2011-2017**

-	Date	Company	County
1	06/04/2011	Bausch & Lomb	Waterford
2	06/06/2011	Mycroft	Waterford
3	08/08/2011	Boston Scientific	Tipperary
4	16/09/2011	Coca-Cola	Wexford
5	22/09/2011	MSD	Tipperary



-	Date	Company	County
6	26/07/2012	Envelope Supply Company	Kilkenny
7	28/03/2013	Nypro	Waterford
8	30/06/2014	NuVasive	Waterford
9	02/10/2014	West Pharma	Waterford
10	05/11/2015	Clearstream	Waterford
11	25/03/2015	Sunlife	Waterford
12	25/04/2015	Agora Publishing	Waterford
13	29/04/2015	Bausch & Lomb	Waterford
14	15/06/2015	CRI	Wexford
15	07/09/2015	CipherTechs	Kilkenny
16	07/09/2015	Bluefin	Waterford
17	22/09/2015	MSD	Tipperary
18	21/01/2016	First Data	Tipperary
19	21/04/2016	OPKO Health/Eirgin	Waterford
20	13/06/2016	Eurofins	Waterford
21	30/08/2016	Se2	Waterford
22	04/11/2016	Compar AG	Waterford
23	06/02/2017	Mercury Filmworks	Kilkenny
24	06/02/2017	Red Hat	Waterford

#### Site Visits to South East Region 2011 - 2016

Region	County	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
South East	Carlow	2	4	1	2	1	9
South East	Kilkenny	0	3	3	4	10	10
South East	Waterford	11	26	14	11	31	17
South East	Wexford	0	3	2	1	4	7
South East and Mid-West *	Tipperary	1	5	4	3	12	8
	Total	13	36	20	18	46	43

\*Tipperary straddles two regions – South East and Mid-West.

#### Consumer Protection

816. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the rights available to a person that does not use a gift voucher before the stated expiry date; her plans to introduce legislation to ban the policy implemented in this regard; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [12154/17]

**Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor):** Gift vouchers supplied to consumers are subject to the provisions of general consumer protection legislation, in particular the provisions of the Consumer Protection Act 2007 on unfair, misleading and aggressive commercial practices and of the European Communities (Unfair Terms in Consumer Contracts) Regulations 1995 (S.I. No. 27 of 1995). Gift vouchers that are not financial services products are covered also by the provisions of the European Union (Consumer Information, Cancellation and Other Rights) Regulations 2013 (S.I. No. 484 of 2013).

Gift cards that come within the definition of “electronic money” in the European Communities (Electronic Money) Regulations 2011 are subject to the provisions of these Regulations unless the card can be used only to acquire goods or services in the premises of the card issuer or within a limited network of service providers or for a limited range of goods and services. The issuer of a gift card which comes within the definition of electronic money must, at the request of the electronic money holder, redeem the monetary value of the electronic money at par value at any time. Redemption may be subject to a fee in specified circumstances and any such fee must be proportionate and commensurate with the costs actually incurred by the issuer of the electronic money.

My Department published the draft Scheme of a comprehensive Consumer Rights Bill for public consultation on 25 May 2015. In addition to Parts dealing with the consolidation and updating of the law on the supply of goods, digital content and services and on unfair contract terms, the draft Scheme contains a number of provisions for the regulation of gift vouchers, including a proposed ban on expiry dates in contracts for the supply of gift vouchers. The responses to the gift card provisions raised a substantial number of issues, including concerns expressed by businesses about the impact of a complete prohibition on expiry dates and the need for clarity and certainty in respect of the regulation of gift cards that come within the scope of the European Communities (Electronic Money) Regulations 2011. While the present proposal is for a ban on expiry dates for gift cards that do not come within the scope of the Electronic Money Regulations, I am willing to listen to other views and possible approaches, such as a requirement that gift cards remain valid for a set period such as five years.

While I am anxious to progress the Scheme of the Consumer Rights Bill, I have to take account of current European Union legislative proposals for Directives on consumer contracts for the supply of digital content and consumer contracts for the online and other distance sale of goods. These proposals which were announced in May 2015 and published in December 2015 overlap very substantially with two of the main parts of the draft Scheme of the Consumer Rights Bill. Discussions on the digital content proposal at working party level have proceeded rapidly with a first reading of the proposal completed by April 2016 and agreement reached at the June Justice and Home Affairs Council on the basic principles of the proposal and on political guidelines for future work on it. Discussions in the second half of 2016 under the Slovak Presidency made further progress and provided the basis for a policy debate on a number of aspects of the proposal at the Justice and Home Affairs Council on 8-9 December. The current Maltese Presidency has indicated that it aims to achieve agreement on a general approach to the digital content proposal in the first half of 2017. In this situation, I have to consider the advisability of bringing forward a legislative proposal to the Oireachtas when a directly related and fully harmonised legislative proposal may be at an advanced stage of the European Union legislative process. The wisdom of introducing legislation in the Oireachtas in 2017 if large parts of that legislation would have to be repealed or substantially amended within a relatively short space of time is obviously open to question. I will continue to review the progress of the two European Union proposals with a view to deciding the best course of action to take with regard to the Scheme of the Consumer Rights Bill.

### **School Completion Programme**

817. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of school completion programmes in schools that do not have DEIS status (details supplied); the way these programmes will be impacted following the recent DEIS announcement; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11488/17]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I wish to advise the Deputy that there are currently just over 150 Non-DEIS schools supported under the School Completion Programme (SCP). The Educational Welfare Service of the Child and Family Agency (Tusla) has advised that it does not intend to make any changes to the SCP for the 2017/2018 school year as the planning process for the 2017/2018 school year is already at an advanced stage. Tusla will be engaging in discussions with my Department and the Department of Education and Skills in relation to the status of Non-DEIS schools and the SCP over the coming months. It is considered that any changes to the SCP in the context of the recent DEIS announcement will not take place until the 2018/2019 school year at the earliest.

### Early Start Programme

818. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if there is a taskforce for the development of the early years strategy; and if so, the detail of the members of the taskforce, their title and their organisation. [11185/17]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** Ireland's first ever Early Years Strategy is being progressed by my Department. This Strategy, which is expected to be published later this year, will take a whole-of-Government approach outlining Ireland's vision for the coming decade in seeking to improve the lives of children from birth to 6 years. It will address a range of issues affecting children in their first years of life such as child health and well-being, parenting and family support, learning and development and play and recreation.

The Strategy is taking account of the *Right from the Start*, the Report of the Expert Advisory Group on the Early Years Strategy and the reports of two Inter-Departmental Groups established and chaired by my Department in 2015, specifically the Report on *Future Investment in Childcare in Ireland* and the *Report on Supporting Access to the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme for Children with a Disability*. Membership and affiliation of the Expert Advisory Group on the Early Years Strategy is presented below.

The Strategy is also being informed by bilateral discussions with the relevant Government Departments and by a range of stakeholder consultations, including one undertaken with children aged 3-5 and an Open Policy Debate held on in December 2016. The Open Policy Debate brought together over 80 experts, practitioners and stakeholders from the fields of health, education, early childhood care and education, child protection, housing, community, social protection and social inclusion. Participants included parents' organisations, statutory and non-statutory organisations and advocacy groups, trade union and business representatives, and Government departments. In addition, in the coming months and before publication, my Department intends to consult with the various structures created to implement *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*, including the Consortium, the Advisory Council and the Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSC ) National Steering Group.

Membership and affiliation of the Expert Advisory Group on the Early Years Strategy at the time <i>Right from the Start</i> was published
Eilish Hennessy, Chair, National University of Ireland, Dublin
Catherine Byrne, The Atlantic Philanthropies
Siobhan Feehan, Deansrath Family Centre, Clondalkin
Fergus Finlay, Barnardos
Irene Gunning, Early Childhood Ireland

Membership and affiliation of the Expert Advisory Group on the Early Years Strategy at the time Right from the Start was published
Prof. Nóirín Hayes, Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT)
Fiona McDonnell, National Specialist, Early Years Inspectorate
Roisin McGlone, Sligo Institute of Technology
Breda McKenna, Monaghan County Childcare Committee
Patricia Murray, Childminding Ireland
Fr. Gerard O'Connor, St. Ultan's, Cherry Orchard
Patricia O'Dwyer, Public Health Nursing Consultant
Biddy O'Neill, Health Service Executive
Kathryn O'Riordan, Cork City Childcare Committee
Thomas Walsh, Primary District Inspector, Department of Education and Skills
Toby Wolfe, Start Strong

### Child Protection

819. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her Department in co-operation with the Department of Education and Skills institutes procedures and training for the mandatory reporting of child protection concerns by home tutors; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11187/17]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** Since the Children First Act 2015 was signed into law on 19 November 2015, a number of provisions of the Act have already been commenced as follows: Sections 1 to 5 (Part I) and section 28 (Part V) of the Act were commenced on 10 December 2015 and Section 18 (Part III) and Sections 20-26 (Part IV) were commenced on 1 May 2016. I have recently committed to commencement of the remaining provisions of the Act by end 2017.

Responsibility for preparations for the implementation of the Children First Act 2015 rests with individual Departments and sectors. To assist in the preparations for the commencement of the remaining provisions of the Act, my Department and Tusla are in the process of developing a suite of resources to support the full implementation of the Act. This includes the revision by my Department of the Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children and the preparation by Tusla of guidance documents in relation to child safeguarding statements and mandated assisting. In addition, Tusla is developing a comprehensive Children First e-training module which will be universally available free of charge and will set out the information required to recognise and report child welfare and protection concerns. It is intended that this suite of resources will be launched prior to the commencement date to give persons and organisations who will acquire legal obligations under the Act sufficient time to familiarise themselves with the resources.

Any additional training needs identified by Departments/sectors must be met by the Department/sector in question which, in the case of home tutors, is the Department of Education and Skills.

I note that the Deputy specifically inquired as to the position in relation to “procedures and training” for home tutors. Unless the home tutor in question is a teacher who is registered with the Teaching Council, they are not designated mandated reporters under Schedule 2 of the Children Act 2015 and do not therefore attract the legislative obligations attaching to designated mandated reporters under the Act.

## Commercial Rates Impact

820. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her views on whether new Government supports for financially challenged private creches nationwide should be considered in order to reduce the financial burden many are currently undergoing due to the requirement to pay commercial rates to councils; if her attention has been drawn to this issue; if she will consider leading this approach at Government; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11254/17]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I am very much aware of the issue of commercial rates and the impact it is having on early years services.

It is my understanding that the valuation/rating code as it applies to early childhood care and education facilities was last altered following the commencement of the Valuation (Amendment) Act 2015 in June 2015.

In summary;

1. Group 1 type facilities referred to in the correspondence are exempt by way of Paragraph 22 Schedule 4 Valuation Acts 2001- 2015 which provides for the exemption of a building used exclusively for the provision of early childhood care and education and occupied by a body which is not established and the affairs of which are not conducted for the purpose of making a private profit i.e. a not for profit organisation.

2. Group 2 type facilities are exempt under Paragraph 10 Schedule 4 Valuation Acts 2001- 2015 on the basis that the facility is used exclusively for the provision of educational services (ECCE) only.

3. Group 3 type facilities are essentially businesses established for the purpose of making a private profit and are therefore rateable.

There are also a number of early childhood care and education facilities which are exempt under Paragraph 16 Schedule 4 Valuation Acts 2001- 2015 on the basis that the facility is occupied by a charitable organisation and used exclusively by that body for charitable purposes.

Officials from my Department have contacted the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform with a view to arranging a meeting with them to discuss the issue of commercial rates for early years services.

## Pupil Data Collection

821. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of post primary suspensions listed by name of individual school in County Louth for the school year 2013/2014 (details supplied). [11293/17]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The information requested by the Deputy is contained in the following table.

### 2013/2014 Post Primary

Roll Number	School Name	Number of Suspensions
71750U	Bush Post Primary School	4
63891T	De La Salle College	19

Roll Number	School Name	Number of Suspensions
63870L	Drogheda Grammar School	14
63920A	Dundalk Grammar School	27
71770D	Ó Fiaich College	8
63850F	Our Lady's College	12
63860I	Sacred Heart Secondary School	9
71780G	Scoil Uí Mhuirí	42
63840C	St. Joseph's CBS	81
63910U	St. Louis Secondary School	34
63890R	St. Mary's College	68
63841E	St. Mary's Diocesan School	24
71761C	St. Oliver's Community College	74
63900R	St. Vincent's Secondary School	7
63880O	Coláiste Rís	26

### Child and Family Agency Staff

822. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the total number of persons employed by Tusla; and the numerical breakdown of these staff, according to region and job title. [11297/17]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The Child and Family Agency (Tusla) has advised that at the end of January, 2017 there were 3,616.02 whole-time equivalent staff directly employed. The numerical breakdown of staff by region and category is set down in tabular format :

Tusla Census by Staff Category January 2017	WTE
Social Work	1467.45
Social Care	1114.99
Psychologists and Counsellors	23.4
Other Support Staff inc Catering	63.04
Other Health Professionals	9.76
Nursing	49.91
Management VIII+	106.97
Family Support	165.72
Education Welfare Officers	86.84
Admin Grades	527.94
Grand Total	3616.02

Tusla Census by Region January 2017	WTE
CFA - Child Resident Serv	763.75
CFA - Corporate	442.89
CFA - Dublin Mid Leinster	623.26
CFA - Dublin North East	574.21
CFA - South	592.94
CFA - West	618.97
Grand Total	3616.02

## Guardians Ad Litem

823. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if his attention has been drawn to the fact that certain guardian ad litem have been paid over €100,000 each for their services; her views on whether this is an appropriate expenditure; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11298/17]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** Section 26 of the 1991 Child Care Act provides for the appointment of a guardian *ad litem* in respect of care proceedings where a child is not a party to those proceedings and where the court is satisfied that it is necessary in the best interests of the child and in the interests of justice to have a guardian *ad litem* appointed.

Section 26 of the 1991 Act also obliges the Child and Family Agency (CFA) to pay costs (fees, travel and legal representation) incurred by a guardian *ad litem* in the performance of his/her functions. The CFA has no powers under the 1991 Act to query any invoices for costs that are submitted by Guardians ad litem. My Department is kept informed of the expenditure details on a monthly basis.

My Department has developed proposals for the extensive reform of guardian *ad litem* arrangements, as it has been recognised that the current governance arrangements for the guardian *ad litem* service are not adequate. These proposals are focussed on establishing a nationally organised, managed and delivered guardian *ad litem* service by way of public procurement. The new national service will be responsible for providing guardians *ad litem* to the courts, supporting the professional practice and development of guardians *ad litem* and monitoring their performance. The national service will also be responsible for making legal advice available to guardians *ad litem* through an in-house legal facility and arranging legal representation for a guardian *ad litem* where it is deemed by a service provider to be required.

The role and function of a guardian *ad litem* in child care proceedings will be to inform the court of the child's views and to advise the court of what, in the guardian *ad litem*'s professional opinion, is in the best interests of the child, and there will be a presumption in favour of the appointment of a guardian *ad litem* in all child care proceedings; where the court decides not to appoint a guardian *ad litem*, the court will be required to give the reasoning behind its decision.

Government approved the publication of the draft General Scheme and Heads of Bill at its meeting on 17th January 2017 and for its referral to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Children & Youth Affairs for pre-legislative scrutiny.

The proposed legislative reforms will address the current fragmented arrangements and focus on achieving a consistent, high quality service that best meets the needs of vulnerable children and young people. It is intended that the reforms will result in the appropriate use of guardians *ad litem* in proceedings on a basis that is financially sustainable.

## Public Relations Contracts Expenditure

824. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the amount her Department spent on public relations consultants and all matters relating to public relations costs in 2016; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11424/17]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** My Department had no spending on public relations consultants or on any matters relating to public relations

in 2016.

### Community Services Programme

825. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 602 of 25 October 2016, if the decision to discontinue the community mothers' scheme in Clondalkin was taken by her department or by the local Tusla managers; the rationale for this decision; the number of these schemes that were discontinued; and if any replacement is to be provided to new mothers in Clondalkin. [11440/17]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I have requested information from Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. I will forward the reply to the Deputy once I have been furnished with this information.

### Cyberbullying Issues

826. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the systems that are being rolled out to combat the dramatic increase in cyber bullying, as outlined by the ISPCC to the Oireachtas Committee on Children and Youth Affairs; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11486/17]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** In its appearance before the Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs on 22 February 2017, the ISPCC outlined and discussed with the Committee a number of concerns about online habits and how young people interact with each other using modern technologies. Cyber bullying was one such concern, but discussions also took place around issues such as excessive time spent online, sexting, "sextortion" and blackmail, access to inappropriate content and cyber identity. These are all complex issues, exacerbated by the rate at which technological developments continue to happen.

A number of very valid concerns were also raised around grooming and the dangers inherent in engaging with strangers online. Combatting online child grooming is a matter for my colleague the Minister for Justice and Equality, and is addressed as part of a wide-ranging package of measures aimed at the reform of Ireland's criminal law on sexual offences, set out in the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Bill currently progressing through the Houses of the Oireachtas.

Education emerged in the discussions as a fundamental issue for parents and young people, with parental guidance, supervision, and the setting of boundaries considered critical to ensuring children's safety online. The *saferinternetireland.ie* website has a range of resources aimed at parents and their children, including a recent 'Family e-Safety Kit' activity pack aimed at six to twelve-year-olds. The ISPCC itself has developed guidelines and supports for parents.

The Office for Internet Safety, an executive office of the Department of Justice and Equality, was established by the Government to take a lead responsibility for internet safety in Ireland, particularly as it relates to children. That Office has previously published guidance related to cyber bullying and filtering technologies for parents. As part of its work it holds an annual Safer Internet Day, whose theme this year was 'Be the change: Unite for a better internet'. It also supports the 'Hotline.ie' service. In addition to *Hotline.ie*, there are a number of other websites, such as Childline and webwise, that have the capacity to facilitate anyone to report suspicious behaviour encountered online.



My Department supports the National Youth Health Programme which is in partnership with the HSE and the National Youth Council of Ireland. The programme's aims are to provide a broad based, flexible health promotion / education support and training service to youth organisations and to all those working with young people in out-of-school settings. The 'Web Safety in Youth Work' resource, available on the National Youth Council's website, provides valuable advice to young people on reporting online behaviour and on passing on concerns about the protection and welfare of a child or young person.

In seeking to address the problem of bullying we must tackle the root causes of bullying. This includes a focus on tackling prejudice, including homophobia, where it exists in our schools and wider society. The implementation of the Action Plan on Bullying, which is being led by the Department of Education and Skills, provides the framework for the Government's absolute commitment to working with a broad base of interests to protect children from bullying and the often devastating consequences that it can have.

### Child Abuse

827. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of reports of abuse of children across each category of abuse received in each of the past three years to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11513/17]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The most recent figures disaggregated by abuse category published by Tusla in its Review of Adequacy Report are for the years 2013 and 2014, and are as shown in the following table.

Abuse category	2013	2014
Total	19,407	18,676
Physical	4,330	4,066
Emotional	5,271	6,233
Sexual	3,385	3,114
Neglect	6,421	5,263

I understand that the 2015 Review of Adequacy is currently in preparation. I have been advised that the end of year 2015 total number of referrals was 43,596 of which 18,235 related to abuse referrals. I will refer the disaggregated figures to the Deputy as soon as I receive them.

### Foster Care

828. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if Tusla will put in place a universally agreed allegations procedure for use by families that foster children; the reason such a procedure has not been agreed with the stakeholders; the reason their demands have been ignored; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11528/17]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The information sought by the Deputy has been requested from the Child and Family Agency and I will respond directly to the Deputy when the information is received.

### Construction Industry

829. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the level of construction inflation that has been experienced by her Department in each of the past six years and to date in 2017 in respect of construction projects and other capital projects; the way in which she monitors construction inflation and the mechanisms she employs to establish this; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11531/17]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The single largest construction project under the direct management of my Department in recent years is in respect of the Oberstown, Children Detention Campus. The capital development project which commenced on site at Oberstown in 2013 was a fixed price project and, as such, the issue of construction inflation did not arise.

Information regarding any construction inflation in Tusla capital projects, is not readily available in my Department. I have therefore referred your question to Tusla who will respond directly to you.

### **Human Rights**

830. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if, with regard to the case of a person (details supplied), the State is in a position to offer an apology on the basis of the subsequent chain of events; if she will provide further information regarding the circumstances of the person's transferral to Northern Ireland; if consent was sought from the person's parent for such a transfer; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11805/17]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** In order to facilitate enquiries into the matter raised in the question, I request that the Deputy would provide more information to my Department.

### **Community Childcare Subvention Programme**

831. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if consideration has been given to the concerns raised by the community child care sector that the proposed new affordable childcare scheme will reduce the support for school going children of parents that are unemployed; if there is consideration of this in the drafting of the Bill; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [11931/17]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I wish to inform the Deputy that consideration has been given to how the new Affordable Childcare Scheme will benefit the children of parents that are unemployed.

The benefits of moving to an income-basis for eligibility under the new scheme include:

- Clarity, with a move away from a complex array of eligibility criteria to a single, clear basis.
- Reduction of welfare traps and increased support for progression into employment and retention in employment.
- Equity, in ensuring that low-income working families are not excluded from benefitting from subsidised childcare.

The base income threshold guarantees that the maximum rate of subsidy is available to all families below the relative income poverty line, while ensuring that the taper rate between the

base and maximum thresholds does not generate strong disincentive effects with regard to taking up or increasing employment. It also ensures that the majority of current scheme beneficiaries will receive the maximum subsidy rate under the new scheme.

While the new scheme will target subsidies predominately based on income, it was considered whether other criteria such as a work/training requirement should also apply, i.e. whether the family needs childcare because both parents, or, one parent in the case of a one-parent family, are working or in training.

Incorporating a work/training test into the eligibility criteria ties the scheme more clearly to its labour market participation objective. The labour market objective also has implications in terms of hours of availability, given parents' need for childcare availability to match hours of work.

Given that both a child development objective and a labour market objective are relevant to this scheme, it was determined that there should be a balanced approach to eligibility: while people would qualify for a subsidy based purely on income, parents' participation in work/training would determine whether that eligibility is for a subsidy towards enhanced hours of childcare (up to 40 hours per week) or towards standard hours childcare (up to 15 hours per week)

When parents are not in work or training, childcare will be subsidised on a standard hours basis (except in cases where sponsors support a childcare subsidy for families with high levels of need). This approach will mean that this scheme is open – albeit for standard hours rather than enhanced hours – to parents who stay at home to care for their children, and are not taking part in work or training, but who choose to avail of up to 15 hours of childcare per week. In the case of school going children it is considered that the child development objectives are met through school going hours and, as such, the 15 standard hours childcare applies to non-term time.

Under the existing CCS programme, to be replaced by this new scheme, beneficiaries qualify for full-time childcare subsidies even if they are not in work or training. As such, existing affected beneficiaries will enjoy a “saver” status, whereby they will retain their existing benefits for one year following the introduction of the new scheme. However, thereafter they, and any similar new entrants to the scheme, who are not in employment, will qualify for the standard hours only.

### **Community Services Programme**

832. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the areas in which the community mothers programme is still in operation; the number of staff allocated to this programme; and her plans for the restoration of this programme in view of its effectiveness in the past. [11979/17]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I have requested information from Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. I will forward the reply to the Deputy once I have been furnished with this information.

### **Child Care Services Expenditure**

833. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the full year cost of the ACS as currently modelled. [12028/17]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The full year cost of the Affordable Childcare Scheme will be approximately €150 million. This new scheme will make childcare more affordable, and will enable both universal and targeted subsidies for parents towards their childcare costs.

Approximately 79,000 children will benefit from the new scheme in its first year including 25,000 children who will benefit from the universal subsidy. An estimated 54,000 will benefit from the targeted subsidies, including 31,500 children who already receive support under the current targeted subsidy schemes and 22,500 new beneficiaries. Some of the new beneficiaries will already be availing of formal childcare but without any financial support from the State, at present.

Under the targeted element of the scheme, the maximum income threshold ensures that all families within the bottom five income deciles that are using regulated childcare should receive some level of support. However, the scheme also provides a flexible platform for future investment, allowing income thresholds and subsidy rates to be adjusted over time so as to expand support to more families.

### **Child Care Services Provision**

834. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of children she expects to avail of the ACS in total and broken down between the targeted and universal schemes. [12029/17]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** Approximately 79,000 children will benefit from the new scheme in its first year including 25,000 children who will benefit from the universal subsidy. An estimated 54,000 will benefit from the targeted subsidies, including 31,500 children who already receive support under the current targeted subsidy schemes and 22,500 new beneficiaries. Some of the new beneficiaries will already be availing of formal childcare but without any financial support from the State, at present.

### **Child Care Services Expenditure**

835. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the full year cost of the ACS in the event that the wage rate for educators is revised upwards from the current proposed wage rate to €11 an hour and there is a proportionate increase in managers' pay. [12030/17]

836. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the full year cost of the ACS in the event that the wage rate for educators is revised upwards from the current proposed wage rate to €11.50 an hour and there is a proportionate increase in managers' pay to €14.78. [12031/17]

837. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the full year cost of the ACS in the event that the wage rate for educators is revised upwards from the current proposed wage rate to €12 an hour and there is a proportionate increase in managers' pay. [12032/17]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 835 to 837, inclusive, together.

I thank Deputy Ó Laoghaire for his questions. They are of a similar nature and so, for the

Deputy's ease of reference, will be answered together in tabular form. An increase in staff wages to the "Living Wage" of €11.50 per hour, with managers' wages rising proportionately to €14.78, would increase the average unit cost of provision for childcare providers. What impact this would have on the cost of the Affordable Childcare Scheme (ACS) would depend on whether and to what extent the ACS subsidy rates were amended to reflect the change in the cost of provision. There is no automatic link between the cost of provision and the overall cost of the ACS. Any change in the ACS subsidy rates would need to be carefully considered in the light of fee levels and the potential impact on the demand for childcare. However, if it is assumed that the ACS subsidy rates were changed on a proportionate basis in response to a change in the average unit cost of provision, and if there were no change in fee levels and no other change in the ACS, then, on the assumption that the full-year cost of the ACS will be approximately €150 million per year, the table below sets out estimates of how the full-year cost of the ACS would change as a result of the change in ACS subsidy rates.

-	Staff wage(per hour)	Manager's wage (per hour), if it increased proportionately	Increase in full year cost of the Affordable Child-care Scheme (assuming subsidy rates are increased in proportion to changes in unit costs)
Current wages	€ 10.79	€ 13.87	
12030/17	€ 11.00	€ 14.14	€ 3m
12031/17	€ 11.50	€ 14.78	€ 9m

### Child Care Services Provision

838. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of children that availed of centre based child care, both community and private, in 2016. [12150/17]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** Childcare registrations are recorded in line with the academic school year (September to June) and it is therefore not possible to provide the requested details according to the calendar year. Details of registrations, outlined in the following table, are provided for the academic years 2015/2016 and from September 2016 to date.

-	No. of Unique* Approved Registered Children	No. of Unique* Approved Registered Children
Organisation Type	2015/2016 (Sep 2015-June 2016)	2016/2017 (Sep 2016 to date)
Community/Voluntary Organisation	43,764	46,435
Private Enterprise	60,656	88,308
Grand Total	104,420	134,743

\*These figures include approved registered children attending a service at any stage during the academic years 2015/16 and 2016/17 (to date) under any of the current DCYA funded approved childcare programmes. Where a child attended more than one service or under more than one Programme during these periods they are only included once.

### Child Care Services

839. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of children anticipated to avail of targeted subsidies in the ACS scheme in year one; and the estimated cost for that number. [12151/17]

840. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of children anticipated to avail of the universal subsidy in the ACS in year one; and the estimated total cost for that number. [12152/17]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 839 and 840 together.

The full year cost of the Affordable Childcare Scheme will be approximately €150 million. This new scheme will make childcare more affordable, and will enable both universal and targeted subsidies for parents towards their childcare costs.

Approximately 79,000 children will benefit from the new scheme in its first year including 25,000 children who will benefit from the universal subsidy. An estimated 54,000 will benefit from the targeted subsidies, including 31,500 children who already receive support under the current targeted subsidy schemes and 22,500 new beneficiaries. Some of the new beneficiaries will already be availing of formal childcare but without any financial support from the State, at present.

Under the targeted element of the scheme, the maximum income threshold ensures that all families within the bottom five income deciles that are using regulated childcare should receive some level of support. However, the scheme also provides a flexible platform for future investment, allowing income thresholds and subsidy rates to be adjusted over time so as to expand support to more families.

### **Child Care Services Funding**

841. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the estimated cost of reinstating the childminding advisory service. [12153/17]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** In 2002, the Health Service Executive (HSE) agreed to fund a Childminding Advisory Officer post in each county, who would work with the City and County Childcare Committees (CCCs) funded under the Childcare Programme, implemented by the then Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. Within the Department there are no plans to reintroduce the Childminding Advisory Service at this time and, as such, no cost analysis of reinstating this service has been commissioned. My Department has asked Childminding Ireland to chair a working group on reforms and supports for the childminding sector. It is expected that this group will produce a report for my consideration by the end of May 2017.

County Childcare Committees (CCCs), funded under the Childcare Programme, provide valuable services at local level and supporting the childminding sector is an integral part of their work. As a result, childminders have access to some level of support, training and advice.

My Department provides annual funding to each CCC to enable them to support and advise all childcare providers, including childminders, at local level. In 2016, the total amount allocated to the CCCs was €10.4 million. In addition, in 2016 my Department provided €250,000 to the CCCs for disbursement to eligible childminders by way of Childminding Development Grants. My Department also provides annual funding, totalling €2.44 million in 2016, to six national voluntary childcare organisations to provide support at a local level to their members.

This included €340,000 for Childminding Ireland (CMI), the representative body for childminders. This national association supports quality development in family based care for children. It supports parents with childcare choices and concerns and also childminders.

In this context, my Department will await the recommendations of the working group and these recommendations will, *inter alia*, inform future policy in relation to the regulation of the childminding sector as a whole.

### Child Care Services Funding

842. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the estimated cost over a five-year period to increase her Department's agreed threshold of €47,500 of a household's combined income year-on-year for those five budgetary years by €500 per year, therefore, year one increasing the threshold to €48,000, in tabular form; and the total cost over a five year period for all households eligible for ACS subsidies. [12180/17]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I wish to inform the Deputy that the maximum income threshold ensures that some level of subsidy is awarded to all low income families making use of regulated childcare, through including all families within the bottom five income deciles (that is, 50% of the population). It also includes the very large majority of current scheme beneficiaries, while "saver" provisions will ensure that any current beneficiaries with higher income levels are not negatively affected in the immediate transition to the new scheme.

In setting the base and maximum income thresholds, a number of factors were considered such as the poverty line, income distribution, disincentive effects, continuity with current targeted childcare schemes, and cost and cost effectiveness.

When costing the scheme, it was estimated that increasing the maximum income threshold to €52,500 would increase the total yearly cost of the scheme to an estimated €158 million. In other words therefore increasing the total annual cost of the scheme by €800,000 for every increase of €500 in the maximum income threshold as per table.

	Maximum Income Threshold	Total Cost for Year
Year 0	€47,500	€150,000,000
Year 1	€48,000	€150,800,000
Year 2	€48,500	€151,600,000
Year 3	€49,000	€152,400,000
Year 4	€49,500	€153,200,000
Year 5	€50,000	€154,000,000

### Military Medals

843. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if a person (details supplied) who took part in the military parade for the 100th anniversary 1916 commemoration and who has since left the Naval Service is entitled to their commemoration medal; and if so, if this medal will be issued to the person. [11190/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** As part of the Programme for Government, it was proposed that a commemorative medal be awarded to all Defence Forces personnel, Permanent and Reserve, who were recorded as being in service in

the course of 2016. The 1916 Centenary Medal is being awarded as a commemorative medal, personal to an individual's service in the Defence Forces in the course of 2016.

The Military Authorities have advised me that the individual is entitled to be awarded the 1916 Centenary Commemorative Medal. Therefore, it is advised that the individual makes contact with the last unit he served in and the formation will assist him in obtaining his medal.

### **Public Relations Contracts Expenditure**

844. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the amount his Department spent on public relations consultants and all matters relating to public relations costs in 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11426/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** My Department did not incur any expenditure on public relations in 2016.

### **Capital Expenditure Programme**

845. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the level of construction inflation that has been experienced by his Department in each of the past six years and to date in 2017 in respect of construction projects and other capital projects; the way in which he monitors construction inflation and the mechanisms he employs to establish this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11533/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** For Department of Defence capital projects, construction inflation, including projections of future inflation levels, is monitored by reference to both the Tender Price Index published twice yearly by the Society of Chartered Surveyors Ireland (SCSI) and the reports published annually by some of the larger Quantity Surveying and Cost Management firms. The SCSI is an independent Index of construction tender prices in Ireland and is based on tender returns for non-residential projects, covering all regions of the country. The published documentation provides a picture of typical construction inflation levels.

While the overall volume of construction projects progressed by the Department in recent years has been relatively small, the nature of the Defence property portfolio predisposes towards a high proportion of refurbishment work, including work on heritage type buildings, as well as projects relating to specialist military structures that are not typical construction projects, such as firing ranges, etc. The portfolio of properties requiring refurbishment is also quite disperse in location.

Construction inflation is monitored having regard to the prevailing inflation in the construction sector and any unique attributes of particular Defence projects.

### **Defence Forces Strength**

846. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number currently serving in the Permanent Defence Forces; and the full year cost of increasing the numbers from this current level to 9,500, 10,000, 10,500, 11,000 and 11,500. [11629/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** As of 31 January,



2017 (the latest date for which figures are available), the serving strength of the Permanent Defence Force was 9,136 whole-time equivalent personnel. The pay allocation for the Permanent Defence Force in 2017 is €417 million and this amount will allow for the payment of the full establishment of 9,500 personnel. The estimated full year salary cost of a notional increase of the serving strength of the PDF from 9,500 personnel to 10,000 personnel is approximately €11.7 million, and per notional increase of 500 personnel thereafter.

The Government is committed to maintaining the strength of the Permanent Defence Force at or near the establishment figure of 9,500 personnel. A major new recruitment drive was recently announced targeting an intake of some 860 personnel, including general service recruits, apprentices and cadets.

### Defence Forces Reserve Strength

847. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number currently serving in the Reserve Defence Forces; and the full year cost of increasing the numbers from this current level to 3,000, 3,500, 4,000, 4,500, 5,000 and 5,500. [11630/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** The recently published White Paper on Defence sets out a developmental path for the Reserve Defence Force (RDF). It provides that the overarching establishment of the Army Reserve (AR) and Naval Service Reserve (NSR) will be 4,169 personnel, consisting of 3,869 Army Reservists and the expansion of the establishment of the four NSR Units from currently 200 personnel to 300. The current total strength for the Reserve Defence Force is 2,009 effective personnel and subhead A5 provides for a budget €2.115 million for paid training. The budget is sufficient having regard to the existing strength of the AR and NSR.

Indicative costs of meeting the Paid Training requirements for the notional increase in RDF numbers outlined in the question are set out in the tabular statement.

Strength Level	Increase above current strength	Additional Paid Training Cost
3,000	991	€1,043,287.71
3,500	1,491	€1,569,668.99
4,000	1,991	€2,096,050.27
4,500	2,491	€2,622,431.56
5,000	2,991	€3,148,812.84
5,500	3,491	€3,675,194.13

It should be noted that providing for numbers beyond the current establishment would require a reappraisal of organisational structures and levels and costs of PDF support required and given the establishment set in the White Paper and the current reserve recruitment challenges, such an increase is not envisaged.

### Air Corps

848. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of persons that have submitted protected disclosures regarding hazardous working conditions at Casement Aerodrome; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11864/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** I can confirm that three protected disclosures, which have been the subject of previous Parliamentary Questions,

have been made to my Department which relate to allegations concerning health and safety in the Air Corps. Each of the three disclosures was made by a different individual. Under the Protected Disclosures Act 2014, I have an obligation to protect the identity of those making disclosures under the Act and in this context it would be inappropriate for me to comment on the identity of those making such disclosures.

### **Air Corps**

849. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he will commission a study to investigate the potential link between chronic illnesses suffered by former Air Corps technicians and their exposure to toxic chemicals during the course of their duties, similar to inquiries established in Australia that found that conditions suffered by its air force staff were as a direct result of their working conditions. [11866/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** As I indicated in my responses to other recent parliamentary questions on this issue, it is not appropriate for me to comment on the matter of former Air Corps personnel who claim personal injuries alleging exposure to workplace chemicals at this time as these cases are the subject of ongoing civil litigation before the High Court. In reference to enquiries conducted in Australia, I am informed by the military authorities that there are a number of published reports and ongoing studies in relation to Australian personnel who were exposed to chemicals while conducting a particular maintenance task on a specific aircraft programme. As such, the military authorities have advised that it would be difficult to draw a direct comparison between the Irish Air Corps and that of the Australian Air Force.

There are a number of processes already in train relating to reviewing health and safety procedures in the Air Corps. As you know, following a number of inspections at the Air Corps premises at Casement Aerodrome, Baldonnel, in 2016, the Health and Safety Authority (HSA) issued a report of inspection with a number of general improvements and recommendations for follow up. The Air Corps committed to addressing these recommendations as part of an eight phase implementation plan. I am advised that seven out of the eight phases are planned to be completed by May 2017. You will also be aware that in September 2016 I appointed an independent third party to review allegations made in a number of protected disclosures relating to health and safety issues in the Air Corps which were received in late 2015 and early 2016. I await that reviewer's report. I can assure the Deputy that I will ensure that all recommendations, whether arising from the work of the Health and Safety Authority or the ongoing protected disclosure review, will be acted upon to ensure the safety of the men and women of the Air Corps. In the circumstances and pending the completion of the ongoing processes, I have no plans to commission another review on this matter.

### **Defence Forces Remuneration**

850. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the position regarding the issue of payment of backpay to certain members of the Defence Forces (details supplied). [11987/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** On 27 September 2010 the Adjudicator under the Conciliation and Arbitration Scheme for members of the Permanent Defence Force awarded an increase in the Army Ranger Wing allowance. This award is backdated to 1 June 2006. The Adjudicator's Findings cannot be implemented having regard to the provisions of Sections 2 and 5 of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest

(No 2) Act 2009.

This adjudication is part of the outstanding adjudication findings covered under paragraph 1.16 of the Public Service Agreement 2010-2014. Paragraph 5.3 of the Public Service Stability Agreement 2013-2018, known as the Lansdowne Road Agreement, states that “The Parties have agreed that any outstanding adjudications as referred to in paragraph 1.16 of the Public Service Agreement 2010-2014 will be reviewed jointly by the Parties prior to the expiry of this agreement.” The review mechanism is the subject of ongoing consideration in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

### **Defence Forces**

851. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the position regarding members of the Defence Forces who were injured seriously in the line of duty and have been accommodated with their employment, and in situations in which an arrangement has been put in place for lighter duties; the number of such instances in place in the Defence Forces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11989/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** Every member of the Defence Forces who has been injured, in the line of duty or otherwise, as well as any individual who suffers from an illness, disability, impairment or handicap, will be examined as part of the Military Medical Occupational Surveillance programme and will be assigned a specific medical classification code (MCC). The MCC takes account of the particular injury or disability and, depending on the circumstances, may be associated with operational restrictions. Such restrictions arise due to the individual’s condition not allowing him or her to safely participate in the full range of duties, or because participation in the full range of military duties could aggravate his/her condition. Alternatively, the ultimate declaration is that the individual is below Defence Forces medical standards.

There is a mechanism that personnel in this category can, at the discretion of the Minister on the recommendation of the Deputy Chief of Staff (Support) remain on in service. This mechanism is invoked from time to time.

Provision is made, where personnel are employed in a capacity in which their disabilities do not interfere in the efficient performance of their duties, or leave them at risk of further injury, that they may be retained in service.

In such cases the Deputy Chief of Staff (Support) may, in the case of an officer, recommend to the Minister that such an officer not be retired or not be required to relinquish his or her commission immediately. In the case of an enlisted person, the Deputy Chief of Staff (Support) may order, that such an enlisted person not be discharged immediately.

In either case, the Minister for Defence or Deputy Chief of Staff (Support) as the case may be, may subsequently order that the officer or enlisted person be required to retire or relinquish his or her commission or be discharged because of such disability. As the numbers of serving Defence Forces personnel involved are very small and in order to protect the privacy of personnel in question, I am advised by the military authorities that divulging any further details may identify individual cases.

### **Defence Forces Operations**

852. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence further to

Parliamentary Question No. 68 of 15 February 2017 and Parliamentary Question No. 846 of 28 February 2017, the reason for the longer than normal stays at Shannon Airport in April and October 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12163/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** The Department of Justice and Equality and An Garda Síochána have primary responsibility for the internal security of the State. Among the roles assigned to the Defence Forces in the White Paper on Defence is the provision of Aid to the Civil Power which, in practice, means to assist An Garda Síochána when requested to do so. On each occasion that the support of the Defence Forces is required, An Garda Síochána issues a form C70 to the Defence Forces to request their assistance.

Since 5 February 2003, the Gardaí have requested support from the Defence Forces at Shannon Airport on occasion. The duration of Defence Forces deployments at Shannon Airport is determined by the length of time an aircraft is on the ground. As a deployment is a 12 hour shift, a single aircraft on the ground for an extended period, perhaps overnight, would involve more than one deployment of troops per request.

The request for assistance from An Garda Síochána to the Defence Forces does not stipulate the reason for landing or the expected duration of the stay.